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STEP IN RIGHT DIRECTION

A bold and major step it was when the Bill for Reservation of seats for women was introduced in Parliament of India amidst high excitement marked by thumping of desks, protests and walk-outs. Half the battle seems to have been won by the ruling UPA Government with the Rajya Sabha passing it. When the Bill is passed in the Lok Sabha and given the seal of approval by the President of India it will be a historic achievement for Indian democracy.

The argument that 33% of seats for 50% of the population is neither fair nor adequate cannot be easily brushed aside. Equality of numbers may, however, not ensure justice and equity. In that masterpiece *Democracy in America* written more than one hundred and fifty years ago, Alexis de Tocqueville wrote that he was struck by “the equality of conditions” obtaining in America. He also warned against imposing equality on people saying that “equality forced on both sexes degrades them both, and that so coarse a jumble of nature’s works could produce nothing but feeble men and unseemly women.” The passion of democratic peoples for equality, he cautioned, should not turn into delirium.

More recently scholars and social scientists have voiced concern over people’s growing eagerness to jump on to the quota- bandwagon. Noted sociologist Andre Beteille wrote recently, that “recourse to mandatory quotas for solving all social and political problems will have adverse consequences for democracy in India in the long run.” If India’s strength is cultural pluralism, her biggest problem is increasing social fragmentation leading to political instability and chaos. That apart, empowerment of women is vital for the progress of Indian democracy and stability of the society. Empowerment is both a goal and a process. The former is enshrined in the Constitution and proclaimed as national policy by governments and leaders during the last sixty years and the latter has never been taken up seriously. Initiating the process is, therefore, a most welcome development.

A wrong perpetrated for long will be righted, at least partially. Not only in India but in most countries of the world women are treated as inferior to men. The pioneering work of Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) is often referred to in public discourse on the sensitive issue of gender justice. In her book *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, a reply to Edmund Burke’s *A Vindication of Rights of Men*, Wollstonecraft “pleaded for equality of sexes and for women to be judged on their merits, not their marriages.” As Amartya Sen wrote Wollstonecraft remarkably combined “wrath and reasoning” in her famous work.

The Bill seeking to provide 33% reservation of seats in Parliament and legislatures is only a step towards reaching the goal of gender justice and equity. Many hurdles are still to be overcome. Quotas and reservations are not an end in themselves but remedial measures to eliminate inequality and injustice. Deborah Stone showed in her book *The Disabled State* how the state itself becomes disabled when people make too many demands for entitlements and subsidies. In the Indian situation, however, the prevalence of disparities and lack of access to equal opportunity among large sections of the people, women in particular, justify the demand for affirmative action.

Let’s remember that when universal adult franchise was introduced at the dawn of independence many questioned the wisdom of the measure in a country with only 16% of the population being literate. But it is the poor and the illiterate people who have done more than the rich and the literate for the survival and stability of our democracy. No one denies that there are many shackles and constraints from which women need to be liberated for playing an effective role as representatives of the people. Still their entry into legislatures in greater strength will change the political architecture of India. Time will unveil the wisdom and correctness of this historic step and its value for the future of our democracy.

- The Editor

“I have not the faintest doubt that the women of India will finish the work left by men and that they will do it far more gracefully than men.” - MAHATMA GANDHI

THE CITY OLDER THAN TIME

- Prof. Manoj Das

A seer among scholars the venerable Prof Manoj Das who lives in Aurobindo Ashram, Auroville and teachers at Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education has graciously permitted the publication of this essay from his book My Little India.

Wrote Mark Twain in the last decade of the 19th Century, tongue-in-cheek, 'Varanasi is older than history, older than tradition, older even than legend, and looks twice as old as all of them put together.' And yet another traveller, Rev.M.A.Sherring, wrote, 'Twenty-six centuries ago at least it was famous, when Babylon was struggling with Nineveh for supremacy; when Tyne was planting her colonies, when Athens was growing in strength, before Rome had become known or Greece had contended with Persia, she (Varanasi) had already risen to greatness.'

The city lay dazed under a pouring rain when I made my way into it. I enjoyed it, for in that atmosphere impenetrable and opaque throbbled the spirit of Varanasi – primeval and irresistible. Many are the cities boasting of great antiquity, but their origin can be traced either in history or legends. So far as Varanasi was concerned, to ask who founded the city would be as good as asking who founded the Himalayas, as Edwin Greaves observed.

According to a legend the three wise men of the East who went to greet the infant Jesus included the King of Varanasi. (Some other legends identify them as three Brahmins from India or Persian disciples of a Brahmin). King Solomon is believed to have imported to Israel a troop of monkeys and a muster of peacocks from Varanasi. That was a thousand years before the birth of Christ.

And who can say how many times the Bodhisattvas, the Buddha's earlier incarnations, had traversed the narrow zigzag roads of Varanasi – as a prince, as a mendicant, as a merchant or *Shresthi* (the original word for the current Seth), as a student and even as an animal, for most of the Jataka stories begin with 'It happened when King Brahmadatta ruled Varanasi'!

The *sattva* or essence (we cannot call it soul because Buddhism does not entertain the idea of soul) which,

saturated with experiences gained over numerous lives, was at last born as Siddhartha and, through further asceticism, became the Enlightened One, chose to launch his mission of preaching Nirvana from the outskirts of Varanasi.

The road through which I was driving had also been tread by great souls like Mahavira Jina and Shankaracharya in a remote past, and by Kabir, Tulsidas and Tailanga Swami of later times, among countless other spiritual figures. Indeed, countless is the word.

The pouring rain proved a blessing for me, even in a practical way. It had barred crowds from thronging the shrine of the presiding deity of the city, Viswanath. For a minute or two, there was hardly anybody else at the shrine excepting my young friend and guide, Dr.Saroj and I. Even the monkeys had taken a day off. However, one of them, obviously a 'dada' of sorts, came leaping towards us, sported what I interpreted as a meaningful smile, and then retreated. It seemed to tell us, 'Don't believe all that the *feringhees* have written about us – that we slap the pilgrims or snatch away their bags and sticks or even kidnap an infant from a mother's lap and detain it as hostage until appeased with gifts! These things may not be utterly false, but are exaggerated. No doubt we shake our brains to evolve ways to earn a living and you can brand our actions naughty, but you need not envy us, for I assure you that we can never excel you, our human brethren, on such counts.

An unusually large bull quietly stood blocking a lane and ruminating, eyes shut. It enjoyed the rain, but a devotee, despite being harassed by the downpour, was bent on feeding it with a banana. He held the fruit close to its mouth and coaxed it to take it in, but the bull remained unobliging. The devotee must have viewed the holy one's rejection of his offering as inauspicious. No wonder, looking back after two minutes, I should find him still suffering the rain and trying to win the creature's favour. I wished him success.

Like hundreds of other temples in Varanasi the Viswanath temple was damaged or destroyed more than once between the 12th and the 17th centuries. Its last scourge had been Aurangzeb. The ruling queen of Indore, Ahalyabai, reconstructed it and Maharaja Ranjit Singh of Punjab covered its crown with gold. Sightless through in his left eye, this farsighted monarch knew that times

were changing and no plunderer would dare to tear away his valuable offering.

Alas, the wealth plundered from the temples of Varanasi, time and again, was incalculable. Muhammad Ghuri's general, Kudbuddin Aibak, alone, had to engage 400 camels to carry his booty, according to records left by the chroniclers traveling with the invaders.

The early shrine of Viswanath was probably elsewhere. Its builder, according to tradition, was King Divodas – a character belonging to the dusky dawn of history. Shiva and Varanasi were of course always inseparable. But for some reason, annoyed with Divodas, the great God deserted the city. He returned when Divodas invoked His Grace, after building an impressive abode for Him. Some historians interpret the legend as the temporary dominance of Buddhism, at the cost of Saivism, over Varanasi, and the subsequent reassertion of the latter. I do not know, for Divodas appears to be a pre-Buddhist king, according to numerous signs.

By late afternoon the rain had stopped, though clouds galore sealed the sky. We boarded a boat at the Ghat renowned as Dasaswamedh in memory of Brahma performing ten *Aswamedh Yajnas* on the spot in mythical times. The boatman first took us near Manikarnika Ghat (so named because here the ear-jewel of Vishnu had got immersed in the river) where half a dozen pyres were burning, and then, in the opposite direction, along the line of palaces of the erstwhile Maharajas. Most of them were evidently uncared for and on the balcony of one hung some tattered and soiled clothes.

'They are no longer in royal use, Sir; they are sold away to ordinary people like me, chunk by chunk – even room by room,' informed our helmsman.

The Maharajas built palaces in several big cities to enjoy life, but here they did so to enjoy death, for death at Varanasi, both for the king and the commoner, was an easy passage to the heavens.

It started drizzling. The helmsman at once brought out an umbrella and handed it over to us.

'What about you?'

'We are accustomed to rains and storms. But look. Do you know the name of this Ghat? This is Harischandra Ghat.'

Through the drizzle and dusk flashed the scene I used to witness in village operas in my childhood – undoubtedly one of the most moving scenes in the literatures of the world. King Harishchandra, true to his promise, has surrendered everything he had to Visvamitra and is reduced to a pauper. His queen Saivya is a maidservant in a household and maintains her little son Rohit with her meager earnings. She does not know where her husband is. The son, bitten by a snake, dies. But she is not allowed to absent herself from her duties even to carry the dead child for cremation. She can do so only at midnight. The man who guards the cremation ground must collect his master's fee for allowing the facility to be used, even though the queen has nothing to give him. Through a heart-breaking exchange they come to discover the identity of each other: the guard was none other than King Harishchandra himself! Both decide to die in their son's funeral pyre.

But their misfortune has come to an end. The apparently heartless Visvamitra reveals his compassionate self. Everything, including the dead son, is restored to the couple - and their endurance and truthfulness remain an all-time example for people in the grip of misfortune.

We hurried to the shore before the clouds melted into a fresh downpour. From my room in the hotel I tried to feel the heartthrobs of a timeless Varanasi through moments cool and lonely – and remembered C.A.Kelly's poem written in the 19th century:

*Thy Gods have wrapt thee round as with a shroud,
Saintly Benares, where from morn till night,
From mosque-crowned street and temple-haunted height,
Throb out the voiceful murmurs of the crowd,
Over thy hallowed Ganges echoing loud;
While in the deep nook of each flower-clasped shrine,
Ever the speechless Shape, in calm divine,
Broods o'er the suppliant heads before him bowed.
But the majestic River rolls beneath,
Serene, relentless, bearing towards the sea
The dust of those, who, happy in their death,
By her blest margin meet Eternity.
Last, the clear sunset throws a golden wreath,
And the sweet Night sinks down all silently.*

* * *

Peace should be spread from the individual to the family, to society, the nation and the world and not vice versa. - SRI SATHYA SAI BABA

WORLD DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS-13

- Prof.M.N.Sastri

LANGUAGES

“Language is the dress of thought.”

- Samuel Johnson (1709-1784)

“Language is the means of getting an idea from my brain into yours without surgery.”

- Mark Amidon

Language is the means of communication, a conspicuous trait that makes humankind distinct from other species. It also covers the type of thought process which creates and uses language. A spoken language is a natural language in which words are uttered through mouth. Almost all human languages are spoken languages, with exceptions like gestural languages and body language. There are many languages that can be spoken but have no standard written form. A written language is the representation of a language by means of a writing system and is complementary to a specific spoken or gestural language. The writing system of any language is developed by its users to record speeches when the need arises. There are 25 known systems of writing. Many languages such as the Indo-European languages are the alphabet. The Mandarin (Chinese), Japanese and Korean languages use ideograms, which are symbols or characters that represent ideas or words. The 5,000 year old Sumerian language is considered the oldest written language. Vedic Sanskrit, the earliest form of Sanskrit, is about 3,500 to 4,000 years old.

Language diversity, like genetic diversity, is essential to human heritage. Each and every language embodies the cultural wisdom of a people. As in the case of living species, languages have been evolving, becoming endangered and even suffering extinction. Any language that is in a continuous state of change is known as a living or modern language. Any language that ceases to change or develop is called a dead language. Languages typically become endangered and die when speakers of a small group come in contact with a more dominant population speaking a different language. That has been happening since the primitive hunter-gatherers transitioned to agriculture, during the period of European colonial expansion, and more recently with globalization and urbanization. Language endangerment is also caused

by external processes such as military, economic, religious, cultural or educational subjugation, or it may be caused by internal forces, such as community's negative attitude towards its own language. Internal pressures often arise from external sources, through halting the intergenerational transmission of language and the associated cultural traditions. All these factors contributed to the spread of English, Spanish, Portuguese and Russian.

Ethnologue is currently the most comprehensive language inventory. Its 15th edition released in 2005 contains about 6,912 written and spoken languages. Most of these languages have also sub-groups called dialects. Languages are classified into families. They are Indo-European (Europe, SW to South Asia and Oceania), Sino-Tibetan (East Asia), Niger-Congo (Sub-Saharan Africa), Afro-Asiatic (North Africa to Horn of Africa, SW Asia), Austronesian (Oceania, Madagascar, and Maritime SE Asia), Dravidian (South and SE Asia), Altaic (Central Asia, Northern Asia, Anatolia and Siberia), Austro-Asiatic (mainland SE Asia), Tai-Kadai (SE Asia) and Japonic (Japan). The 30 most spoken languages of the world are Mandarin, English, Hindi, Spanish, Arabic, Russian, Portuguese, Bengali, Malay, French, Japanese, German, Farsi (Persian), Urdu, Punjabi, Vietnamese, Tamil, Chinese Wu, Javanese, Turkish, Telugu, Korean, Marathi, Italian, Thai, Cantonese, Gujarati, Polish, Kannada and Burmese. About 52 per cent of the world's population speaks one of just 20 languages. Less than 0.3 per cent speak one of the 3,340 rarest languages.

In terms of the criteria such as the number of primary speakers, the number of secondary speakers, the number and populations of the countries where used, the number of major fields using the language internationally, the economic power of the countries using the language, and the socio-literary prestige, the ten most influential languages of the world are English, French, Spanish, Russian, Arabic, German, Japanese, Portuguese and Hindi/Urdu. English, the language that occupies the preeminent position, is the language used by 400 million people as the first language. In addition, it is a second language for about 1,400 million people, bringing the overall figure using the language to 1.8 billion. English now holds the position of the language of globalization, of international business, politics, and diplomacy. It is

also the language of computers and internet. It is predicted that by the end of the century, half of the world will be proficient in the English language. Britain is no longer a super power but its language now rules the world earning *the sobriquet* “*the world language*”! “*Rule English*” has taken the place of “*Rule Britannia*”! According to the 2005 estimates there are at least 350 million English speaking Indians, equal to the combined English-speaking population of Britain, the US, Australia and New Zealand.

Over a period of time, a language becomes endangered when its speakers cease to use it, decrease in numbers, use it in increasingly reduced number of communication domains, or fail to pass it from one generation to the next. Gautama Buddha preached in Pali, the language dating back to 6th century BC. It is now limited to liturgical use in Sri Lanka, Thailand and Myanmar. The language has no script. Sanskrit, a language dating back to the 1500-2000 BC and called the mother of all languages, is a scientific and systematic language and its literature is easily the richest in the world. It is even enshrined in the Constitution of India as one of the official languages. But it finds limited use in the communication domain. The Irish language, often called Gaelic, Ireland’s official language has only 30,000 fluent speakers left, down from 2,50,000 when the country became independent in 1922.

Languages become extinct when the last of the primary speakers in a small indigenous group dies. There are 199 languages in the world spoken by fewer than a dozen people. The last person who knew the language of the Eyak people died in 2008 in her native Alaska. The last native speaker of Manx, similar to Irish and Scots Gaelic, died in 1974. As 85-year old woman, the last native speaker of Bo, one of the ten languages of the great Andamanese tribe died in February 2010, breaking a 65,000 year-old link to one of the oldest cultures. Only one speaker of Livonian remains in Latvia. Nearly 80 languages and their variants became extinct with the death of the last known speakers. The US alone lost 53 languages since the 1950s.

Languages extinction may also occur when a language evolves into a new language or form of languages. An example is Old English, the parent of Modern English. *Ethnologue* lists 516 languages as nearly

extinct (Africa-46; The Americas-170; Asia-12; and the Pacific-210). Projections indicate that by the end of this century more than half of the spoken languages on Earth, many of them not yet recorded, may disappear.

India has a total number of 428 languages (including a whopping 6,661 mother tongues or dialects!) with 22 of these declared as official languages. Languages numbering 415 (including dialects) are living languages. UNESCO’s *Atlas of the World Languages in Danger of Disappearing* reports that India tops the list of countries where languages are precariously balanced between neglect and extinction. There are 196 endangered languages, including 84 that are ‘unsafe’, 62 that are definitely endangered, 35 officially endangered and nine extinct. Some extinct languages are, Ahom and Turung (Assam), Aka-Bea, Aka-Bo, Aka-Cari, Aka-Kede, Aka-Bale, Oko-Juwoi (Andaman) and Pali. The death of the Andaman languages and culture will be a great loss of the links to ancient civilizations in view of the fact that the “Great Andamanese people were direct descendents of the pre-Neolithic (pre New Stone Age of more than 12,000 years ago) people. Some languages listed as nearly extinct with a handful of speakers still surviving are Jeru (Andamans-7 speakers), Jarawa (Andamans-250 speakers) Onge (Andamans-100 speakers) A-Pulikwar (Andamans-24 speakers), Khamyang (Assam-50 speakers), Parang (Orissa-767 speakers), Jad (Uttarakshi, Uttarakhand-300 speakers), Koda (Bankura and Burdwan Dts. W. Bengal-300 speakers), Ruga (Meghalaya-Less than 100 speakers), and Vishavan and Aranadan (Kerala-150-200 speakers)

So far only a small fraction of the endangered languages have been documented with respect to grammar, language evolution, anthropology and linguistics. Linguists have recently begun large scale efforts to save some dying languages. For example the Cornish, the universal language of Cornwall (UK) in 1300 went into extinction by 1990. It is being revived since then with about 300 people now speaking the language with some knowledge. *The Enduring Voices Project*, a joint undertaking of the *Living Tongues Institute* and the *National Geographic* is working in collaboration with local communities around the world to document and help prevent languages from becoming extinct with the help of modern technology through creating audio visual

recordings of words, sentences, stories, songs and traditions and multimedia tools. In this project India has been identified as a “language hotspot” containing concentrations of diverse and poorly known endangered languages. This project also covers thousands of tribal communities, from East Africa to Australia and the NW Pacific Coast. The state of Andhra Pradesh has taken up the task of preparing text-books and dictionaries in tribal languages such as Gondi, Kolami, Koya, Savara, some of them having no script, as a part of literacy campaign.

If the language is extinct, much of the old tradition, culture, stories and fables, knowledge of the local environment, and even a unique world view vanishes with it. Rough projections warn that without sustained conservation efforts, half or more of these endangered languages will go out of use by the end of century.

“If I learn to write well, my language will never disappear.”

- Michiguanga man at a Writers' Workshop in Peru

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GANDHI, NEHRU AND INDIA'S INDEPENDENCE-VI

- A.Prasanna Kumar

“True democracy cannot be worked by twenty men sitting at the Centre. It has to be worked from below by the people of every village.” - GANDHIJI

Sixty three years may not mean much in the history of a country with a past of thousands of years. Still, for a country that suffered for centuries at the hands of alien rulers and marauding invaders, the attainment of independence by peaceful means which was described as ‘the greatest mass movement’ in the history of the modern world was no ordinary achievement. That was why Jawaharlal Nehru described the great moment as ‘*tryst with destiny*.’ Explaining the foundation of Indian polity Sir Ernest Barker wrote that it was a “mixture between a great Indian tradition of devout and philosophical religion and the western tradition of civil and political liberty in the life of the community. Gandhi was the great bridge.” The Gandhi-Nehru framework of Indian democracy was designed to transform the large Indian state into a democratic republic based on liberty, equality and justice. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru

declared that the state would ceaselessly strive to realize the goals enshrined in the Constitution through democratic means.

At the dawn of independence there were 330 million people in India, as many people as there are today living under the poverty line! Every year 18 million new mouths are to be fed, a number equal to that of Canada's population. Nearly six hundred Princely States were integrated with the Indian union in a short time in the hope of creating a strong and united India. Today ours is a highly fragmented society with language, region, religion and caste being used to foment hatred and rivalry among the people at all levels. India is a land of paradoxes. It “alternately maddens and delights” wrote a foreigner baffled by the ‘stunning opposites’ found everywhere. Chilling poverty coexists with vulgar opulence; tranquil meditation in the midst of mindless violence; soaring intellect versus fundamentalist bigotry; selfless purity of a few as against the shameless greed and lust for power of the numerous power-hungry politicians and corrupt officials; outstanding achievements of a few obscured by the routine failures of the many. India always promises but never performs! It is an overcrowded country; an ‘overloaded state.’ A country that has produced great leaders without herself becoming great! India is today “a land dimmed by a long litany of ills” shaken by assaults from outside and from within. Octavio Paz wrote that “India is an immense cauldron and whatever falls into it is condemned to remain there forever...a living museum.”

India's choice of ‘simultaneous change model’ (as Rajni Kothari explained) for achieving multi-dimensional development placed an enormous burden on the newly liberated country. The poor and backward country with barely 16% of the people being literate was least prepared for such a gigantic leap on all fronts. No country in the history of the world undertook such a challenge of rapid political, economic and social development in such a short timeframe. It takes decades to develop democratic discipline and habits. Social scientists expressed concern about the “revolution of rising expectations” unleashed at the time of independence resulting in “a revolution of rising frustration” if the aroused aspirations were not fulfilled.

Myron Weiner in his article “Indian Paradox” (1989)

6 *Potti Sriramulu had a more than minor impact on the history, as well as geography, of his country. If Jawaharlal Nehru was the Maker of Modern India, then perhaps, Potti Sriramulu should be named its Mercator.* - RAMACHANDRA GUHA

refers to the “far more puzzling contradiction between India’s high level of political violence and its success in sustaining a democratic political system,” while Paul Brass wondered how India functioned “with a highly competitive and distinctly adversarial system of politics.” If Welles Hangen and others wrote on “After Nehru Who?” “After Nehru How?” and “After Nehru What?” Selig S. Harrison predicted the collapse of the Indian system saying that “the odds are almost wholly against the survival of freedom and the issue is, in fact, whether any Indian state can survive at all.” A Consociational Interpretation of “The Puzzle of Indian Democracy” was ably provided by Arend Lijphart of the University of California in explaining how “the world’s largest and most heterogeneous democracy” successfully maintained democratic rule since 1947. Lijphart argues that the characteristics of consociational democracy —1.grand coalition that includes all linguistic and religious groups, 2.cultural autonomy for these groups, 3.proportionality in political representation and civil service appointments and 4.a minority veto with regard to vital minority rights— are all present in the Indian system. He shows how India has “always had a power-sharing system of democracy, especially strongly and unmistakably during its first two decades of independence from 1947to 1967, but continuing albeit in somewhat attenuated form after about 1967.” He quotes Rajni Kothari who observed that the Congress encompassed “all the major sections and interests of the society” and that Nehru was “a perfect example of prudent and constructive leadership in the development of successful power-sharing systems.” Applying the “two turn-over” test ie two democratic and peaceful transitions of power subsequent to the creation of the initial democratic government, India, according to Samuel Huntington, can be considered a fully consolidated democracy.

Freedom House scale puts India at 54 on a 100 scale far behind western democracies. The weakening of power-sharing after Nehru and the de-institutionalization process that was set in motion considerably enfeebled the Indian system. As Varshney put it “Nehru had used his charisma to promote intra-party democracy.... Indira Gandhi used her charisma to make the party utterly dependent on her” resulting in the weakening of the organization. There was enough

evidence to show that the federal system, Constitutionally biased towards the Union, was becoming more centralized. During the first twenty years from 1947 to 1967 President’s rule was imposed 10 times but was clamped 66 times between 1968 and 1989, during the twenty one years that followed. The decline of the political party and Parliament and the rise of personalized leadership at various levels imposed new burdens on an already fragmented society. Parliament which in the first two decades received world wide encomiums for its role and for the quality of its debates began to lose its prominence. For instance, the number of Lok Sabha sittings which was 135 per year during 1952-57 came down to 90 in the nineties and discussion on the annual budget in Parliament which used to last more than two days now lasts for hours only. Poor attendance of the members in general and walk-outs and clashes, not always verbal, have lowered the image of Parliament of India and of the state legislatures as well. The quality of administration too has declined and our civil services which played “a significant and indeed a critical role in maintaining the integrity of the country and in bringing about all the major developments” in independent India have ceased to be an instrument of change helping in social and economic development of the nation. Instead, the bureaucracy has turned into a tool of manipulative politics, either meekly serving its corrupt political masters or slyly perpetuating its own interests through highly questionable means. The nexus between the two opportunistic governing classes—the politician-bureaucrat combine as it is often referred to—has severely eroded the confidence of the people in the integrity of governmental institutions and public servants. Rajni Kothari says “there is no ideological consensus but wholesale Criminalization of Politics; increasing Communal orientation and highly corny of system of governance.”

The failure of the established structures of democracy to effectively articulate the demands of the people and satisfy their legitimate aspirations, at least to some extent, and ‘the uneven effects of economic development’ accentuated the social fragmentation and political confusion. Regional leaders, as Sunil Khilnani put it, began to grow their own ‘vernacular gardens’ while some religious groups started giving new and communal twists

to democratic politics. Religion and caste have come to be used for acquiring new identities in the struggle of groups to gain access to power. The values of modern Indian state defined by Nehru as democracy, religious tolerance, economic development and cultural pluralism have come under severe attack and according to Khilnani, “politics and the state, once seen as the prophylactic that would invigorate the country, were now seen as the disease.” The disease threatens to become malignant if the evil of corruption is not checked. The India of today is described as one of the most corrupt societies of the modern world and the warning of a philosopher that ‘what is to be feared is not the corruption of the great but that corruption can lead to greatness’ applies to India. As James Manor put it “no leader in India can be both honest and powerful.” When he was Minister T.A.Pai once said in Parliament that “If a peon accepts money it is called “Bakshish”, if a clerk takes money it is called “mamool” if a leader takes money it is called ‘party fund’ and if an officer takes money it is bribe.

India cannot be easily summed up. Octavio Paz says that India is ‘a reality that is far easier to delineate than to define.’ Rajni Kothari thinks that “the most remarkable aspect of the fifty years story has been the almost continuous coexistence of democracy and poverty....the people still have faith in and actually work through the democratic process”.Paz cautions against the new addictions: “Marx’s famous phrase about religion as the opiate of the masses can now be applied and more accurately to television which will end up anaesthetizing the human race, sunk in an idiotic beatitude.” He warns the affluent middle class, the ‘children of television,’ of the effects of the ‘new opiate’ (television) and of being indifferent to the sufferings of the many poor. Electronic media thrives on ‘eccentric success and numbing disasters’ and as India abounds in both the media’s role could often be ‘intrusive and arrogant.’ Like bureaucracy, electronic media, for that matter technology too, must be kept under check, by both government and society. Civil society must assert itself through educational institutions, professional autonomy and media vigilance.

Democracy in India is today certainly not what it had promised to become in the first decade of independence. No longer ‘the Athens of Asia’ or ‘the role model’ as it was hailed then. The value-system

underlying the polity has suffered extensive corrosion. The pillars of democracy like Parliament, legislatures, political party, civil service and even judiciary have decayed. Professional autonomy has almost collapsed. The health of the public policy environment too does not appear to be sound. Threats to national security from within and outside have assumed alarming proportions. It is a matter of national shame that in India despite a fast growing economy and significant achievements in science, technology and other areas over 300 million people- equal to India’s population at the time of Independence—are still living below the poverty line.

Still India’s capacity to overcome crisis and hardship has been her enduring strength. There is no dearth of good political leadership at both national and state levels and efficient administrative cadres. A claim often heard is about India’s youth power with more than 50% of the population being under twenty five years. The success stories of some of our captains of industry and heads of business houses have attracted global attention. Their support and guidance can help in reviving the sick and ailing industries in both public and private sector. Similarly in education also an interface between the industry and academia, between private and public educational institutions can help India in becoming a real knowledge society. The need of the hour is inspirational leadership at all levels to generate national consensus so that values underlying the polity are restored and goals enshrined in the Constitution realized. The time to act is now.

(Concluded)

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C. SUBRAMANIAM, B SIVARAMAN & THE GREEN REVOLUTION - I

- Dr. R V Vaidyanatha Ayyar, IAS Retd.
Former Secretary to Government of India

In Tamil Nadu, C Subramaniam [CS] earned a reputation as a dynamic minister; for several years he held the portfolios of finance and education simultaneously. In 1962, he moved to Delhi from Madras as Minister for Mines & Heavy Industry. After Nehru’s death in May 1964, Lal Bahadur Shastri asked him to move to Food & Agriculture. Shastri told him that, “No other minister is prepared to take up this portfolio because it has seen the Waterloo of many former ministers,” and

China is a big power with a medium power mindset and a small power chip on its shoulders.

- THE ECONOMIST OCTOBER 3,2009

requested him to take up this challenging job. CS was hesitant. His well-wishers were of the view that some people inimical to him would have suggested to the PM that he should be given the agricultural portfolio, "in order to bury him." It was well known that he and Kamaraj who was Congress President and played an important role in the succession to Nehru, were in opposite camps of the Tamil Nadu Congress party. Managing the Agricultural Ministry is a classic case of *indirect management* that is to say formal authority falling short of responsibilities and success being dependent on actions by individuals and agencies outside the chain command, and over whom one has no direct control. The central ministry is responsible for ensuring adequate food supplies, and developing and implementing the agricultural strategy for the whole of India. However, agriculture being a state subject, the ministry is crucially dependent upon the states for the implementation of its strategies and programs. Whenever there is success the credit goes to the states as the implementing agencies. If anything goes wrong the discredit goes to the central minister who is responsible for evolving the strategy.

1964 was a year of inflation driven by food prices; it was followed by two years of unprecedented drought. Food production fell sharply, back to the 1956-57 levels. India was experiencing near-famine conditions living precariously "from ship-to-mouth", perilously dependent upon PL-480 supplies, and written off as a hopeless basket case. On the top of it, PL 480 agreement came to an end. Rather than extend the agreement, President Johnson deliberately chose to "short tether" PL 480 supplies, that is to say not to make any long-term commitments of PL 480 supplies but instead compel Indians to lodge repeated pleas for the supplies. In his memoirs, LBJ took credit for fathering the Green Revolution through the deliberate policy of short tether, though less charitable are inclined to link the short tether with the President's desire to teach India a lesson for its stance on Vietnam. Misery loves company. The macroeconomic situation was so desperate that the Fourth Plan formulation was in disarray, and the government had to agree in 1965 to a six month long study of the economy by a World Bank Mission for making policy recommendations. On the top of it, the Indo-Pakistan War of 1965 led to suspension of aid for a short period.

In February 1967, CS lost his seat in the tidal wave that engulfed the Tamil Nadu Congress in the General Elections. By then, he put in place with the able support of B Sivaraman, whom he handpicked as Union Agriculture Secretary, almost all the policies and institutional mechanisms that launched the Green Revolution. B Sivaraman continued to be the Union Agriculture Secretary till he became Cabinet Secretary on January 1 1969. A measure of the spectacular success of these policies is the fact that in just four years from 1967, food grain production increased by 34 million tonnes; in absolute terms, this increase was more than that achieved over fifteen years from Independence till 1964 - 65. The increase in production was not a flash in the pan, but the beginning of a self-sustaining growth in production. During this four year period, the public food grain reserves increased to eight million tons, a level sufficient enough to give up unilaterally PL 480 imports.

What drove the revolution was technological transformation, supported by a paradigmatic shift in policy from "one that was based on institutional reorganization of agriculture to one that accepted the existing institutional structure as given but sought to increase production through price incentives and technical change." The development strategy followed since the beginning of planning in 1950 proceeded from the premise that an underdeveloped economy was predominantly agricultural, that agriculture suffers from declining returns to scale, concentration on "primary production" acts as a trap preventing long-term development, and therefore industry has to be the lead sector for propelling the economy towards higher stages of development. In this strategy, the role of the agricultural sector was secondary to provide the additional food supplies, financial resources and surplus labour needed for industrialization. Food prices were central to the strategy of planned development; if food prices go up, inflation rises, reducing in turn the real resources available for investment and consequently the rate of growth. As Nehru put it a letter to the chief ministers in 1957:

If the price of food grains goes up, then the whole fabric of our planning suffers irretrievably. How can we keep the prices of food grains at reasonable levels? The only course appears to be to have a large stock of food grains every time. The moment government goes into

the market, prices shoot. the only other course, is compulsory purchases at fixed and reasonable prices.

In determining “fixed and reasonable prices”, considerations of holding the price line dominated those of providing a fair return to farmers. The imperatives of rapid industrialization and price stability called for low food prices and compulsory procurement of all the marketable surplus at depressed prices. In retrospect, one can notice a fatal flaw in the strategy, for if food production has to increase, food grain prices cannot be depressed, and yet they were in order to maintain the price line. In fairness to planners, it should be said that “institutional” strategy rested on sound theoretical foundations provided by mainstream development economics of those days. Till the seminal work in the early 1960s of Theodore Schultz established it was otherwise, development economics believed that food grain production would not respond to higher prices, as it was price inelastic. It also held that except for extremely smallholdings, agricultural productivity was inversely related to the size of land holdings. This proposition provided the rationale for breaking large holdings through land reforms, and for promoting farm cooperatives to facilitate joint farming by farmers with too small and economically unviable holdings. All in all it was believed that price incentives were not necessary for enhancing agricultural production and productivity can be enhanced, and that structural transformation of rural life (land reforms, farm and service cooperatives, and local self-government), and application of scientific farming practices would suffice. The institutional strategy did not found favor either with successive Food and Agricultural ministers or with chief ministers. As A P Jain, Food and Agricultural minister put it in 1957 :

There is a school of thought consisting of economists and persons confined to their rooms. They think that you can finance the plan by depressing the agricultural prices. Without incentive for the farmer, he is not going to produce and plan will wreck on the policy of depressing agricultural prices

Neither land reforms nor cooperative farming ever received the impetus that planners desired. Eventually, land reforms did not proceed beyond abolition of *zamindari* and absentee landholding; farm cooperatives were no more than ephemeral statistics, and the first

generation of *panchayat raj* institutions, that came into being in pursuance of the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee report (1957) withered away in a hostile political environment, in almost all states excepting a few like Maharashtra and Gujarat. State level politicians were none too happy with emergence of parallel centers of political power, and loss of their monopoly over political patronage. The limitations of the institutional strategy became obvious by mid-1950s. Production hit a plateau, was highly vulnerable to seasonal conditions, and inadequate to meet the growing demand for food. Consequently, the country drifted to dependence on PL-480 supplies for maintaining the elaborate rationing system, even as PL 480 stocks began to dwindle in the United States. What the institutional agricultural strategy accomplished was *depedencia*, critical dependence on PL 480 wheat imports. The outcome of that strategy is a good illustration of the *law of unintended consequences*. However, given the political configuration, the prestige of the Planning Commission, and the absence of any striking technological alternative that pressed for a policy change, the institutional strategy lingered on.

The new agronomic practices that made Green Revolution possible centered round high yielding varieties (HYV). The yield of HYV was enormously high in comparison with even the “improved “ seeds that were earlier used. As their cultivation required assured irrigation the yield was invariant to fluctuations in seasonal conditions. Their cultivation, however, was capital intensive; the high capital investment required for creating irrigation facilities, and the high recurring investment for intensive use of fertilizers and pesticides were inconceivable without an assured reasonable return on capital, which in turn meant an assured remunerative price. Thus the large-scale application of the new agronomic practices was conditional upon a paradigmatic shift in the agricultural policy, and further on a revamp of the planned development strategy that was pursued from the Second Plan. The huge imports of fertilizers and pesticides meant that industry, the designated lead sector, no longer had an exclusive claim on the scarce foreign exchange resources.

After Shastri succeeded Nehru, he began a quiet but steady process of consolidating political power. Shastri was not an ideologue; he was from a rural background,

had pro-rural inclinations, understood the importance of agriculture and was sensitive to the operational realities of the Congress party. Unlike Nehru, he was in no position to checkmate the chief ministers and state congress party leaders who all along were opposed to the agricultural policy in vogue. Silently but subtly he altered the entire approach to the development strategy, and brought about significant changes in decision-making process. The Prime Minister's Office [PMO] was created to help consolidate power of the Prime Minister. The PMO headed by pro-market L. K. Jha displaced the Planning Commission as the prime mover of economic policy. The cabinet secretary was detached from the Planning Commission, which was transformed from a body laying down policy for the Central and State governments to an advisory body.

After taking over CS had a brief chat with PM and told him that he would study and come up to the cabinet with a strategy and if that were not acceptable he would not like to continue as minister. He began to look at agriculture from an entirely different perspective, from the perspective of agriculture as industry. He wondered why unlike in industry, pricing and technology were considered unimportant for boosting agricultural production. His very first cabinet paper as Food and Agriculture minister called for an economic, if not incentive price for the farmer, a move opposed by the Planning Commission, and the Finance ministry. T T Krishnamachary, Finance minister, articulated the opposition. In his sharp manner of speaking, he asked, "How could we afford higher procurement and consequently issue prices? What about urban discontent?" The Finance ministry had two concerns with the proposal: inflation and budget deficit - both priority concerns of that ministry. The theories of Schultz were not yet part of the Indian economic discourse. Getting prices right is often a right strategy but it does not resolve the policymaker's dilemma about managing the short-term. The economist's lag- the inevitable lag between the price and production increases- is often a nightmare for the decision-maker. Therefore it is the short-run rather than the medium run, and much less the long run, that dominates policy thinking. From the short-term perspective, a price increase was utterly undesirable. If the higher foodgrain prices were passed on to the consumers, food prices would increase leading to higher

inflation; if not they need to be subsidized leading to higher budget deficit. The price increase suggested was undesirable from the Planning Commission's point of view also. Either inflation or subsidization would reduce the real resources for planned development. And further, the proposal was a heresy that challenged a cardinal tenet of planned development. And then there was the question of turf. The Planning Commission was resiling from the institutional changes that Shastri brought about. And the policy initiative of the Agriculture ministry seemed to confirm the worst fears of the Commission that it was losing its monopoly over economic policy. The memoirs of the key participants in the policy change also bring out the personality clashes between CS and T T Krishnamachary (Finance minister), and between CS and V K R V Rao (Member Planning Commission in charge of Agriculture). At the suggestion of CS, a committee was appointed under the chairmanship of L K Jha. The Committee did not advocate forthrightly dismantling of the dysfunctional pricing policy; however its recommendations initiated a gradual shift in the pricing policy. The committee recommended a 15% increase in procurement price, and setting up a standing Agricultural Prices Commission to study costs regularly and make recommendations on prices. It was also decided to set up the Food Corporation of India for procurement, distribution of foodgrains. FCI was also entrusted with the handling of imported foodgrains and the modernization of rice mills.

CS reorganized the Agricultural Ministry. Agriculture secretary was one of the four secretaries in the department. Of the other three, one was in charge of community development and cooperation, another in charge of IADP (Intensive Agricultural Development Program) districts and another in charge of agricultural production boards. He handpicked Sivaraman for the post of the agriculture secretary, and got the other posts abolished and all the functions vested in agriculture secretary. CS's second cabinet note proposed reorganization of agricultural research, and transforming Indian Council of Agricultural research (ICAR) from an attached office of the Agricultural ministry headed by an IAS officer into an autonomous organization headed by an agricultural scientist. ICAR was to have control over all agricultural research organizations of the central government. A report on the revamping of the agricultural

research system was ready by 1963; what all CS had to do was to dust off the report and give an impetus to implementation. A respected agricultural scientist B C Pal was appointed as head of ICAR. CS's attempt to abolish Non-food commodity committees (cotton, jute, coconut, tobacco) and entrust their work to ICAR ran into opposition from MPs, as some were members of those committees. CS came out with a compromise to please the MPs without affecting his objective. Research was entrusted to ICAR and the old committees entrusted with development. Dual functioning went off for some time but research was straightaway research assigned to ICAR. Sivaraman used his cadre contacts to persuade T P Singh, the expenditure secretary, to accept the proposals to revise the pay structure of agricultural scientists.

Coming to know of CS's earnest attempts to come out with a new strategy, Ralph Cummings of Rockefeller Foundation, which was supporting agricultural research in India, came over and appraised him of the trials with new yielding varieties of wheat seeds. Trials were going for two years in the Indian Agricultural Research Institute and Ludhiana University and the results were encouraging, but no clearance was so far given for pilot trials on farmers' fields. The broad outlines of a new agricultural strategy that relied on the use of these seeds gradually fell in place. CS constituted three panels, the first comprising agricultural scientists, the second economists, and the third agricultural administrators. The panel of agricultural scientists was sharply divided on generational lines, and on lines of specialization. The younger scientists, particularly geneticists, were enthusiastic about the new seeds while the older scientists, particularly agronomists, were skeptical. The skeptics were not sure whether the tradition-bound Indian farmers would adopt the new practices, and whether high yields noticed under controlled conditions could be replicated in the farms. They opposed the bringing in of the Mexican seeds on the ground that these might bring new diseases to India. Even some of the geneticists, particularly those who developed improved varieties, were critical of the proposal to import seeds from abroad; they claimed that they were on the verge of a major breakthrough and developing an Indian variety. B. Sivaraman advised his Minister not to buy this story since it would then mean continuing to lead a ship-to-mouth existence. So virulent

was the opposition in Tamil Nadu, where the local scientists developed a new variety of rice, ADT27, that *Taichung Native I*, a high yielding variety of rice obtained from International Rice Research Institute, Manila was introduced all over the country except in Tamil Nadu.

(to be concluded)

* * *

ROLE OF MASS MEDIA IN INDIAN DEMOCRACY

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Role of Media during the Nationalist Movement :

During the freedom struggle, Media and the Journalist played a significant role in awakening the masses towards the nationalist movement. They instilled patriotic fervour among the people. They have encouraged social reform, criticized the defects of the administration, pleaded for administrative reforms, condemned the imperialist economic exploitation of the country and served many other noble causes as well. It provided the much-needed political education to the people, increased the social awareness among the masses and helped in inculcating rational outlook towards social and political problems of the society. The cumulative effect was the realization of national awakening among the people. Thus the story of Indian Journalism during this stage is a saga of adventure, patriotism, sacrifice and dedication to a noble cause.

Post Independence Scenario :

Thanks to the sacrifices made by our nationalist leaders, India gained political Independence in 1947, i.e., 62 years ago. As India completes six decades of uninterrupted independence, we can look back with a considerable degree of pride at the shaping of a democratic political system in the country. Unlike the experiences of our neighbouring newly independent countries like Pakistan and Myanmar, the roots of democracy have been strongly laid down in India. The achievements that have been realized for the last six decades in agriculture, industry, defence, space and atomic energy have been spectacular. Our service sector

If education is for enlightenment and cultivation of the mind, as it should be, it is as essential for women as for men. - KANDUKURI VEERESALINGAM

is expanding; foreign trade and investments are on upswing. In the fields of information technology and knowledge production, we are on the threshold of global supremacy.

In spite of these impressive achievements, the Indian Political System is suffering from certain severe problems that are threatening to affect the very survival of Indian Democracy. Mass illiteracy, ignorance, stark poverty and wide spread unemployment are staring at us. About 26 crores of our people are still living below the poverty line without any basic amenities of life such as literacy and education, health care and sanitation, shelter and livelihood and thus are deprived of enjoying the fundamental rights to live with human dignity, guaranteed by our constitution. The professions once regarded as noble, have drifted away from their ethical moorings and no longer command the respect of the people. The credibility of the moulder (Teacher), the healer (Doctor) and the dispenser of justice (judge) is in doubt. The Indian democracy is also affected badly by criminalization of politics, populism, inefficiency, corruption, greed, drift and complete absence of transparency in the functioning of the institutions. As the National Commission to Review the working of the Indian Constitution observes, "The people of India are more divided amongst themselves than at the time of country's independence; the noble purpose of public life have degenerated than ever before into opportunistic and self-seeking politics of competitive personal gain..... Crisis of leadership, corruption, insensitivity and inefficiency of administration have resulted in extra-legal systems and parallel economies and even parallel governments". It is unfortunate that ideology has given way to opportunism since long, generating a sense of insecurity, gloom and frustration all over the country.

Role of Media and Journalists in Indian Democracy :

In the same way as it played during the nationalist movement, the media has a duty to play a key role even in the independent India. News papers, the electronic media and the journalists can play the most crucial role in articulating the concerns and problems of the people especially in our villages and small towns, by sensitizing the government and the politicians as well as civil society about the problems faced by the masses. Journalists, especially those with the regional language media, can not only help broad-base our politics but play a major

role in the overall development of the weaker and marginalized sections and in protecting responsibly the interests of rural India. A vibrant and free media can create awareness among the people by disseminating facts. This is a prerequisite for the smooth working of a democracy and for the cause of good governance. The representatives of the media should contribute effectively and meaningfully in this process through their writings and objective report. The media have to play a key role by highlighting any deficiencies in developmental schemes, and mal administration and corruption, acting as watchdogs. It is a great mission to uphold and promote certain cherished values and lofty ideals, eschewing pessimism and negativism. Such a mission calls for commitment and courage of conviction of the kind demonstrated by those who laid the foundation for a free press in India during the years of our freedom struggle. A recent study on the role of the press in the Third World stressed the importance of development Journalism, a field much neglected in India. "In addition to the basic task of carrying news stories or reports, it was felt that the press should also act as a social monitor, a constructive critic, the stimulator of debates on public issues, a medium of feedback, a watch dog of democracy, a balancing wheel in the governmental structure a great social vitalism, a big enemy of tyrants, the right arm of liberty, an exposor of public corruption, an interpreter of public events and a professional forum for investigative and interpretative journalism".

When press in India strives to realize all these objectives, it is no doubt that it will become a powerful promotional tool for strengthening democratic values and for realizing good governance in the Indian political system.

* * *

GARDEN FEVER

- Shri P.N.Rao

Principal, VT College, Visakhapatnam

I must chillout to our green retreat to recharge my batteries,

I long to go again and all I ask is a cup of coffee and other eateries;

And some company or even alone,

Only to stroll among the green beauties with the charm of their own.

I don't have legs,/My mind says/Don't weep/ For I need not bow/ Even in front of a king.

- A PERSIAN PROVERB13

I cannot, cannot, when the garden fever grips my mind
and attention
I just cannot deny that call and invitation,
Of the 'Green Peace' and immaculate air without any
pollution
The best escape from my occasional temper and tension.
O! what a sight to see the mango tree in the summer
season,
With different hues and shades like the sunset horizon,
Especially lovely when it is bowing low and pours its
profusion,
Harbinger of spring and rejuvenation.
I gotta go to the "Thota" time and again,
Gonna difficult shine or rain,
All I ask is a merry company of a fellow rover and Nature
lover,
And a quiet and deep sleep after the long garden trek is
over!
(Lines written after reading "SEA FEVER")

- by John Masefield

(Born in 1878, he was a Poet - Laureate of England.
His boyhood spent at sea was the basis for his poem
"SEA FEVER").

* * *

THE IDEAL WOMAN-III

- Sri C.Sivasankaram

Sri Sita was conscious of her part to the hilt in the
Avataric mission of Sri Rama. She was memorising the
event that led to her self-immolation in her past
incarnation as Vedavati. She recollected the
circumstances that led to her self-immolation as Vedavati
and the cause and contribution of Ravana to that tragic
end and the irrevocable resolve she had taken in that
illfated hour. Now is the hour for the implementation of
the vow. To the rejoicement of the same world the vow
and curse must see the end of Ravana. There should be
no dithering. Time is up. Thirteen years of exile is over,
one more year is left with her. So She must rise to the
occasion, dither not and hurry lest the bus should miss
and the villain must be seen off the world once for all.
She is Goddess of creation (Srutikarthri) and She is the
foster mother of the world (Jagadhatri).

The fury and agony of Vedavati, her past incarnation
generated in her irrevocable determination, strong
conviction to uproot Ravana and his vile, violent hordes
to yield place to the formation of a government headed
by a man of God.

Sri Sita's premonitions, forebodings were surging in
kaleidoscopic speed in her revenge-seeking mind.
Ravana had to disappear. The world created by her
should enjoy halcyon days. Peace must reign without
cease. She resolved She must awaken the spirit of hers
in her Avatar as Mahisasura Mardini. She is like her lord
Sri Rama pretending (acting) as Sailusa. Sri Rama was
heard now and then utter that he was behaving like the
actor (Sailusiva) in a play on the stage of the world.

Sri Sita was not so foolish as to believe that the animal
kingdom had contained a golden deer. Now is the time
for the accomplishment of Ravana's end. Efforts must
shape on a warfooting. She must come out of her purdah
and begin the play of her role in the greatest epic of the
world. The golden deer wailed, "*ha Sita, ha Lakshmana*"
in tones resembling that of Sri Rama. Sita pretended.
Scared Lakshmana must vacate the post and leave her
helpless and vulnerable. She hastened to abuse and cast
aspersions on Lakshmana, her trusted sentinel, and ward
for thirteen years. The wounded Lakshmana vacated
the post, ran post haste towards the source of Sri Rama's
wail. It allowed Ravana to take immediate step to abduct
Sri Sita. Real Sita was kept safely in the soft corner of
Fire God before she embarked on her momentous long
march to the forest. The Sita Ravana forcibly abducted
was illusory Sita. Now Sri Rama was deprived of His
life-long mate combined with creative energy. Rude
shock it was to Sri Rama. From now on the Avatar of
Vishnu behaves and acts as any human being with
ordinary impulses and attitude. He felt forlorn, desolate
and good for nothing wandering nook and corner of the
forest. He became moony like any lovesick human. Sita
was deeply religious and punctual in her offering of
oblations. Rama visited places where Sita used to haunt
to elicit from them how Sita was abducted and where
she might be. He enquired the tendrils which supplied
flowers to Sita for her daily worship. He went to the

*Perhaps our eyes need to be washed by our tears once in a while so that we can see life
with a clear view again. - ALEX TAN*

ferry where Sita used to perform Sandhya Vandanam. There is echo of his agonised cry. Nothing conducive to the knowledge of her disappearance was audible. Sri Rama lost sense and sensibility along with commonsense. Now he lost Sita His efficient energy. He made friends with Sugriva who lost his wife, He belongs to the sunclan and son of Sun. Vali the brother of Sugriva abducted the wife of the latter. Both Sugriva and Rama were married men separated from wives. Theirs was common plight. The alliance between Sri Rama and Sugriva was unequal. He killed Vali, the son of Indra, through dubious means. All these sub-Aryan acts done were due to Sita's absence. Sita is discrimination incarnate and discernment is her innate trait. Sri Rama was found worldly and poor in evaluation of men and matters after her disappearance. Sita is His breath, His life belt, and His Chaitanya. Sita was bred and reared in an environment of detachment and other worldly inclinations ruled by the rod of renunciation. Her father Janaka was kingly sage and an undisputed authority on the upanishadic philosophy. He was the final authority on the question of Karma and Jnanakanda. The great law-giver Yagnyavalkya sought his legendary and spiritual knowledge for enlightenment of a related subject. She was under such sages surveillance and its impact was conspicuous. She was baptized in the sacred waters of detachment probably to fit in on a future date with odd and hazardous circumstances. Her resolution to see Ravana done away

with before she joined Her lord was grim and it was this grim resolve that prevented her to comply with the request of Hanuman to carry her on his back to Rama.

The mission of her incarnation is the elimination of Ravana. That was to be done by Rama in subtle cooperation of her fiery tapasya the penance of a highly advanced fidelity epitomized by her, to remain forever as Lodestar for the women of generations to come. The thorn has to be removed; the demon must be uprooted. Her mission concludes after all women are confident and self-reliant and are found free from fear of demoniacal attempts at molestation of their honour. The society at the top of her mind was to create a world of honour, when women can move alone fearlessly at midnight too. Her Tapasya continues to burn at the dawn of such hour. May her ideal bear fruit unlike Mahatma Gandhi's who aspired for a freedom where woman can walk alone at night!

Some felicitous reflections of Swami Vivekananda on Sita : "Sita is a true Indian by nature. She never returned injury. Be Sita, Sita is typical of India".

The song of the heart of Sri Sita is much sweeter and melodious than the symphony of Beethoven.

To conclude if Sri Rama is the embodiment of Dharma Sri Sita is virtue's own image. Sri Sita is consummate symbol of stainless conjugal fidelity.

(Concluded)

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