

Dialogue and Democracy

Reflections on Ideas, Issues and Policies

A. Prasanna Kumar

Centre for Policy Studies

Gayatri Vidya Parishad

Visakhapatnam

2010

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to
the memory of
Prof. Bhavaraju Sarveswara Rao
Founder-President, Gayatri Vidya Parishad
and
Chairman, Centre for Policy Studies

A word about this volume.....

India is neither 'shining' nor 'collapsing' as a democracy. There is however, cause for concern for a variety of reasons. The decline of institutions, of professional autonomy and above all of values in public life has seriously affected public trust and faith in the democratic system. The 'School of Asia' for democracy, as India was hailed in the first decade of its independence, is now struggling to come to terms with itself, trying hard to regain the glory of 'the faded golden age' of the 1950s.

Debate and discussion which made India's Parliament a role model and which to a large extent influenced the making of public policy have given way to walk-outs and hurling of abusive epithets, even fist fights, in the hallowed precincts of our Parliament and State legislatures. Sober discussions in the press and on the platform have been replaced by high-voltage, high pitched and trivialized confrontations between parties, leaders and even intellectuals on the small screen.

Dialogue that helps in generating consensus on crucial issues is today marginalized. The maturity of Indian democracy was extolled by scholars and experts all over the world when through 'consensus' two transitions were smoothly effected — in 1964 when Jawaharlal Nehru and in 1966 when Lal Bahadur Shastri, suddenly died. Greater was the acclaim for India when the restoration of democracy took place after the imposition of national emergency in the mid-seventies.

Democracy may not be the best form of government created by man. But it is better than all other forms. Hence most countries of the world have adopted it and some claim to be even if they are not. India's strength lies in its resilience and its ability to overcome shocks, disasters and tragedies. As Rajni Kothari aptly said it is "the poor and the suffering classes that have kept democratic process alive far more than the elite and affluent middle classes." The enfeeblement of Indian democracy over the years is a matter for concern. But there is no room for despair. Through constant dialogue at every level, problems big and small, can be resolved. Dialogue implies debate, discussion and also dissent. That is the need of the hour. India is a land of stunning paradoxes and also of incredible achievements. The aspirations of the youth of India who constitute more than fifty per cent of the population need not come into clash with the anxieties of the ageing population. Nor can the growing affluence of the over 300 million upper middle classes be allowed to accentuate the misery of as many people living below the poverty line.

Study of policy process has remained 'a neglected dimension of Indian scholarship' according to experts. It is the responsibility of the educated and thinking classes to remedy the situation by focusing on issues and problems of contemporary relevance at all levels of society. At home, in school or college, efforts must be made to generate a climate of healthy debate and constructive action.

Centre for Policy Studies was started by Shri A.Sankar Rao, Founder-Managing Trustee of Sankar Foundation, on October 2,1995, as a forum for the expert, the intellectual, the scholar and the common man to interact on issues of contemporary relevance. Besides organizing meetings and seminars and bringing out publications, Centre for Policy Studies issues a bimonthly Bulletin reaching out to nearly a thousand people and institutions all over the country. In 2002 CPS was on the verge of closure as Shri Sankar Rao began to concentrate on the eye hospital and started winding up other institutions of Sankar Foundation. At that critical moment stepped in the dynamic Prof.K.C. Reddy of Andhra University. A dear friend and valued colleague, Prof.Reddy was determined to prevent

the closure of CPS. He spoke to his teacher and the venerable scholar the late Prof.Sarveswara Rao, the Founder-President of Gayatri Vidya Parishad who was as keen as Prof. K.C. Reddy to save it. Prof.P.V.Sarma, a colleague of Prof.K.C.Reddy took the initiative and put it across to his elder brother Prof.P.Somaraju, the Secretary & Correspondent of Gayatri Vidya Parishad and its backbone. Shri D.Dakshinamurthi, President of GVP Degree Colleges and a key member of the GV Parishad welcomed the proposal. Prof.Somaraju, guided by Prof.Sarveswara Rao, acted with promptness and precision in carrying out the merger of Centre for Policy Studies with Gayatri Vidya Parishad. On March 23, 2002, Centre for Policy Studies became a part of the Gayatri Vidya Parishad, thanks to the members of the Gayatri Vidya Parishad headed by Prof.Sarveswara Rao and Prof.Somaraju. That was the turning point. Centre for Policy Studies continued its work with renewed vigour with its patrons, members of the Governing Body and the public in general supporting it throughout these fifteen years. It is the Centre's good fortune that eminent physician and philanthropist Dr.B.Swami who succeeded Prof.Sarveswara Rao as the President of Gayatri Vidya Parishad was equally generous and supportive. Gayatri Vidya Parishad is fortunate again that Shri D.V.Subba Rao, former Chairman of Bar Council of India, Ex-Mayor and a towering intellectual has succeeded Dr.B.Swami as the President.

Prof.Sarveswara Rao's demise is a severe loss to the Gayatri Vidya Parishad and the Centre for Policy Studies in particular. This book is dedicated to his memory, a token of gratitude and admiration for the constant guidance and inspiration he provided to Centre for Policy Studies right from its inception. The members of the Gayatri Vidya Parishad led by Prof.Sarveswara Rao and later by Prof. B.Swami have been a source of strength and support to the Centre in all its activities.

During these fifteen years CPS has been able to organize more than two hundred seminars, meetings and discussions largely because of the enthusiastic participation by a number of prominent persons, well wishers and friends. The bimonthly Bulletin, now in its fiteenth year, is being well received by the eminent and the earnest. Though its work has gone on uninterruptedly during the last fifteen years the achievement of CPS is modest and a great deal more needs to be done in the years ahead. CPS has a bright future because of the unfailing support of Gayatri Vidya Parishad and the interest being evinced by friends, well wishers and eminent persons in its acitivities.

The editorials published in the Bulletin launched on October 2,1996, numbering 85, are now presented in a book form, as desired by friends and well wishers, in the hope that like the Decennial Volume brought out in 2005, this volume will also be well received. I must thank Shri V.Seetaramaiah, Prof M.S.Rama Murty and Prof. Mrs.M.Vijayalakshmi for their valuable suggestions and help in proof-correction and to Shri M.K.Kumar of Sathyam Offset Imprints and his able assistant Mrs. Kiranmayi for bringing it out in time.

Visakhapatnam
October 6, 2010

A. Prasanna Kumar

Messages

received at the Decennial Celebrations, 2005

डॉ० संजय बारु
प्रधानमंत्री के कीडिया सलाहकार

Dr. Sanjaya Baru

Media Advisor to PM
Tel : 23016920



D.O. No. 509/MA/9/2005

प्रधान मंत्री कार्यालय
नई दिल्ली - 110 011
PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE
New Delhi - 110 011

September 07, 2005

Please refer to your letter dated September 1, 2005. The Prime Minister is happy to know that the Centre for Policy Studies is celebrating its tenth anniversary on October 2. Independent research institutions like yours can play an important role in guiding Government and shaping public opinion on policy matters. The Prime Minister wishes the Centre for Polity Studies many more years of creative and productive intellectual effort.

Thanking you,

Yours Sincerely,



(Sanjaya Baru)

★ ★ ★

न्यानमूर्ति जी. एन. रॉय
अध्यक्ष

Justice G.N. Ray
Chairman



भारतीय प्रेस परिषद्
PRESS COUNCIL OF INDIA

सूचना भवन, द्वितीय तल, ८ सी.जी.ओ.
कॉम्प्लेक्स,

लोदी रोड, नई दिल्ली - ११० ००३

Soochna Bhawan, 2nd Floor, 8 CGO Complex,
Lodhi Road, New Delhi - 110 003

Resi.: 5, Sunehri Bagh Road, New Delhi - 110011

Telefax : (O) 24368723 (Res.) 23010271, 23015797

I am pleased to learn that Centre for Policy Studies on the occasion of its 10th Anniversary on October 2, 2005 is bringing out a Decennial Volume containing articles published in the Bulletin and speeches delivered at the Centre during the last ten years.

Centre for Policy Studies is one of the esteemed platforms where intellectuals from various fields come together and discuss different issues which affect the lives of general masses. Thus, a Decennial Volume which comprises thought provoking speeches by eminent personalities who have contributed towards the development of society and nation as a whole in their own way, would certainly give an opportunity to the readers to know the views of the intellectuals on varied subjects. Centre for Policy Studies' decision to publish the Decennial Volume is indeed commendable and would be a worthy addition to any library.

I congratulate Centre for Policy Studies on its tenth Anniversary.



(G. N. RAY)

Messages

received at the Decennial Celebrations, 2005

Justice K. Jayachandra Reddy,
Retd. Judge Supreme Court of India
Former Chairman
Press Council of India

14, Meghna Paradise,
Ishaq Colony, Trimulghery,
Secunderabad-500 015
Telephone No. 27819595

Dt. 10th September 2005

Centre for Policy Studies in my sincere opinion has been relentlessly and successfully providing, true to its concept, a forum for the intellectuals, the academics and experts to interact, focussing on issues and policies of contemporary relevance.

The Centre was launched on 2nd October, 1995, the 125th birth Anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi. It is heartening that the Centre is celebrating its 10th anniversary.

As days are advancing, it is unfortunate that ideology has given way to opportunism generating gloom and frustration all over the country.

A time has come for the educated and intellectuals to give a lead and stir the people to unite and weed out maladies that are affecting the society, democracy and national integration.

In this voyage, Centre for Policy Studies is playing an important role and the Board of Governors, patrons and in particular the Director Sri A. Prasanna Kumar of the Centre are to be complimented.

It is a good gesture and is in fitness of things to publish a Decennial volume containing articles published in the Bulletin and the speeches delivered at the Centre, which shall be of immense value for the posterity.

K. Jayachandra Reddy

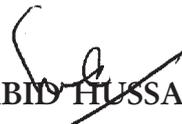
★ ★ ★

Abid Hussain
Former Ambassador of India to USA

237, Sector 15-A
NOIDA - 201 301

It is heartening to know that Centre for Policy Studies which was launched on Gandhi Jayanti day in 1995, is celebrating its tenth anniversary on October 2, 2005 at Visakhapatnam. I also understand that the Centre is bringing out a Decennial Volume which will comprise articles and speeches delivered at the Centre during the last ten years. This indeed, is a step in the right direction. The Commemorative day will, no-doubt, highlight the activities and progress made by the Centre but would also provide an excellent opportunity to remember and pay our respectful homage to the memory of the great Mahatma. It will expose the younger generation to the moral values and the spiritual insights advocated by Bapu during his lifetime and will enable all of us to ponder over their value and abide by them at a time when the world is ridden with savage violence and turmoil. This will also help to evoke the image of a society in which people will have hope and find opportunities to build a great future. Subversive movements occur when people lose faith in themselves. I deeply appreciate the imaginative decision of the management of the Centre for choosing the timing of the function as to coincide with the auspicious event of "Gandhi Jayanti". I wish the function a great success.

In the end I sincerely applaud the good work that the Centre is doing and I earnestly hope that its excellent performance will set an example to others to follow.


(ABID HUSSAIN)

amrik singh

2/26, Sarvapriya Vihar, New Delhi - 110 016

August 16, 2005

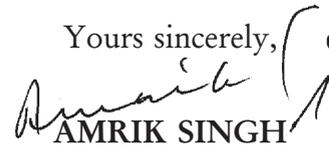
My dear Prasanna Kumar,

Thanks for your letter of 3rd August, 2005, asking me to send a message on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of your Centre. In response, I would like to say as under :

I spent three weeks at Visakhapatnam a couple of years ago. One of the happy discoveries that I made there was that, in addition to the university, which was doing reasonably well, there also existed another voluntary body which took interest in matters which have implications for policy making. In my judgement, this was a very welcome initiative. A large number of people who think about these issues were involved in the Centre. I had an occasion to address one of the meetings of the Centre. It was a great pleasure to meet like-minded people, at that meeting.

There are not many towns and cities in India which have taken a similar initiative. Early this year, I addressed one such meeting in Kolkata under the auspices of what goes under the name of Bengal Initiative. That had been founded in 1905 when the partition of Bengal had taken place and has continued to function for a whole century was something which thrilled me. I hope and pray that this Centre too will continue to function and flourish more or less in the same manner.

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely,

AMRIK SINGH

★ ★ ★

Soli J. Sorabjee

Senior Advocate, Supreme Court of India
Former Attorney General for India

06th September 2005

Democracy postulates a well informed and intelligent electorate. The publications of the Centre for Policy Studies cover various fields of human endeavour and contain useful material and information.

You have been rendering excellent service to the community.

May I wish you every success in your future activities.

Soli J Sorabjee

Messages

received at the Decennial Celebrations, 2005

Prof. B. SARVESWARA RAO

Emeritus Professor of Economics, A.U. (Rtd.)
Formerly Vice-Chancellor, Nagarjuna University & President, Gayatri Vidya Parishad

8-59-5, 2nd Lane, Vidyanagar,
Visakhapatnam - 530 003
Phone : 2754638

Dt. 26-9-2005

Dear Prof. Prasanna Kumar,

I am very happy to know that the Centre for Policy Studies, founded by you on Gandhi Jayanthi Day in 1995 completes 10 years by October 2, 2005; and you have proposed to celebrate the event in a fitting manner. It has been my good fortune and privilege to be associated closely with the Centre for Policy Studies for the last four years, representing the well known Educational Trust, Gayatri Vidya Parishad on its Management Committee. I am particularly happy that eminent persons are associated with your academic venture from the beginning. You have developed the Centre in a commendable way with a clear vision serving the academic institutions and citizens in the city and elsewhere. Conducting Seminars and Meetings regularly on contemporary public policies and issues relating to polity, society and human development, with the participation of eminent persons is one of the important activities of the Centre. Publication of a by-monthly Bulletin carrying articles on different themes, and your thoughtful editorial & undertaking research studies and publication of the research findings on important social issues are other activities of the Centre. I am much benefited by going through the Bulletin regularly.

I am also happy that you have proposed to bring out some studies as a mark of celebrating ten years of service to education and society - a collection of important articles published in the Bulletin, a "Gandhi Reader" and a volume on "Reflections on Religion and Philosophy". I know very well, the Members of the Gayatri Vidya Parishad very much welcomed the Centre for Policy Studies to be an institution of the Gayatri Vidya Parishad, four years ago, and I sincerely hope that the Centre will be further developed under the auspices of the Gayatri Vidya Parishad with your guidance and direction.

With king regards,

Yours sincerely,


(B. SARVESWARA RAO)

★ ★ ★

RAJ BHAVAN,
HYDERABAD - 500041



September 10, 1999

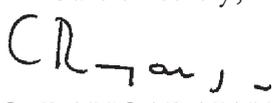
Dear Shri Kumar,

Many thanks for sending me a copy of the Centre's publication 'Emancipation Before Empowerment'. I have enjoyed reading the publication. Such micro level studies are very much needed. It is an unfortunate fact that the same attitude towards women persists in all strata of the society. Even in educated families, the perception has not changed. Economic emancipation is fundamental. Further it has to be supplemented by an attitudinal change.

When I come to Visakhapatnam next, I shall get in touch with your Centre.

With regards,

Yours sincerely,


(C. RANGARAJAN)

KHUSHWANT SINGH
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT
(RAJYA SABHA)



18, August 1998

Dear Prasanna Kumar,

I read your Bulletin -- all of it. I was particularly struck by the quality of the writing in the editorial -- lucid, candid and concerned with the wretched state of the country. I did one in a similar vein for my column in The Hindustan Times. Yours reads better.

Keep it up.

Khushwant Singh
(KHUSHWANT SINGH)

★ ★ ★

INDER MALHOTRA
SYNDICATED COLUMNIST & NEHRU FELLOW

5 March 2004

Dear Professor Kumar,

Profuse thanks for your excellent review of my book on Dynasties. I have also read the reviews of the books of Dr. Raja Mohan and Mr. Abid Hussain. I am impressed by the quality of the Bulletin you produce and I hope it is circulated widely enough to contribute to Visakhapatnam's intellectual quality.

Inder Malhotra
(INDER MALHOTRA)

Messages

received at the Decennial Celebrations, 2005

Mark Tully

1, Nizamuddin East, New Delhi - 110013
tel.fax: 24359687, Tel: 24352878
e-mail: tulwri@ndf.vsnl.net.in
e-mail: markandgilly@vsnl.com

July 2, 2004

I have now been able to read it and particularly enjoyed India and Human Development with its warning against complacency - a particularly appropriate warning with all the talk of Shining India. I also enjoyed the article on Sir Arthur Cotton's green revolution of the nineteenth century.

Your editorial on 2004 Verdict was very interesting. I had always thought that high voltage publicity was not working because I had seen the failure of Rajiv Gandhi's high voltage campaign in 1989.

It was good that you remembered Alistair Cooke and I do agree that 'freedom of the press is not absolute'. We journalists sometimes tend to think it should be!

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely,


(MARK TULLY)

★ ★ ★

MANOJ DAS C/o Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, Pondicherry - 605 002 INDIA

14 June 2004

Dear Dr. Prasanna Kumarji,

It was so kind of you to send me a bunch of your imaginatively edited Bulletin. I read with great interest your review of My Little India. It is done with love and by a most sensitive mind. I am grateful to you.

Hope, all is fine with you.

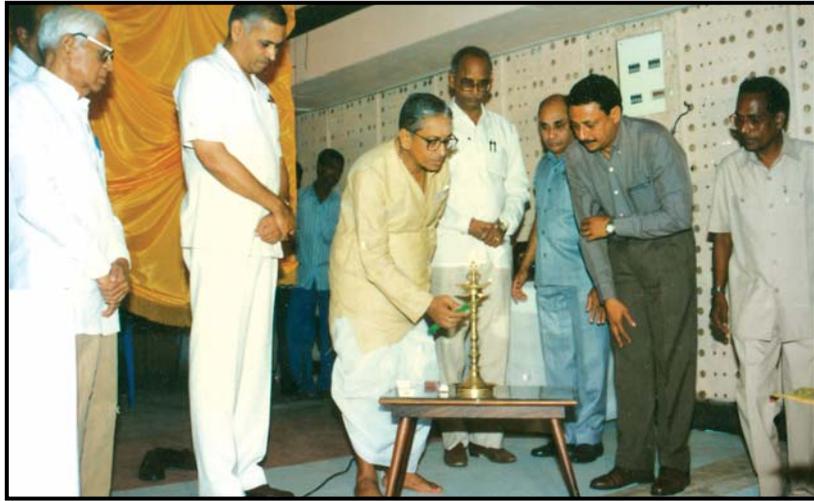
With warm regards,

Sincerely,

(Manoj Das)

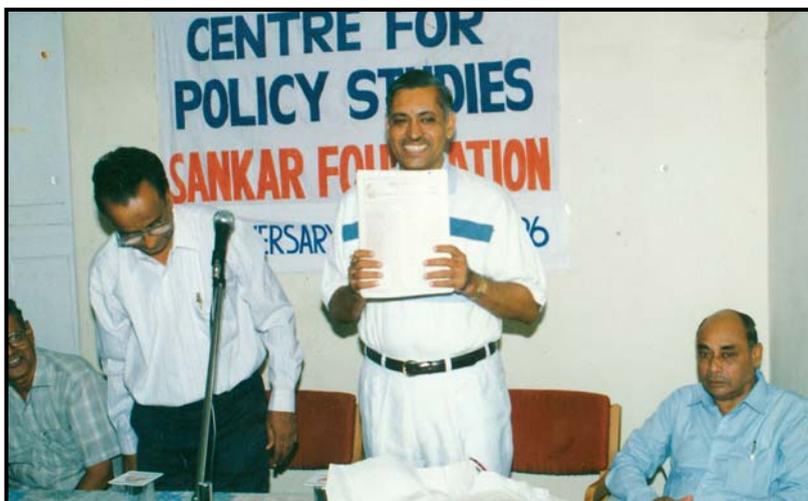
Memorable moments

Satguru Sri K. Sivananda Murty lighting the lamp at the inauguration of the Centre's activities, the first being a Seminar on Gandhi, United Nations and World Peace on October 26, 1995.



Prof. B. Sarveswara Rao, Patron of Centre for Policy Studies and Former Vice Chancellor speaking at the Seminar Sri K. Parvathi Kumar presided over it on October 26, 1995.

Dr. Abid Hussain releasing the first CPS publication "Street Children -Visakhapatnam A Case Study" on December 6, 1996 Prof.K.Radhakrishnamurthy, the author, and Sri A. Sankar Rao are also seen in the picture.



Sri K. Parvathi Kumar, International President, World Teacher Trust and President, Sankar Foundation releasing the CPS Bulletin Inaugural issue on October 2, 1996

Memorable moments



*Former Prime Minister
Shri PV Narasimha Rao
addressing CPS
on August 6, 1999*

*Shri Khushwant Singh who
delivered a lecture
on November 15, 1999
on "India in
the 21st Century" being welcomed*



*Shri D.V. Subba Rao
replying to the felicitations on
his appointment as
Administrative Manager of the
Indian cricket team to
West Indies on February 19, 1997*

*Shri C. Anjaneya Reddy IPS
addressing
CPS on
December 6, 1997*



Memorable moments

*Shri Soli Sorabjee,
Attorney General of India
who spoke on
March 28, 2004
on Good Governance
being welcomed.*



*Hon'ble Justice
Shri K. Jayachandra Reddy,
Chairman
Press Council of
India addressing the Centre on
August 13, 2004*

*Sri C.S. Rao, IAS, Chairman
Insurance Regulatory and
Development Authority of
India releasing CPS
publication "Impact of
Electronic Media on Women :
Visakhapatnam A Case Study on May
11, 2005. Dr. B.Swami, President,
Gayatri Vidya Parishad and
Dr.M.Gopala Krishna Reddy,
Vice-Chancellor and
Dr.A.Prasanna Kumar are also seen*



*Prof. K.C. Reddy,
Chairman AP State Council of
Higher Education
at the Seminar
on
Economic Reforms*

Memorable moments



*Dr. Mrs. Karki Hussain
speaking on
Sino-Indian Relations
on December 5, 1996
Sri A. Sankar Rao
is by her side*

*Veteran leader
and Gandhian
Sri Vavilala Gopalakrishnayya
addressing the Centre.
Smt. Digumati Saraswati Devi
and Kum. P. Jagan Mohini
are also seen*



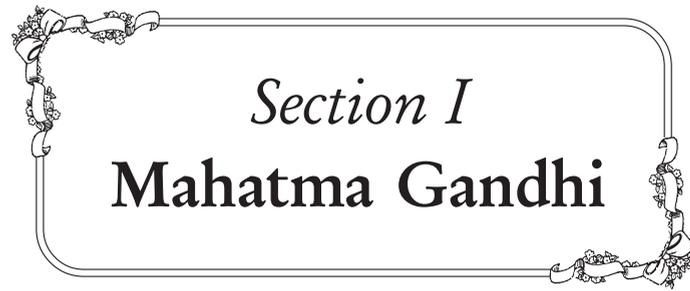
*Dr. B. Swami,
former Vice Chancellor,
replying to
felicitations
on Teacher's Day,
September 5, 1996
Dr. Swami succeeded
Prof. Sarveswara Rao as the
President of Gayatri Vidya Parishad*

*Prof. M.N. Sastri
speaking on
Nuclear Energy-Friend
or Foe on
April 29, 1997*



*Gandhiji “represents the conscience of the future man”
“nothing better has ever been taught or lived
since the world began”*

- Dr.S.Radhakrishnan



Section I
Mahatma Gandhi

*“The Gandhi story is inexhaustible like
the Ramayana, Mahabharata combined and
like the epics it is equally amenable
to revered study and mercenary exploitation.”*

- K. Swaminathan

Section 1

Section I Mahatma Gandhi

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Servant of Humanity

“Let me remain what I am - a striving servant of India and through her of humanity,” wrote Gandhiji in his reply when he was likened to rishis by Andhra leader Ayyadevara Kaleswara Rao. “Rishis are made of sterner stuff,” said the Mahatma in his reply to Kaleswara Rao’s letter in 1944. This was among the many lessons in humility and civility that his disciples learnt from Gandhiji’s tours, lectures and letters. Writing to Pattabhi Sitaramayya in 1946 Gandhiji said “Whatever the case we have to be civil in the face of incivility. This is the secret of non-violence.” It is the lack of civility and humility that leads to violence, be it the home or the society or the world at large.

Despite the world looking at him with awe and veneration, even disbelief, he did not claim to be the mythical Atlas carrying the burden of humanity on his shoulders. Instead he vowed in utmost humility and unwavering faith to remain the servant, a striving servant, of India and of the entire humanity. Rajmohan Gandhi saw in his grandfather the epic hero, Rama, who went into exile when he should have been crowned! Like the Buddha and Christ centuries before him Gandhi lived and died for the poor.

He never preached what he did not practise. Social and religious equality would be impossible to achieve without gender equality. To deny women equal status is to reject *ahimsa* and *abhaya* the two key concepts of Gandhian philosophy. “A woman’s intuition has often proved truer than man’s arrogant assumption of superior knowledge,” he declared and narrated instances of Kastur Ba correcting and guiding him. “Ba was in no way weaker than I;” he wrote, “in fact she was stronger. If I had not had her cooperation I would have been sunk. It was that illiterate woman who helped me to observe all my vows with the utmost strictness and kept me ever vigilant. Similarly in politics also she displayed great courage and took part in all the campaigns.” (Rajmohan Gandhi *Mohandas* p619)

History accords exaggerated importance to the exploits of conquerors and rulers and the accumulation of wealth by the rich while poets and writers consume ‘oceans of ink and forests of paper’ to flatter them in huge volumes. Governments and politicians excel them all by raising statues and memorials all over. But seers, savants, saviours and servants of humanity do not need memorials and monuments to be reverently remembered by humanity.

Gandhiji’s first fast was for Hindu-Muslim unity. His last was also for communal harmony. On his last birthday, October 2, 1947, he said: “With every breath I pray God to give me strength to quench the flames or remove me from this earth. I, who staked my life to gain India’s independence, do not wish to be a living witness to its destruction.” There seemed to be no end to his agony. On January 12, 1948 he spoke again of the only solution to “the rot that has set in beloved India”. “Death for me would be a glorious deliverance rather than that I should be a helpless witness of the destruction of India.” Only eighteen days he had to wait for the fulfillment of his wish.

Jawaharlal Nehru saw in Mahatma Gandhi the ‘greatest symbol of the India of the past and of the future’ and said that the light that shone in this country was no ordinary light, light that illumines the path of India and entire humanity, showing the way out of darkness. As Sri Aurobindo prophesied “the light which led us to freedom, though not yet to unity, will burn on till it conquers.”

Section 1

Gandhiji's idea of Independence

As we celebrate the 140th birth anniversary of the Father of the Nation, apart from the official ritual so routinely and uninspiringly performed on October 2 every year, our minds are filled with sadness over the utter disregard shown to Gandhiji's ideals during the last sixty two years and considerable anxiety about the future of India. In this age of globalization, reckless spending and lavish living those who talk of Gandhian ideals, even if it is for an hour before a small gathering, might be labeled uncivilized and medieval in their mindset.

But the bright new younger generation who constitute more than fifty percent of India's billion plus population and who are ordained by destiny to shape India's future in the first century of the new millennium would certainly love to know about the legacy the Mahatma bequeathed to us and the relevance of Gandhian ideals and values. Today's youth may be in a great hurry to achieve their goals through hard and innovative work despite being hard pressed for time. But they are also sensible enough to apply their sensitive minds to learn about the roots of our culture and the value foundations of our system so that course correction, wherever and whenever necessary, can be done without further delay. The younger generation would feel proud to know that the greatest minds of the last century, scientists like Einstein, philosophers like Russell, literary giants like Bernard Shaw and Nobel laureates of different hues, saw in Gandhi a beacon, an extraordinary light that would show humankind a way out of the darkness.

Likened to the Buddha and Jesus Christ, Gandhi lived and died for the poor, the entire humanity. The words of an Arab poet, Mikhail Noema quoted in Rajmohan Gandhi's classic *Mobandas*, sum it up : "the spindle in Gandhi's hand became sharper than the sword; the simple white sheet wrapping Gandhi's body was an armour plate which guns from the fleet of the Master of the Seas could not pierce and the goat of Gandhi became stronger than the British Lion."

We need to answer the basic question that every youngster is asking today six decades after India became free. Is this the Independence for which Mahatma Gandhi and other leaders fought and which we celebrate pompously twice a year on August 14 and January 26? What are our leaders so religiously praying for on October 2 and January 30, sitting in front of the Rajghat in Delhi and Gandhi statues all over the country? What according to Gandhi was Swaraj or Independence? Would the Father of the Nation have rejoiced at India's achievements if he were living in our midst today?

They need to be told that Swaraj for Gandhi was empowerment of the weak and the disadvantaged sections of the society. Sad but true almost as many people as those who woke to freedom on August 15, 1947, about 330 million, are today living below the poverty line! Independence, Gandhi defined, means 'self- mastery, self -discipline', not the greed and selfishness that permeate every walk of life and every branch of government. Commending the Gandhian philosophy of simple living and high thinking Aldous Huxley had warned not only India but the entire world not to suppose 'that technology and organization could turn the petty human animal into a superhuman being and could provide a substitute for the infinities of spiritual realization.'

From May 1893 on that cold night in Pietermaritzburg in South Africa when he was thrown out of a railway compartment till that fateful Friday, January 30, 1948 when the treacherous assassin's bullets killed him, Gandhi's life was a fight against violence, greed, injustice and exploitation. Probably no single individual in human history suffered and sacrificed for so long and so intensely as Gandhiji did. That is why young minds of today, like the great Einstein prophesied, would rub their eyes in disbelief hearing the Gandhi story. And we, the fading generation, have a duty to tell the younger generation of what little we know and how much we all and the future generation owe to Mahatma Gandhi.

What Gandhiji Means to us

India was an infant democracy, having won independence only five and a half months earlier. Still, it was a nation that was thrown into a state of shock and disbelief on that fateful Friday evening, January 30, 1948, when the news spread about the assassination of the Father of the Nation. Mahatma Gandhi was a different father. He had little time for his own family. His family was the largest in the world. It had no caste or religion. It transcended boundaries and borders. Three hundred and thirty three million people of India wept and many of them went without food that night. The radio, the only available medium for quick transmission of news those days, wept throughout broadcasting doleful music and messages of grief.

We were boys then who did not immediately understand the reason for such mourning and overwhelming grief when we returned home from the playground after a game of cricket. Some of us even heaved a sigh of relief as the sun set on the horizon as there would be no school the following day. Shocking it was to see our elders crying, glued as they were throughout that night to the radio set. Food was not cooked in the house and almost all the elders fasted in grief. Tears rolled down everyone's cheeks when the radio broadcast a sobbing Jawaharlal Nehru's "Light has gone out of our lives" speech. Friday, January 30, 1948 was the gloomiest day in every Indian home. 31st was no less. Millions of people cried inconsolably hearing, Melville de Mellow's commentary, broadcast live by All India Radio, on the funeral of Gandhiji that Saturday evening.

Sixty years after that, raising the question '*what Gandhiji means to us*' might sound odd if not ridiculous. Still it has its own relevance even though some question the 'relevance' of Gandhiji for today's India of a billion plus people most of whom do not know much about him. We have seldom been a nation during the last sixty years to know the value of the Father of the Nation. We are still a backward country, fragmented socially and culturally with a large percentage of population, larger than the population of the United States, living below the poverty line. There are, of course, islands of prosperity where people feel differently from the mainstream.

Romain Rolland called Gandhiji "A Christ without a cross." Gandhi bore a greater burden, a heavier load of human misery and suffering and for much longer time, than Christ had done. He also led as pure and hard a life as the heroes of our epics had supposedly done to protect righteousness. Gandhiji's religion was for the entire humanity, not for a region or set of people. "Not a Sunday show", as he himself declared, "but an hourly and minutely mentor and monitor" emanating from a belief "in the ordered moral government of the universe" that is "subject to the acid test of reason." In short 'a religion that would free the world of all ills.'

True economics stands for social justice and Swaraj means freedom in terms of empowerment of the weak. Ernest Barker wrote that Gandhi "had a Platonic feeling that governing and administrative persons should live on a pittance, content with the opportunities of service and not expecting greater rewards." Such ideas would be considered weird and 'uncivilized' in today's India where the salaries of top leaders and civil servants get revised steeply and regularly as they too have to compete with those in the affluent private sector. Gandhiji may not mean much to those in politics, especially those in power. But to the vast majority of people not only in India but all over the world he means a lot. Because "he stirred up loving hearts to action" and "lived *for* as well as *in* mankind."

(October 2008)

Section 1

Mahatma's message

“My life is my message,” said Gandhiji when asked to give a message. “I have nothing new to teach the world. Truth and non-violence are as old as the hills,” he declared with characteristic humility and gently warned against any attempt to convert his ideas and actions into a creed or doctrine. “There is no such thing as Gandhism. I do not want to leave any sect after me,” he said.

Rajmohan Gandhi, the Mahatma's grandson and a scholar of repute, brought out last year *Mohandas—A True Story of a Man, his People and an Empire*, a masterly study of 745 pages. Explaining why he has chosen to write another book on Gandhiji, having already written one volume, Rajmohan says “*The Good Boatman* was not a biography. This one is.” Gandhi the individual is not sufficiently felt, or seen or understood though “he looks at us from currency notes, postage stamps and billboards,” says the author adding that familiarity is not knowledge. Quoting Einstein's famous words that “generations to come will scarce believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth” Rajmohan agrees that in ‘some ways it is an unbelievable story.’

Gandhi's battles, fought first in his mind, began early in his life. “At the time that communal unity possessed me I was a lad twelve years old,” wrote Gandhi. The Congress was not yet born. Along with eradication of untouchability, the boyhood dream of ‘amity’ between Hindus, Muslims and Parsis became his life's mission. His resolve to fight falsehood and violence in all walks of life was strengthened in South Africa where he was insulted and assaulted. Satyagraha, ‘truth-force’ or ‘love-force’ or ‘soul-force’ was born. Non-violence implied non-possession. Service and sacrifice must begin at home and accordingly he made his wife give up, not without an argument, gold and ornaments. Kasturba nobly stood by him in the long and hard struggle the Mahatma fought to liberate his people politically, socially and economically. “If I had not her cooperation I would have been sunk,” he admitted. When he opposed partition of India Muslims saw in Gandhi ‘their enemy number one.’

But when he walked hundreds of miles to save their families and raised crores of rupees for Muslims traumatised by communal riots they found in Gandhi their true saviour. At the stroke of the midnight hour when Jawaharlal Nehru was making his famous ‘tryst with destiny’ speech amidst celebrations in Delhi, Gandhiji was praying in the house of a poor Muslim family in Calcutta. Five lakhs of Hindus and Muslims attended his August 15 meeting at Calcutta which he described as ‘the joy of fraternization between the two communities’.

An Andhra Dalit Chakrayya, who lived in Sevagram was dear to Gandhiji who was upset by Chakrayya's premature death. Gandhiji suggested that a Dalit be made the President of India with Nehru, Patel and Rajendra Prasad as ministers, offering his own services as private secretary without salary. Why not a Bhangi girl as the President of India? If a Princess could become the Queen of England why not a Bhangi girl as the President of Indian Republic, he asked? Gandhiji wanted the world to know that in India no one was high and no one low. What the Buddha had taught humankind and what Ashoka had done through his emissaries of peace, Gandhi wanted independent India to convey as her message for universal peace and harmony.

The Arab poet Mikhail Noema's lines find a place in the biography: “The spindle in Gandhi's hand became sharper than the sword; the simple white sheet wrapping Gandhi's body was an armour plate which guns from the fleets of the master of the seas could not pierce and the goat of Gandhi became stronger than the British Lion.”

Gandhi's message to the Bengal Ministers led by Prafulla Ghosh who called on him on August 15, 1947 heeds to be recalled - Be humble; be for bearing. Now you will be tested through and through. Beware of power; power corrupts. Do not let yourself be entrapped by its pomp and pageantry. Remember you are in office to serve the poor in India's villages.” How necessary it is today to have these lines displayed prominently in all government offices and corridors of power’.

Debt of Gratitude

October 2 is a different day. Not just in the lives of the billion plus people of India. In every home and every part of the world where people think and talk of peace and compassion, Gandhi Jayanthi is an occasion to pay homage to the memory of Mahatma Gandhi. Humanity, wrote a famous scholar, owes a heavy debt of gratitude to Gandhiji . The greatest minds of the last hundred years tried to explore and explain the mind, the message and the mission of the Mahatma even if the attempt was fascinating, puzzling and even frustrating to some. But all were agreed that no one, no saint for that matter, “has done so much to lighten the misery of the oppressed and restore their self-respect”. Among the extraordinary qualities of his head and heart were humility and humour which endeared him to millions all over the world. “ I have nothing new to teach the world,” he declared in utmost humility, “Truth and Non-Violence are as old as the hills.” These two were the guiding principles of his life, the pursuit of which was his mission till his last breath. Men can overcome misery, cruelty and violence by truth and non-violence. That is the message of his life and death. Satyagraha is both a science and an art of overthrowing evil with good. Happiness does not lie in possessiveness and victory is not success. Gandhiji explained the evolution of Satyagraha and his own travails in propagating it when he referred to the five stages -indifference, ridicule, abuse, repression and respect. It is the soul force that triumphed over an empire on which the sun was expected not to set.

He could laugh at himself and make fun of his own persona. “Mine is a mad house,” he once said, “ and I am the maddest of the lot. But those who cannot see the good in these mad people should have their eye examined.” In a land of paradoxes he described himself as the biggest paradox. Religion to Gandhiji was ‘not a Sunday show, but hourly, minutely mentor and monitor.’ His religion begins where doctrine ceases, explained a scholar. An authority on psychology Erikson described Gandhiji as ‘ a religious actualist’ who made ‘an alliance of his inner voice and the voice of mankind.’ His attitude towards religions was ‘ not one of negative toleration but positive appreciation.’ He respected all religions though no religion was perfect. “ The Allah of Islam is the same as the God of the Christians and Isvara of the Hindus. Even as there are numerous names of God in Hinduism there are names of God in Islam. The names do not indicate individuality but attributes. God is above all attributes, Indescribable, Immeasurable. It would be height of intolerance and intolerance is a species of violence to believe that your religion is superior to other religions.” To him there is no God other than Truth and that can be realised through Ahimsa or non-violence. Death has no terror to the God-fearing. He found no incompatibility between man’s physical and intellectual limitations and his capacity for spiritual progress. People of all faiths attended Gandhiji’s prayer-meetings and an instance of the Mahatma’s hold over them was what a visitor from abroad wrote: “The best Christian in the world today is a Hindu and he lives at Sevagram.” Gandhiji undertook fasts for causes big and small. His idea was not to embarrass anyone or authority but ‘ to sting people’s conscience into action.’

Violence confronted him, as his grandson narrated in his biography, at every stage in his long life, right from the hard struggles in South Africa till his last breath on January 30, 1948. The answer to violence is non-violence, only non-violence. A week before his assassination Gandhiji told Edgar Snow that non-violence is a political means, not only a matter of personal ethics. That was a few days after a bomb was hurled at his house and seven days before Godse’s bullets did what the bomb could not. The frail body gently bled to death and the mortal remains were consigned to holy flames in the midst of inconsolable grief. No one can ever silence that spirit. As Radhakrishnan summed up “nothing better has ever been taught or lived since the world first began.”

Section 1

Homage to the Mahatma

“The Light which led us to freedom, though not to unity, still burns and will burn on till it conquers,” prophesied Sri Aurobindo in his tribute to Mahatma Gandhi. Hailing it as no ordinary light Jawaharlal Nehru said that “the light will illumine this country for many more years, and a thousand years later that light will still be seen in this country and the world will see it and will give solace to innumerable hearts.” That light represented eternal truths, showing us the right path, according to Nehru. Nothing better has ever been lived or taught since the world began, wrote Radhakrishnan. To Rabindranath Tagore it was “ineffable, like music, like beauty”.

When homage is paid to the memory of the Mahatma on October 2 every year those who were fortunate to bask in the glory of that Light have now a duty to tell the younger generation about the significance of that Light. Gandhiji who led the greatest mass movement and the most peaceful revolution in human history was killed by his own people for whose redemption he lived. Einstein wrote that future generations would find it difficult to believe that such a man in flesh and blood walked on this planet. Four decades after he left us many, as Einstein said, would rub their eyes in disbelief when told about the mesmerizing hold of Gandhiji on the masses during the freedom struggle. As many, if not more, would doubt the relevance of his message in the 21st century.

The answer to the questions cynics and skeptics raise is contained in a simple explanation Gandhiji himself gave. Truth and non-violence are as old as the hills, he said. “No literature or propaganda is needed about it. Those who believe in the simple truths I have laid down can propagate them only by living them,” he said. There is no dharma higher than Truth and no duty higher than Ahimsa. He rejected the suggestion that he propounded a new theory or philosophy. There was no such thing as Gandhism, he asserted.

He was a practical idealist who, as Shriman Narayan put it, had no use of any ideas if they could not be implemented and being acted upon in life. He was in a hurry to liberate his people not only from political bondage but also from social injustice and economic exploitation. “I entertain no fads in this regard,” he declared and clarified that even atomic energy could be used for the benefit of the people. Human labour and dignity should be respected. Unemployment should give way to full and rewarding employment. True economics, he explained, stands for social justice. It promotes the good and equality of all including the weakest.

Every minute of his life was spent for the welfare of the people. His dream was to wipe out every tear from every eye. His dream was communal harmony based on equal respect for all faiths. He talked of that great dream when he launched his movement around the twenties of the last century. Two decades later he again spoke about that dream and poignantly stated that “If that dream could be realized even now when I am old man on the verge of death, my heart would dance. Children would then frolic in joy.” Fifteen days later he fell to the assassin’s bullet with God’s name on his lips. As Radhakrishnan wrote “We have killed his body but the spirit in him which is light from above will penetrate far into space and time and inspire countless generations for nobler living.”

When President APJ Abdul Kalam exhorts school children to translate their dreams into vision and vision into reality, he is reminding us all of the Mahatma’s dream. The best homage we can pay to the Mahatma is to promote those ideals that liberated us politically to be taught in every school and college. The custodians of the future need to be educated about the legacy they have inherited and its imperishable value. Not in schools and colleges only but in every home an effort should be made to know about it. Gandhiji himself said that he learnt his first lessons in civic responsibility from his uneducated mother.

Gandhiji - "The Practical Idealist"

"I claim to be a practical idealist," said Mahatma Gandhi once. Explaining how life and its problems taught him many lessons, Gandhiji dismissed any claim of having discovered a new philosophy or message for humankind. "I have nothing new to teach the world," he declared, "truth and non-violence are as old as the hills." In his tireless pursuit of truth he learnt from his experiments and errors as well. Truth and non-violence constituted the main tenets of his philosophy. But in a discussion with a Jain seer Gandhiji admitted that by instinct he was truthful but not non-violent. Said the Mahatma: "I have been truthful but not non-violent. There is no dharma higher than truth. Ahimsa is the highest duty".

Cautioning his disciples and followers against making an attempt to promote 'Gandhism' and publicising his ideas, Gandhiji said: "There is no such thing as Gandhism. I do not want to leave any sect after me." Nor was there any need to promote Gandhian ideals through propaganda. "No literature or propaganda is needed about it. Those who believe in the simple truths I have laid down can propagate them by living them. Right action contains its own propaganda and needs no other," he explained. As Ronald Duncan put it Gandhiji was the most practical man who would always drive any thought to its personal implication and practical application.

Satyagraha or Sarvodaya, truth or ahimsa --- every ideal he set for himself was first tested in the laboratory of his mind. Science was as important for him as religion. There was no conflict between them. His spirituality synthesized science, religion and philosophy. If Satyagraha ennobles the human spirit, Sarvodaya brings all people--the rich and the poor, the employer and the employee, the tallest and the lowest--together 'in the silken net of love.' The need is to control the root of all problems--the human mind. "The mind," wrote Gandhiji, is a restless bird; the more it gets, the more it wants and still remains unsatisfied." Simple yet meaningful life is possible only when the mind is tranquil. Restraint holds the key to human development. Highest perfection is unattainable without highest restraint, he stated. Explaining the meaning of selfless action, the Mahatma quoted from the Gita and said: "The sages say that renunciation means foregoing an action which springs from desire and relinquishing means the surrender of its fruit."

Politics and economics are vital for human progress. Politics cannot be a taboo for ever. Eschew politics of power but not politics of service, he exhorted. Politics without religion (ethics) is dirt. True economics stands for social justice. It promotes the good of all equally including the weakest and is indispensable for decent life. The goal of both politics and economics is the welfare of all, not of a particular section or even the majority of the people for that matter.

In a land of paradoxes, Gandhiji conceded, he was the biggest paradox. The man with a modern outlook wore just loin cloth and carried the spinning wheel wherever he went. His capacity for enduring pain and suffering and insults and indignities was boundless. That was why Einstein called him 'the miracle of a man.' Gandhiji had also that extraordinary gift of laughing at himself. Referring to the spinning wheel he once said: "People have laughed at my spinning wheel and an acute critic once observed that when I died the wheels would serve to make the funeral pyre. That, however, has not shaken my faith in the spinning wheel." But Gandhiji was quick to add that if "the government can provide full employment to our people without help of khadi and village industries, I am prepared to wind up my constructive work in this sphere." A poignant endorsement of the Gandhian approach was made three years after Gandhiji's assassination by Acharya Vinoba Bhave who declared that if the state could find other avenues of employment he would have "no hesitation in burning his wooden charkha to cook one day's meal!"

The Mahatma was not against machines and modernization. He would welcome the machine that lightens the burden of the people living in cottages and would 'prize every invention made for the benefit of all'. What he opposed was the craze for the multiplication of machinery and accumulation of wealth without any concern for the starving millions. He practised what he preached and preached ideals that can be acted upon. His 135th birth anniversary is an occasion for us to reflect on the everlasting relevance of his work and ideals and offer our gratitude to the Mahatma for bequeathing to us such a treasure. May we grow to be worthy of it!

Section 1

Remembering Gandhiji

Gandhi Jayanti is a day of peace and prayer; an occasion for renewing our faith in the wealth of values he bequeathed to us. The greatest tribute we can pay to his memory, wrote Jawaharlal Nehru, “is to follow reverently in the path he showed us and to do our duty in life and in death.” The Mahatma’s service and sacrifice secured freedom for India and held out to the war-ravaged world hope in the midst of darkness.

Gandhiji called himself a paradox. He was no ordinary paradox. He sought to blend the saint and the politician and establish the Kingdom of God through non-violence. In combining intellectuality and pragmatism, courage and compassion, wisdom and humour, correctness and courtesy and ethics and politics, he had few equals in history. By making an alliance of the inner voice and the voice of mankind he taught us the essence of spiritual realization. Milton Mayer observed that Gandhi “was the first Christian politician since Jesus – Washington, Jefferson and Lincoln not excepted.” Gopala Krishna Gokhale, Gandhi’s mentor, saw in him Indian humanity at its best. A western writer noticed three great modern influences on Gandhi - Tolstoy, a Russian, Ruskin an Englishman and Thoreau an American. He felt that Gandhi’s development took place not in India but in England and South Africa. In fact he read Edwin Arnold’s English translation of his favourite scripture Bhagavad Gita for the first time in England and that was a turning point in Gandhi’s life.

Gandhiji was both a puzzle and paradox. Observers were at times baffled but always fascinated by his words and deeds. To some he was a scientist - “not a mere scientist but a great scientist in the realm of social truth.” He was an artist at work, exulted one of his most trusted disciples. Nothing better has ever been taught or lived since the world first began, wrote Radhakrishnan. He was ‘a great bridge’ explained Ernest Barker ‘between a great Indian tradition of devout and philosophic religion and the Western tradition of civil and political liberty in the life of the community.’ Aldous Huxley found in Gandhi a warning to people who thought that ‘technology and organization could turn the petty human animal into a superhuman being and could provide a substitute for the infinities of spiritual realization.’ Bernard Shaw, the sharpest literary mind of the last century, and a great admirer of the Mahatma, received from Gandhi a gentle retort when Shaw expressed his misgivings about non-violence saying that “the vegetariansim of the sheep makes no appeal to the tiger.” To which Gandhi gently replied that he did not believe that “the British are all tiger and no man.”

The poor and the exploited were Gandhi’s main concern. His goal was the removal of poverty and human misery. Of India he once wrote that “eighty per cent of the Indian population are compulsorily unemployed for half the year”. Political freedom, he declared, had no meaning for the millions of Indians who had no food and shelter. He wanted the village to become an equal to the town and the city. The village would provide the basis and the foundation for Indian democracy where every child and every woman would live and work on equal terms with man. Swaraj for him meant essentially Gram Swaraj.

It was India’s great good fortune that such a man lived amidst us to lead us from bondage to freedom. His grandson, Rajmohan Gandhi, titled his grandfather’s biography ‘The Good Boatman’ who ferried his people to the shore of safety and freedom. When Gandhiji once called on Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore, India’s first Nobel Laureate wrote “When you had taken your leave, I found God’s footprints on my floor.” Neither the passage of time nor pettiness of politics can erase those *footprints* that have adorned the entire land. They shall continue to serve as a beacon for India and humanity at large.

Martyrdom of the Mahatma

January 30, every year, brings back poignant memories of the martyrdom of Mahatma Gandhi. Even though fifty-five years have passed since the Mahatma left us, people in every part of the world continue to derive solace and inspiration from his life and work. The poor and the meek, in particular, have an affinity with the Mahatma because in him they found an expression of their aspirations. Leaders paying homage to Gandhiji's memory at Raj Ghat, official functions and academic discussions are all a part of the annual routine and familiar ritual. It is amusing, if not annoying, to hear some discussing the 'relevance of Gandhi' to contemporary world. Gandhiji found himself out of place when India, for whose freedom he devoted all his time and energy, was celebrating her Independence on the 15th of August 1947. He was away in Bengal mourning the tragic partition of India into two countries and saving the lives of thousands of innocent people. Let us recall what Lord Mountbatten wrote on that occasion:

"My dear Gandhiji,

In the Punjab we have 55000 soldiers and large scale rioting on our hands. In Bengal our force consists of one man, and there is no rioting. As a serving officer, as well as an administrator, may I be allowed to pay my tribute to the One Man Boundary Force."

Gandhiji's first fast was for the cause of Hindu-Muslim unity. His last fast was also for the cause of Hindu-Muslim unity. A devout Hindu 'who sought spiritual communion with Christianity and Islam' Gandhiji was hailed as the greatest Indian since the Buddha and the greatest man since Jesus Christ. The British saw in him their truest friend. His religion was devoid of ritual and dogma. It was based on faith in God and trust in human goodness. There is nothing stronger than the human spirit. "Strength does not come from physical capacity. It comes from an indomitable will", he explained.

Non-violence is the only panacea for a world dominated by greed, hatred, selfishness and violence. To quote Gandhiji: "Non violence is the first article of my faith. It is also the last article of my creed." He never claimed to have discovered a new religion or philosophy. He sought to synthesize the different and various streams of India's culture and heritage and present to the people of India a practical approach to tackle their numerous problems. "I am not a visionary," he said, "I claim to be a practical idealist. The religion of non-violence is not merely for the Rishis and saints. It is meant for the common people as well." That is why Jawaharlal Nehru saw in Gandhiji "the greatest symbol of India, of the past, of the present and of the future we could have." The revolution he launched was described as 'much more radical' than any of the revolutions ever suggested. Still, he knew better than anyone the difficulty of the task that lay before him. No one was more aware of his limitations than Gandhiji himself. He was not opposed to either the machine or to modernization or to even large scale production provided they did not affect the people and the villages they live in. The benefits of the machine and of production must reach the people. The rich cannot prosper at the expense of the poor just as the cities cannot expand at the expense of the villages. Village development holds the key to national progress. His emphasis on discipline is no less relevant. Calling upon the youth to observe disciplined obedience he said: "I beseech you to realize the supreme importance of discipline. Let it not be said that we are a people incapable of maintaining discipline. Indiscipline will mean disaster."

His Satyagraha showed that there was 'a greater power in life than force and that power lay in truth, love and non-violence.' It is "not merely the negative virtue of abstaining from violence but the positive one of doing good." That is why Gandhiji's "sword of spirit pierces to the very heart of the moral problem with which modern civilization is confronted." The New York Times in its tribute to Gandhiji wrote that "He has left as his heritage a spiritual force that must in God's good time prevail over arms and armaments and dark doctrines of violence."

When today's world is threatened by 'dark doctrines of violence' and horrendous deeds of terror, the hope for humankind lies in the spiritual force and power of love the Mahatma bequeathed to us. As the great seer Sri Aurobindo said in his tribute to the Mahatma "the light which led us to freedom, though not to unity, still burns and will burn on till it conquers."

(February 2003)

Section 1

Gandhiji, UN and World Peace

Gandhi jayanthi is a day of renewal of our faith in, and rededication to, the values dear to the Father of the Nation. Gandhiji's life, work and death testify to the triumph of Truth and Love over hatred and violence. The spirit and light that emanated from him "extended beyond India and beyond time." India, the world and humanity at large need more than ever before that spirit and that power of non-violent action. "I worship God as Truth and there is no other God than Truth", he declared. God, said the Mahatma, never occurs in person but always in action. His conception of God and religion transcended all faiths and frontiers. No one understood better than he the essence of every religion and none was more aware of its shortcomings. In his own words: "If I could not accept Christianity either as a perfect or the greatest religion neither was I then convinced of Hinduism being such." The world of today needs the religion of Gandhi because it is not religion that is being practised. It is not religion in the strict sense of the term. It is faith in innate human goodness and the invincibility of human spirit. It is religion based on Truth and Love and religion that thrives on non-violence. It is religion that he preached and practised applying it in daily life to individual problems, to collective work and to political goals as well. Religion is a means to self-realization and politics a means of promoting social good. As such there could be no conflict between religion and politics. Gandhiji asserted the point thus: "Those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means". Satyagraha "his supreme achievement" demonstrated that "there is a greater power in life than force."

October is also the month in which the United Nations was born. At the end of the Second World War was created this world body to promote peace and cooperation among nations. The UN Charter declared that its object was to save succeeding generations of people from the scourge of war. The UNESCO proclaimed its goal as building defences in the minds of men, as war begins in the minds of men. Ironically as many people have been killed by violence since the UN came into being during the last fifty six years as in that terrible second world war.

The strength of the United Nations lies in two things—its longevity and its numerical strength with all but four of the 193 countries of the world being its members. Beyond that the UN's claims to success are negligible. Its finances are weak, credibility low and influence limited. The UN has been functioning according to the commands of the big powers, especially the United States. Kofi Annan, the suave Secretary General of the United Nations, must be aware of the quip that the Secretary General is more a Secretary than a General! The UN's biggest failure is its inability to curb arms race and proliferation of lethal weapons and to prevent local wars that have taken a heavy toll of life and property in different parts of the world. The latest menace to world peace comes in the form of terrorism. IT means not only the exciting Information Technology but also the most dreaded menace-international terrorism. With money being available in plenty thanks to the rise of drug mafia and legitimacy being provided by dubious religious doctrines and self-proclaimed leaders of bigotry and promoters of hatred there has risen a global network of terrorists threatening world peace and security. The terrorist who kills innocent people is no martyr even if he kills himself in the process. Such a terrorist is a maniac and menace to society. Worse still he has acquired access to latest technology and most dangerous weapons. Therefore the fight against terrorism is a global fight. Weapons alone are not enough. Collective thinking and common effort at every level, both macro and micro, will have to be generated to fight the new menace.

The roots of violence lie in poverty, illiteracy and ignorance. This is where Gandhiji and the United Nations become more relevant now than before. We must turn to the message and mission of Gandhiji to wipe out poverty and injustice. As Pope John Paul II once said development is another name for peace. Who else but the United Nations can undertake such a massive work of eliminating want, disease and ignorance? The American President said that the century's first war is against international terrorism. But the real war should be against the source of all violence and terrorism—poverty, bigotry illiteracy and injustice. And everyone and every nation must join in that war to ensure world peace.

“No Ordinary Light”

Gandhi Jayanti is a day of renewal of our faith in that spirit that moulded the lives of millions of India and led this great country of ours from bondage to freedom. The light that has shone in this country, wrote Jawaharlal Nehru, was no ordinary light, the light ‘that has illumined this country for many years, will illumine this country for many more years and will give solace to innumerable hearts a thousand years later.’ The spirit, said RadhaKrishnan, ‘is a light from above which will penetrate far into space and time and inspire countless generations for nobler living.’ It is light “that comes from the eternal source of wisdom’ in the words of Rabindranath Tagore.

To those born in the recent past Gandhiji might mean just another great name and to the many trapped in the culture of consumerism, Gandhiji may not even appear relevant in the new millennium. When the goal is to become a millionaire or billionaire or crorepati - the disease being aptly called ‘affluenza’ — why bother about such values as truth, love and non-violence? Richard Attenborough’s movie ‘Gandhi’ prompted many men and women in the west to ask the question which the great Einstein had prophesied “Did such a man really walk on this earth?” Neither the passage of time nor the awesome power of science and technology can corrode the indelible imprint he left behind on this earth.

Gandhiji was opposed, not to authority but to the misuse and abuse of power, not to the acquisition of property but to the needless accumulation of wealth, not to industrialization but to indiscriminate mechanization, the “craze” for machinery as he described it, not to the exercise of rights but to the shirking of responsibilities. From his “unlettered mother’ he learnt the importance of duties and responsibilities and from his noble wife the value of gender equality. His humility was disarming and selflessness amazing. His radiant presence was a source of comfort as much to his followers as to the numerous foreign visitors always seen around him.

In thought, word and deed, the Mahatma belonged to the poor and the downtrodden. His mission was to wipe every tear from every eye. We may not have either the will or the capacity to wipe the tears of our suffering brethren. But can we not shed at least a tear for them? Gandhiji’s ‘swaraj’ was for “those toiling and unemployed millions who do not get even a square meal a day and have to scratch along with a piece of stale bread and a pinch of salt.” To quote his own words again, even God could not dare to appear before the poor and the hungry except in the form of a “bowl of rice”. The weakest sections of the society were the closest to his heart. Recall, he exhorted the people, “the face of the poorest and the weakest man whom you may have seen and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him.”

To him India’s Independence would be complete only when the landlord and the peasant, the factory owner and the worker, people belonging to all religions, irrespective of any distinction of caste, or creed or status enjoy freedom. Fifty two years ago Gandhiji left us. His spirit and vision have been a source of strength to us during these eventful, if not turbulent, years and they will continue to guide us in the years ahead. The light that led us from darkness to freedom is ‘no ordinary light.’

(October 2000)

Section 1

A Beacon for the Whole World

Celebration of Gandhi Jayanthi is seldom confined to India alone. That day, October 2, when India gave birth to a 'mighty soul' is dear to the entire world and as Jawaharlal Nehru said the Mahatma 'shone like a beacon not only for India but for the whole world.' Sad but true the light that emanated from India is today not visible to the Indians. The message of the great Gautama Buddha is not as much known to the people of the land of his birth as to those living outside. Such things happen in India. Aldous Huxley lamented that 'Gandhi's body was borne to the pyre on a weapon carrier' and that 'military and coercive might' as displayed by the presence of soldiers, police and fighter planes, was paraded at the cremation of the messiah of peace! It was 'an inevitable irony,' Huxley felt. Today our leaders, at all levels, perform the ritual of paying homage to the Mahatma, flanked by gun-toting security men and the 'inevitable irony' is that the land that gave birth to apostles of nonviolence from the Buddha to Gandhi is afflicted with mindless violence.

The Gandhian path is not hard to follow. We need not wear khadi. Such symbolic gestures do not enhance the credibility of our commitment to the Gandhian ideals. An English writer who was fascinated by the Mahatma's life and message was amused that leaders in India, claiming to be the heirs to the Gandhian spirit, indulge in long speeches and lavish dinners donning huge garlands. That has been the bane of Indian politics since he left us, rather we sent him out of this world, fifty years ago.

We are a nation of small men. Small in every sense of the term-small in thinking and small in not being able to understand the greatness of the Mahatma. Let us try to do only small things at our own level in a humble way like avoiding pomp and extravagance at public functions. Should we waste money, precious public money, on huge garlands, cutouts and processions, in honour of our leaders, elected, nominated or self-styled? Should we wait for hours for a VIP to arrive and start a meeting or function? Is not a common man's time as precious as that of a VIP? Is it necessary for us to be told by a minister or leader that we should keep our surroundings clean? Can we not organise citizens' welfare measures such as providing medical aid to the ailing poor and to victims of tragedies and disasters? Let us on this sacred day of his birth resolve to honour the memory of the Mahatma by following his advice at the local level. Only by serving the poor and the less fortunate brethren can we claim to be worthy of his legacy. The beacon that illumined the path for all humanity will continue to shine for ever. We, on our part, must strive to ensure that the rays of that great light bring cheer to every home and village in the land of his birth.

(October 1998)

The Greatest Treasure

“I have a sense of utter shame both as an individual and as the head of the Government of India that we should have failed to protect the greatest treasure that we possessed,” said Jawaharlal Nehru in the Constituent Assembly two days after Mahatma Gandhi was slain. In that moving speech Pandit Nehru also described Gandhiji as ‘the greatest symbol of the India of the past and of the India of the future’.

History tells us that darkness cannot tolerate the ‘light’ in the great. It happened in Athens in 399 b.C. when Socrates was put to death. It happened again in 32 A.D. when in Golgotha Jesus Christ was nailed to the Cross. It was reenacted in Delhi on January 30, 1948 when ‘the Father of the Nation’, lovingly called Bapu, was killed by his own people ‘for whose redemption he lived and died’. What the dark forces extinguished then was only the body of Gandhiji. As Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan put it : “We have killed his body but the spirit in him which is a light from above will penetrate far into space and time and inspire countless generations for nobler living”.

It is that spirit that India must recover and that light that India must seek with renewed vigour and determination in the golden jubilee year of Independence. It was no ordinary spirit and light. The whole world found in Gandhiji a new hope for humankind battered, within a space of thirty years, by two terrible wars. Scholars and scientists, statesmen and seers, poets and philosophers and millions of ordinary people too realised the power of love and non-violence.

Our leaders at the time of Independence, though shaken by the sudden and tragic exit of the Mahatma, stuck to the daunting task of nation-building, drawing inspiration from Gandhiji’s life and message. The value system underlying the new policy was largely nurtured by him. And it is solid and durable value system. Non-violence is the only panacea for the ills of humankind. If it was Hindu-Muslim unity then, it is communal harmony or national integration now. If it was Harijan emancipation that Gandhiji crusaded for, it is social justice today meaning emancipation of not only the Dalits, but of all oppressed classes and women in general. No political party of government can question the essence of the value system that Gandhiji so steadfastly nurtured. Only by reaffirming our faith in the Gandhian approach and by renewing our pledge to pursue those goals, can we hope to free the Indian society from the malaise of apathy, corruption and greed for pelf and power. Gandhiji is India’s greatest gift to the modern world. That is why October 2nd is an important day not only in India’s calendar but for the World at large. The treasure he bequeathed to us is inexhaustible. It is not confined to India alone. It belongs to all those who believe in the uniqueness of the human spirit - all those who accept that love is greater than brute force and that man is more valuable than both machine and money.

Necessary for us to remind ourselves that Gandhiji was not opposed either to the use of machine or the growth of Industry so long as it did not deprive the poor and the downtrodden of their livelihood. He knew, better than others, about the difficulties and hurdles that come in the way of the emancipation of the poor. Someone quipped that ‘the meek shall inherit the earth but not its mineral rights’. It was for the poor and the meek that Gandhiji lived and died. Their number has not decreased. Probably it never will. To them all in particular October 2nd is a day to remember.

Section 1

The light that illumines our path...

Forty nine years ago 'the light' had 'gone' 'out of our lives' - the light that had led us from bondage to freedom, the light the entire world looked to for 'a way out of the darkness'. The dazed Jawaharlal quickly recovered from the shock to remind us that 'it was not ordinary light' and that the light that represented the eternal truths 'will illumine this country for many more years and a thousand years.

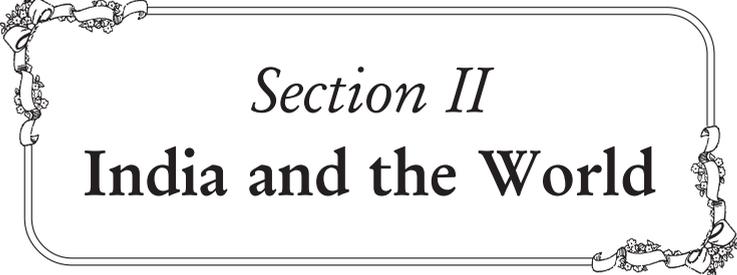
As messages from all over the world poured into grief stricken India, a moving tribute from a leading English daily of that time brought tears even to the stout-hearted. The Hindustan Standard of January 31, 1948 left the editorial page blank except for these few lines : "Gandhiji has been killed by his own people for whose redemption he lived. the second crucifixion in the history of the world has been enacted on a Friday - the same day Jesus was done to death one thousand, nine hundred and fifteen years ago. Father, forgive us".

Memorials in stone and metal have been raised and January 30 and October 2 witness rituals of homage to Gandhiji. Fifteen days after the assassination of the Mahatma, in a broadcast to the Nation, Nehru cautioned against memorials which 'mock him and belie his message' and exhorted the people to understand Gandhiji's 'way to live and the way to die' and 'follow reverently in the path he showed us and to do our duty in life and in death. As Rajaji observed "October 2 and January 30 cannot be better observed than by a rededication to Truth and non-violence to the extent we are, each one of us, capable of and by a prayer for increased strength of heart in order to be more and more devoted to that ideal".

Gandhiji does not need to be propagated nor to be rescued from the many who claim to be his followers. Every one of us, including the millions who did not either see or read him, is his legatee. As Edgar Snow beautifully put it "This small man, so full of a large love of men, extended beyond India and beyond time. There was a mirror in the Mahatma in which everyone could see the best in himself and when the mirror broke, it seemed that the thing in oneself might be fled forever".

Rajmohan Gandhi summed it up all in just one line : "Our link with Gandhiji is not of blood but of spirit" it is that human spirit that transcends the barriers of time and space. That light and spirit are not the preserve of a country or of a people. They are eternal. They illumine our path...

(February 1997)



Section II
India and the World

*“There was a time long ago when
an Indian had to hang his head in shame;
today it is a proud privilege to be an Indian”*

- Jawaharlal Nehru

Section 2

Section II India and the World

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China's Quest for Hegemony

Is China redefining global geopolitics? Having risen to the status of a superpower is China emerging as the new hegemon of the Eastern hemisphere? People's Republic of China's achievements are of gigantic proportions. China's ambitions are no less. The world is so awestruck by China's amazing progress on several fronts that people from all parts of the world are eagerly visiting Beijing and Shanghai that showcase China's stunning achievements. Recent publications by scholars of repute throw light on the implications of the subtle and intriguing moves being made by China on the chessboard of international politics.

The western world led by the United States of America, the so-called first world of yesteryears, is watching with anxiety and concern Beijing's moves on the global scene. The latest issue of *Foreign Affairs* (May-June 2010) carries an incisive article by Robert D. Kaplan under the title *The Geography of Chinese Power*. The author begins with a reference to the famous 1904 article by the English geographer Sir Halford Mackinder who had predicted that China would eventually guide the world by "building for a quarter of humanity a new civilization, neither quite Eastern nor quite Western." Kaplan shows how China combines western modernity with 'a hydraulic civilization' (societies that exercise centralized control over irrigation) explaining how 'internal dynamism creates external ambitions.' Explaining in detail how China is stretching its influence not only in the Asia-Pacific region but also in Africa, Kaplan predicts "the emergence of a Greater China of truly hemispheric proportions." India which according to Kaplan is "building a great navy" may checkmate China. The US would welcome it. How the US, the hegemon of the Western hemisphere, will prevent China from becoming the hegemon of the Eastern hemisphere could be 'the signal drama of the age', writes Kaplan.

Exactly a year ago Kaplan had written in the same journal, *Foreign Affairs* (March-April 2009) a well researched article titled "Center Stage for the Twenty-first Century —Power Plays in the Indian Ocean" The Indian Ocean, wrote Kaplan, "combines the centrality of Islam with global energy politics and the rise of India and China to reveal a multilayered multipolar world. India's and China's great power aspirations, as well as their quests for energy security, have compelled the two countries to redirect their gazes from land to the seas." He had forecast an intense rivalry in the Indian ocean between China and India with America, the one great power from outside the Indian Ocean region, acting as 'broker between India and China in their own backyard.'

The Guardian Weekly of March 5-11, 2010 carried an article by Bruno Philip in the leading French daily *Le Monde* which says that China is putting together 'a string of pearls' in India's home waters. The string, writes Bruno, is a part of Chinese strategy 'to trap India into a spider's web reducing its options in the event of a crisis.' Building a port at Gwadar in Pakistan, constructing ports at Sittwe, Mergui and Dawei in Myanmar, developing the port of Hambantota in Sri Lanka, modernizing the Chittagong port in Bangladesh, tightening the boundaries with and security in Tibet and Nepal are among the other major activities in building this 'string of pearls'. *The Chinese Global Times* is quoted as saying "Worry about China competing for dominance of the Indian Ocean runs deep inside India."

Anxiety and concern do run deep inside not only India but every other neighbour of China. Sixty one years of its aggressive and expansionist activities bear testimony to China's quest for global supremacy that began with the occupation of Tibet and ruthless suppression of revolt by the upholders of a great Buddhist tradition and culture. India was invaded and large areas of its territory grabbed. Vietnam was taught a lesson with 'a punitive war.' Hong Kong was embraced into its fold. Taiwan also known as the Republic of China, Formosa and Nationalist China is being 'enveloped.' The pattern is familiar. The process may be different, marginally. The goal is hegemony, regional or global. Modern history is mostly a story about such great powers as UK, France, USA, Germany, Russia, Japan and Italy and now China. Greatness and goodness rarely go together, in individuals or nations.

(June 2010)

Section 2

Global Powershift

It is an uncontestable fact that there is a massive shift in the global balance of power. The international system is not what it was just a few years ago and may undergo several tectonic changes in the years ahead. The shift in balance of power has been silent and sudden, caused by a convergence of several factors. History teaches that great nations and empires from ancient Rome to twentieth century Great Britain declined due to loss of economic strength. Still, it is possible that the recession and meltdown staring at today's world are symptoms of a deeper malaise.

The geopolitical shift that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union was marked by the emergence of the United States as the predominant military power and the 'lone superpower' besides being the centre of the international economy. Samuel Huntington, the author of *The Clash of Civilizations*, conceded that the world perceived the United States as a 'rogue superpower, intrusive, interventionist, exploitative, unilateralist, hegemonic, hypocritical.' Not only archrival Russia but other leading role players like China abhorred the idea of such a unipolar world dominated by the 'superhegemonist ambitions' of the United States. The way the US and Russia tried to checkmate each other on the chessboard of international politics during the last few years is reminiscent of the politics of cold war. Lesser powers too resented the United States assuming "the self-appointed task of unilaterally invading and rebuilding other countries."

Suddenly the world came to witness the unexpected climb-down of the United States from being the *sui generis* to that of *primus inter pares* (first among equals). Mighty America's quest for winning new friends and allies including India gained momentum in the first decade of the new century. In addition to its old ally Japan, China and India began to figure prominently in American strategy and diplomacy though it is bemusing to hear an American policy maker's recent statement that the US and China are 'natural allies' because they both are 'the two world's largest consumers and largest importers of oil.' Notwithstanding the severe economic setbacks, 2008 is a landmark year in the history of the United States as for the first time an African-American has been elected its President. Barack Obama the President elect has brought to America a new hope with his charisma and dynamism, assuring his country of its status as the world's pre-eminent economic and military power.

Recession, energy crisis and rise of terrorism have brought the former rivals and present big powers closer to one another in their effort to fight the new challenges. The first decade of the 21st century has witnessed horrendous terrorist strikes in many parts of the world with India being the worst affected. The 'golden age of globalization', say some experts, has ended as evidenced by the fact that global outsourcing is fast losing its attraction. Prosperity of some individuals and a few nations may have gone up. But human misery has alarmingly increased. The world food prices have, since 2005, shot up by 83%. And the woes of the farmers have not abated. Added to these is climate change which will hit humankind very hard in the future. A Report released by the Center for Strategic and International Studies says that planet earth will be warmer by 1.3 degrees and there will be "heightened internal and cross border tensions caused by large scale migrations; conflicts sparked by resource scarcity; increased disease proliferation." The 'carbon monster' will be man's worst enemy according to the report. Ecological meltdown has begun to cause immense damage to marine resources and seas are being converted into 'dead zones', warn climate scientists. An expert has revealed that fish stocks are being decimated and some species are "down to a mere 2% or 3% of what they were in 1850."

At stake is not the future status of big nations or the prosperity of some individuals but the survival of humankind and the health of planet earth itself. Unless nations, big and small, realize that the time has come for collective and constructive action to overcome these challenges, the future of humankind is bleak. It is not enough to say 'we can.' We should, sooner the better.

Planet in Peril

For an hour on March 29, 2008 lights in thirty million houses all over the world were turned off. There was light in that darkness. It was a thoughtful way of paying obeisance to mother earth. A confession of guilt and an expression of gratitude to the planet for so nobly carrying the unbearable load of dirt and garbage caused by human callousness. There are limits to endurance, human or planetary. Al Gore, the Nobel prize winner, calls it planetary emergency confronting humankind. His documentary *Inconvenient Truth* is a timely eye-opener on global warming with 'irrefutable evidence of the extent of damage to the environment.'

His Nobel lecture, excerpts of which along with R.K.Pachauri's, are carried in the latest issue of *Span*, presents the grim scenario with chilling facts and figures. The millions of tons of global warming pollution we are dumping 'into the thin shell of atmosphere surrounding our planet' cause heat from the sun to be trapped leading to increase in temperatures. "As a result the earth has a fever. And the fever is rising," he warns. Global climate change is indicated by rising sea levels, shrinking glaciers and extinction of plants and animals. Temperatures at the earth's surface, says an expert body, could increase from the 2000 level of 2.5 degrees (F) to 10.4 degrees(F) by 2100.

Environmental damage is increasing alarmingly. On this Al Gore says: "We are recklessly burning and clearing our forests and driving more and more species into extinction. The very web of life on which we depend is being ripped and frayed." If 'nuclear winter' was earlier the perceived threat to human survival, today it is 'carbon summer' that threatens to extinguish life on planet earth. R.K.Pachauri, Chairman of the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, in his Nobel lecture recalled the Indian concept of "vasudaiva kutumbakam" and called for united global action. He warned that every year of delay means greater climate change in the future. Both Al Gore and Pachauri call for immediate action. We can avoid 'the worst if we act boldly, decisively and quickly,' says Al Gore.

The silver lining to the dark cloud is the effort being made, even if it is modest, at the local and individual level to fight eco terrorism. Exnora International, the Chennai based organization, has shown the way by bringing about amazing transformation of houses, slums and streets in some areas in Chennai. M.B.Nirmal, its founder-chairman, has devised a multi-pronged approach to tackle the menace of environmental degradation. "Think globally, act locally and do domestically" is his motto. His slogan "All good things begin with me" is the message he gives to the youth wherever he lectures on the subject. His mission is to cool the globe. For that action starts at home, continues in the vehicle and culminates in the workplace (educational institutions in case of students) is his prescription. To cool the globe let us first cool our homes, he says. Growing plants even in concrete jungles is possible through innovative methods. Plants and grass can be grown not only in pots made of clay and mud but in pipes and bamboos. It is all greenery that is grown both horizontally and vertically in and around houses. Every street must be green he says and when houses, streets, towns and cities look green the globe too will turn green saving humankind from the pollution caused by endless emissions. Every drop of water is precious says Nirmal who suggests several methods to make use of water instead of recklessly throwing it into sewerage.

The need of the hour is to initiate bold, decisive and quick action, as Al Gore exhorts, at every level and at the individual and domestic level as Nirmal does. The mission is to save the earth for our sake and for the sake of our children and theirs. It requires a massive movement with missionary zeal to spread the message far and wide. Every human being living on this planet has a duty to perform and in every home begins the first step.

(April 2008)

Section 2

Our Best Friends

Books, wrote the Old Farmers Almanac a hundred fifty years ago, are “masters who instruct us without rods or ferules, without words of anger, without bread or money. If you approach them they are not asleep; if you seek them they do not hide; if you blunder they do not scold; if you are ignorant, they do not laugh at you.”

Jawaharial Nehru, a great lover and writer of books, wrote to his young daughter Indira Priyadarshini, a lonely child then with her father in jail and mother in hospital, to grow up into a brave girl in the company of her ‘real mends’ books. Why does one read books? asked Nehru in one of his letters to his daughter and answered thus: “To instruct oneself, amuse oneself, train one’s mind, etc., etc.—certainly all this and much more. Ultimately it is to understand life with its thousand facets and to learn how to live life. Our individual experiences are so narrow and limited, if we were to rely on them alone we would also remain narrow and limited.” Books, wrote Nehru, “lift us out of our narrow ruts and steady us when storms and heavy winds bear down on us.”

The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi and the *Selected Works of Jawaharial Nehru* are a treasure trove for all interested in knowing the saga of freedom struggle. There is abundant literature on India’s freedom struggle and several biographies of the great leaders of modern India. *Mahatma Gandhi -Essays and Reflections on his life and work* edited with a scholarly introduction by Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and *Jawaharial Nehru an anthology* edited by his son Sarvepalli Gopal bring out the best of Gandhi and Nehru in a concise form. Mahatma Gandhi made it a point to present a copy of the Gita to a bridal couple on the joyous occasion of their wedding. Poignant it is to read that Nehru, granted an hour’s permission by jail authorities to go to the hospital to see his ailing wife Kamala, gave her a copy of Edgar Allan Poe’s poems conveying his love and sadness and returned to his barrack feeling ‘both heavy and empty, lonely and weary.’ Rajaji felt a deep void when he completed writing the Ramayana, a classic in the English language.

From Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore, India’s first Nobel Laureate in literature, to the recent winner of the Booker Prize, Kiran Desai, India has produced eminent writers whose works have been translated into many languages and who have been acclaimed all over the world. The enrichment of our social and cultural life by vernacular literature is too well known to need special mention here. Literary meets and book exhibitions bear testimony to it.

Among the many good books to arrive in the market special mention must be made of President APJ Abdul Kalam’s *Indomitable Spirit*, Rajmohan Gandhi’s book on his grandfather *Mohandas* and Ramachandra Guha’s *India After Gandhi*. To describe them as unputdownable would be an understatement. They inform, instruct and inspire us. The educated elderly will, of course, read them if they have not already done it. It is the younger generation that should be persuaded to read and learn from them what they have inherited and know why they are the custodians of the future. What the billion plus people of India owe to the great leaders of the past must be made known to every Indian. One is reminded of Sir Ernest Barker’s words written in a different context. Explaining the debt modern world owes to ancient Greece (Athens) Barker wrote: “We are what we are because they were what they were.”

Gandhiji wanted every tear to be wiped from every eye during his struggle to liberate India from political bondage, economic misery and social exploitation. Today our scientist-humanist President DrAPJ Abdul Kalam wants to make the billion plus Indians smile. In the noble and stirring words Jawaharlal Nehru asked: Who lives if India dies? Who dies if India lives? How can we let down ourselves and our great nation when we depend on our best friends — good books?

Summitry vs Asymmetry

“We live in a world of extraordinary inequalities of opportunity, both within and across countries,” writes Paul D. Wolfowitz, President of World Bank in his Foreword to the 2006 World Development Report which focuses on equity and development. The 320 page report offers conceptual clarifications of the terms equity and development and in the final tenth chapter explains how achieving greater global equity is possible through global action. Primarily, the effort should be to provide for “more equal international partnership” and reforms that can “enhance the power and broaden the economic access of countries where the poor live.” The Report says that the global playing field between nations is uneven and has uneven effects on different groups within countries. Equity implies equal opportunity and avoidance of deprivation in outcomes, especially in health, education and consumption levels according to the Report.

The United Nations is firmly committed to the goals of human development. In pursuit of these goals the United Nations has been regularly organising world conferences at which resolutions are passed and agreements reached. The 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development, known as Rio Earth Summit, prepared a plan of action for human development. The Millennium Development Goals set during the last fifteen years were reaffirmed at the Millennium Summit in September 2000. Broadly these goals centred round, opportunity, empowerment and security.

The 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development prepared a blueprint for action globally, nationally and locally. The aim was to plan for human development and also for the planet and its future. Sustainable Development was defined by the World Commission on Environment and Development (Brundtland Commission) as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” It promotes equality and justice ‘through people empowerment and a sense of global citizenship.’ It implies participation through democratic processes. The main aim of sustainable development is to ensure fulfilment of human needs for peace, clean air and water, food shelter, and useful employment. In August 2002 a report released by the U.S. Government stated that improved resource management, good governance and application of new technologies along with good environmental stewardship should be adopted as strategies to promote sustainable development. In April 2006 the UN released a report on the trends in sustainable development and the UN’s Commission on Sustainable Development is due to meet in New York to review progress in four inter-related areas—energy; industrial development; atmosphere and air pollution and climatic change.

Global summits and world conferences prepare blueprints and plans of action, at both macro and micro levels, to fight inequality, injustice and inequity. The WDR Report makes pointed reference to ‘inequality traps and vicious circles.’ It says that “unequal economic opportunities lead to unequal outcomes and reinforce unequal political power.” Asymmetrical relationships operate at all levels. Gender injustice is a glaring example. Women contribute more than 55% to world output besides child bearing and performing domestic duties such as house-keeping. Their share in wealth, income and political power seldom reaches double digits. The plight of children living in poor countries is pathetic, especially in the crucial areas of education and health. In most cases it is a journey through poverty from birth to death. The challenge confronting humanity is no ordinary one. Aptly it has been described as “a neo Malthusian trilemma of population overload, resource depletion and climatic change brought on by the profligate cashing in of fossil-fuel capital and threatening to reverse human progress.” (Guardian Weekly April 28 - May 4, 2006)

It is possible to hold at the global level, summits and conferences, pass resolutions and prepare plans and blueprints. It is however hard, perhaps impossible, to overcome asymmetry, local, national or global. Obviously because of lack of will. But as the saying goes where there is will there is always a way.

(June 2006)

Section 2

Indo-American Relations

Never before has the visit of an American President to India attracted such attention and comment as George Bush's, exactly a month ago. Why has the United States come to re-evaluate India's strategic importance in world affairs? Why has the US gone out of the way to enter into a nuclear deal with India which has not signed the NPT? Is the former 'cold warrior' planning to use India against her neighbours from whom threats may emanate for the hegemony of the United States? Or is the US viewing India as a major global market to further America's trade interests? As a former American President observed 'the business of America is business.'

Nearly two million Indians and people of Indian origin live in the United States. At the social and intellectual level the peoples of these two countries generally have a healthy and durable relationship. Still, at the political level the world's oldest and the largest democracies seldom displayed much warmth for each other at world fora. In fact there were many verbal clashes involving diplomats and leaders of both India and US. American perception of India, right from the beginning, was unfavourable. Many reasons are there for such a bias against India. American diplomacy was conditioned by the British policy which considered Pakistan as 'a natural ally' and frontline state in South Asia for promoting economic and strategic concerns in the middle east. On Kashmir the western powers led by the US lent support to Pakistan's contention right from January 1948 when the dispute was referred to the UN. Pakistan was a member of pacts and alliances made by the US and her allies during the cold war period. On the other hand India opposed the role of the western countries in the middle-east and the creation of the State of Israel in May 1948. India's support for Communist China and leadership of the non-aligned movement drew sharp criticism from leaders and media in the western world.

Dean Acheson, American Secretary of State during the Truman Presidency, did not conceal his dislike for India and its first Prime Minister. Wrote Acheson: "I have never been able to escape wholly from a childhood illusion that, if the world is round, the Indians must be standing on their heads or perhaps vice versa." His successor John Foster Dulles called the policy of non-alignment 'immoral.' Henry Kissinger wrote a scathing piece against non-alignment and its leaders who according to him found 'international affairs a fertile field of manipulation for ambitious men because of their intractable domestic problems.' The American media and state department called India 'preachy' found Jawharlal Nehru arrogant and his emissary Krishna Menon diabolical. The worst in Indo-American relations was seen in 1971 when the US sent its Seventh Fleet towards India with President Nixon using abusive terms in his references to Indira Gandhi.

The US has realised the strength of Indian democracy not only in successfully conducting elections but also in effecting smooth change of guard at both national and state levels. India is a 'superpower' in English language and software technology. India may not be 'shining'. But it is emerging as a strong power with the youth being 2/3 of India's population. The 21st century, according to western experts, will be dominated by China and India.

At the beginning of the 20th century an American President wanted the world to be made safe for democracy. When the 21st century arrived, America, the strongest power in the world, wants democracy to be made safe for the world. The underlying assumption is that the United States only has the political competence and moral responsibility to design the architecture of world peace and human development. As the global policeman, the US can launch attacks against any country in the name of freedom and democracy. America is the lone superpower keen on maintaining her stature and supremacy in world affairs. In contrast India is the second most populous country in the world in which the people living below the poverty line outnumber the entire population of the United States. India never wanted to play the role of a hegemon or superpower in world affairs through weapons and wealth. As Nehru declared India's policy aimed at good relations with all, close relations with neighbours and elimination of poverty, injustice and exploitation. In 2006 India may have acquired a new and welcome ally in US. Emerging India, however, will neither ignore her old allies and trusted friends nor ever forsake the policy of non-violence, peace and goodwill towards all nations of the world.

The Global Powershift

The focus is on China. The last twenty five years have witnessed the emergence of China as a global power with growing influence in many areas. In 1978, before China embarked upon reforms, her share in the world economy was less than one percent with a total foreign trade worth \$ 20.6 billion. Today China has a share of 4% of world's economy. Chinese goods are flooding the markets everywhere and European Union comprising some of the most advanced nations, is nervous about the Chinese "invasion" of European markets. China has more than 300 million mobile-phone subscribers and over a 100 million people have access to Internet. In both software and hardware the Chinese are overtaking every nation with astonishing efficiency and success.

Frederick the Great of Prussia was said to have proclaimed that his population was his strength. Mao Tse Tung spoke on similar lines and even warned the western powers during the Vietnam war that China could send another lakh of soldiers to defend Vietnam if one lakh were killed. Deng Xiaoping converted the world's largest population into the most enterprising community committed to transform China from poverty to prosperity through hard work and effective application of modern technology for the upliftment of millions of poor people.

A leading British journal has, in a recent article, written that "The world's largest autocracy (China) and its largest democracy (India) have more in common than one might think". India, according to the journal, is displaying dynamism "that has never been there before" though 'political timidity' is preventing both China and India from growing faster than at the present rate. India's problems arise from "lousy infrastructure, bumbling and burdensome regulation and restrictive northern states". Advanced countries are understandably 'concerned' about the rise of the two Asian giants and increasing cooperation between them. That China's imports from India have in the recent past gone up by 80% is an indication of growing mutual cooperation between the two great neighbours.

The need of the hour is to gird up for a turning point in India's history that is at our doorstep. The last twenty years have witnessed major breakthroughs in India's foreign policy thanks to the vision and bold initiatives of all Prime Ministers beginning with Rajiv Gandhi to the present incumbent Dr. Manmohan Singh. In spite of the uncertainty and instability of coalition politics and persistent acts of terrorism causing severe loss of life and property our leaders have displayed commendable dynamism in improving relations with neighbours and the big powers. The impossible has become possible in some instances, like improving relations with Pakistan and continuing the dialogue process. It will take longer time and greater effort, perhaps, to pull the millions of our countrymen from the clutches of poverty, to eliminate corruption in public life and prevent caste and communal conflicts. A challenge indeed for our leaders and the system of governance we have chosen!

The United States has every reason to justify its claim as the world's number one power, perhaps the sole superpower. A Harvard scholar has in a recent publication described America as the mightiest state since Rome enjoying "a position of power that is historically unprecedented". Another scholar is less modest when he writes that "we are the greatest and most virtuous power in history". Writing on Rome Lord Acton said that ancient Rome was destroyed not by any external power, because it had no enemy it could not defeat, but by its own internal weaknesses.

History tells us about the number of great powers that went into oblivion. A famous historian dismissed five hundred years of dominance of a great power as a 'wink in the eye of history'. Dominance is never absolute or permanent. The time seems to have arrived for two great civilizations to become global role players. India and China have a chance to prove that true greatness lies not in waging wars and killing people but in eliminating poverty and in promoting peace and goodwill among all nations. That was Nehru's dream - articulated at Haripura in 1938, proclaimed in 1947 and concretized in the form of Panch Sheel in 1954. Is the 21st Century unfolding the fulfilment of the dream of India's first Prime Minister?

(December 2005)

Section 2

The Making of Foreign Policy

Foreign policy, it is said, represents a nation's total culture. It is "shaped by values, attitudes and perceptions derived from the historical experience and strategic circumstances about the nation's position in world politics." The 19th century maxim that no nation has permanent friends but every nation has permanent interests is quoted often in public discourse. Diplomacy is the handmaid of foreign policy. Aply it has been summed up that 'foreign policy is what to do and diplomacy is how to do it.'

Explaining the evolution of India's foreign policy Jawaharlal Nehru said that it was "inherent in the circumstances of India, inherent in the past thinking of India, inherent in the conditioning of the Indian mind during our struggle for freedom." The values underlying the freedom struggle exerted a deep impact on the making of foreign policy. Gandhiji provided the necessary inspiration and direction when he declared in 1920 that "an India awakened and free has a message of peace and goodwill to a groaning world." Eighteen years later at the Haripura Congress, Nehru made his famous pronouncements on the foreign policy goals of free India. The people of India desired to live in peace and friendship with all countries. India, said Nehru, would work for international cooperation and goodwill. The world was on the brink of the Second World War when a message of peace and goodwill was sent from India.

The motto was closer relations with neighbors and good relations with all and the goals of the world's largest democracy were enunciated at Columbia University in the United States in 1949 by Jawaharlal Nehru thus: "Maintenance of freedom both national and individual, the elimination of want, disease, and ignorance which afflict the greater part of the world's population." He felt that it would be 'astonishingly foolish to get into this business of cold war either on grounds of principle or on grounds of expediency.' Keeping away from the rival power blocs in the post Second World War world dominated by cold war was not enough. A positive and dynamic policy aiming at elimination of poverty, injustice and violence by involving the just then liberated countries was articulated. Non-alignment was not neutrality. It was not passive non-involvement in world affairs but active mobilization of the third world countries in a movement for establishing a new world order based on freedom, equality, and justice.

Foreign policy, cautioned a scholar, is not an exercise in sainthood. The resentment of the west was not unexpected. US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles called the policy 'immoral'. Henry Kissinger felt that the policy was the result of psychological chaos underlying the mindset of the non-aligned leaders. Having failed to tackle their 'intractable domestic problems' the non-aligned leaders were "tempted to play a leading role in international affairs which was a fertile field of manipulation for ambitious men," wrote Kissinger. A leading American daily asked India not to be 'preachy.'

Yet, it is remarkable that Nehru's successors have scrupulously adhered to the basic tenets of India's policy. Lal Bahadur Shastri boldly exposed the hollowness of the Chinese bluff during the Indo-Pak war of 1965. Indira Gandhi skillfully prevented the inclusion of military clause in the Indo-Soviet Treaty of 1971. Morarji Desai could quote from the Mahabharata in a dialogue with his Soviet counterpart. Rajiv Gandhi's call for global disarmament and the efforts of Narasimha Rao, Gujral and Vajpayee to improve ties with the neighbours are all instances bearing testimony to the continuity of India's policy and to the commitment of the policy makers. India did not need a seat in the UN Security Council to promote peace and goodwill among nations. India was no super or great power when nations heard her with respect. As a western scholar put it Nehru did not need to go to New York to meet the world press. The world press came to Delhi to hear him.

In the globalised new international system India's influence may have declined. Non-alignment may have lost some of its relevance. But the goals proclaimed and the path chosen by India continue to be relevant. Peace and non-violence might appear elusive in a world troubled frequently by bouts of terror and violence and dominated by a culture of acquisitiveness and ruthless competition for wealth and power. Still, it should be borne in mind that the quest for and contribution to the evolution of a peaceful international system have marked India out as a different role player in world affairs. Few countries in human history can claim to have striven for world peace and goodwill among nations for so long as India, From 3rd century B.C., when Ashoka sent emissaries of peace to distant lands.. Defeat in war and conquest by the invader could never dampen the Indian spirit. The past inspires, the present expects and the future beckons India to vigorously pursue the goals of peace, disarmament and universal brotherhood. The quest is beyond time and distance.

A Dangerous Divide

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

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

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

Gender injustice is another side of the corroded global insignia. Women, fifty percent of human population, account for 66% of the work done on this planet. But they have a share of just 10% of world's income and they own a mere 1% of world's property. They hardly constitute 10% of the membership of world's legislatures. Every hour at least ten women die because of pregnancy related diseases. Every minute 13 children die of preventable diseases and malnutrition in the less developed countries.

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

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

(April 2004)

Section 2

The Scourge of War

The war on Iraq is outrageously irresponsible. Whatever might be the oppression Saddam Hussein inflicts on the people and the violations of the UN Resolutions he has made during the last twelve years, no outside power has the right to attack Iraq causing death and destruction on such a large scale and in such savage manner. There is no justification under international law or under the UN Charter for such action against another country. The operation undertaken jointly by the United States and United Kingdom puts the hands of the global clock back. Much worse is the danger of the world slipping into prolonged spells of violence and religious and ethnic conflicts.

On moral grounds too this is indefensible. The Anglo- American attack on Egypt in 1956 and the numerous acts of aggression committed by the so-called global policemen are too well known to be mentioned here. The United States has been supporting “some of the bloodiest tyrants” in the world. Marcos in Phillipines, Batista in Cuba, Pinochet in Chile, Somoza in Nicaragua and Suharto in Indonesia were supported by the United States. Taliban and Osama bin Laden owed their rise to US patronage. Even Iraq and Saddam Hussein received American aid and assistance in their fight against Iran. The United States has been bullying nations with threats and warnings in the name of democracy and human rights. That the other big powers like France, China and Russia have committed such acts of aggression in the past does not exonerate the United States from the responsibility of launching this unwarranted attack.

The biggest casualty of this war is the United Nations. The fifty seven year old world body claiming the membership of almost all the countries of the world has been totally marginalised. Created in 1945 with lofty ideals among which is the commitment to save succeeding generations of people from “the scourge of war” the United Nations is now a helpless spectator unable to summon even emergency sessions and raise its voice when the Charter is flouted. The big powers, USA, UK and USSR in particular, promised the war ravaged world in 1945 that they would strive individually and collectively for peace and international cooperation. Implicit in their pronouncements and declarations was the assurance that no threat would ever come to world peace from them, though the winds of cold war led to several “delusions and compromises”. Twenty years ago the United States threatened to walk out of the UN when the small nations cornered the US in the General Assembly. The American hubris also stems from the fact that about 25% of UN budget is funded by her. A western writer George Monbiot wrote that “Unilateralism means piracy; the armed robbery of the poor by the rich.” Another observed that if blood is thicker than water, for America oil is thicker than blood !

The United States is, without doubt, a great nation. It is the oldest of modern democracies. Great Presidents like Lincoln, Wilson and Roosevelt earned the grateful admiration of people all over the world for their contribution to human progress and welfare. Scholars, scientists, industrialists, writers and poets have made the American society a role model for countries in every part of the world. Twentieth century was called the American century. The US has become the destination not only for those in search of greener pastures but also for all those who seek freedom for the pursuit of creative endeavours. It is not easy to recall the names of so many great minds that migrated to America during the last hundred years from Einstein to Salman Rushdie. The most depressing reality is that the thoughtless and reckless action of its President has made the entire nation unpopular in the eyes of the world and vulnerable for many years in the future.

Pity indeed that there is no third force in the world, like the non-aligned group led by Nehru, Nasser and Tito, to strive for the restoration of sanity in the midst of mindless killing of innocent people. They would have rejected outright the very idea of “regime change” and “restoration of democracy” in a sovereign nation by using military force. What is happening in the middle-east is tragic and deplorable. What is in store for the future may be much worse. The road to peace and freedom can never be laid with blood and destruction.

Fifty Fourth Anniversary

On December 10, 1948 the resolution endorsing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations by a vote of 48-0 with 8 abstentions (6 states of the Soviet bloc, Saudi Arabia and South Africa). Since then every year on December 10 people all over the world celebrate the anniversary of the historic declaration designed to encourage respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. The Declaration is “a statement of goals and aspirations and reflected the vision of many countries of the world as an international community.” The Preamble to the Declaration refers to “the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family which is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.”

The concept of human rights which is bound up with the development of modern democracy has its origins in the natural rights philosophy. In modern times English political philosopher Thomas Hobbes and theorist John Locke, the latter in particular, provided theoretical inspiration for the growth of such concepts as rights and liberties essential to preserve the society. Locke’s formulation of natural rights became a source of inspiration for the two famous declarations of the 18th century — The American Declaration of Independence (1776) and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man (1789). The concept of human rights was expanded in the twentieth century by such famous pronouncements as Wilson’s Fourteen Points, Roosevelt’s Four Freedoms and the Beveridge Report of 1942.

In 1946 the United Nations appointed a Committee of philosophers, historians and lawyers “to see whether enough agreement could be found among the world’s diverse cultures to draw up a list of fundamental human freedoms.” The UN Commission of Human Rights composed of 18 member states set up a drafting committee headed by Mrs Eleanor Roosevelt to prepare a draft of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. After two years of hard work the drafting committee submitted the Declaration. Hailed as a Magna Carta for all humanity the Declaration represents “a milestone in the long struggle for human rights.’

The Declaration which touches governments at their most sensitive point is, however, not legally a binding document. Critics have described it as a document of pious phrases accepted in principle but not in practice. States generally cherish their sovereign prerogatives and evade or ignore these obligations with ‘depressing regularity.’ The UN’s weakness is never more pronounced than in its inability to ensure the enforcement of human rights by its member states. Ironically the worst offenders of human rights violations are members of the Commission on Human Rights.

In a recent article UN Secretary General Kofi Annan says that “the most fundamental rights have too often been sacrificed in the supposed interests of the state. The sovereignty of states must no longer be used as a shield for gross violation of human rights.” The Secretary General says that the mission of the United Nations will be defined by a new and more profound awareness of the sanctity and dignity of every human life, regardless of race or religion. He exhorts peoples of all countries “to look beyond the framework of states and beneath the surface of nations or communities.” It is to be hoped that the Secretary General will take effective measures for the fulfillment of the noble mission defined by him for the world body.

The accretion of conventions and instruments to the Declaration during the last fifty four years has to some extent enhanced the credibility of the UDHR. On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration some important decisions were taken to give strength and substance to human rights. Focus was on empowerment of women, protection of the child and of the environment. The framework has been widened and commitment reiterated. But in a world of persisting poverty and exploitation human rights will remain pious exhortations and platitudes unless the gap between the rich and the poor, and between the developed and less developed countries is bridged. Anniversaries and annual celebrations cannot enhance the utility of the declaration as long as humankind is afflicted with poverty and injustice. Someone aptly remarked that the poor shall inherit the earth but not its mineral resources.

(December 2002)

Section 2

A Year After 9/11

It has been a plethora of meetings and seminars marking the first anniversary of the September 11, 2001 attack on the United States by terrorists. In print too the output is massive which some describe in the cliché 'as oceans of ink and forests of pulp.' '9/11' and 'The Day That Changed The World' have entered the lexicon. While experts, especially in the United States, justify worldwide debates and discussions, a few dismiss it as an isolated act perpetrated by a secret society. A British historian writes that it does not fit into any historical context.

What is the impact of 9/11 on global economy and globalization process? Has it ushered in a new era in international politics? Has the US along with its allies succeeded in liquidating terrorist bases and outfits? How are the LDCs (less developed countries) faring during the last twelve months of decreasing flow of aid and assistance from the developed countries? These are among the many questions raised in keen discussions at every forum. The focus is intense and debate sharp.

Scholars specializing in history and international relations have come up with interesting comparisons between the September 11, 2001 attack and the major events of the previous century such as the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand of Austria triggering the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 and the attack on Pearl Harbour on December 7, 1941. British historian Eric Hobsbawm drew a parallel between 1914 and 2001 and concluded that like the great powers of that time, the US in 2001 'chose to make it a turning point.' The Marxist scholar says that America's 'current domination is without precedent, outstripping even British imperial supremacy.' The Economist argues that the 2001 attack on US marks the beginning of a new era in international relations 'analogous to 1945-47 in that events started shifting the tectonic plates in international politics.' Major policy changes effected by Russia and the expansion of NATO are cited in support of it.

In a thought provoking article titled "Clash of Globalizations" Stanley Hoffmann points out how globalization 'makes an awful form of violence easily accessible to hopeless fanatics. Terrorism is the bloody link between inter-state relations and global society.' Hoffmann explains how insecurity and vulnerability are rising with countless individuals and groups becoming global actors. Transnational terrorism is the new threat according to him. The world, according to Hoffmann, is caught between a new Scylla and Charibdis - the universal intervention unilaterally decided by America and the chaos in the form of new attacks by future Bin Ladens.

The most disturbing revelation is that nearly 60% of the Taliban and Al Qaeda forces are at large, having escaped the fury of American attack. Osama bin Laden and Mullah Omar are alive and getting ready for new attacks, according to western intelligence agencies. The US and her allies have obviously not succeeded in achieving their main goal of wiping out the terrorist targets. Operation Enduring Freedom, the code name given to the American response to the 9/11 attack, is not yet over. The American president called it a war against terrorism and if he launches an attack against Iraq it will not be favourably viewed by most countries including America's allies. One is reminded of similar rhetoric used by the great powers in the First World War which they described it as the war to end all wars. Critics later sarcastically called the Peace of Versailles dictated by the victorious powers as the peace to end all peace!

The impact on India of the terrorist attack and the American response to it is of immediate concern to us. Many terrorist groups have entered POK and some have sneaked into India posing serious threats to India's security. It does not require any expertise to foresee increased activity by the terrorist groups not only on our sensitive borders but in towns and cities in all parts of the large country. The government needs the whole-hearted support and cooperation of all sections of the society in meeting the threats emanating from across our borders. Hard times are ahead and we must be ready for every challenge thrown at us. We have the strength and will power enough to overcome any critical situation.

The Kashmir Impasse

As we get closer to the eagerly awaited elections in Jammu and Kashmir our minds are filled with both hope and anxiety, the former because of the elaborate and careful preparations being made by the Election Commission and also due to the firm commitment of the Union Government to make the exercise free and fair and the latter caused by sabre rattling of extremist outfits and unwarranted meddlesomeness by outside powers in India's internal affairs. Strange and absurd it is that Pakistan's General Musharaff who appointed himself to the highest office, choked democratic institutions and silenced dissent talks of fair elections and the right of self-determination of the people of Kashmir!

Let us first try to put the record straight. It all began with the invasion by Pakistani tribals of Kashmir in 1947 and occupation of a part of it by force which was an act of aggression. That Jammu and Kashmir without POK acceded to India as per the Instrument of Accession which was later ratified by the elected government and Constituent Assembly of the state is also an undisputed fact. Pakistan's invasion of India in 1965 and proxy war during the last two decades provide enough proof, if proof were needed, of the ulterior motives and designs of Pakistan. Pakistan's claim to Kashmir on grounds of religious affinity is dubious and untenable. It need not be repeated here that India has the second highest Muslim population in the world and that there are more number of Muslims in India than in Pakistan. Only recently a poll conducted by foreign media revealed that the majority of the people of Jammu and Kashmir prefer to remain in India.

The question why things began to deteriorate in Jammu and Kashmir is not easy to answer and experts offer different reasons for the deteriorating situation resulting in brutal killings of civilians, innocent people and military personnel. That mercenaries and terrorists flooded into the valley at the behest of Pakistan is also being realized by all countries. Pakistan has succeeded in 'internationalising the Kashmir dispute' after causing considerable damage to India politically, economically and psychologically. Now Pakistan talks, not of the freedom of its own people, but of the rights of Kashmiris!

What hurts India most is the role and attitude of Western powers. In 1947 Britain persuaded America to treat the issue as 'a dispute between India and Pakistan' because of cold war compulsions. They feared the rise of Soviet hegemony in South Asia. Their calculation was that Islamic countries would neutralize the influence of Communism led by the Soviet Union. Now, after the end of cold war, the same western powers perceive a serious threat to their position in the region from the same Islamic states. They want to keep Pakistan in good humour without hurting India. For strategic and military reasons they need Pakistan. For political and moral reasons they support India. So they try to do the balancing act, equating Pakistan with India in word and deed and treating the aggressor and victim alike. It is as hard for Indians to accept that Pakistan acquired nuclear capability without American nod as it is for the world to ignore the fact Taliban and Osama Bin Laden, the main source of Afghan misery and international terrorism, were sponsored by the United States.

The road to peace in Kashmir is full of landmines, not only the traps set by the mindless terrorists but also the diplomatic and political mines laid by vested interests and outside powers. There is no point in putting the entire blame on the erstwhile Congress governments and the present NDA establishment at the center for all the mess that has been created. Those with ideas were not in power and those in power had no vision. At the time of Independence high expectations were aroused that democracy, in spirit and practice, would permeate among all sections of the people and regions of the country. Unfortunately it did not percolate from the top to the lower rungs of the system.

Now is the time for all leaders and parties to come together and strive for peace in Kashmir not only through elections but by means of decentralization and devolution of powers. Decentralization of governance and acceptance of plurality of cultures are vital to the stability and success of our democracy and the only solution to the problems of unrest whether it is Punjab or Nagaland or Kashmir, The coming weeks are a severely testing time for all - the leaders, the people and the entire system.

Section 2

Rhetoric And Reality

Six months after the attack on America on September 11 and the declaration of 'war against terrorism' by the major western powers the world has not returned to normality or sanity. It is no longer a world order but "world disorder" in the words of an expert on world affairs. Were the reaction and response to the horrendous attack of 9/11 appropriate? Have the USA and her allies achieved the goals of their mission such as capture of Osama Bin Laden, restoration of civilian rule in Afghanistan and rooting out the terrorist bases in different parts of the world? The answers to such questions remain elusive. Leave aside consensus. It is confusion all over.

Many seem to realise now that the war psychosis created after 9/11 has resulted in counter-productive and dangerous consequences. The rhetoric employed by American President Bush, British Prime Minister Blair and other leaders has significantly raised the political temperatures all over the world contributing to greater tensions and misunderstandings among the peoples of many countries. If it is a 'war' against terrorism how long and against whom will this 'war' be waged, ask many. A recent article in a reputed journal argued that Osama Bin Laden is in a win-win situation. If he is caught and punished he will be hailed as a hero and if he is killed he will be a martyr inspiring many to carry on his work.

Equally questionable is the thesis of 'axis of evil' propounded by George Bush. His predecessor Ronald Reagan called the Soviet Union 'Evil Empire'. Everyone knows how America "hatched a monster in Saudi Arabia" (Osama) and that the CIA masterminded the covert and overt operations against the Russian forces in Afghanistan in the eighties. The rise of Taliban too since 1994 is mostly due to American support. In the wake of such a role in the region, to use words like 'war' and 'crusade' would amount to 360 degree turnaround that baffles the imagination of all those following the happenings of the last six months.

George Bush has proposed a hike in the defence budget which will mean a defence expenditure of \$43 million an hour or \$1bn a day, described as 'the biggest increase in US defence spending in 20 years. In spite of the tragedy that struck America and the prompt and firm response of the American government, George Bush cannot be likened to Woodrow Wilson or Franklin Roosevelt who had a global vision that aimed at bringing nations together through cooperation and goodwill. One is amazed at the report that Margaret Thatcher, former British Prime Minister, spoke recently on 'fighting Islam.' Even if their speeches are not always accurately reported there is enough room for newspaper readers and analysts to infer that there is considerable bias in the attitudes and utterances of western leaders.

George Monibot writes in the Guardian Weekly (March 14-20) that "a new sort of US racism is branding those of Asian and Middle Eastern origin as terrorists." Instances of harassment of people of South Asia and the Middle East at airports and public places have not come down during the last six months. Leaders at every level are causing immense damage to state and society by their unbalanced, if not irresponsible, utterances. Gujarat in India is a sad and shameful example of the current malaise. If Jonathan Swift had lamented that we have religion enough to hate not religion enough to love, former Prime Minister V.P.Singh was at his brilliant best recently when he declared that he would pray to God "to relieve us of religion."

If rhetoric is damaging, reality is disturbing. The new millennium has not begun too well. Political violence, social clashes and economic downturn are ominous portents for the future. A leading British daily has revealed that 'every day more than 19,000 children die from easily treatable diseases in the developing world. That is 13 children every minute equally pathetic is the plight of women in the third world countries. A seasoned columnist has described the western offensive after September 11 as "a war against the third world.' It should instead be a war against poverty, disease and backwardness of the millions living in the third world. War, it is said, begins in the minds of men. Violence feeds on intemperate language that promotes a culture of intolerance. The world needs a culture of peace that should be nurtured in every home and every small place.

End of Terrorism ?

The First World War that lasted for 1565 days and claimed over 10 million lives was called by the allied powers as 'a war to end war.' The peace that followed the infamous Treaty of Versailles in 1919 was described with appropriate sarcasm as 'the peace to end peace.' Four great empires collapsed, the map of Europe was redrawn, lofty proclamations about elimination of political, social and economic inequalities were made and in 1920 was born the League of Nations, the first international organization for the prevention of war and promotion of peace.

The euphoria did not last long. Great powers were soon back in business. It did not take even twenty years for the seven great powers to go to war. In 1939 broke out the Second World War, costlier and bloodier than the first and that caused the destruction of Nazi and Fascist forces. Ironically it is only during war in the midst of death and destruction that nations and leaders talk of peace and justice! In 1944 when the twin sisters - IMF and World Bank - were born at Bretton Woods and a few months later at Dumbarton Oaks, also in the United States of America, the big three, USA, UK and USSR, designed the frame and form of the United Nations to save humankind from the scourge of war and to promote peace and progress of the world. The simple but unassailable truth is that the big powers, particularly the western powers, came to acquire a hold over the world's main political and economic institutions. The rest is history, bitter, unpleasant and strife-ridden, that has seen escalation in violence and accentuation of hardship and misery for most people of the world. The international power structure has undergone many changes and with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the USA has become the undisputed sole superpower. Such is the dominance of the lone superpower that the claim is made that a new era AB - 'After Bipolarity' has begun around 1991 and the world is now said to be in AB 10 !

The USA is undoubtedly a great nation. Its contribution to the progress of the modern world is multi-dimensional. The Americans are gifted in many ways and are justifiably proud of their cultural synthesis which has been rightly hailed as "commingling of cultures." Its military power and economic strength are unmatched. It is the oldest of modern democracies and unquestionably the most vibrant. If the western world claims that the millennium that has ended has been 'the western millennium,' America has stood in the forefront with its many sided achievements.

Despite all this, America's bid to perpetuate its hegemony in world politics by setting an international agenda is unjust and unwise as well. A nation that proclaimed isolationism as its principle in foreign policy for more than a hundred years cannot shift gear and intervene in every part of the world in the name of multilateralism and world peace and security. For over a decade the United States harassed India and tried to bully the latter into submission in the name of CTBT and Human Rights. CTBT has been rejected by the American Congress and today America thinks that security cannot be sacrificed in the name of human rights. There are many in America who now place security on a higher pedestal than human rights.

The policies that the world's greatest power pursues and the institutions it controls, including the United Nations, have neither ensured peace nor ended inequality and injustice. The benefits of information technology largely the creation of the United States, have been offset by the menace of international terrorism. Globalization, however inevitable it may be, has excluded more number of countries and populations from the benefits it claims to have produced. Many developing countries are unable to cope with the pace of change and economists insist that the gap between the rich and the poor is widening alarmingly.

Is it going to be the end of terrorism? George Bush and Tony Blair along with their allies may soon achieve their goal in Afghanistan. There are other areas too that have been breeding grounds for international terrorism which have to be targeted. It is going to be a long war. But the real fight against the roots of terrorism will have to be fought by not only all governments but by all statesmen and champions of peace like Nelson Mandela, Mikhail Gorbachev and Kofi Annan. Humanity and its leaders cannot forever remain mute witnesses to the goings - on in today's world. Every home, every village and town, like every big city and nation and every leader, big or small, must strive for a new world order based on equality and justice, not with weapons and force but by means of non-violence and instruments of peace.

Section 2

The Road to Peace

It was literally a bang and whimper story. The Agra Summit was unlike any other high level meeting of heads of governments. The build up was unprecedented and the media hype excessive. There was, however, no denying the fact that people's expectations were high in the wake of Indian Prime Minister's bold initiative and invitation and Pakistan President's positive response and visit to India. The two countries, inheritors of the tragic legacy of partition and unfriendly neighbours since 1947, meeting to peacefully resolve their problems, was indeed a big event in the history of the sub-continent.

To put the blame on the media, especially the television, for the failure of the Agra Summit would amount to political immaturity. Media management is an art of statecraft and a leader who faults the media is like the proverbial carpenter blaming his tools. In a way such a summit involving two hostile countries focussing on sensitive issues should have been held away from too much of media glare. From secret diplomacy of the last century we have travelled to open diplomacy. Transparent diplomacy, however, is still to arrive in a world of endless conflicts. Television is a powerful medium and as it has aptly been said it is 'an inflammer of appetites, enlarger of expectations and diminisher of patience'. When aroused expectations are not fulfilled it leads to increased frustration and violence. That is a lesson given to us by the Agra Summit.

Still, all is not lost. As the leaders of both India and Pakistan proclaim, the process will continue. If it is an ongoing process for peacefully settling disputes it does not matter if it takes several months if not a few years. Pakistan may have succeeded in internationalizing the dispute and in 'settling a few old scores'. India's policy of engaging Pakistan in a dialogue may be helpful in limiting crossborder terrorism. Such checklists are for officials to prepare and for experts to analyse and explain. What is to be noted is the fact that the two countries are talking of peace and are preparing for talks and meetings in that direction.

The India-Pakistan tangle is too complex and complicated to be resolved in days and weeks. Its roots are soaked in blood when thousands of innocent people were brutally killed in senseless riots and lie in the acts of perfidy perpetrated by the British government. If Great Britain and the United States which based its Asia policy on 'the vacuum theory' played Pakistan against India for their own strategic and economic interest in the region, the former Soviet Union and China were no less responsible for making the area highly volatile. India and Pakistan, like many other third world countries, became pawns on the chessboard of cold war politics and super-power rivalry. The price for playing into the hands of global powers has been heavy.

Kashmir is not the only cause of Indo-Pak tension. Some would argue that Kashmir is not the cause but the consequence of Indo-Pak rivalry. Since 1989, however, 'Kashmir has been afflicted with dangerous escalation of violence and growing militancy. The need of the hour is not only to tighten our security belt but also to lay the road to peace. In the last fifty and odd years since India and Pakistan became independent never was there such genuine desire for peace in both the countries as now. The Agra Summit, even in its failure, has created a climate of peace and goodwill unheard of in the history of Indo-Pak relations. An instance of it is the preamble of the Declaration of Pakistan-India Peoples' Solidarity Conference released on July 12, two days before the Agra Summit. A line from it reads thus, "The resources of the two countries must be transferred from bombs to books, from submarines to schools, from missiles to medicines, from frigates to food, from runways for bombers to railroads for people".

The road to peace is not easy to lay. But those who try *to* do so are different from others. Rabindranath Tagore, the subcontinent's first Nobel Laureate, said that "Those who are great among men are the road-builders and path-finders". That was before India and Pakistan were born. Let us try to shift our attention from boundaries drawn by colonial powers and borders and lines of control manned by soldiers to roads to peace and bridges of understanding. The time to act is now.

(August 2001)

Stepping into a New Age

For over a year now the word 'millennium' has been so overused that any mention of it would be considered a cliché. Still a new century has dawned and people are not tired of talking and writing about what is in store for the world in the coming years. Not just the change of date or year or for that matter of century on the calendar that attracts our attention. The change is real and massive. Science and technology have opened up new vistas to human imagination.

We are stepping into a new age. It is one of hope and excitement for the young and one of astonishment, if not bewilderment for the old. The former need to be restrained, feel the latter. The old must learn to adjust, assert the young. The skills of the youth are defining the contours of the future while the values of the older generation do not lose their relevance. Experts, however, see today a 'digital divide' between generations. E-mail, the web and internet are indicators of the awesome power of technology and the rapid pace of change. What is new today may become obsolete tomorrow.

This is also the age of globalisation which is supposed to be inexorable. In a recent article in 'Foreign Affairs', it is written that globalization "can expand access to technology that enriches life and technology that destroys it. It can equalise economic opportunity and accentuate economic disparity". Its benefits are not certain. Market economy may be unavoidable. But if it leads to market culture and market society it would be disastrous for our future. Economic and social darwinism will render the weak weaker and the poor poorer.

So the danger of the world being rent apart appears real. The gap between the haves and the have nots, and the young and the old may widen further. Economic and technological factors alone cannot be identified as the underlying causes for the growing divide. A leading journal points out how in many ageing societies like Germany, Italy and Japan the people above 65 years outnumber the youngsters under 15 creating "a frightening imbalance between past and future". Many youngsters seem to resent the fact that they work hard and pay heavy taxes for the benefit of those who cannot or do not work but depend on the government for their subsistence.

In India the problems of the ageing people are manifold. Many state governments have expressed their inability to meet the growing pension bill. In some organisations the pension bill exceeds the wage bill of the employees. Many middle class families in which both the husband and wife go to work taking care of the old has become a real problem. The concept of old age home is becoming increasingly popular. If people are living longer than before it is not their fault. Again it is not their fault if their services are not utilised by the government. Many retired employees enjoy good health in old age because of good habits and self-discipline. In fact in certain professions like law, medicine and teaching the older they get the better they perform. The time has come for a clear and correct policy enunciation on such issues as the age of retirement and the ways of utilising the services of the older generation. At the same time the argument that the problem of unemployment can be solved to some extent by not extending the age of retirement is also valid. More so when the government slams the door on recruitment in the name of privatisation. The problem is therefore complex. It is both an economic and ethical dilemma.

Is India justified in hoping to emerge as a global power in the new century? Increasing attention being focussed on India by the advanced nations and the brilliant work of Indian scientists and engineers abroad confirm India's potential. Many see in the present the heralds of a new dawn. The task, however, is daunting. With nearly 50% of the people being illiterate, more than a third being below the poverty line and millions of young men and women being unemployed, how can India hope to become a great power? Unless top priority is given to the eradication of illiteracy, poverty and backwardness all our plans and projections will be exercises in futility.

Whereas countries big and small have overtaken India in providing basic amenities to their people, the world's largest democracy still struggles to improve the living conditions of the vast majority of its people. India's hope of becoming a great power can never be fulfilled on hungry mouths and empty stomachs.

Section 2

“Conscience of Humankind”

The fifty second anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on December 10 is yet another milestone in the history of the long struggle for freedom and justice. In a way the Declaration is the twentieth century’s greatest gift to humankind. It marked a break with the past tainted with the horrors of the Second World War and the atrocities perpetrated by the Nazi and Fascist forces. It might then have appeared to some as “a collection of pious phrases”. But as Mrs. Elanor Roosevelt, the Chairperson of the Drafting Committee appointed by the United Nations, clarified the Declaration was universal in its scope and unless there is “concerted citizen action to uphold them, close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world”. As the great lady had wisely foreseen the last fifty and odd years have witnessed pompous proclamations of human rights at the global level and gross abuse of these basic rights at the local level. Mrs. Roosevelt’s words that human rights originate in small places like the school, the farm and the factory continue to serve as guidelines to all those engaged in protecting and upholding them.

Though the original content was limited to civil and political rights of the individual known as the ‘first generation rights’, the expansive nature of the concept resulted in ‘second generation rights’ including economic, social and cultural rights which place a duty on the governments to act in order to ensure the realization of these rights. Now it has progressed to include right to self-determination and right to sovereignty over natural wealth and resources of the country, rights known as “third generation rights” that belong to people rather than individuals.

Ironically the United Nations itself has been faulted as “some of the worst offenders in the field of human rights are the members of the Commission on Human Rights where their representatives make pious statements”. The UN’s failures in the past and at present are too numerous to be listed here. The guarantors of human rights turn out to be the main abusers. The UN has admitted failure and conceded that governments either evade or ignore their obligations with ‘depressing regularity’.

The ever-widening scope of human rights signifies that it is no longer the preserve of diplomats, statesmen, and international lawyers to promote human rights. The world has changed a great deal with the emergence of NGOs, civil society institutions, activist groups, feminists and environmentalists, all engaged in the task of sensitizing the people to the basic needs of every human being. The goal of evolving a human rights culture requires not only spreading awareness of human rights among the masses but also instilling in them confidence and capacity to protect their own rights. Women and children, in particular are among the most vulnerable sections of the society that need special protection. All governments cannot and some may not ensure the protection and promotion of human rights. It is now being increasingly accepted that NGOs, civil society institutions, mass media and educational institutions will have to play a major role in educating the masses on human rights and fundamental duties also. The Justice Verma Committee appointed by the Government of India has made some recommendations ‘to operationalize the suggestions to teach fundamental duties to the citizens of the country’.

Four decades ago Dag Hammarskjold, the then UN Secretary General, declared that the question of peace and the question of human rights were closely related. Today his successor, Kofi Annan, says that human rights and human development are closely related. A patriarch wisely declared that development is another name for peace. The quest for peace and development is endless. But the path toward that goal is paved by human rights, rightly hailed as the ‘Conscience of Humankind’.

Freedom and Democracy

Democracy has been described as the gift of the twentieth century to humankind. Never before in the history of the world, says the West with legitimate pride, have so many people enjoyed the fruits of freedom. If nationalism and diplomacy were the 'gifts' of the nineteenth century (that cannot, of course, sideline the contributions of Karl Marx, Charles Darwin et al) freedom and democracy are undoubtedly the major gains of the twentieth century.

Still, only about 50 of the world's 193 countries are rated as genuine democracies. While most countries are not really free, many are afflicted with poverty, disease and backwardness. 42 countries where over 700 million people live are called HIPC— Highly Indebted Poor Countries. The international system now yoked to globalization and market economy is beyond the reach of these poor countries. The amazing achievements of science and technology in the last hundred years have brought no particular relief to these poor countries. Global imbalances appear more glaring and the gap between the rich and the poor is getting wider than ever before. As Amartya Sen has rightly cautioned "market mechanism .on its own may not take us very far In eliminating deprivation". In their manifesto on 'THE THIRD WAVE British Prime Minister Tony Blair and German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder write: "The essential function of markets must be complemented and improved by political action, not hampered by it. We support a market economy, not a market society." It only shows that fears about globalization and market economy are not unfounded.

The much talked about information revolution has also not been able to bridge the gap between the advanced and developing nations. Joseph Nye points out that the information revolution "contrary to the expectations of some theorists has not equalized power among states. If anything It has had the opposite effect". The coming century, predicts Samuel Huntington, another famous social Scientist, will witness clashes between big powers 'in various permutations and combinations'. Those who warn are not prophets of doom but scholarly persons of eminence and foresight.

Fifty eight years ago Franklin Roosevelt propounded the famous Four Freedoms—freedom of expression, freedom of religion, freedom from want and freedom from fear. A few years later Jawaharlal Nehru proclaimed that elimination of want, disease and injustice 'both at the individual and national levels' was a goal of India's policy. Around fricft time the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was passed by the General Assembly of the united Nations. The Chairperson of the Human Rights Commission constituted In 1946, Mrs. Elanor Roosevelt, superbly summed up the human rights philosophy in simple words: "Where, after all, do universal human rights begin ? In small places, close to home—so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world". The school, the farm and the factory, the place of work and the home are the places she identified. They are always the cradles of freedom, democracy and civic virtue.

War, want and disease have taken a heavy toll of human life in the twentieth century. Violence, want and disease are the biggest threats to human life in the twenty-first century. All of them are preventable and by no means insurmountable challenges. An encouraging sign is the concern being shown in the world today for the sufferings of women, the plight of the exploited child and the misery of the oppressed poor. Such concern must be translated into concerted action so that the benefits of freedom and democracy will reach everyone of the seven billion people of the world. Electoral democracy is no substitute for effective democracy.

(June 2000)

Section 2

The Scourge of Terrorism

One of the greatest dangers facing humankind is terrorism. Experts describe terrorism as “an attempt to destabilize democratic societies and to show that their governments are impotent.” There are, it seems, 109 definitions of terrorism and though the word ‘terror’ entered the political lexicon during the French Revolution’s ‘reign of terror,’ instinctive terrorism is as old as history. It is ‘an ancient phenomenon making impact on contemporary society by using modern technology.’ Access to technology, availability of money, media attention and growth of fanaticism have made the terrorists the most dreadful human species of modern times.

Raymond Aron called it a terrorist act when “its psychological effects are out of proportion to its purely physical result.” A Chinese philosopher put it succinctly : “Kill one and frighten 10,000”. explaining the strategy of the terrorists. Terrorism is today a media event as the media is often perceived as “a facilitator of the terrorist process.” Publicity, it is said is the oxygen for the terrorist. The terrorist wants attention and audience. They thrive on “the wizardry of the theatre.” A bus load of school children, it is pointed out, are a better target than a truckload of soldiers.

Terrorism is war by proxy. It is an inexpensive type of ‘warfare. Its effects, however, could be demoralizing as many innocent people get killed. Freedom and democracy are its enemies. At the same time it must be borne in mind that despotic rule and authoritarianism leave people with no option but to resort to violence. The history of modern revolutions, including the non-violent freedom struggle in India, is replete with instances of violence and terrorism in people’s fight against oppressive regimes. State terrorism continues to be a major threat to freedom and happiness. Among the others listed as perpetrators of terrorist acts are religious fanatics, eschatological cults and hate-filled activists who want to inflict pain on a large scale. The weapons at their disposal are mentioned as: chemical (most likely), biological (relatively easy and highly deadly) and nuclear (least likely). With genetic technology getting cheaper by the day, the threat of biological terrorism is most frightening.

Many nations are spending huge amounts In their fight against terrorism and terrorist threats. How much of money India is spending, directly and indirectly, in fighting cross-border terrorism is not easy to assess. In Jammu and Kashmir alone India must have spent over Rs. 2000 crores in the last few years in fighting the menace. The last ten years of Pakistan-sponsored and ISI-engineered terrorism in the Kashmir valley caused enormous financial and psychological strain to the nation. More than 30,000 civilians and 1000 soldiers have lost their lives and lakhs of Kashmiri people have been rendered homeless. The ISI spends Rs. 5 crores every month on mercenaries and terrorists operating in Kashmir. Greater threat is emanating from Afghanistan where there is a wave of narcomania. Pakistan and Afghanistan have become breeding grounds of narcoterrorism. India must, therefore, be ready to face harder battles in the days to come not only in Kashmir but in the north east and elsewhere.

A number of measures have been suggested by experts to meet the terrorist menace. At the global level two channels, among others, are available to nations in their fight against terrorism. One is the United Nations against which a question-mark continues to be raised and the other is diplomatic effort to mobilize the support of nations to make conditions unfavourable for terrorist activities. At the national level strong political leadership, efficient intelligence network, Incorruptible police system and media and public support are vital for safeguarding national security against internal and cross-border terrorism. It is a challenge for the entire nation.

India in World Affairs

Change, says a paradox, is the only permanent thing in life. The law of change operates remorselessly causing ups and downs for individuals as well as nations. History tells us about the rise and fall of nations, of great civilizations like the Chinese and the Indian, and of 'the glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome'.

Great powers of the past like Austria, Hungary and Turkey are mere dots on the map of today's world. Historians revelled in describing centuries as 'The Age' of such and such a country and no wonder The Economist in its special issue called the last 1000 years 'The Millennium of the West'. According to a cliché when France had a cold the whole of Europe sneezed! The British imagined that the sun would not set on their empire, just as the people of the land of the rising sun, Japan, believe that their booming economy would never have a sunset.

Two hundred years ago it was a wobbly conglomerate of thirteen colonies. Today the United States of America is the world's only superpower confident of dominating the 21st century also if not the next two hundred years. It has been the American century. Is it a unipolar or multipolar world? Henry Kissinger described today's world as politically multipolar and militarily bipolar. The USA, Russia, China, Europe and Japan, predict the experts, will be the great powers of the next century. 'Perhaps' or 'possibly' India, they add. Why not? argue the optimists. A billion people, 15% of the human race, not enjoying even 1.5 per cent of world's wealth is a tragic fact. India is of course overpopulated. Frederick the Great of Prussia in the 18th century and Mao of China in the twentieth century considered their large populations as great national wealth. Only India has not been able to tap this enormous human capital.

Whether nuclear weapons enhance national security is a matter for debate. But it is certain that they do not enhance national prestige. Fast growth rate and higher GDP will give India a strong economy. Even they by themselves cannot take India to the top of the world. Small countries like Singapore and Taiwan are economic giants but political pygmies. A nation's status depends on a number of factors. India's prestige soared in the early years of Independence largely because of the legacy bequeathed by Mahatma Gandhi, the leader of 'the greatest mass movement in modern history', and the manner in which Jawaharlal Nehru and other leaders nurtured Indian democracy into the School (Athens) of Asia. All that is now distant memory.

President K.R. Narayanan's speech at the banquet held in honour of American President Bill Clinton and his address to the joint session of Parliament earlier, contained references to India's policy of non-alignment and its relevance in today's multipolar world. The President recalled how the policy is based on high principles and national ideals. The President's reference is both timely and relevant and in fact a caution to India and the world against ignoring principles and ideals of everlasting significance. The articulation and pursuit of those ideals earned for India and Nehru high respect in the comity of nations. As a writer put it 'Nehru did not need to go to New York to address the world press. The world press came to Delhi to meet him'. Nehru's successors too played a constructive role in world affairs whether it was during the Afghan crisis or in promoting the cause of nuclear disarmament in the eighties. Let us also not forget that the Western powers and press were critical of India for being 'preachy' and 'hypocritical' on some occasions, though they conceded that India was a bridge-builder between the East and the West. The President has done well by setting the record straight and in the process by showing the way to India's place in world affairs.

Section 2

Heralding the Dawn...

A new century and a new millennium will arrive in less than a month. Notwithstanding the debate over the actual commencement — January 2000 or 2001 — of the next century, a lot is being said about the achievements of the 20th century and on how the new century will be like. The century coming to an end has been variously described - as a century of fear, a century of terror and also as the century of the common man because “the common man has suffered the most.” Two global wars and mindless acts of violence and terrorism have taken a heavy toll of life and property.

It took 10,000 years for world population to reach the one billion mark by 1800 A.D. Only another hundred years were needed for the second billion to arrive by 1900 and thereafter the population growth has been rapid with the third billion arriving in forty years by 1940, the fourth by 1960 and the fifth and sixth by the end of the century. There were 62 countries at the beginning of the twentieth century. Today there are 193. 118 of these are democratic though in many of these countries the people are neither free nor equal.

Thanks to science and technology the world has shrunk, like time and space. It is a global village, a global family said to be ‘progressing’ on a global economy. It may be the end of history for the champions of capitalism. For the vast majority of the people living in the poor third world countries the tunnel is too long and dark for any light to appear. No end of poverty is in sight. Shame indeed that we talk of the millennium when millions are starving and hundreds are dying every day for want of food and medical aid.

The gap between the rich and the poor, often described as north south divide, is widening. The rich are getting richer and the poor poorer. Experts are voicing their concern over increasing human misery despite tremendous technological progress. Someone has rightly cautioned against technology becoming ‘a facilitator to tyranny—invisible tyranny.’ It has a corrosive effect on human values. Technology, it is suggested, should not try to produce appropriate democracy. On the other hand, the argument goes on, democracy should try to produce an appropriate technology.

Certainly a great century, this has been for the way in which humankind moved from bondage to freedom, from ignorance to knowledge and from medieval thinking to modern outlook. The pace of progress has been stunning. Great minds have enriched our civilization with their discoveries, inventions and writings. Science, literature, arts and creative works have narrowed distances, demolished boundaries and broadened human outlook. Genius can never be the monopoly of a nation or people.

The advanced countries, especially the western powers, may claim with justifiable pride that democracy has been nurtured by them with diligence in this century. The United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, among other things, are great gifts to humankind. At the same time they will do well to remember that the message of peace has again come to the world from the east. The life and work of Mahatma Gandhi will continue to inspire people all over the world for centuries to come.

The lessons of the twentieth century should guide us towards a saner and safer world in the next century. It has rightly been said that the knowledge of the west must be combined with the wisdom of the east. Our goal, not mere hope, should be to strive for a world without violence and injustice, a world where people do not suffer from want, disease and ignorance. Only when every village prospers and every human being enjoys freedom and equality can there be a real global village. That will arrive sooner than later in the next millennium if only we want it and work for it. Let us now make that deal with the future.

How Human Are We ?

The theme of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is “All Human Rights for All”. The Declaration hailed as the Magna Carta for all humanity highlights the universality, the indivisibility and the interrelationship of all human rights emphasising the idea that human rights—civil, cultural, economic, political and social—cannot be dissociated from one another. UN Secretary General Kofi Annan proclaimed that the values of tolerance, democracy, human rights and good governance are universal. The supreme goal of the Human Rights Declaration, according to the United Nations, is ‘respect for the dignity of all people’ and Human Rights should become ‘the common language of humanity. A universal culture of human rights empowering people by building a global partnership for human rights is among the major goals of the United Nations. The agenda set by the UN and Human Rights Commission is laudable and the call for grass-roots participation in promoting human rights has not come a day too soon.

Yet how distant the goal is and how difficult it is to realise it can be understood when some of the disturbing facts are taken into account. The United Nations has recently called for urgent action to raise the living standards of the world’s poor after disclosing that 1 billion people have been left out of the consumption boom for the past two decades. Gross inequalities between rich and poor countries are worsening with 20% of the global population accounting for 86% of consumption. Consumption has increased six-fold in the advanced countries where 37 billion dollars are spent annually on pet food, perfumes and cosmetics. Compare this with the UN budget of less than \$ 3 billion for the maintenance of peace and security in the world and the \$37 billion being spent on perfumes and cosmetics would be enough “to provide basic education, water and sanitation, basic health and nutrition for all those now deprived of it and still leave \$ 9 billion over” according to UN figures.

225 richest people in the world, says the UN report, have a combined wealth of more than \$ 1 trillion—equal to the annual income of the poorest 47% of the earth’s population, around 2.5 billion people. The assets of the three richest persons of the world including Bill Gates exceed the combined GDP of 48 least developed countries. The cost of providing water, sanitation, basic health, enough food, etc., for all would cost \$ 40 billion which is less than 4% of the combined wealth of the 225 richest persons mentioned earlier. A child born in New York, Paris or London will consume, pollute and waste more in lifetime than 50 children born in a developing country. 2,7 million people die every year due to air pollution and 80% of these victims belong to the poor areas of developing countries.

In such a world of poverty and inequity mere celebration of the anniversary of Human Rights Declaration brings neither cheer nor hope to humankind. Nobody questions the importance of declarations and celebrations. Perhaps ceremony is to politics what ritual is to religion. But when it is performed in a routine manner without the necessary effort to realise at least a part of the agenda, its credibility is in serious doubt. Someone aptly said that the meek shall inherit the earth but not its mineral resources !

We celebrate Gandhi Jayanthi and pray at his samadhi on January 30 but practise the worst forms of violence. We honour Dr. Ambedkar’s memory with pompous speeches from the pulpit but perpetrate heinous atrocities on hapless Dalits for whose emancipation he lived. In our great land where Christian pilgrims from Europe once saw Christ in Gandhi at Sewagram we burn to death a noble missionary and his two little sons who spent their lives in the service of poor lepers. And the noble martyr’s wife, overcoming terrible grief with superhuman fortitude at the death of her husband and two dear sons, pleads for mercy for the perpetrators of the inhuman act. If she is not a Christ in human form in our midst where else can we see God ? There are still such angels and Mahatmas in today’s world of greed, hatred and violence. Let us try to walk in their footsteps. Time indeed to ask ourselves — How human are we ?

(February 1999)

Section 2

Dangerously Retrograde

Exactly a year ago our Bulletin, dated June 2, 1997, carried articles and views of experts on the menace of nuclear weapons, beginning with the leader titled 'Nuclear Dilemma'. That was the time when India was vigorously pursuing the goal of good neighbourly relations and reiterating India's 'abhorrence' of the theory of nuclear deterrence. India's spokesman declared in 1996 at a conference in Geneva that nuclear weapons would not ensure national security. The political temperature of the sub-continent was all right, if not encouraging and there was hardly any sign of what was to follow in less than twelve months.

Right from the early fifties when India began to articulate its principled opposition to the proliferation of nuclear weapons, India's voice was heard with respect in world fora. Not only the towering Jawaharlal Nehru but the maverick Rajiv Gandhi made it a point to tell the nuclear big five, whose perfidy has rendered world peace elusive, of the incalculable harm of nuclear explosions and growing arsenals. Quite ably did India convince many of the nations of the world of the futility of getting into the trap of nuclear weaponry. Describing the deterrence theory as 'repugnant' India rightly declared that the nuclear powers had no right to 'incinerate millions of babies into radio active dust.' Weapons of Mass Destruction, India asserted, would not only destroy planet earth but were opposed to the canons of 'just war.'

This crusading work for nuclear disarmament and fight against nuclear terrorism lie today in ruins, underground nuclear explosions are matched by explosive utterances by leaders of both countries. South Asia has been thrown into a vortex of frenzy. That India should have chosen to take the lead in this totally avoidable situation numbs the sensibilities of not only the peace loving Indians but the many well wishers of this great country. That India should take pride in acquiring weapons capable of wiping out human life degrades our spirit. In this hour of depression it may be of some solace to our disturbed minds to remember that this is the land that gifted to the world a Buddha (the Saviour not the smiler) two thousand five hundred years ago and a Gandhi only recently. May sanity return to this nation!

(June 1998)

The Nuclear Dilemma

Public concern over nuclear weapons, disposal of nuclear waste and safety of nuclear reactors, is growing all over the world. The dangers of accident, miscalculation, incorrect computer-processed information, pathological traits among leaders and terrorists acquiring nuclear weapons are among the numerous threats which can no longer be considered imaginary. The human predicament is ably described by Spencer R. Weart in his book 'Nuclear Fear' thus : "Radio active monsters, utopian atom-powered cities exploding planets, weird ray devices and many other images have crept into the way everyone thinks about nuclear energy whether the energy is used in weapons or in civilian reactors". The Economist of January 4-10, 1997 cautioned that "Arma-geddon is no longer just a piece of Biblical symbolism, the end of the world has been an achievable, man-made possibility".

The big five nuclear weapon states - USA, Russia, France, Great Britain and China - have led humankind to the brink, not only by conducting over 2000 mega blasts but also by stockpiling nuclear arsenals which carry TNT enough to destroy the planet thirteen times over. The USA tops the nuclear test score board with a tally of 1032, followed by Russia with 715, France 210, Great Britain 45 and China 45. For these nuclear haves peace and stability depend on the pernicious theory of deterrence. A strong nuclear deterrence is still 'an essential part of American security policy. The \$4 trillions America spent on nuclear weapons since 1945 and the \$20 billions she spends every year on nuclear deterrence have brought peace and stability to the world, feel the Americans. Russia, despite being overtly pro nuclear-disarmament, is as committed to nuclear deterrence as her main rival has been. China conducted an underground test less than a year ago only "to ensure the safety of its nuclear weapons" France thinks that nuclear tests, like weapons, add to 'French honour and status'.

The threshold states, some of whom are called 'rogue regimes' by the nuclear haves, are not sure whether possession of nuclear weapons would get for them a status on par with the big five, or would ensure security for them in their region. The world is heading toward nuclear anarchy, marked by bullying and blackmailing. There is another dilemma for power-starved countries like India. If electric power is generated by nuclear reactors in many advanced countries, over 50% in France and 30% in Germany, why should these third world countries not make use of nuclear energy to overcome chronic power scarcity? How safe will these reactors be in hugely populated countries like India where accidents might lead to massive destruction of life and property?

Clearing the nuclear debris is no ordinary challenge. The United States will need to spend \$230 billions during the next ten or twenty years to clean up the contaminated sites from old test and storage sites and disused weapons and assembly plants.' A Harvard study (see Economist, February 2, 1996) fears that Russia's nuclear bits and pieces will end up in unauthorised hands and the problem is how to ensure that fissile materials are stored safely and not recycled for weapon use.

The nuclear dilemma is essentially a human dilemma. Robert Oppenheimer, 'the father of the atomic bomb' was confronted with this dilemma. The blast, his genius caused, brought before his eyes' the vision of the Divine Krishna suddenly growing to reach from earth to heaven, taking on a dazzling multicolored form with numberless arms and eyes, the numberless flaming jaws that swallowed the armies, saying "I am become Death, the destroyer of the world. "Great scientists, like Oppenheimer, Einstein, Born and Bohr, who revealed the power of the atom, have warned us enough of the impending danger. It is for us to learn, from them and from history, and to act before it is too late.

(June 1997)

Section 2

The Urban Challenge

Reports emanating from the United Nations contain ominous projections about the cities of the world. They are “Social time bombs” which are growing so fast that “their arteries are showing through their outskirts”. In about twenty years from now there will be seven ‘megacities’ of more than 20 million people and six of them, including Bombay and Karachi, will be in the third world. Mega cities, as Eugene Linden’s article in ‘Foreign Affairs’ shows, breed mega problems like pollution, disease and violence leading to urban chaos. According to Linden 61% of humanity will be living in cities in the next century as against less than 10% at the beginning of this century. Linden says that “population pressures and the integration of the world economy have unleashed forces that can overwhelm a city, however well managed”. Another expert went to the extent of saying that because of growing unemployment caused by migrations from rural to urban areas, cities could become ‘mass graveyard’. The fate of the cities, writes Linden, determines, the fate of nations and regions and ‘swollen cities and weakened states’ will present a grim scenario as we step into the 21st Century.

Writing on the Indian situation, Prof. M.N.Srinivas says that “we have become urbanized as never before.” From 10% in 1951 India’s urban population has soared to near 30% and villages are getting urbanized thanks to videos, TV sets and computers. The Hindu (August 5, 1996) editorially discussed the garbage problem facing India’s cities. In Surat, according to the paper, 1250 tonnes of garbage are generated every day of which 250 tonnes of garbage are not removed and 60 million litres of the 130 million litres of sewage are not collected. In Delhi 1400 tonnes of garbage and 600 million litres of sewage are not cleared. In Mumbai the figures of uncleared garbage are 800 tonnes and sewage 800 million litres. (In Visakhapatnam of the 400 tonnes of garbage generated every day 100 tonnes are not cleared according to the local authorities). Municipal Corporations ‘operate to a third of their capacity’ writes the Hindu, besides being corrupt and inefficient. The task before urban planners, administrators and city dwellers is daunting. Experts say that enlightened leaders, competent administrators and ecology-conscious citizenry must come together and embark on a plan of action to prevent the impending chaos. Lester Brown has recently suggested environmental taxes in place of high income taxes for mobilizing resources and for instilling in the minds of the people awareness and responsibility. Prof. M.N.Srinivas’s sharp comment on the ostentatious consumer habits of the rich reminds us of the need of ‘cultural liveliness’ replacing ‘competitive lavishness’.

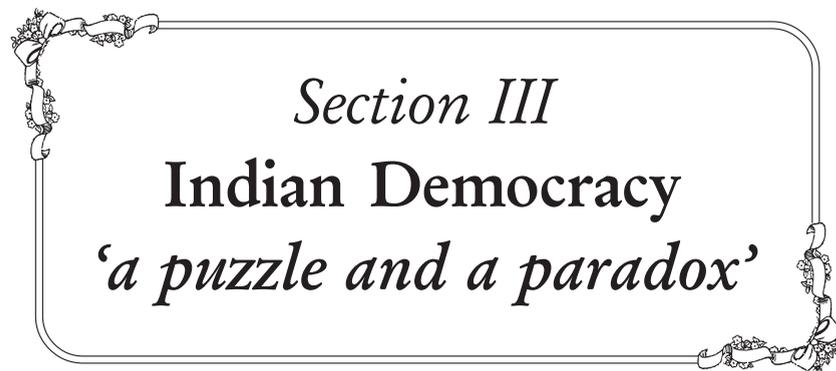
(December 1996)

We can Overcome...

In 70 countries, according to the 1996 UNDP Report, people are on average poorer than they were in 1980 and in 43 countries poorer than in 1970, notwithstanding the claims of the protagonists of “the governing economic culture of the world market” the gap between the haves and havenots is widening alarmingly. Of the global GDP of \$23 trillion, the share of the developing countries is only \$5 trillion or a mere 22%. During the last three decades the share of the rich countries increased from 70 to 85 percent while that of the poorest countries dropped from “a meagre 2.3 percent to a disgraceful 1.4 percent.” In a thought-provoking article titled “High-way Robbery by the Superrich” in the Guardian Weekly of July 28th, 1996 Victor Keegan shows how the 358 billionaires of the world corner wealth that equals the combined incomes of the poorest 45 percent of the world’s population. If the 358 billionaires, says Keegan, decided to keep \$5 million or so each to tide themselves over and give the rest away, they could virtually double the annual incomes of nearly half the people on earth. The author’s comment that “inequality has not only grown between countries but within them” confirms that humankind is not getting any closer than before to the alleviation of poverty and suffering. In a perceptive article in Foreign Affairs of May-June 1996 Ethan B.Kapsten says that “the failure of today’s advanced global capitalism to keep spreading the wealth poses a challenge not just to policy makers but to modern economic “Science” as well.... Growing income inequality, job insecurity and unemployment are widely seen as the flip side of globalization”.

Market culture is based on ruthless competition which brings out the worst in man and degrades human spirit. The populist and the demagogue set the agenda for human progress and polls dictate policy. In the midst of such growing confusion India’s plight is pathetic mainly because of an uncertain situation within and unfavourable setting outside. But if only we turn to those times when the historic tryst with destiny took place, for guidance and inspiration, we can find light at the end of the tunnel. Those were the times when ‘the advanced West’ was fascinated by ‘the most creative thought coming out of the East’ and when great western philosophers looked to India for showing ‘a way out of the darkness’. Gandhiji said that “true economics stands for social justice; it promotes the good of all equality, including the weakest and is indispensable for decent life”. Jawaharlal Nehru who synthesised Western liberalism, Marxist egalitarianism and Indian values in evolving a framework for India’s progress reminded us of the path just a few days before his death”. In India, it is important for us to profit by modern technical processes and increase our production both in agriculture and industry. But, in doing so, we must not forget that the essential objective to be aimed at is the quality of the individual and the dharma underlying it”. india can still do it. And the world at large will also stand to profit by it.

(October 1996)



Section III
Indian Democracy
'a puzzle and a paradox'

“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... the poor and suffering classes have kept the democratic process alive far more than the elite and affluent middle classes”

- Rajni Kothari

Section 3

Section III **Indian Democracy Puzzle and Paradox**

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Another Milestone

“WE THE PEOPLE OF INDIA.....IN OUR CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY this twenty-sixth day of November,1949, do HEREBY ADOPT, ENACT AND GIVE TO OURSELVES THIS CONSTITUTION” stated the preamble when exactly sixty years ago THE CONSTITUTION OF INDIA was adopted. Rajendra Prasad, Jawaharlal Nehru and B.Pattabhi Sitaramayya were the first three signatories while Feroze Gandhi, Harekrushna Mahtab and Sunder Lall were the last three to sign on the historic document. In between figure the signatures of three hundred eminent men and women who worked for almost three years to give shape to India’s Constitution that came into force on January 26, 1950.

The Diamond Jubilee of the adoption of the Constitution was nowhere celebrated. Instead it was observed as a day of mourning. Prayer meetings were held all over India, Mumbai in particular, paying homage to those killed in the dastardly terrorist attacks in Mumbai on November 26, 2008. Come Republic Day 2010 there will, of course, be nation wide celebrations of the Diamond Jubilee of the Republic of India.

Nations, like human beings, are born in pain and suffering. India was no exception. Partition aggravated the pains of partition. The wounds inflicted by communal riots became festering sores in the body politic. Day and night, for long years he walked, fasted and prayed to free his people from bondage and to keep them together in peace. The Father of the Nation’s last walk on earth was a march into history and immortality. Less than six months after India became free, the light that illumined ‘our path’ and showed us the way out of darkness went ‘out of our lives.’ India became free in August 1947, but was not a nation yet. About six hundred Princely States had to be integrated into the newly liberated country. Many of the rulers of these states were reluctant to join the Indian Union and some of them even entertained the idea of declaring independence. In 1918 Vallabhbhai Patel, on threshold of an illustrious career in public life, revealed his mind and mission by raising a question: “The coming generations have a claim on us, who are their trustees. If we leave them only a heritage of insults and dishonour, of what use would all the wealth and all the comforts that we may leave to them be?” Forty years later, the hero of Barodli, now famous as Sardar Patel, was called upon to translate his dream into reality. ‘The great unifier’ achieved the merger of the Princely States with the Indian Union using both pressure and persuasion as the weapons of his strategy.

Simultaneously another great task was being performed. The Constitution of India was being drafted by leaders of luminous intellect and extraordinary vision. The Constituent Assembly became the forum for it, representing the regions of the vast land and all sections of the 330 millions. The first meeting of the Constituent Assembly took place on December 9, 1946 and, in all, eleven sessions were held to complete the job. Dr B.R.Ambedkar, Chairman of the Drafting Committee, summed up the achievement in a memorable speech. “This Assembly may well congratulate itself for having accomplished so formidable a task in so short a time” he declared and in endearing humility said that the credit for so ably drafting the Constitution should also go to Alladi Krishnaswami Aiyar and B.N.Rau.

Ambedkar’s words of concern for India’s future are relevant sixty years after they were uttered. “On 26th January 1950, India will be an independent country. What would happen to her independence? Will she maintain her independence or will she lose it again? This is the first thought that comes to my mind. It is not that India was never an independent country. The point is that she once lost the independence she had. Will she lose it a second time? It is this thought which makes me most anxious for the future.” His exhortation that “We must be determined to defend our independence with the last drop of our blood,” must always be borne in mind.

(December 2009)

Section 3

Mandate and Message

The mandate is clear and the message unequivocal. The biggest democratic exercise in human history with 417 million people casting their vote gave a firm and decisive verdict mandating continuity of policy with a more effective implementation of the agenda set by the UPA government in 2004. The electorate's seal of approval has been clearly conveyed through the verdict for the policies and programmes of the last five years. It's more than a vote for stability. It strikes a timely balance between the states and the union, seeking to harmonise the rising aspirations and demands of the people of the states and the many regions with the legitimate quest of the union to keep the large and heterogeneous nation strong and united in the midst of global meltdown and growing terrorist threats from across the border.

First of all our grateful thanks should go to the Election Commission and all the personnel, official and non-official, for so ably and smoothly conducting the massive electoral exercise spread over weeks in soaring temperatures. A total of 8070 candidates representing 369 parties contested the 2009 elections to the 15th Lok Sabha. Of these only 36 parties were able to send one or more members to the Lok Sabha while the rest 333 parties could not secure a single seat.

There have been increases and improvements of sorts in this election. For the first time the number of women MPs has crossed the 10% mark with as many as 59 women being chosen to the 15th Lok Sabha as against 45 in the previous Lok Sabha. That, of course, is nowhere near the demand for 33% reservation for women. Gender inequality and injustice, warned Amartya Sen, is a social failure leading to other failures. The number of young MPs has also registered a rise with the 15th Lok Sabha having 79 MPs under 40 as against 34 in the 14th. Ironically enough the number of MPs with criminal cases pending against them has also increased. According to National Election Watch their number has gone up to 150, with 73 of them facing serious charges in 15th Lok Sabha, from 128 in the 14th Lok Sabha with 55 facing serious criminal records. The number of crorepathis has almost doubled from 154 in the previous Lok Sabha to 300 now.

Apart from these facts and figures the verdict is an endorsement of the policies and welfare measures such as the National Rural Employment Guarantee scheme, Sarva Siskha Abhiyan, the National Rural Health Mission, the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission and programmes for the benefit of the disadvantaged groups such as SCs, STs, OBCs and minorities. The 11th Plan provides for a substantial increase in social welfare expenditure. Inclusive growth is vital for the empowerment of the disadvantaged sections of the society. Greater investment in education and healthcare is a welcome development. India is expected to catch up with China, at least in one field, in the next thirty years and that is in having more number of people above 65 than under 15, which necessitates provision of healthcare and pension benefits for the ageing population.

For Prime Minister Manmohan Singh the Congress led UPA government's victory in the election gives particular satisfaction. It is a vindication of the bold stand he has taken on the civilian nuclear cooperation with the United States which culminated in the agreement signed in Vienna in September last year 'when the global community represented by the Nuclear Suppliers Group, NSG, accorded India exceptional status, ending 34 years of ostracism.' When Manmohan Singh had vowed in 2005 'to recover for India its due status in the world' he must have been inspired by the astute role played by Jawaharlal Nehru to raise India's stature in the comity of nations, in the first decade of independence. As Geoffrey Tyson wrote "Nehru did not need to go to New York to make pronouncements on world affairs, the world press came to Delhi to hear him."

The heat, both electoral and summer, is almost over. Things should get cooler from now on with the onset of the monsoon being eagerly awaited. It's time for the Congress party, the UPA Chairperson and the suave Prime Minister to shed hesitation and start functioning more cohesively and purposefully in completing the mission they embarked upon five years ago. The agenda is heavy and task daunting. Raising growth rate and reducing fiscal deficit will be at the top. And good governance also means transparency, honesty and ensuring a corruption-free administration. Making the impossible possible is what politics is ultimately about.

The 2009 Election

It is customary to describe every General Election as crucial for the survival and stability of our democracy. Right from the first in 1952 every general election has generated keen political rivalry and considerable public excitement over the outcome though the Congress was for a long period the dominant party in national politics. The 1977 election was the first to upset electoral calculations and predictions of pollsters and psephologists. The last two decades have witnessed a paradigm shift in India's electoral politics characterized by the rise of regional parties and a significant power-shift from the centre to the states. The formation of government at the centre and the enunciation of public policy had been the prerogative of the Congress party for over four decades, except for a brief break during 1977-80. When the BJP led NDA government came to power in 1999 followed by the Congress led UPA government in 2004 expectations have been aroused about the possibility of the emergence of a bipolar constellation in India's electoral politics, though the total vote share of the two major parties, the Congress and the BJP, put together, did not cross the 50% mark of the votes polled.

The elections to the 15th Lok Sabha are, however, crucial in more ways than one. The uncertainty about the poll outcome is worrisome because of the likelihood of a severely fractured verdict in the 2009 election. Pollsters predict less number of seats in the Lok Sabha for the two main national parties, the Congress and the BJP, and more number of seats to regional and small parties. That might lead to a weak coalition government at the centre with the small parties calling the shots. There is no denying the fact that coalition governments provide for wider representation and more active participation of people at all levels, accommodating the interests and demands of hitherto neglected sections of the society. But when political parties are small and weak, allied to narrow sectarian interests, they would adversely affect political stability and the larger national interests. A weak government will be a national liability in times of grave economic crisis or serious threats to national security such as recession and terrorist attacks. Coalition politics of today are like a political game of musical chairs. It is politics without principles, parties without ideology and leaders without scruples- all engaged in a desperate, if not shameful, chase for power driven on the engines of money, liquor, caste and religion. Sops and subsidies are publicly offered without any sense or substance. Does it not amount to legitimizing corruption when for a vote cast something is promised in return as quid pro quo? Are the leaders not trying to cheat the voters by anaesthetizing them with all sorts of promises?

The 2009 election to the 15th Lok Sabha is the biggest democratic exercise in human history. From 176 million voters in 1952 the electorate has grown to a massive 713 million strong body today. With all its faults and limitations India is the world's largest democracy, having survived several assaults from within and from outside. The credit for the survival of Indian democracy goes mainly to all those who have voted in elections and to the hard working and dedicated government staff and non-official personnel responsible for the successful conduct of elections. As Rajni Kothari, the doyen among Indian political scientists wrote "The poor and suffering classes have kept the democratic process alive far more than the elite and affluent middle classes." The message is clear and loud. Every eligible voter must vote and vote with conscience. As many people as were there when India became free in August 1947 are still living below the poverty line. They need to be freed from want just as those living in fear must be liberated from insecurity. Women who constitute 50% of the population have never had double digit percentage representation of the total number of members of Lok Sabha — an average of less than 7% from 1952 to 2009 !

Politics is too serious a matter to be left entirely to the so-called politicians whose profession is pursuit of power for selfish ends. It will remain dirty if we don't pick up courage to try to cleanse it of the dirt and disease accumulated over the years. The electronification of elections and the growing urge among all classes of people for clean politics may bring about a change sooner than later. The 2009 election may, hopefully, be the turning point.

(April 2009)

Section 3

We must and we shall

Fifty nine years ago WE THE PEOPLE OF INDIA gave to ourselves the Constitution embodying, among other things, such lofty goals and ideals as, justice, liberty and dignity of the individual and unity of the nation. We have since multiplied more than three times in number from about 330 million people then to a billion plus now in the world's largest democracy. The Constitution of India drafted with vision and skill by great minds of those stirring times, has since been amended as many as 104 times. We the people of India have, during the last six decades, been silent and helpless witnesses to many such happenings as:

- * the erosion of Constitutional and political values and decline of important branches of the government such as the legislature, the executive and the judiciary,
- * Parliament of India, the nation's highest legislative body, and state assemblies and councils being unable to spend their time and energies on issues of vital national and public concern,
- * the executive abdicating its responsibility and the judiciary being unable to quickly dispose of cases,
- * the misuse or abuse of established Constitutional principles and practices for eg. Article 356 proclaiming President's rule in a state has been invoked as many as 108 times since 1951 - 99 times between 1965 and 2009 as against 9 times in the first fifteen years between 1950 and 1965
- * the blatant misuse of public office for private gain making India's system of governance highly corrupt and regressive
- * the emergence of a political culture thriving on a dangerous nexus between the criminal, the politician and the bureaucrat
- * the collapse of professional autonomy and integrity leading to the rise of middlemen and power brokers with a stranglehold on the nation's precious resources
- * the acceptance of the most shameful reality that as many people as those living at the time of independence do not have two square meals a day and that every ten minutes a woman and every hour a child are dying due to lack of proper medical care and malnutrition
- * the media, both print and electronic, thriving more on disaster and sensationalism than on its avowed pursuit of truth in the service of the people
- * the so-called temples of learning becoming commercial centres engaged in wealth accumulation focusing more on imparting skills than on instilling values in the young minds.
- * hospitals ceasing to be healing centres with a human touch and instead functioning as starred hotels proving right the comment of the Economist that in the 21st century "both medicine and disease have developed respect for wealth".

Still, we have also found a silver lining to the dark cloud enveloping India in the form of India emerging as 'a super power' in English language, a giant in software and modern technology thanks to the achievements of our scientists and engineers in space research, software and new technological and medical skills and the power and dynamism of our youth who constitute more than fifty percent of our population. We as the people of India may have failed to live up to the noble ideals set before the nation sixty years ago by the Father of the Nation and his able lieutenants. A leading journal wrote that economics is what economists do. Politics is certainly not what our politicians do today. Nor is the bureaucracy discharging its duty of being the instrument of change and development. But we as the inheritors of that priceless legacy owe a duty to the youth of today and to posterity. We must strive to regain the spirit of those times when the Constitution proudly proclaimed India a Sovereign Democratic Republic promising freedom, justice, dignity and happiness to the people of this great country. We can no longer remain passive and mute spectators to the spread of the dangerous disease afflicting our body politic. The time has come for everyone to act. We must and WE SHALL.

A Wake - up call for India

The hype is back with a bang. If it was 'shining India' a few years ago, it is now 'rising India' an 'emerging global power.' Described as Asia's third great power, India, we are constantly reminded, will soon overtake China in population. Now being a superpower in English language having overtaken the US with the highest number of English knowing people in the world, India will before long match that super power in both status and sophistication. Day in and day out we see reports of India's march towards parity with the US and China as a global power.

Beneath the hype that creates many illusions are some stark realities. Apt is the comment that "the Chinese always want to know; the Indians always want to show that they know." Ten percent of the 1.1 billion people of India, with their proven skills and expertise, have done us proud by making India a leading power in IT and software taking us closer to the long cherished goal of being on par with the United States of America. Sad but true the number of people living below the poverty line and struggling for two square meals a day, is equal to the population of the United States.

India is a perfect example of J.K.Galbraith's concept of public poverty, characterized by inadequate public services, failing public schools, and degradation of environment. The record is dismal in health, education and water services. The World Development Report provides enough evidence to confirm it. MMR and infant mortality rates continue to be high, despite sixty years of planning and numerous welfare programmes. Both political leadership and the bureaucracy, should accept responsibility for the failure. They have failed to convert national resources into national wealth. Still, they delude themselves into thinking that they alone can usher in development and ensure the well being of the people.

The polity is in a state of decay, because of many factors, the most glaring of which are anarchy, authoritarianism and unbridled corruption. Alexis de Tocqueville cautioned against the 'wild instincts of democracy' and stressed the need for popular control to check them. India, the world's so-called largest democracy, is today run not just by wild instincts but by predatory forces. Those in power do not shirk to abuse it, whether they are elected leaders or selected civil servants. Operating in tandem with them are some of the elite classes, stricken with affluenza, a disorder without a cure. The fast growing number of millionaires and billionaires may get for India media headlines and global 'status.' But the families of farmers who die in distress and the growing number of beggars found at public places urgently need to be taken care of by both the state and society. The Speaker of Lok Sabha has said in a recent lecture that rural India is in crisis. India, socially, politically and economically is in crisis. It is not enough if we publicly honour the memory of Dr B.R.Ambedkar every year on April 14th. Our independence is real when we secure for the people for whom Ambedkar lived and died, equality of status and of opportunity. Elections alone cannot ensure the stability and success of our democracy. That too when electoral politics are manipulated by vote banks, for securing votes of targeted groups These are banks without any deposits of public trust or confidence. The First Past the Post System (FPP) helps persons who do not get even 25% of the votes polled to get elected to legislatures.

Our legislatures have no time to discuss and debate issues and legislate on important matters; leaders and officials have neither the vision nor the will to transform promising India into a performing nation; no social leaders capable of showing the people a way out of enveloping gloom. Let us first think and act locally and strive to become a strong nation and stable democracy. The wake-up call should not be allowed to become an alarm bell.

(April 2007)

Section 3

Perils of Adversarial Culture

Is the judiciary usurping the powers of the legislature? Are the judges legislating from the bench, thereby doing the job of the legislatures and the elected representatives? Is there truth in the charge that “in India law is not governing the government but government that is governing the law”? Is there now a crisis of legitimacy in view of the ‘confrontation’ between the Supreme Court and Parliament over the recent assertion by the former that it has a right to scrutinise every law in the Ninth Schedule? The perils of adversarial culture have surfaced again in the sixtieth year of our independence.

Any discussion of judicial review begins with the classic case of *Marbury vs Madison* of 1803 in which the famous Chief Justice of American Supreme Court, John Marshall, displayed “judicial statesmanship of the highest order.” Marshall shrewdly enlarged the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court conferred by Article III of the Constitution and famously declared: “It is emphatically the province and duty of the judicial department to say what the law is.” During the last two hundred years since Marshall’s historic judgement The American Supreme Court invalidated more than a hundred acts of the Congress or their provisions and over 900 state laws. The “due process” clause in the Fourteenth Amendment enabled the Supreme Court “to sit in judgement not so much on the constitutionality as on the wisdom of legislation.” Interestingly “the due process” clause was not incorporated in India’s Constitution on the advice of Justice Frankfurter of the American Supreme Court when he was consulted by Sir B.N.Rau, one of the architects of our Constitution. As Chief Justice Patanjali Sastry explained: “Our Constitution contains express provisions for judicial review of legislation as to its conformity with the Constitution, unlike in America where the Supreme Court has assumed extensive powers of reviewing legislative acts under cover of widely interpreted ‘due process’ clause.”

Alexis de Tocqueville whose *Democracy in America* is hailed as an “immortal work” wrote that “the power vested in American courts of justice of pronouncing a statute to be unconstitutional forms one of the most powerful barriers that have ever been devised against the tyranny of assemblies.” But those who oppose “the continued judicial expansion, especially into the realm of public policy” quote Thomas Jefferson who warned the court against making the Constitution “a blank paper by construction.” His words are often recalled: “To consider the judges as the ultimate arbiters of all constitutional questions is a very dangerous doctrine and one which would place us under the despotism of an oligarchy.” Abraham Lincoln voiced concern over ‘judicial obstructionism’ coming in the way of his mission to liberate the blacks in American society. Jawaharlal Nehru spoke on similar lines when he asked the judiciary not to become a hurdle in the way of social progress. Sir Ivor Jennings commented that litigation is the biggest national industry in India.

Still, judicial activism is a welcome development as the power of judicial review is exercised to meet the changing needs of the times. In the absence of a dynamic public welfare policy, judicial intervention to free the society from the shackles of oppression and injustice and to ensure protection of basic freedom for every individual is a vital necessity. The rise of the jurisprudence of public interest litigation bears testimony to the concern of the judiciary for the welfare of the people, especially the weak and the underprivileged.

As Chief Justice Harlon Stone of the US Supreme Court wrote: “while unconstitutional exercise of power by the executive and legislative branches of the government is subject to judicial restraint, the only check upon our own exercise of power is our own sense of self-restraint.” That applies to the other two branches of government also. It was proclaimed in ancient Athens, the cradle of democracy, that ‘no virtue is so virtuous as the virtue of self-restraint.’

(February 2007)

Success or Survival ?

Indian democracy has always been a puzzle. In a land of paradoxes the puzzle of democracy may baffle many outside India. But to the people of India who sustain it with their unflagging faith in the democratic process, it is normal, as normal as the traffic chaos on the roads in our cities. Despite noise, rage and recklessness the traffic slowly but certainly moves on. It is chaos in motion, like the 'functioning anarchy' as India was once described. For democratic India it is indeed a crawl, compared to authoritarian China's swift and successful march on the path of modernization.

As the Republic celebrated its 56th anniversary with the usual show of military strength the Speaker of Lok Sabha went about with quiet efficiency mobilizing the views and support of Speakers of state assemblies in tackling the sensitive issue of Parliament vs Supreme Court. The Speaker is the custodian of the rights and privileges of the members of Lok Sabha and has the right to expel or suspend members guilty of breach of conduct. The decisions of the Speaker cannot be subject to judicial review, according to the Speaker. The other argument is that the Constitution is supreme in India and the Supreme Court has the power to review the decisions of Parliament when an issue of Constitutional importance arises. The issue should not simmer into a confrontation between the legislature and the judiciary, elected representatives vs nominated judges.

Half a century after the Constitution came into force basic issues concerning domain and jurisdiction cause a stand off between the highest branches of government. Is it due to lack of clarity in the world's longest Constitution or inability of the people at the helm of affairs to arrive at an understanding on the respective areas of functioning? Modern world's oldest democracy America faced such situations, if not crises, in its early years. The famous Marbury vs Madison case of 1801 resulted in the Supreme Court asserting its power of review. Thomas Jefferson, "a politician among thinkers" and later Abraham Lincoln "a thinker among politicians" strengthened the democratic system with their firm assertion that the power of the people should ultimately prevail. Jawaharlal Nehru, often likened to Jefferson, struck an identical note in the early years of our Independence, when he proclaimed that the judiciary should not come in the way of social progress.

In the sixties the nation witnessed an interesting debate over the same issue with noted Parliamentarian Nath Pai leading it. In the years that followed amendments to the Constitution and judgements of the Apex Court added to the sharpness of the debate. There is no last word in such matters. Speaker of Lok Sabha Mr Somnath Chatterjee, himself a noted lawyer, now feels compelled to put the jurisdictional record straight following the suspension case of eleven members of Lok Sabha. The matter assumes considerable significance necessitating a fresh look into the powers of jurisdiction of the three branches of government.

At a time when the economy is poised to get India a global status, it is vital for the political leadership to steer the nation away from even a semblance of instability. Granting that governance is not easy in coalition politics and that India is a 'rainbow country' with a variety of political formations, still it is possible for the leaders, especially those in charge of the major institutions of our democracy, to make the impossible possible.

For too long we have heard such terms as 'electoral democracy' and a country that always promises but never performs. We are tired of it all. There can be no further delay in converting the present opportunity into an advantage and asset so that the fruits of a long struggle and heavy sacrifice are made available for the people of the world's largest democracy. Survival is not stability. For that matter mere stability does not represent success. And our idea of a successful democracy is 'to wipe out every tear from every eye' and 'lead the people into that heaven of freedom' where people realize the goals of Justice, Liberty, and Equality enshrined in the Preamble to our Constitution.

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January 26th and 30th

January is always important on our national calendar. Celebration of the Republic day on 26th is followed by solemnity of the Martyr's Day on 30th. The 55th Anniversary of the Republic was a low-key celebration this year. A feeling of relief that it passed off "peacefully" more than any jubilant spirit marked the occasion. The ritual was routine, carried out with meticulous care in the midst of tight security. Chilly winds and cold weather added to the tenseness of the atmosphere in the Capital of India, in particular. Still, the presence of the President and Prime Minister, leaders of impeccable integrity, on the occasion was a signal of reassurance that the nation is in safe hands.

Three days later came the 57th anniversary of the martyrdom of Mahatma, the day on which the nation pays homage to the Father of the Nation. Official functions at Rajghat apart, prayer-meetings, two minutes' silence at 11 a.m. and "vardhanti" functions in the evening constitute the day long programmes that day, in every town and city and villages too. It was most disappointing that this year such functions and meetings were conspicuous by their non-occurrence. Even the 11 a.m. two minutes silence was not observed, perhaps because it was a Sunday. Print and electronic media too sidelined the Mahatma's death anniversary. People were obviously busy with the more important things of life !

As one part of India tries to recover from the shattering effect of "Tsunami" another part of the country gets ready for elections. India always has to overcome disasters -- natural or man-made. The former are beyond our control and the latter beyond anyone's comprehension. How else can one explain the impunity with which our politicians convert elections into murderous street-brawls and hazardous polls from which nearly half of the eligible voters shy away? The Election Commission has been working overtime to rein in the political class and inject discipline and sanity into the entire process. "The EC alone cannot prevent the criminal elements from getting into state legislatures and Parliament", said the Chief Election Commissioner recently as some states with a notorious record of "scientific rigging" get ready for the battle of the ballot. No surprise that a national journal came out with the revelation that at least 100 members of the present Lok Sabha face criminal charges as per records.

Still, the dark cloud has a silver lining. There is not only a noble Head of State but also a visionary Prime Minister. They both evoke public confidence in the system they head, that too at a time when public respect for politicians, administrators and public institutions is at an abysmal low. The nation's demographic profile reveals that more than 70% of India's population are under 35 years of age. India's younger generation is unquestionably bright and many of them are just brilliant in whatever field of activity they are engaged in. The excellent performance of Indian youth in centres of learning and research, in culture and sport and in big industry at home and abroad is too well known to need mention here. The future may be secure in the hands of the youth, if only those in charge of national governance strive to put the system back on rails. Otherwise youth expectation will lead to frustration that can cause irreparable damage to the polity and society.

The Republic of India, now 55 years old, and its billion plus people need to draw inspiration and strength from the message of the Mahatma which transcends time and space. The stirring words of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan sum up the mission of Gandhiji. "His life and death will remain a witness to the faith that men may still overcome misery, cruelty and violence by Truth and Love.... nothing better has ever been taught or lived since the world began."

The 2004 Verdict

The 2004 elections have shown again the strength and maturity of the Indian electorate. With quiet dignity the people of India have demonstrated their power to defeat a government and choose another. Nowhere and at no time in human history was there an electorate of 670 million of whom more than 350 million voted in a general election. Atal Bihari Vajpayee hit the nail on its head when he said that the 2004 election was a victory for Indian democracy. *The Guardian* of the United Kingdom wrote that “It was a massive vote of confidence in India’s democratic system, a vote that swept aside declarations of a surging economy.”

First and foremost let us salute the Indian voter for keeping the world’s largest democracy alive. He/she is also the anonymous author of the silent democratic upheaval that shocked the high and the mighty, stunned the experts and political pundits and amazed India watchers all over the world. The skeptics who had predicted the collapse of Indian democracy after Nehru and who wrote its epitaph in 1975 when Indira Gandhi imposed the infamous emergency learnt their lessons. Still, cynics and prophets of doom are there in good number eager to consign Indian democracy to the dustbin of history.

Not only the NDA government but also some theories and generalisations stand rejected. For example if anti-incumbency was put forth as the main reason for the defeat of NDA at the centre and some ruling parties in the states that went to polls, states like Orissa, Bihar, Delhi and West Bengal prove it wrong. If it is argued that it is a fractured verdict, the counterpoint is that in a heterogeneous and fragmented society and in a polity of more than 25 contesting parties, the result could not but be otherwise. The Congress with just 26.69% vote share emerged as the single largest party with 145 seats while the BJP with 22.16% vote share finished second with 138 seats. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) with 5.69% vote secured the third place with 43 seats. The NDA with 35.30% total vote share was edged out by the Congress led UPA with 35.19% and almost as much percentage voted for neither of these two alliances. The Congress which had obtained 45% of votes polled in the first general election in 1952 has slipped to a little over 26% in 2004 while the BJP which as Jan Sangh had a meagre 3% vote share in the 1952 election has, during the last few general elections, raised its share to over 22%.

Parliamentary democracy is governed by the FPP--first past the post-principle. In coalition politics dominated by too many parties it is possible that the gap between votes polled and seats secured could be very wide and disproportionate. That has been the major flaw of Indian democracy, particularly during the last fifteen years. Another major defect is the inability of the system to prevent those facing criminal charges from getting elected to Parliament and state legislatures. Some of them have become ministers too! Money and liquor continue to be the weapons in the hands of many candidates and parties in fighting elections. The 2004 election must have been the ‘costliest’ election in the annals of Indian democracy as most of the candidates and parties spent huge amounts in every constituency.

Media hype, road-shows and film stars’ campaigns have trivialized the election campaign making it appear, at times, more like a film show. As Nobel Laureate Octavio Paz whose book *In Light of India* was widely acclaimed cautioned: “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.” Some TV channels seemed to think that they made and unmade leaders and governments in the recent election.

The 2004 election has administered a severe punishment to those who had chosen to advance the election for no other reason except to regain power when the going was good. That the Election Commission did not buckle under political pressure, upholding its autonomy in the formulation of ground rules and in the conduct of the massive exercise, augurs well for the future. The new government at the centre and in the states that went to polls would do well to bear in mind the hopes and aspirations of the people in policy formulation and decision-making, keeping scrupulously away from the culture of self-advertisement and high-voltage publicity. No one is indispensable in a democracy in which people are the sovereign.

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General Elections

Parliamentary system of government is also called Prime Ministerial system because of the enormous power and prestige enjoyed by the Prime Minister. As long as he or she is supported by a majority, wrote an expert, there is nothing the Prime Minister cannot do except making a man woman and woman a man. From Walter Bagehot's classic on the English Constitution scholars quote such famous words as the cabinet being the keystone of the political arch and the Prime Minister being the keystone of the cabinet arch in the parliamentary system. Even a little known leader becomes strong once he is elected as the Prime Minister. Clement Attlee, for instance, was no match to his charismatic predecessors Winston Churchill and Lloyd George in demeanour and oratory. But with concealed ruthlessness he presided over cabinet meetings and took many momentous decisions. In our own country Indira Gandhi literally danced to the tune of king-maker Kamaraj in 1966 when she was chosen to succeed Lal Bahadur Shastri. What she became a few years later and how she exercised power is too well known to need mention here.

Atal Behari Vajpayee, brimming with confidence, went on January 27 to the President of India and recommended the dissolution of the Lok Sabha seven months in advance. The same Vajpayee was asked by the President six years ago to seek a fresh mandate when his coalition government failed to secure a majority in the Lok Sabha. The coalition outfit that tried to avoid a general election then, is today seeking an early poll. Vajpayee today is not only the keystone of the coalition (cabinet) arch but also the undisputed master of the entire system. His political skill and style of functioning have kept the 'flock together' and more importantly, given the polity, stability and direction in difficult times. His peace initiatives, with Pakistan in particular, have aroused hopes of a new climate of peace in the sub-continent and of solutions to nagging problems between neighbours in the region.

Still, the BJP would only be emulating its arch rival, the Congress party, if it focuses all the attention on Vajpayee and asks people 'to adore him'. If the United States has in the recent past (before 9/11) claimed to "have never had it so good" the BJP has thrown up a new slogan/cliche "the feel good factor" as the main reason for advancing the elections. Some of the achievements of the NDA government are impressive though the BJP led NDA government is taking credit for every good thing that has happened including the favourable monsoon last year! Euphoria generates such myths as invincibility and indispensability.

What causes concern is the fact that the ruling coalition and the opposition parties do not seem to have an ideology or a coherent plan of action for the future. There are more important issues and concerns that need to be urgently addressed than putting up for national debate the credentials, or the lack of it, of the Congress President for becoming the Prime Minister of India. Poverty and unemployment continue to be the main challenges before the nation. Corruption has destroyed the efficacy and credibility of almost all institutions at every level of our public life. The causal relationship between poverty, corruption and violence is too serious a matter to be ignored for long. Gender injustice and marginalisation of the disadvantaged sections of the society are equally serious and urgent matters that need to be addressed. Nobody grudges the massive investments for the development of national highways and airports. But neglecting education and health will be disastrous for the future. Investment on education and research in universities has not received the attention it deserves.

President APJ Abdul Kalam has wisely raised such issues for the consideration of the people and political parties in his Republic Day message. He has gently reminded our leaders and parties of their responsibilities towards the nation and its groaning millions. A general election is an occasion for stock-taking, not for muck-raking and mud-slinging. Winning the trust of the people is far more important than securing certificates and testimonials from foreign countries and international agencies. A healthy and informed debate on major issues is the need of the hour. Moderation and restraint should be the governing principles of such a public discourse.

The Menace of Corruption

Corruption, like poverty and unemployment, is a serious challenge for Indian Polity. In fact a causal relationship between corruption and poverty and violence is perceived in the Indian political system. The nexus between the neta, (politician) babu (bureaucrat) lala (businessman) and dada (criminal) was explained in detail by the former Central Vigilance Commissioner who came out boldly against this 'low-risk high-profit business.'

In the first week of November every year a cacophonous exercise, called the National Vigilance Week, is organised by the government establishments during which time leaders and heads of organisations make platitudinous speeches. Every institution and public place is decorated with slogans and placards against corruption. Despite all these exercises and exhortations our nation is said to be more corrupt than before and on the global corruption scale prepared by Transparency International India's place is somewhere around 73, lower than before.

The great Indian expert on statecraft Kautilya wrote that there were about forty types of corruption. In modern times a systematic study of corruption has been made by scholars who trace its roots and growth. The term corruption has, it seems, its origin in the Latin word 'rumpere' which means 'to break.' A simple definition of corruption is 'abuse of public office for private gain'. According to a USIS publication it contains four main features: a) misuse of a position of power b) gaining advantage for those who, actively and passively, are parties to the misuse c) undesirable effects on third parties and d) secrecy surrounding the transaction.

Governments act as monopolies in many ways because of the discretionary power enjoyed by them and their agencies in decision-making. Often governments take shelter under the cover of secrecy and are not always accountable for their actions. Gunnar Myrdal explained how in Asian countries corruption had been institutionalised. According to him 1) Bureaucrats involved in corruption do not lose their jobs. They are not sent to prison nor are they made to part with their ill-gotten wealth. 2) The law enforcing officials are corrupt and they share their booty with the corrupt. 3) People not only tolerate corruption but show respect for those who made fortunes and 4) It is easier for the citizen to pay for the work (corrupt money) than to wait for his turn. The strategies and institutions to fight corruption are formal and ineffective according to experts.

A recent report of a Parliamentary Committee referred to the alarming growth of black money at least by 20% when the economy was struggling to achieve an annual growth rate of 6%. Loans given to industrialists, bureaucrats and politicians amounting to over Rs. 60,000 crores were written off. Strange but true, official reports showed a decline in the rate of corruption during a twenty year-period with CBI cases coming down from 1349 in 1972 to 1231 in 1992 and the number of persons prosecuted by the CBI which stood at 300 in 1972 came down to 164 in 1992.

After the annual exercise involving a plethora of meetings, workshops and publications to fight corruption four states have gone to the polls to be followed by a general election in 2004. It is now accepted that the coming general elections will be the costliest in the history of our democracy. In simple terms electoral politics have come to mean a business of investment and returns or rewards. In such a situation how can the nation produce leaders with will and courage to tackle the menace of corruption? Not only ancient Rome but many countries in modern times have been ruined by corruption and moral vacuum. Time to wake up and act before it is too late.

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Constitutional Reforms and Polity Reconstruction

But for the high tension on India's borders and the threat of a war, the report submitted by the National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution would have generated a nation-wide debate. The report of the Commission has already attracted the attention of the experts with many newspapers and journals making study and analysis of the 249 recommendations suggested by it. In spite of initial criticism and skepticism voiced against the very idea of Constitutional reforms and constitution of an expert body for the job, the task completed by 'the Commission and the manner in which it has been done have received the approbation of many. One of the key factors for such a turnaround in public perception is the eminence and integrity of the members of the Commission. Mention must also be made of the humility and sincerity with which they approached the daunting assignment, neither overawed by the magnitude of the load of work nor dispirited by the adverse comment in press and public. Those who opposed the creation of the Commission had far outnumbered those we commended it. It is against such a background that the Report submitted by the Commission must be examined.

The need to reform the Indian polity cannot be overstated. As early as 1959 Jayaprakash Narayan pleaded for a reconstruction of Indian polity. In the words of Lok Nayak whose birth centenary is being celebrated this year "This is not only a question of constitutional forms of political systems. It is a creative question in the widest sense of the term. It is a task that defines India's destiny. It spells a challenge to India's sons and daughters." Since then the demand for constitutional reforms has been made several times, feebly in the past and strongly during the last ten years or so. Eminent elders associated with Indian politics for long years and also with the working of the Constituent Assembly, during those momentous three years, have been suggesting reforms to stem the rot. Fifty years after the Constitution came into force a bold step to constitute a commission and to consider effecting changes without altering' the basic structure' has been initiated. In that context a public debate on the recommendations made by the NCRWC is both necessary and relevant.

Among the major afflictions of Indian polity are: its unrepresentative character, its criminalization, the politicization of the state, the distortions occurring due to the nexus between money and muscle power and the disproportionality between the votes polled and the seats obtained under the First Past the Post system. The steep increase in the use of article 356 to unseat a state government and impose President's rule there by the Union government in the last three decades is too well known to merit special mention here. Similarly the unwillingness of state governments to nurture democracy at the grassroot level by implementing effectively the 73rd and 74th amendments works contrary to the three main goals of democracy, decentralization and development.

Elections in a democracy are only a means to an end, never an end in themselves. In spite of the tall claim of successfully conducting elections during the last half-a-century, the fact remains that those elected to the legislative assemblies and Parliament do not represent the majority of the people of India. Under the FPP, with vote banks deciding the outcome of election results, those securing less than one third of the votes polled are getting elected and even a coalition of a dozen parties hardly gets the fifty percent support of the electorate. Worse still, those with criminal background have sneaked into assemblies and Parliament and, of course, to the corridors of power. A study made by the Election Commission in 1997 revealed that 40 members of Lok Sabha and over 700 of the 4071 members of the various state assemblies had a criminal record. A CBI official pointed, out that 17% of the contesting candidates, with U.P topping the category by 40%, had a criminal record and "criminals in some cases have a higher chance of being elected than non-criminals."- President K.R. Narayanan appealed to political parties not to appoint criminals for public office.

Indian polity must be restructured. Constitutional reforms and institutional changes should be welcomed though by themselves they cannot bring about a national political transformation. Social and cultural factors are no less important. Equally so are conventions and customs.' It is an amalgam of all these that India needs at this critical juncture to put the nation on the path of progress and in achieving the goals enshrined in the Constitution and elegantly proclaimed in the Preamble. We the People must rise to the occasion.

Progressive Deterioration

One more Republic Day celebration is over, performed more ritualistically than before. It was anxiety on its eve, tension during the entire exercise and sigh of relief at the end, amidst tight security all over. Ceremony and celebration, like pomp and pageantry, are essential to politics and public life, at least to bolster people's spirit. Parades and announcements of awards along with flag hoisting functions are also a part of the ritual.

Fifty two years ago India became a Republic. The Constitution drafted with wisdom and vision came into force then pledging to secure to the people of India justice, liberty and equality. Chapters III and IV of the Constitution were lauded as 'the soul' of the Constitution and 'the arms of the revolution' and experts hailed the architects of modern India for choosing the path of rapid evolution instead of violent revolution.

The euphoria of the early years was generated by three main factors: 1) the manner in which India's freedom struggle was waged 2) the smooth completion of the gigantic task of integration of the Princely states with the provinces and 3) the making of the Constitution followed by the impressive rise of India as a stable democracy in Asia. India emerged as a new force in world politics thanks to the role played by her leaders at home and abroad. All that appears today as a distant dream of 'a faded golden age.'

The rapid decline of that ethos and the almost total collapse of established institutions have largely been due to the failure of leadership. Not only political leadership but leadership in every walk of life which we generally attribute to the erosion of the value system. The issue cannot be analysed and discussed in a short exercise like this. Still, the blame for the ills afflicting the polity during the last fifty years must be laid at the door of the political class. Leadership in Indian politics is as far removed from principle as parties from ideology and civil service from civility and service. Words have not been matched by deeds and promises have not been fulfilled by performance.

How else can we explain the front-page headline in a leading English daily recently? "All Set for Poll-Money and Muscle Mobilised!" Caste and religion automatically follow into our so-called democratic exercise of conducting elections, routinely described by the officialdom as 'free and fair.' Coalition politics, instead of accommodating the interests of diverse groups, has deepened the fissures of our body politic. One latest instance is the UP political chessboard which on the eve of the election showcases the ugly face of Indian politics. The functioning of our parties and their leaders does not allow us to exude any optimism or even hope about the immediate future.

The party heading the ruling coalition which depends on so many outfits for survival is too busy managing them to find time for enunciating a constructive policy for the future. The party in opposition, unaccustomed to being out of power for long, is no better off carrying a heavy load of problems. The few good Chief Ministers of some states in India are hamstrung either by internal revolt and dissent or by lack of resources and unhelpful attitude of the highcommand/headquarters. High command is always high in command though not always high in upholding democratic principle.

Politics is a complex business. It was Bertrand Russell who said that in politics the springs of human action are derived from 'acquisitiveness' 'rivalry' 'vanity' and 'love of power.' A renowned political scientist remarked that power is a value chasing other values. Once power is acquired other things automatically follow. Right now politicians in India are busy chasing power and the situation is getting murkier and murkier with too many parties being in the run. Elections are like a game of musical chairs for these parties and politicians and 2002 may unfold many dramatic shifts and puzzles, beginning with the UP elections in February. As we look desperately for the light at the end of the tunnel we are troubled by the reality that the tunnel is too long and the light we hope to see may after all be illusory!.

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Elections and Democracy

The only surprise in the elections in May 2001 to some state assemblies is the margin of victory achieved by the political parties/coalitions voted to power, certainly not the results as such. But what causes concern, if not shock, to many is that forces inimical to democracy such as crime, corruption and dynasty are seeking legitimacy through the election process. That is ominous for our beleaguered democracy.

The decline of Indian democracy, after a decade of exemplary record, has been marked by three distinct phases. The first phase witnessed a gross violation of established democratic norms and parliamentary conventions. Customs and conventions, the 'unwritten maxims' of a Constitution, reflect the value system and the political maturity of the people. The strength of great modern democracies like America and Great Britain, lies to a large extent in the respect people have for customs and conventions. Till Franklin Roosevelt's re-election for a fourth term, it was only a convention that the President should not seek the office for more than two terms, that kept away any Presidential ambition for a third term of office. In Britain the role of customs and conventions makes fascinating reading and constitutes a glorious chapter of British Constitutional history. In India such customs and conventions came to be set aside from the mid-sixties onwards and today they lie buried deep under political morass.

In the second phase began the process of deinstitutionalization. Political leadership, both at the national and state levels, struck lethal blows at institutions raised and nurtured with care and vision after India became independent. The functioning of Parliament, the state legislatures, civil service and judiciary, besides that of numerous other institutions, has ceased to evoke public admiration and respect. Nobody ventures to talk today of institutional autonomy and professional pride. The nexus between the politician and the criminal has drained the system of moral strength. That political parties and leaders have injected the criminal element into the body politic through Parliament and state assemblies needs no special mention now.

Indian democracy seems to have entered the third phase of its decline when law and the Constitution take a severe beating at the hands of political parties and leaders. Electoral success can override even law and the Constitution. Success in lottery, wrote Walter Bagehot, is no argument for lottery. It is not to stretch the argument against election process and electoral success. It is certainly a plea against subverting the process for personal aggrandizement.

A lively political discourse has been initiated by eminent theorists on democracy and constitutional liberalism. The point is forcefully made that the democracy without constitutional liberalism is dangerous. Constitutional liberalism, writes a scholar, has led to democracy but democracy does not seem to bring constitutional liberalism. And constitutional liberalism means respect for rule of law, protection of basic liberties and decentralization of power which are as important as free and fair elections. Democracies are being classified as electoral democracies, workable democracies, liberal democracies and illiberal democracies. An African political scientist has added a new category called 'choiceless democracies' that are indebted to and dependent on international financial institutions for their survival with very little decision making power over their goods, services and economy. Market economy, argue the champions of globalization, does not cramp the democratic process. On the other hand most democracies seem unable to tackle the forces unleashed by globalization. Economic stamina is vital for political stability. Democracy is not an end in itself. It is a means by which people seek to realize their individual and collective goals. Good governance is the hallmark of a stable and successful democracy.

Fifty years after free India's Constitution came into force we continue to ask some basic questions. Is India a mere electoral democracy? Or has India matured into a workable democracy? Has it ceased to be a 'functioning anarchy'? Elections of the recent past and the events that followed have not made us any wiser. Our only hope is that politics of the present and the elections of the future will not at least make us sadder.

Crisis of Credibility

Our beleaguered polity is beset by another crisis. The latest problem has been caused not by the vagaries of a midterm poll or pulls and pressures of coalition politics that have surfaced in the last five years or more but by exposures of corrupt practices at the highest level. At a time when political stability seemed to have been achieved a stunning blow to the system has been struck by shady deals involving members of the ruling coalition. Attempt at damage control with the help of semantic smokescreens and counter charges can only be an exercise in futility. It is a crisis of credibility for the government and the confidence of the people has hit the rock bottom.

That almost all parties and political leaders manipulate the levers of power to their own advantage is common knowledge. That Indian politicians cannot be both honest and powerful has entered political scripture and that does not need any special mention now. But what is causing grave concern is not only growing corruption in high places but the increasing probability that corruption can take people to high positions. That is why the entire System has become rotten with no signs of recovery in the foreseeable future. Earlier our leaders and civil servants were described as 'honest' or 'less honest' Today the epithets used are 'corrupt' and 'very corrupt.'

Contempt and cynicism dominate public debate in such situations. Sweeping generalizations are made and examples from history are quoted in making a point. Adam Smith was not less blunt than Samuel Johnson when he called the politician 'a vulgar or insidious animal'. An eighteenth century doggerel was more devastating : "What this rogue loses, that rogue wins, All are birds of a feather! Let's damn the Outs and damn the Ins, And damn them all together." That even advanced nations are also corrupt gives us neither comfort nor hope. That such corrupt practices occurred in the past, even the Nehru's time, is another fallacious argument. The sins of the past cannot be invoked to justify those of the present, No purpose is served by trading charges and by political skulduggery.

Not just the all pervasive corruption that causes deep concern and agony to the people of India. Most institutions, the arteries of the democratic system, have lost their, vitality. Parliament and state legislatures have little time for cool deliberation and constructive debate. Judiciary has not been able to render justice in time. Bureaucracy. continues to be inward looking, incapable of being either civil in approach, Or service-minded in functioning. Those in power and those seeking it are oblivious to the alarming growth of multinationals and external forces that pose a serious threat to India's political and economic sovereignty. (In this issue a news item on the role of WTO and multinationals in choking India's pharmaceutical industry makes disturbing reading). Our industries are facing recession and in some cases closure. Thousands of workers are being laid off. Chinese goods flooding the small sector pose a serious threat to indigenous trade and business. About the security threat emanating from across the border everyone knows the intensity of the menace.

This is a moral and political challenge confronting the entire nation. It concerns everyone of us. The consequences of apathy and indifference could be costly. It is time we realised the value of our hard-earned freedom and time of course, we instilled in the minds of our children the importance of those values by both precept and practice. The need of the hour is to replace despair and cynicism with a renewal of faith in our democratic system. The media, to some extent the Judiciary, and civil society institutions are vibrant enough to help in the task of national rejuvenation. Let us all in our own humble way and at our own level start the repair and reconstruction work, leaving the petty-minded politicians and self-serving establishments to fend for themselves. India has survived many crises in the past and she has strength enough to overcome the present turmoil. That requires a total and massive effort.

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Time for Reflection

August 15 - a time for celebration, time for stocktaking and, of course, for rededicating ourselves to the noble task of making India strong and stable. More than the routine celebratory ceremonies and familiar rhetoric is the urgent need for sober reflection on the happenings during the last one year and for an assessment of the challenges ahead. The fifth conflict thrust on India since 1947 is fortunately over. 407 precious lives have been lost in the Kargil conflict and the number of wounded and disabled jawans and demoralised families is distressingly high. During the last ten years over 4000 people have lost their lives due to insurgency, besides the 1100 soldiers killed in Sri Lanka in the IPKF operations. The scourge of terrorism continues to haunt India, almost in every part of the country.

The silver lining is the solidarity displayed by the people of India, literally and certainly not metaphorically, from Kashmir to Kanyakumari. Irrespective of caste, creed and region all the people of India have saluted the brave jawans and officers and stood by their families in their hour of grief. The martyrdom of those who laid down their lives in defending the country's honour and integrity has helped India to emerge stronger and more united than before. No country in modern times displayed 'magnanimity in victory' as India has done. After the 1971 victory over Pakistan, India released 96,000 prisoners of war and signed the Simla Pact only to be rewarded by betrayal of trust by Pakistan. The Prime Minister's bus ride to Lahore early this year to improve relations between the two countries has been followed by a treacherous attack across the border. Still, India does not gloat over the Kargil victory. A weak and hostile Pakistan can never be a source of strength to India. The strength of India lies in her people, in her resources, in her great heritage and in the values and ideals set before the nation at the time of Independence and while making the Constitution. Definitely not in the compliments collected in Washington and the major capitals of the world and in the benefits doled out by the World Bank and the IMF !

From border war to ballot war the country has swung for yet another battle for power. What a decade this has been! Five general elections and seven Prime Ministers, India has witnessed between 1989 and 1999. Shifting power balance from Delhi to State Capitals as national parties, swallowing their ego, enter into pacts and deals with regional and small parties, for poll adjustments and seat sharing. A very significant development of the last ten years is the sharp increase in the percentage of votes and number of seats for regional and state parties at the national level. That augurs well for the federal structure in that there can be greater accommodation of diverse and heterogeneous groups in the system. Nevertheless a real federal polity will emerge only when democracy is strengthened at the grassroot level, as envisioned in the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution. The voter turn-out during the last ten years has also increased from a national average of 56% /n 1991 to about 62% in 1998. In other words there does not seem to be any 'voter fatigue' inspite of frequent elections. However, much to the disappointment of the contesting candidates, there is now 'donor fatigue' as donors make no secret of their inability to offer donations for parties and candidates for a third time in three years!

Right now confusion and uncertainty seem to prevail everywhere. Ideology and principle have long ago taken the backseat. Changing colour and side is Indias main political game. Means are seldom important. It is the end that matters and that is power. Elections, it is said, provide the means by which parties and leaders try to convert the mood of the people into votes and votes into power. The next two months will witness the most crucial and hopefully not the most bitter election of the century in the worlds largest democracy. The people of India have displayed remarkable maturity in all the elections during the last five decades. It is everyone's hope that the people's maturity will now be allied to vigilance ensuring a free, fair and peaceful election.

What Next?

A month of agony is almost over. Elections to Lok Sabha and some state assemblies spread over thirty painfully long days have not in any way boosted the national morale. Not just disappointment over the way the entire exercise has been gone through but a mood of despair seems to prevail all over. First to blame for this should be the Election Commission for preparing a long and tedious schedule. Where the EC should have acted with firmness and speed, it pontificated and at times competed with power-hungry political leaders for media publicity.

Then as in the past, political parties and leaders, certainly some of the big guns, flouted EC guidelines and basic electoral norms with impunity. That crores of rupees were spent by parties and candidates making a mockery of the so-called ceiling on election expenses is known to one and all. That mafia, muscle and money power swung into action everywhere confirms our worst fears about the poll being 'fair and free.' That liquor flowed like water even in drought-stricken areas shows again the Incompetence and indifference of our law-enforcing machinery need not be stressed here. The champions of 33% reservation of seats for women in legislatures could not provide even 5% of the tickets for women in the elections. Of course, we always honour and respect our women in principle

The outcome of the huge exercise is being eagerly awaited. With all parties and candidates claiming victory and success, the real losers must be the people. What else will they get except rise in prices, hike in taxes and all kinds of levies, direct and indirect? After so much of violence and such unprecedented vulgarity in debates and campaigns how can we expect acrimony and slander to make way for informed debate and healthy public discourse on policies and programmes? If grabbing power by any means is the only goal of all these parties and contestants can any sane person expect incoming governments and-rulers to embark upon constructive policies and programmes for the benefit of the poor, the underprivileged and millions of such people?

Notwithstanding the 'Kargilisation' of politics we remember with gratitude the sacrifices made by our armed forces and salute our jawans and military personnel for defending the honour and integrity of our nation. The heroes of Kargil made us all proud. But as Dominique Lapierre movingly wrote the real heroes of India are the 330 million people who go to sleep every night without eating a morsel of food. They should be our main concern.

Today is a sacred day, a day on which Mahatma Gandhi was born. We pay homage to his memory and dutifully recall his mission and message. The greatest tribute and honour we can offer to the Father of the Nation is to launch a movement, of least at the local level, to liberate the toiling masses from the shackles of poverty and backwardness. Elections come and go (unfortunately they have come too often in the last ten years). Governments rise and fall. Politicians and bureaucrats continue to let India down badly. Still, India survives largely because of the fact that the foundations of democracy were laid on the Gandhi-Nehru framework, which an eminent Indian described as the finest expression of humanism.' May that spirit guide us

(October 1999)

Section 3

We, the People of India

Our polity is afflicted with thrombosis. The political arteries of the system are choked and there is little hope of immediate revival. The caretaker government at the centre is groping in darkness for direction. Neither the BJP now heading the government, nor the Congress that hopes to get into power, is sure of the outcome of the forthcoming general elections. The regional parties whose strength has leapfrogged from 27 in 1989 to over 120 in 1998 hope to retain their political clout in spite of their numerical inferiority. The TDP with a mere double digit score in the 11th Lok Sabha could manage to get four ministerial berths and Speakership in the 12th Lok Sabha while the AIADMK, also of double digit distinction, could overthrow the Vajpayee government after extracting its pound of flesh.

National, regional or local, our political leaders are a class by themselves. They know when to change colour and how to make a quick buck. The salaries and allowances of our Governors, Ministers, Members of Parliament and of state assemblies have been steeply hiked and about their perks, the less said the better. The salaries and allowances of the government and public sector employees always keep rising thanks to pay commission reports and inflation Indices, Our airplanes and air-conditioned coaches In trains are unable to meet the passenger rush. Starred hotels, bars and posh restaurants are all the time over-crowded with dim lights, loud music and high rates enhancing the status of the elite classes. Motor vehicles big or small, are fast on wheels and loud in noise converting our roads, designed and laid by the British, into battlegrounds and at times into graveyards. These and many such status symbols of modern India are daily given a cinematic flavour over our multi-channelled television only to confirm that anything can happen in Indian politics and Indian cinema!

Behind this mask is the stark reality of poverty, unemployment and growing human misery. Over 300 million Indians, according to the World Bank, struggle for a square meal a day. Remember that too when the foodgrain production has crossed the 200 million mark. For these poor people a cup of milk once in three days is a luxury in spite of the 'white revolution'. Our rural poor spend 82% of their hard earned income on food. Half of ail children under five are malnourished and one third of new borns are of low weight because of their mothers' anaemia. Every hour a woman and every ten minutes a child are dying in India for want of medical care or nutrition. Millions of young men and women are in urgent need of employment. Fifty one years of freedom and twelve general elections have not brought any smile to more than half of India's population.

Elections and political stability are undoubtedly very important. But more important and urgent is the challenge facing the nation. We the people of India have given to ourselves a Constitution in 1950 assuring ourselves of liberty, equality, justice, fraternity and dignity. It is time we asserted our rights and displayed our duty towards the less fortunate and disadvantaged fellow citizens. The tears that Gandhiji sought to wipe from Indian eyes have during these fifty one years swollen into rivers of misery threatening to devastate the entire nation, If only every well placed Indian vows to uplift one or two of his countrymen through voluntary service and effort most of our people will be freed from the shackles of poverty and backwardness. We the people of India may not succeed in getting a stable and honest government. It may again be a hung Parliament or fractured verdict. Politically we may still be helpless. But there are many things, beyond elections and political leaders, which we can do and which we must consider as most important. If those with clarity of vision and commitment to the goal take up the task of reconstruction, beginning at the village, ward and local levels, the transformation will come about sooner than later. Welfare and vigilance committees must be formed in every area, whether it is a town or a village, combining the wisdom and experience of the elderly and the energy and enthusiasm of the youth. Unless we spread the meaning and message of true democracy to every home and village, India will continue to be a mere electoral democracy to the delight of the politician and the advantage of the vested interests. The time for action is now.

The Continuing Drift...

It is but natural to do some stock-taking as the year draws to a close. Politicians may not have the time or inclination to do soul-searching. But people have a right as well as duty to evaluate the performance of those in power and fix responsibility for their acts of omission and commission. Constant vigilance is necessary and vital for proper functioning of democratic government. It is rightly said that democracy provides both facility and opportunity for self-correction.

The manner in which the Indian people exercise their franchise and punish representatives and parties for non-performance has evoked world-wide admiration. The credit for the stability and 'success' (whatever it might mean) of the world's largest democracy undoubtedly goes to the people of India. If, however, their choice is limited and power inadequate to improve the system, it is not their fault. If the nexus between criminal gangs and some politicians/bureaucrats continues to thrive, if corruption remains unchecked and if violence rocks Mumbai in the West. Srinagar in the North, Coimbatore in the South and some areas of the North-East, people are justified in blaming those in power for lack of control over administration. People's faith in leaders and administration has touched the rock-bottom with prices of essential commodities galloping ominously.

Where are the leaders who can speak with courage and vision? Where are the leaders who can instill confidence in the minds of the people? Coalition politics might be the cause for the continuing drift. But, courage and conviction on the part of leaders can steer the nation to safety and success. India's problems are not just political. More disturbing than the climate of political uncertainty is the economic downturn that may land India in a terrible mess. Unemployment is on the increase and it serves us no purpose to describe it as a global problem. Trade and industry are sending out negative signals and that will result in greater inflation and unemployment. Equally dangerous are social tensions caused by caste and communal factors in both urban and rural areas.

A mood of despair has gripped the nation. Alternative approaches and strategies are being thrown up for public discussion and for possible solution to the malaise. If the Marxists had found India unsuitable for executing a Russian or Chinese type of revolution to achieve their goal, the liberals, particularly those influenced by the Westminster model, must have found the democratic approach being followed in India inadequate to achieve the goals enshrined in the Constitution. The 'path of rapid evolution' chosen instead of the path-of violent revolution', as a writer put, it has been converted into a funnel of darkness. Will there be light at the end of this long tunnel? The discourse, therefore, assumes special significance in the context of the critical present and uncertain future.

Someone sarcastically wrote that the twentieth century has been described as the Century of the Common Man because the common man has been the worst sufferer in this century. India bears testimony to that fact. Instead of throwing up our hands in despair, will it not be a step in the right direction, if all responsible persons, especially the intellectuals and the well placed middle classes, form themselves into people's welfare committees in every village, town and city, keep a watch over the happenings in their area and generate a consensus on basic issues concerning them? Is not governance too serious and important a matter to be left entirely to the politicians and bureaucrats? Surely an attempt, if not a beginning. can be made.

(December 1998)

Section 3

Electoral Reforms....

Political uncertainty stares at the nation even though a new coalition government has assumed office promising stability and good governance. Under the first past the post (called the FPP) system a party or coalition coming to power inspite of not being able to get a clear majority of the votes polled is understandable. But our polity is so badly fractured that no national party has, during the last two general elections, been able to secure more than 30% of popular vote resulting in weak coalitions coming to power at the centre. Over-dependence on small and regional parties for survival does not augur well for the future. Nor is it right to blame the voters for the emergence of coalition government as the voters cannot know what kind of coalition would be formed after the elections. The absence of consensus and absence of responsible leadership in coalition politics is a serious problem of Indian democracy. Lord Asquith long ago described such a situation in coalition politics as “football of contending factions.” Such factional feuds and personal whims should not be allowed to dominate coalition politics of today.

The 1998 elections have not taken us any closer to the cherished goal of free and fair elections. Money, muscle and malpractice continued to exert their vicious hold on the electorate in many parts of the country. Even the promise of providing identity cards to all the voters has not been kept and the Election Commission could not do much in checking electoral malpractices. The ceiling of Rs. 15 lakhs towards election expenses for a candidate ended up as a big practical joke on the nation. Probably this has been a highly expensive, if not the costliest, electoral exercise we have had in the history of Indian elections.

Still, the optimists might draw solace from the increase in voter turnout in the 1998 elections. If it was 56.7% in 1991 and 57.9% in 1996, it is 62% in 1998. Some have even claimed that the 1998 election is “a vote for coalition, for federalism, a vote against centralism and against corruption.” The fact that regional parties which had won 65 seats in 1996, have now bagged over 100, seems to have enthused the protagonists of ‘true federalism.’ There are some who take a long-term view about the emergence of a two-constellation, if a two-party system cannot come into being, system, with one, left of the centre, led by the Congress party and the other, right of the centre, led by the BJP. Whatever silver lining one might find to the dark cloud, it is necessary to admit that the present situation is most disturbing. No party or leader, national or regional, has emerged from the 1998 election with a clean image or clear vision of the future. The situation is depressing and the prospect gloomy.

The time has come for a serious national debate and firm action to stem the rot. Should India go in for major structural changes? Does the Constitution need an overhaul? How can we make our representatives more accountable to the people? How can we fight the frightening growth of corruption? Should all parties and leaders not come together in fighting poverty, unemployment, corruption and caste and communal tensions? We need leaders who can think clearly and act boldly. Referring to the problem of institutional insufficiency in tackling the complex problems of western democracies, a leading political scientist suggested ‘innovative methods’ instead of ‘radical surgery,’ as a remedy for the ills of the advanced democracies. Does India need today innovative surgery for healing the many wounds of its ailing polity? Reform or perish is the refrain heard everywhere. Will the new government make at least a beginning in effecting the much needed electoral reforms?

(April 1998)

VOX Populi VOX Dei...

Nearly 600 million voters, more than the combined population of the 'big four' USA, UK, Russia and France, are eligible to exercise their franchise in the 1998 general election, rightly described as the biggest democratic exercise in human history. All credit to the people of India, the election commission and the entire machinery of government conducting the poll for facing the challenge with firmness of will and faith in the process.

There is, of course, the dark side of the picture. Neither the national parties nor the regional outfits have come up with any meaningful agenda and pro-poll alliance to fight poverty, unemployment, corruption and violence. Parties and leaders, uncertain of the outcome of the election, have struck pacts and deals, more in despair than in hope, only to get into seats of power. Money, muscle and primordial loyalties will, it is feared, dominate the process in many contests, "Welcome to the dirtiest fight in the world's largest democracy," observed a recent issue of the internationally reputed journal, *The Economist*. The intelligentsia and the betteroff sections of the Indian society may also think on similar lines. Apathy and cynicism are the enemies of democracy. We may not be able to prevent totally the entry of criminal and corrupt elements into the system. But we can certainly check their rise and influence by ensuring that a majority of the people exercise their right to vote freely and fairly.

The need of the hour is to keep vigil over the process at every place all over the country. The trust of the people of India is the backbone of our system and it is the duty of the government, the election commission and every one of us to ensure that the confidence of the people is not shaken by the many unscrupulous elements that seek to establish a stranglehold on the electoral process and political institutions. The people of India, known for their unshakeable faith in the democratic system, will again rise to the occasion during this crucial election. In the golden jubilee year of our independence let us resolve to revitalize our democracy and renew our pledge to strive for a just and humane society.

(February 1998)

Section 3

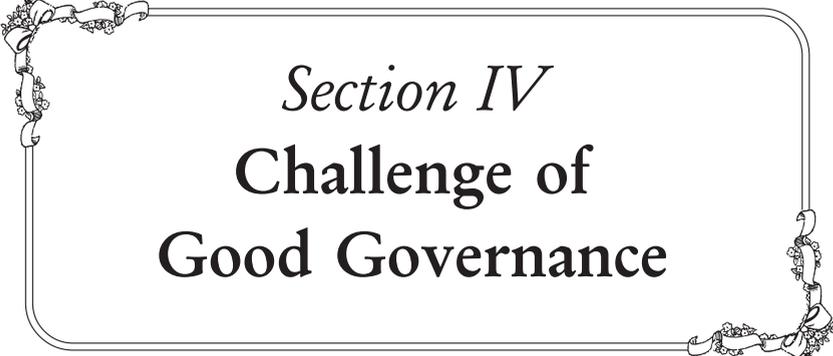
Yet Another Crisis

Hardly has the euphoria over the golden jubilee of our Independence subsided when yet another crisis confronts the people of India. After the twin dangers of political instability and economic gloom of 1990-91 were overcome, attention began to be focused on ensuring steady economic growth, checking corruption and arresting the spread of violence. The agenda was pursued, adding a new and welcome dimension of good neighbourly relations, after the 1996 elections too. Sadly things are back to square one. And understandably the focus now will be on the 'stability of the system'.

Parliament is in turmoil. In the crossfire between power-wielders and power-seekers, the worst sufferers are the people. Shame indeed That money bags and crass political opportunism are the instruments employed for ensuring the so-called stability. Parties already drained of ideological strength and devoid of commitment to ideals and principles, are desperately trying to keep their flocks together. The present is uncertain and the future gloomy.

We should not allow India to function as a mere 'electoral democracy'. The largest democracy in the world can no longer claim any success if it has to be judged only by the yardstick of 'successful conduct of general elections.' Even these elections do not necessarily produce either stability or good candidates. A person contesting in elections need not get a majority of votes to win the election as the plurality rule enables the candidate with the largest single number of votes 'even if that number is less than half of the votes cast to win the election. That, in turn, means that the majority of the people may not regard the elected candidates as the best or most desirable. As such it is essential that the participation of the voters in any and every election should be more than 80%. Equally important it is to remain vigilant, fearlessly articulating our views. The fight against poverty, corruption and criminalisation of politics must be intensified. On that there can be no compromise.

(December 1997)



Section IV
**Challenge of
Good Governance**

*“Politics and the state, once seen as
the prophylactic that would invigorate the country,
were now seen as the disease”*

- Sunil Khilnani

Section 4

Section IV Challenge of Good Governance

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March to Freedom

Independence Day conjures up memories of those stirring times when India marched to freedom after years of struggle in a movement that had no parallel in human history. Never before had so many people taken part in such a non-violent revolution involving selfless service and sacrifice by men and women from all walks of life. The climax was, of course, the historic *tryst with destiny* midnight speech and the unfurling of the national flag by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru.

No less stirring was the inspiring saga that unfolded in 1885 when an Englishman, Allan Octavian Hume, founded the Congress and invited Woomes Chunder Bonnerjee to become its first President at the historic inaugural session at Bombay on December 28 and 29, 1885. A galaxy of stalwarts “whose distant footsteps echo through the corridors of Time” led the Congress in its early years. If an Englishman was the founder of the Congress, a Hindu was its first President followed by a Parsi and a Muslim and the exalted office was adorned by such stalwarts as Dadabhai Naoroji, Pheroze Shah Mehta and D.E. Wacha (Parsis) WC Bonnerjee, Surendranath Banerjee, Gopalkrishna Gokhale, Madan Mohan Malaviya, Lajpat Rai and Motilal Nehru (Hindus) Budruddin Tyabji, R M. Sayani, Syed Mohamed, Hasan Imam and Mohammed Ali (Muslims) George Yule, William Wedderburn, Alfred Webb, Henry Cotton and Annie Besant (English). Their words and deeds bore testimony to India’s rich tradition of cultural pluralism. Henry Cotton the President of the twentieth Congress at Bombay summed it up in words of enduring inspiration:

“We live in deeds, not years; in thoughts not breaths;
 In feelings, not in figures on a dial;
 We should count life by heart-throbs,
 He most lives
 Who thinks most, feels the noblest, acts the best.”

At the thirty second Congress at Calcutta Annie Besant became the President. As C.R. Reddy famously wrote: “She poured new life into every department of life and culture and into all the races and countries of the world. She grew with years and grew beyond them and kept on growing.” That occasion was made memorable with Rabindranath Tagore rendering the invocation “in a voice that reached the farthest corners of the pandal, hushed the vast audience with its music and heartfelt eloquence.”

When Dadabhai Naoroji became the President for the third time in 1906 and used for the first time that historic expression *Swaraj*, his private secretary was Mohammed Ali Jinnah. Gopalkrishna Gokhale was not even forty when he became the Congress President in 1905. The first Congress session at Bombay did not cost the country even Rs 3000.

The problem now is one of identity for the 63 year old Indian democracy. Measuring the progress of the country with the yardstick of growth rate, rising number of billionaires and upper class affluence is mistaking the trees for the woods. Trade and business should thrive. They are vital for economic growth and national development. Nice to see our star hotels, cloth shops and jewellery marts always overcrowded. But when libraries, bookshops and parks appear almost empty most of the time they speak of growing intellectual and cultural poverty. India’s problem is not the wealth of the few but the poverty of the millions, as many in number as those living at the time of Independence.

We become worthy inheritors of the legacy of selfless service and sacrifice of the great leaders of the past only when we right the wrong and liberate the poor and the suffering millions from the shackles of poverty, pain and exploitation. Therein lies the significance of August 15.

Section 4

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.

Omissions and Commissions

Republic Day celebrations evoke keen public interest for two main reasons—the awe-inspiring parade in the nation’s capital depicting India’s military power and the tableaux showcasing the cultural diversity of the world’s largest democracy, and the awards and medals announced on the eve of the day. During the last two decades, however, security concerns have placed a huge burden on the government in ensuring incident-free celebration at every level. Not only the tensed-up government but also the public heave a sigh of relief that it all has ended well.

If security concerns dampened, to some extent, public enthusiasm for the R Day celebrations the announcement of awards and honours has not enhanced the government’s credibility in the exercise. The omission of some names is as glaring and puzzling as the inclusion of some. The approach of the government of India in these matters is irritating and irrational. It is time the President and the Prime Minister bestowed serious attention on the matter so that the Republic Day honours and awards attain greater credibility and public appreciation.

These acts of omission and commission pale into insignificance before the more serious lapses that afflict the nation, now celebrating its sixtieth anniversary as a Republic. First and foremost is the menace of corruption which is cancerous in its growth. Hardly a few branches of the huge governmental machinery are free from the taint of corruption. If James Manor wrote that an honest politician in India is a contradiction in terms, an honest official too may be a square peg in a round whole. Not that there are no honest politicians and officials but the fact is that people tend to paint the politician and the official with the same brush as ‘dishonest.’ John Stuart Mill famously wrote that in a society in which people are unjustly imprisoned the place for the just man is also the prison.

The steep decline of professional autonomy and personal integrity of public servants has hastened the collapse of institutions at both national and state levels. Parliament is no longer the nation’s highest forum for the discussion of public issues. Its place has been taken over by the electronic media debating issues and non-issues round the clock. Nobel Laureate Octavio Paz warned long ago that the affluent middle classes were becoming the ‘children of television’. Today not only affluent middle classes but also the helpless poor are the victims of ‘the new opiate.’

Political parties are another paradox and puzzle of Indian democracy. Most of them have neither an ideology to work for nor a plan of action to pursue. Dependent on individual leaders they thrive on sycophancy and tedious flattery of their political masters. Bandhs on roads and railway tracks and protests and walk-outs in assemblies and Parliament are the main activities of political parties, leaders and workers. A nation that has so many public holidays and that loses so many precious hours and days due to bandhs and strikes can never progress even if half the population are young and many of them brilliant as scientists, engineers and professionals.

Sunil Khilnani was dead right when he diagnosed the malady: “Politics and the state, once seen as the prophylactic that would invigorate the country, were now seen as the disease.” The state is suffering from a serious ailment. Every citizen has the right and also the duty to pull up the government. Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty, it is wisely said.

But what are we, the people, doing? Watch on television the senseless acts of destruction of public property? Keep quiet when precious young lives are lost in violence, day in and day out, in some part or the other of India? Allow the dada-babu-neta –lala nexus to loot and plunder the nation’s wealth and resources? If not exercising the vote during an election and not raising our voice in protest when necessary is an act of omission, allowing malignant corruption to grow unchecked, the criminal-politician to get away with his misdeeds is an act of commission. Let’s not blame the government all the time. Let’s stand up against unjust authority as often as we can. Politics and governance are too serious a matter to be left entirely to the politicians and the government.

Section 4

That elusive heaven of freedom

“Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake” - Rabindranath Tagore’s immortal invocation in *Gitanjali* comes to our mind when we talk of freedom and celebrate Independence Day in August every year, just as that famous line in Jawaharlal Nehru’s “tryst with destiny” speech - “At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom” is recalled with pride and joy at most celebrations on August 15.

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan addressing the Constituent Assembly on the night of August 14 uttered equally important words of caution: “From tomorrow morning.... - from midnight today...we cannot throw the blame on the Britisher. We have to assume 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.”

Mahatma Gandhi who was in Calcutta dousing communal flare-ups, spending that historic eve of Independence in ‘the poorest corner’ of Calcutta in the house of a Muslim family, was approached by the newly sworn in ministers of the West Bengal government for his blessings: “ Be humble. Be forbearing. Now you will be tested through and through. Beware of power; power corrupts. Do not let yourselves be entrapped by its pomp and pageantry. Remember you are in office to serve the poor in India’s villages” was his message.

Gurudev Tagore’s prayer for a world without fear, human life of dignity and self-respect and universal brotherhood was made almost a hundred years ago and *Gitanjali*’s centenary will be celebrated in a few years time. That heaven of freedom continues to elude us. How many of us can hold our heads high today? Could we prevent the world from being “ broken up into fragments narrow domestic walls.”? Are our minds “led forward into ever-widening thought and action?” All that we can do today is to offer *anjali* to Tagore’s *Gita* !

When India awoke ‘to life and freedom’ Nehru metaphorically said that the world was asleep. Sixty two years after that golden hour, India seems to be in deep slumber when most of the world is awake, alive and kicking. Radhakrishnan’s warning was stern and timely. Freedom, he reminded, implied responsibility and his concern for the common man especially in providing food and shelter is as relevant today as it was then, like reference to corruption in high places and need for administrative efficiency. Gandhiji’s message was, in fact, an admonition not merely to those ministers of West Bengal government but to every minister and political leader since then. Power has corrupted every branch of government, all political parties and most leaders and civil servants. About that there is no doubt, though the few honest leaders and civil servants remain helpless. Otherwise as many people as those living India, when those warnings were issued on the first day of India’s independence by the Father of the Nation and one who later became the second President of India, would not be living today below poverty line and their equal number struggling for their livelihood.

To those in power liberty might mean opportunity to abuse power or use it for personal gain. Equality and justice, also enshrined in the Preamble to the Constitution, shall continue to be unrealizable goals as long as the three branches of government and the numerous institutions created to strengthen democracy subordinate public interest to the inflated egos of political masters, bureaucratic bosses and aimless political parties that search in political darkness for crumbs of power and pelf. Borrowing the words of Tagore and Nehru let us pray on August 15 : My Father let our rulers awake to the reality and try to redeem the pledge.

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?

(August 2008)

Section 4

Revolution through Construction

On May 15 homage was paid to the memory of Sir Arthur Cotton on his 205th birth anniversary. An Englishman who came to India as an engineer and returned later to his home country as a great benefactor, Arthur Cotton ushered in an agrarian revolution by constructing the Godavari anicut which the Court of Directors hailed as “a new and splendid illustration of Cotton’s powers of mind and self-devotion from the exercise of which the country had so largely benefited.”

The Governor of Madras M.E. Grant Duff lamented that “people perished for want of the water that flowed in abundance at their feet,” and Arthur Cotton was convinced that so magnificent a country in such a state of ruin was the “greatest disgrace to a civilized government.” Having got the clearance from the government for the project he prepared, Arthur Cotton took up the job in hot summer and withstood the strain for five long years declaring that : “The more I worked the stronger I became!”

The anicut construction work began in April 1847 and took five long years for completion. Ten thousand labourers, five hundred carpenters and as many smiths were employed. It was completed on March 31, 1852 costing over 15 lakh rupees. It was hailed as “the noblest feat of engineering skill which has yet been accomplished in British India.” (Morris.) The Godavari district which stood at a poor 13th among the 22 districts of the Madras Presidency leaped to 2nd place and Cotton’s irrigation works increased state’s revenue by 25%. “The construction of the anicut resulted in “an agrarian revolution,” which led to tremendous economic changes, followed by a unique social reform movement launched by Kandukuri Veeresalingam. How apt was the tribute that “Arthur Cotton will be venerated by millions yet unborn!”

If Cotton’s was revolution through construction of the 19th century, Gandhiji launched and led the greatest non-violent revolution in human history. Never before in the history of humankind were so many people engaged in such a peaceful mass movement for freedom, justice and equality. The Mahatma’s non-violent revolution was for political freedom and social emancipation. The message of the Mahatma is that a revolution, scientific or engineering social or political, can be made through constructive action without violence and bloodshed.

The term revolution is an overused, if not abused, term. For some it means achieving a goal or purpose through bloodshed. History, distant or recent, abounds in such instances. For some others involved in the modern technological revolution even a small change is a revolution and as a writer caustically commented that drainage construction is hailed as ‘a sewerage revolution.’

A revolution implies a fundamental change in ideas, attitudes and behaviour. A recent definition of revolution is given Dr APJ Abdul Kalam as “the ability to imagine, invent and create something new by combining, changing or reapplying existing ideas” emerging from creativity. There was force in the statement of a historian that ancient Greece was more modern than modern Europe. The Vemana, the Kandukuris and the Gurazadas were indeed far ahead of their times and that is why they continue to be read and admired.

Science and technology have brought to humankind amazing benefits and unimagined comforts of life. Still, they have not been able to explain and resolve the riddle of human relationships. A revolution through construction in the form of building bridges of understanding and pathways of harmony among peoples of the world is overdue.

(June 2008)

The Republic at fifty nine

The Republic Day celebrations on January 26 provide an interesting contrast to the Independence Day functions on August 15, though both are equal in importance on the national calendar. The President taking the salute, the presence of the Head of State or Government of a foreign country as the guest of honour and the massive parade showcasing the nation's different cultures and military might on a cold winter morning watched by thousands of people in Delhi and by millions on the small screen make the Republic Day celebrations the most spectacular event of the year.

The 59th Republic Day celebration this year was also unique for the reason that for the first time in independent India's history a lady President took the salute. This is without doubt another achievement of which the world's largest democracy can be legitimately proud. Even the oldest and sturdiest of modern democracies, the United States of America, has not been able to achieve in two hundred years what India has successfully accomplished in just fifty years. Neither a black nor a woman has been elected President of the United States of America. Should one of the two get elected as the US President in 2008, as per the present indications, the US will only have emulated India which has had three Presidents from the minority communities besides one Dalit and a woman, during the last six decades.

India's Constitution which came into force on January 26, 1950 is a lengthy document, an amalgam of several streams of social and political philosophy and a declaration of high ideals and goals reflecting the hopes and aspirations of three hundred and thirty million people awakened to freedom and hope through the greatest non-violent revolution in human history in the midst of brutal and mindless partition riots was completed, with quiet efficiency and firm determination, the task of integrating the more than 560 princely states with the Indian Union. No less astonishing was the drafting of the Constitution in two years eleven months and eighteen days by the Constituent Assembly led by such stalwarts as Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabhbhai Patel, Rajendra Prasad, B.R. Ambedkar, B.N. Rau, K.M. Munshi and Alladi Krishnaswamy Aiyar. Noted scholar Granville Austin described the making of the Indian Constitution as 'perhaps the greatest political venture since that originated in Philadelphia in 1787.'

Varying interpretations were made about the nature of the Constitution. A fusion of western liberal philosophy and Gandhian idealism became the foundation according to some while Austin highlighted the two revolutions, national and social, the former emphasizing democracy and liberty and the latter equality and justice, underlying the spirit of the Constitution. Constitutional liberalism is essentially a blend of two philosophical strains, the Greek emphasizing individual liberty and the Roman focusing on Rule of Law. Democracy without constitutional liberalism is dangerous because economic, civil and social liberties are vital for human dignity.

India's Constitution has been amended as many as ninety four times in less than six decades. Still there is force in the argument that the Constitution needs to be restructured in view of several intractable problems and persisting afflictions of the polity. The abuse and misuse of some articles of the Constitution is one example that does not need to be elaborated here. The credibility of the political system has been eroded by the manipulative electoral politics. Political parties securing less than 5% of national vote exercise disproportionate influence in the government in the present era of coalition politics. The legislature and the executive have abdicated their responsibilities resulting in a culture of 'judicial assertiveness' and 'judicial populism' and as an eminent jurist put it 'the judicial pendulum has swung erratically on occasions.'

There is a dearth of leadership with vision, both politically and socially, at all levels. Power and wealth have occupied the center stage of politics and society. That was not the vision of the architects of the Constitution who placed on top of the Constitutional pedestal such high ideals as equality, justice, fraternity and dignity. It is time the nation regained the noble spirit that lent an aura to the making of the Constitution of the world's largest democracy. Time to act before it is too late.

Section 4

Dreams of our Youth

“My dream is to see India as a strong nation and stable democracy striving for global peace and harmony,” said a student of social sciences while her friend studying law vowed to work for the eradication of corruption and poverty, the two most dreadful afflictions of Indian society. The refrain of most of the speeches by the students taking part in the meeting on “India of My Dreams” was to free India from violence, corruption and poverty. A final year medical student, however, presented a different dream. “I long to see that day when Americans stand in long queues before Indian embassy or consulate for visas just as we Indians are doing today before American Consulates in India,” he said amidst applause. “I want to see India governed by good leaders who are hard to find except in books. One wonders how greed, selfishness and duplicity are pathways to power in a country that attained freedom under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi and was shaped by Nehru, Patel and others as the world’s largest democracy,” observed another participant. The eleventh and the last in the lecture-series on “India at Sixty” organised by the Centre for Policy Studies commemorating the sixtieth anniversary of our independence evoked a keen response from college and school students who unfolded their dreams clearly and boldly before a packed auditorium.

Words such as dreams and vision have become immensely popular among our youth thanks to Dr APJ Abdul Kalam. His equation that dreams must be converted into vision, vision into plan of action and plan of action into achievement has ignited several young minds. The learned Dr Kalam must have drawn inspiration from Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru who always talked about their dreams and vision of India. Even a few days before he departed from this world Gandhiji talked of his dream of people of all religions living together in peace and harmony. His disciple and India’s first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru talked till his last breath of his vision of a strong and united India. “Nothing is more encouraging than to capture our dreams and give them a real shape,” he once said. Soon after taking charge as the Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru was asked “What is your principal problem? How many problems have you got?” Nehru replied “I have got 360 million problems in India!” When the questioner and others around looked perplexed Nehru explained that problems had to be viewed from the point of view of the 360 million people living in India and that planning had to be done for all the 360 million!

Sixty years after that India has today over 500 million youth having their own dreams about their future and that of India in the 21st century. They have a right to expect India to provide opportunities for the fulfillment of their dreams and a right to ask why poverty, corruption and violence persist in the world’s largest democracy despite sixty years of independence. They also have a duty to come up with their ideas and an approach to do course correction. The sooner it is done the better it will be for them and the country.

Politics is described as the art of the possible. Great leadership aims at converting the impossible into the possible. Robert Kennedy famously said “Some people see things as they are and ask the question: Why? I dream of things that never were and ask the question: Why Not?” These words stirred the youth of those times and continue to inspire youth everywhere. Our youth have beautiful dreams. They are experts in creatively managing today’s awesome technological power for the benefit of humankind. They feel inspired when they read about a Mahatma Gandhi or a Jawaharlal Nehru or when they see and hear a leader like APJ Abdul Kalam or for that matter when they get a pat from their elders and the proper guidance from their teachers. May their dreams come true!

(December 2007)

India at Sixty

This is an occasion to celebrate, to renew our faith in and rededicate ourselves to the ideals that guided and inspired our leaders and people in India's peaceful march from bondage to freedom sixty years ago. Jawaharlal Nehru famously called it *Tryst with Destiny* and beckoned the nation "to the greater triumphs and achievements that await us." He set the agenda too when he exhorted us to realize "the ambition of the greatest man of our generation to wipe every tear from every eye" and added "that may be beyond us but as long as there are tears and suffering, so long our work will not be over. And so we have to labour and to work hard, to give reality to our dreams."

Sri Aurobindo who was born on August 15 seventy five years before India became independent gave a message on August 15, 1947 which is particularly relevant today. Said the seer: "I have always held and said that India was arising, not to serve her own material interests only, to achieve expansion, greatness, power and prosperity—though these too she must not neglect,—and certainly not like others to acquire domination of other peoples, but to live also for God and the world as a helper and leader of the whole human race."

India in 1947 had a population of 330 million. Despite the trauma of partition riots and the daunting task of integrating the 560 and odd Princely states with the union India produced a Constitution and became a sovereign republic. Today India has the world's second highest population with a billion plus people. 18 million new mouths arrive every year to be fed, equal to the population of Canada. India has survived four major wars and severe assaults from within and as a scholar summed up poverty and democracy have co-existed in the world's largest democracy.

India is a land of paradoxes. A baffled western writer was right when he said that India alternately 'maddens and delights' with its 'stunning opposites. Chilling poverty co-exists with vulgar opulence; tranquil meditation in the midst of mindless violence, soaring intellect versus fundamentalist bigotry, selfless purity of a few 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 failure of many—it is an overcrowded country, overloaded state and overheated government!

Experts have used such words as puzzle and paradox to describe the Indian democracy. Octavio Paz called it a 'living museum.' The first seventeen years witnessed much greater progress than the previous seventeen hundred, writes Ramachandra Guha. Why has India declined from that 'golden age' when India was hailed as a role model for the newly liberated countries? Sunil Khilnani observed that "Politics and the state, once seen as the prophylactic that would invigorate the country were now seen as the disease." Rajni Kothari lamented thus the steep fall of Indian democracy: "There is no ideological consensus but wholesale criminalization of politics, increasing communal orientation and highly corrupt system of governance."

People still have faith in democracy and display their power in no uncertain terms in casting their vote and in changing governments. India's ability to survive shocks and tragedies and capacity to effect smooth political transition have amazed the outside world. India is now a rising power, on the threshold of global prominence. Dr APJ Abdul Kalam exudes optimism about the creative energies and abilities of the 550 million under 25 Indians in transforming India into a great power in the 21st century. India is the nation to watch, say analysts and experts.

Still as Nehru said sixty years ago our mission is to wipe out tears from every eye and eliminate suffering in every part of the country. Sri Aurobindo desired that India should become 'a helper and leader of the whole human race.' That reminds us of the mission undertaken by Emperor Ashoka in 3rd century BC to spread the message of universal peace and goodwill through emissaries of peace sent from India. The past inspires; the future beckons and independent India at sixty should rise to the occasion to make its tryst with destiny a reality.

Section 4

Wealth, Technology and Happiness

In this age of relentless pursuit of material well-being societies are judged by the living standards of the people and by such indicators as GDP, FDI and PCI. Economic power is the yardstick by which the status of a country is determined. Till a decade ago in the bi-polar world it was military strength or nuclear weaponry that accorded status to the so-called super powers. Cold war has been replaced by trade war and the contours of diplomacy are being fine-tuned by commercial and economic factors.

Interesting questions are being raised in the on-going debate on freedom, happiness and security. Does wealth lead to happiness? Is being better off better? Is happiness dependent on material well-being? Does technology make life really comfortable? What is good life and how much is enough for a good life?

The views of famous philosophers and thinkers figure in such discourses. Adam Smith in his *Wealth of Nations* wrote that “the desire of bettering our condition comes with us from the womb and never leaves us till we go into the grave.” Economic growth, he observed, is propelled by the desire to better our condition. According to Adam Smith the main benefit in a commercial society is that it provides for ‘a greater degree of liberty and security’ than other societies. He, however, conceded that increase in standard of living would not necessarily lead to greater happiness. On the other hand tranquillity, which is vital for happiness, might be absent in a commercial society. Defining happiness as a lasting state of contentment without being disturbed by restless desires, Smith wrote that “happiness consists in tranquillity and enjoyment.”

The combination of wealth and technology is the new force that is catapulting individuals and institutions into global role players. Most people are restlessly chasing wealth and technological power. When Mahatma Gandhi said that “technology feeds our pleasure centres but is squeezing out our human spirit, intensifying our search for meaning” many labelled Gandhiji as anti-technology. Aldous Huxley answered the critics saying “that the mistake of some contemporaries of Gandhi was to suppose that technology and organisation could turn the petty human animal into a super human being and could provide a substitute for the infinities of spiritual realisation.”

Only recently John Maeda lamented that ‘technology is overbearing and intrusive.’ *The Economist* summed up aptly when it observed two years ago: “People are analogue, not digital, biological not mechanical. It is time for human centred technology, a humane technology.”

On 10 December 1948 the UN General Assembly adopted the Human Rights Declaration which seeks to promote human dignity and well being. Eleanor Roosevelt the Chairperson of the Human Rights Commission and the committee that drafted the Declaration identified the foundations of the Declaration in these words: “Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home—so close and so small that they cannot be seen on maps of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person; the neighbourhood he lives in; the school or college he attends, the factory or farm or office where he works. Without concerted citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world.” The Declaration is hailed as the “Conscience of Humankind”.

Mother Teresa has explained it all in just two simple lines: “Riches can suffocate if they are not used in the right way, whether they are spiritual riches or material riches. In the home begins the disruption of the peace of the world.” And at home we learn the basic difference between need and greed.

Sixtieth Independence Day

On the threshold of reaching another milestone India is getting ready for a celebration of 60th Independence Day. Fifty nine years ago India became two nations. As the Father of the Nation mourned the tragic partition, millions of lives were shattered, directly or indirectly, by the partition holocaust. India had a population of 330 millions when independence was proclaimed on August 15, 1947 - Today nearly as many are living below the poverty line with perhaps an equal number of people enjoying the benefits of economic boom and market culture.

Two Indias. The India of affluence and the India of agony, the former is perceived as shining or rising while the latter as an albatross round the neck of the former—the India of hope and the India of despair. The value system nurtured by Gandhiji that influenced the architects of the Constitution and ushered in the world's largest democracy lies buried and we silence the spirit of the Mahatma with what he disapproved most—speeches and flowers— at his memorials and portraits. The 'faded golden age' when Nehru's democracy was hailed as the Athens of Asia and Indian Parliament, a model worthy of emulation, seldom get a mention in public discourse or even in lecture-halls. In less than twenty years of independence disappeared Gandhian values and British Parliamentary practices, customs and convention which operating in tandem were expected to steer Indian democracy towards the goals of equality, equity and justice.

Our educated and qualified youth, both boys and girls, are doing wonders at home and abroad as the champions of the new internet-triggered revolution. They are our pride and hope for the future. But they should not forget that more than ten times their number of boys and girls of the same age group have not seen the portals of a college in India. The Law of Acceleration operates with such effect that many of our bright youngsters may fall into the trap described by Japanese sociologist Osamu Nakano that "youth are choosing pleasure over pain, recreation over work, consumption over production and appreciation over creation."

No point in blaming the political class or the ruling elites for all the ills of our society. The collapse of professional autonomy and integrity is as alarming as political decay. The credibility of the moulder (teacher) the healer (doctor) and the dispenser of justice (judge) is in doubt. Swami Ranganathananda lamented that "it is unfortunate that teachers in India lost faith in their own profession before our society lost faith in them." More recently The Economist has warned that "today's disease and medicine have developed great respect for wealth. It will be the next millennium's task to cure it." A Professor's lecture(classroom) a doctor's or lawyer's fee place a huge burden on the national exchequer. Perhaps an unpardonable oversimplification or exaggeration (teachers, it is said, have a right to indulge in them) if one ventures to say that teachers thrive on students' ignorance, doctors on human disease and lawyers and judges on litigation just as politicians and civil servants need poverty to survive and the media disaster to succeed! The fact that there are outstanding persons in all walks of life—scientists, teachers, doctors, administrators, lawyers, judges, and journalists —is indisputable. But Gresham's Law operates to such an extent that the bad coins are driving out the good coins from both polity and civil society, notwithstanding the fact that we have a President and Prime Minister of unimpeachable integrity and noble vision.

Swami Vivekananda a hundred and ten years ago and Radhakrishnan fifty years later warned against man succumbing to the power of technology. CEM Joad identified the disabling weakness of modern western civilisation as the disparity between mechanical power and social wisdom. In the early years of our independence some western thinkers called India a rainbow bridge between the wisdom of the East and the knowledge of the West. Technology is vital for our progress and our status as a superpower in software is deservedly recognised. But as former Harvard President Rudenstine and Schumacher observed modern technology must be allied to 'human values and traditional human wisdom.' India along with China may emerge as a great power in this century. Right now it is in our hands to shape India's future. Lord Acton wrote that ancient Rome was destroyed not by any external enemy because it had no enemy it could not conquer but by its own internal weaknesses. History does not teach too often. Two Indias must become one, not twenty.

Section 4

Debates or A 'Pitiful Charade'?

A leading British journal, writing not long ago on the decline of Parliament, described the debates in British Parliament as 'a pitiful charade.' Concepts such as the sovereignty of Parliament and accountability to the people through debate and discussion have regrettably lost their importance in public discourse, according to the journal. In theory Parliamentary debates are expected not only to mirror public opinion but also to help in resolving the contradictions that abound in the democratic system. Debate and discussion sustain the spirit of democracy. They help in reducing tension and conflict between groups and parties that compete for power. Consensus must replace conflict through creative activity and cooperation and that is facilitated by debate. That is where democracy scores over other forms of government. In the parliamentary system of government the legislature creates the executive and controls it through a system of checks and balances and the entire government is made responsible to the people at large. Parliament has other important functions too, besides supervising the work of the executive. Through debates and discussions it informs, educates and enlightens the public.

Literature on Parliamentary debates has been enriched by scholarly contributions that find a place in public libraries all over the world. They are consulted and quoted often in public discourse. The speeches of celebrities in British and Indian Parliaments and in American Congress are a source of inspiration to generations of leaders and members of legislatures. Their wit and humour have often enlivened the proceedings in the House and evoked the admiration of the public at large. Lady Astor the first woman member of the British House of Commons was a legend in her own lifetime. A back bencher once shouted in British Parliament when Lady Astor was speaking "Madam, forget about the subject on which you are speaking; please tell us as to how many toes a pig has." Lady Astor shot back "Honourable member, take out your socks and count them." Adlai Stevenson, the Democratic Party leader whose speeches were hailed in both the American Senate and at the United Nations, floored the Republicans once by saying that "If the Republicans stop telling lies about the Democrats, we will stop telling truth about them!" Indian Parliament too witnessed such brilliant display of wit, wisdom and repartee, especially during the first two decades.

But in the recent past such has been the decline in the quality of debates in Parliaments and legislatures that even when they are telecast live not many small screen viewers prefer to watch the proceedings. In India the situation seems to be really pitiful. The attendance in Lok Sabha and State legislatures is generally low. The quality of debates and discussions is poor. More so because of frequent walk-outs, boycotts, shouting and hurling verbal abuse at one another that are shown live on television. Precious public money is spent on the sessions of Parliament and state legislatures which hardly find time for constructive debate and dispassionate discussion of issues and public policy. The people may get the government they deserve, as the saying goes. But they don't have to pay so much for such unproductive and discouraging national activity for so long. Pity whom? The elected representatives for not being able to participate in meaningful debates and discussions? Or the people who elect them to legislatures where public interest is sacrificed for settling individual and group clashes and where vitriolic language and verbal abuse dominate the proceedings?

The world's largest democracy faces today a crisis of governance and decay in public life. Indian Parliament, once hailed as a role model for other democracies, presents a pathetic picture of the worsening situation. About the State legislatures in general the less said the better. The irony of it all is that the Lok Sabha is presided over by an outstanding Speaker who is straining every nerve of his to put the system back on rails as a Prime Minister of impeccable integrity and endearing grace and an opposition leader of high eminence and with nearly half a century of experience as member look on helplessly most of the time. Public confidence in the system can never be high when there are no checks on accumulation of power and abuse of office. If vigilance is the custodian of freedom, dissent is the antidote to authoritarianism. The great strength of democracy, it is rightly said, lies in its capacity for self-correction. Our Parliament, legislatures and the executive must show the way before it is too late. Allowing the collapse of the system will be an act of betrayal of the faith of one billion plus people of India in freedom and democracy.

Gender Injustice

The month of March, during which women's day is observed, has witnessed a plethora of conferences, seminars and meetings on women's empowerment which is both a process and a goal. Encouraging it is to hear that some headway has been made in the empowerment of women since the Beijing Declaration of 1995. In consonance with its action-plan the United Nations has, to some extent, been successful in giving direction to the goals it has set before itself such as promotion of legal cells, research and training to improve women's conditions, providing direct assistance to disadvantaged groups, mobilizing international opinion and creating awareness. There is no denying the fact that women, especially those belonging to the middle classes, have come to occupy important positions in public life, and a new generation of women are making their mark as engineers, doctors, administrators and managers in developing countries.

Still, women continue to be discriminated at all levels. At the global level women account for 66% of the work turned out though their share in income is only 10% and they enjoy only 1% of the property. 70% of world's 1.3 billion poor people are women. 2/3 of the 1 billion illiterate people are women and 75% of the world's refugees are women and children. Two million girls suffer every year genital mutilation. 20% of women are victims of domestic violence. Over 1600 women die every day from causes relating to pregnancy and childbirth. Over 15000 girls are annually sold in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh for kidney sale and flesh trade. The main obstacles to gender justice are identified as poverty, illiteracy, alcoholism, female foeticide, clitoridectomy and domestic violence. Asymmetries in work culture exist as men's work is more valued than women's while men enjoy higher social status. As former Director-General of UNESCO, Federico Mayor, said: "Woman you have brought with you a new song. But we did not let you speak out although yours is the voice of half the earth".

In India, as in the countries of South Asia, most women continue to be the victims of social injustice and political and economic exploitation. Article 15 (1) of India's Constitution prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender and Article 15(3) authorizes the State to make special provisions for women and children. But the contradiction between proclaimed public goals and principles and private lives is glaring and distressing. The manner in which the bill for 33% reservation for women is being dealt with shows the callousness of leaders and political parties towards an issue of utmost importance. Lack of political will and public support is among the factors responsible for the persisting backwardness of women.

The work of two great Andhras must be recalled when women's issues are discussed. Kandukuri Veeresalingam 1848- 1919 described as the 'greatest modern Andhra' fought till his last breath against the obstinacy of orthodoxy and social evils and performed widow remarriage in most adverse conditions. Andhra, thanks to Veeresalingam, was in the forefront of the movement for women's emancipation. He was aptly called the Raja Rammohan Roy of South India. Durgabai (later Mrs. Deshmukh) was a girl of 14 when she, in response to Gandhiji's call, made a bonfire of foreign clothes and donned khadi. She was just 22 when she launched destitute homes and institutions for women's care and welfare. A chain of institutions for poor girls and widows came into being in different parts of the country thanks to her boundless energy and tireless work. Neither Veeresalingam nor Durgabai had any advantage of wealth or position, nor received government grants or media support. Yet they achieved what no government could ever do. They had what we do not find today — courage and selflessness.

(April 2005)

Section 4

Redeeming the pledge

“Few countries in the developing world”, said Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, “have been able to implement such far-reaching reforms within the framework of a parliamentary democracy,” referring to India’s reform programme. Dr. Manmohan Singh, who as finance Minister had initiated the reform process, feels that such a reform programme will be enduring only when it enjoys “the widest possible social and political support”.

Nearly half-a-century ago, India’s first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru explained the essence of parliamentary democracy in a memorable speech in the Lok Sabha: “Parliamentary democracy demands many virtues. It demands, of course, ability. It demands a certain devotion to work. But it demands also a large measure of co-operation, of self-discipline, of restraint,” said Nehru adding that the system of Parliamentary democracy embodies the principles of change and continuity. The author of the famous *Tryst with Destiny* gave full credit to the people for making the democratic experiment successful in India. “It has functioned with a large measure of success in this country because our people have the spirit of democracy in them,” he said. It would, however, be hazardous to assume that people’s spirit would always remain high and patience inexhaustible when those in power continue to use public office for personal gain and private benefit.

All that reminds us of ‘faded golden’ age in which India was a role model for the just then liberated countries of the third world. Where have we gone wrong since then? Scholars and experts generally refer to some major failures of the Nehruvian era such as the inability to control population growth and check corruption and the lack of will to introduce land reforms. The decade that followed witnessed three wars and the sudden death of two Prime Ministers. The political system survived these shocks and crises, only to be tested by a series of unhealthy developments in the years that followed. Institutions raised and nurtured with diligence came under assault. Established norms and conventions were set aside. The gravest threat to the system occurred when national emergency was clamped in 1975. The intensity of the damage was such that India still remains a flawed democracy.

India may have emerged as the world’s largest democracy. But some scholars describe it as an electoral democracy only. They seem to endorse the view that India is a ‘functioning anarchy’. The rating given by Freedom House to Indian democracy is low on several counts. Transparency International has placed India at 73 on the scale of corruption and recent surveys lowered the place to 90 among the 145 nations surveyed. In simple words it means that India is among the most corrupt countries in the world.

Fifty seven years after freedom was won, India has 250 million people – almost the population of the United States – living below the poverty line. One fourth of the world’s poor live in India. Female illiteracy, infant mortality and malnourishment among children are alarmingly high. Services such as water supply, electricity and sanitation are beyond the reach of millions of people. Poverty and unemployment continue to be formidable challenges. HIV infections threaten to assume epidemic proportions. India’s rank according to the Human Development Index continues to be low.

The dark cloud has, however, a silver lining. India is fast emerging as a software giant. The United States and European Union place India on par with China as the two emerging giants in the 21st century with both the Asian countries maintaining a steady growth rate. But comparisons with China need not be stretched too far. As stated by Nehru then and Manmohan Singh now parliamentary democracy takes time to produce results though half a century is a period long enough for any country to be able to translate its goals into achievement.

India is on the threshold of a great future. *Tryst with Destiny* was a pledge made to the nation in 1947. It was given Constitutional sanctity and legitimacy in 1950. Gandhiji, the Father of the Nation, wanted to wipe out every tear from every eye. The time has come to redeem the pledge. It is the hour of reckoning for India. The sooner our leaders and administrators wake up to the reality the better it will be, not only for the one billion people of India, but for the entire world.

‘The language of common sense’

‘Good governance’ is today’s buzzword. For long the term ‘governance’ remained obscure though political scientists and administrators were familiar with it. All of a sudden it came into prominence about fifteen years ago dominating public discourse in the post cold war era. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States became the most dominant power in world politics. Economic prosperity and military supremacy made America the sole super power. Globalization has widened the gap between the rich and the poor and between the advanced and the less developed countries. America and her European allies began to use the concept of good governance to evaluate countries and their performance.

What constitutes ‘good governance’? Is it about procedures or transparency in administration or about the quality and processes of decision-making? What are the parameters by which good governance is determined? There has been neither clarity nor consensus among those who use the term. It is a policy metaphor, say some experts, that has many connotations. Like democracy, it means different things to different people. A critic has called it ‘an overstretched metaphor’ without any practical utility. Just a fad that has lost its appeal, say others, who are displeased with the semantic ambiguity that surrounds the term.

Early in the last century the professor turned President of America, Woodrow Wilson, gave the world Fourteen Points and set an agenda for world peace and progress of democracy which prompted the French Prime Minister to quip that God was satisfied with just ‘ten’ but not Wilson with fourteen! If President Wilson wanted the *world to be made safe for democracy*, almost a hundred years later, an expert from the same country has recently suggested that now *democracy must be made safe for the world*. In 1941 Franklin Roosevelt pronounced Four Freedoms - Freedom of Speech and Expression; Freedom of Worship; Freedom from Want and Freedom from Fear - as essential freedoms. That was the time when Nazi and Fascist powers were threatening to conquer the world with savage attacks on Allied powers and also on innocent countries. The Beveridge Report published in 1942 attracted wide attention for preparing a comprehensive ‘cradle to grave social insurance scheme.’ Five giant evils - Want, Disease, Ignorance, Idleness and Squalor - were identified as impediments to human welfare.

The spread of democracy to every part of the world and the consolidation of democratic culture were among the major gains of the twentieth century. The inspiration was, of course, drawn from the nineteenth century. Alexis de Tocqueville, the celebrated Frenchman, in his classic, *Democracy in America*, underscored the need “to educate democracy, to put, if possible, new life into its beliefs, to purify its mores, to control its actions..... to adapt government to the needs of time; and to modify it as men and circumstances require.” He also warned against ‘the wild instincts of democracy’. Another prophet of democracy of those times, Thomas Jefferson, declared that liberty was the core of democracy. Where the citizens have no right to control the government, he argued, the result is a society of wolves ruling over sheep and the “sheep are happier of themselves than under the care of the wolves”. David Hume wanted “the normal thoughts of ordinary men” to be respected. Isaiah Berlin, who passed away a few years ago, called for *the language of common sense* in political inquiry and political understanding. Complex political reality cannot be explained by complex language says Berlin quoting Tolstoy’s words that “simple- people often know the truth better than learned men, because their observations of men are clouded by empty theories.” An interesting coincidence was that around that time Swami Vivekananda said : “Bring light to the ignorant, and more light to the educated for the vanities of the learned are many!”.

Before embarking upon good governance, let governments first of all fulfil basic human needs such as food, shelter, clean air and water, education and ‘useful and satisfying employment’ and as the Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development stated meeting ‘the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.’

Section 4

India and Human Development

India's low place on the human development scale, described in the Human Development Report 2003, and the World Bank's caution against Indian government's complacency arising out of \$85 billion foreign exchange reserve have generated a keen debate all over the country. Notwithstanding official rebuttals of the UNDP Report's findings and World Bank's warnings, the fact remains that the growth rate of Indian economy during the last seven years dropped from around 7% to less than 5% per annum and fiscal deficit rose to 11% of the GDP. That calls for an urgent and realistic reassessment of the process of reforms and fiscal policy. Only recently East Asian economies which had appeared sound suddenly started sliding down. Even the strong American economy which witnessed unprecedented boom in the 90s has been hit by recession. These are recent examples that serve as reminders to our policy makers and those in charge of our economy.

The term 'Human Development' is not easy to define. In fact some social scientists argue that it is easier to describe what development is not than to say what it is. The concept is in a way complex. Development is a multi-dimensional process of social change and according to some experts 'it is a carrier of innovative values.' There is no fixed yardstick by which human development can be accurately measured. According to the renowned UN expert, the late Mahbub ul Haq, the Human Development Index includes many human choices including longevity, the quality of life, pollution free environment, gainful employment and peaceful community life. Haq defined Human Development as "a process of widening people's choices as well as raising the level of well-being achieved..... the defining difference between economic growth and the human development schools is that the first focuses exclusively on the expansion of only one choice-income-while the second embraces the enlargement of all human choices-whether economic, social, cultural or political." Experts are unanimous that economic growth is only a means to an end.

The Human Development Report 2003 focuses on the Millennium Development Goals, born of the historic Millennium Declaration adopted by 189 countries at the UN Millennium Summit in September 2000. The eight goals set by the Report are: eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, achievement of universal primary education, promoting gender equality and empowerment of women, reducing child mortality, improvement of maternal health, combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, ensuring environmental sustainability and developing a global partnership for development. The Report makes favourable reference to some of India's achievements such as devolution of authority and decentralization resulting in reduction in poverty in West Bengal and Kerala, the work done by Sulabh International, an NGO, in providing affordable sanitation and improved environment in rural and urban slums, and India's impressive growth rate during the 90s.

India's major concerns are rising unemployment, the growing menace of HIV/AIDS, persisting poverty and exploitation of millions of socially disadvantaged people, especially in the rural areas, and gender injustice. The fifty six year old Indian democracy is weak and wobbly. Lack of proper leadership and policy failures are among the many causes for the ill-health of our democracy. Population control, elimination of corruption, implementation of land reforms and empowerment of women and the disadvantaged- sections should have been placed at the top of the national agenda. The present crisis is a product of past mistakes and miscalculations and it is no surprise that 126 countries of the world are ahead of India on the human development scale. It would amount to self-deception if we claim that we are better off than the other sixty countries of the world and that the methodology adopted by the UNDP is faulty and therefore incapable of making a 'real' assessment of India's progress. Human development is too serious a matter to be left entirely to the politicians and the bureaucrats.

Power, Policy and People

'Politics is about power' is a familiar maxim. There is, however, considerable semantic ambiguity about the terms 'power' and 'policy'. Both are often loosely used. The study and practice of politics enjoyed exalted status in ancient times. Politics, for the ancient Greeks, was 'the master science' and 'the noblest pursuit.' In India it was 'Rajaneethi.' Kautilya in distant past and Machiavelli in pre-modern times produced treatises that dealt with the practical and the pragmatic side of politics. The modern concept of power began to receive attention with the publication of David Hume's famous essay in 1748. Scholars have classified power into five main forms: force, persuasion, authority, coercion and manipulation. Of these coercion and manipulation are generally regarded as the real forms of power.

The rise of modern democracy has been characterised by a perceptible shift in the power-paradigm. People are supposed to be the wielders of political power, even if it is indirect and periodic. Power is supposed to flow from the people to their elected representatives and through the latter to the party or group (or an individual) that exercises power. Elections provide legitimacy to the system. Democracy arouses public expectations and aspirations and fulfilling them is the task of the parties that obtain the mandate of the people. Policy formulation, and implementing it through plans and programmes are among the tasks of the party/parties in power. There can be no politics without policy and policy formulation is a complex process. In essence politics centres around power, policy and people.

Of the 124 democracies (they are classified as liberal and illiberal) in the world today many have failed to satisfy the primary needs of the people and to guarantee basic rights and freedoms like liberty, equality and justice. This has led to deep frustrations and disappointments. Growing violence is a symptom of this malaise. India is often referred to as the 'largest' democracy in the world and the 'stablest' in the Third World. Survival, like age, is no sign of strength or success. Indian democracy is at the crossroads today. (Probably it has got stuck there for quite sometime!) The ills of our democracy are far too many to be listed here. Collapse of institutions, decline of professional autonomy, erosion of credibility, growing corruption and criminalization of politics are among them. The rot that set into the system three decades ago has not been stemmed and things seem to be drifting from bad to worse. No amount of publicity and public celebrations of the so-called achievements of the parties and individuals in power can hide the truth.

Briefly two or three aspects can be mentioned here to describe the disturbing scenario. First is the rise of manipulative politics all over the country. At both the national and state levels parties and leaders have exploited the drawbacks of 'the first past the post system' (parliamentary model) to sneak into power and stay there by hook or by crook. Needless to repeat here that plurality of votes, not necessarily majority of votes, is enough for a party to get into power. Electoral politics combined with manipulative politics constitute the first and most important drawback of the Indian democracy today.

Secondly there does not seem to be any conscious effort by parties or leaders to evolve a coherent and constructive policy on any major issue - political, economic or social. There is no economic agenda focussing on such major concerns as poverty alleviation and employment generation. The failure of Women's Reservation Bill to get Parliamentary approval is a glaring and shameful instance of political pusillanimity and opportunism. The policy of the government, not only the present but of most governments in the past, seems to be to have no policy at all. If the government believes only in reacting to a crisis its hands are always full as there is no dearth of crises in our country. Democracy is now a kind of adhocism that reacts to crises and problems.

When millions of people are excluded from the institutions of governance and more number of people are marginalised, alienation and frustration appear everywhere. Unless all people are emancipated from hunger and poverty and empowered at the grassroot level the top heavy Indian democracy may have to face more serious problems in the years ahead. Decentralization and devolution of powers and empowerment of women and the disadvantaged sections of the society should be placed on top of the agenda. The sooner it is done the better it will be for Indian democracy.

Section 4

Democracy and Good Governance

August 15, conjures up memories of those historic moments when India, under the leadership of Gandhiji, moved from bondage to freedom. The sufferings and sacrifice of the great leaders have not wholly gone in vain as India retains her status as the world's largest and Asia's stablest democracy. Independence Day Celebrations have become a ritual with political leaders and officials at all levels making platitudinous speeches in redious ceremonies. Our hope, however, lies in what the school children do and how they envision their and India's future. If their marchpast and salute of the national flag, their rendering of patriotic songs and the national anthem and distribution of sweets add colour and gaiety to the celebration, their words and dreams contain the hopes of their and India's destiny.

It is time for annual stock - taking and the familiar refrain on every Independence Day is that the last twelve months have been the worst since 1947. The assaults on our democracy are both from within and from outside and they have been hard and severe. Still, the system's capacity for endurance and survival is amazingly high. That Indeed is puzzling to many and fascinating to some. Burgeoning military and paramilitary forces and acquisition of the most sophisticated weapons have not solved India's security problems. If only India and Pakistan, according to experts, reduce their military expenditure by just 5% every child in Indian and Pakistan can be put in school. Tragic indeed that the wounds of partition have, instead of healing, become festering sores.

To become a great democracy the three essential requisites are a sound value system, professional and institutional strength and able leadership. All of them were available to India at the time of Independence and no wonder India, in just ten years, emerged as the "School of Asia" for democracy. As a Constitutional expert observed the crisis of Indian polity is due to the fact "that Gandhian selflessness and western professionalism which provided inspiration of Indian polity were thrown overboard". The value system shaped and nurtured by Gandhiji and other stalwart leaders has become almost extinct. Institutions have collapsed, professional integrity is conspicuous by its absence and about the quality of leadership the less said the better. Character, vision, will and wisdom are described as the hallmarks of good leadership. No democracy can boast of great leaders all the time. The problems of Indian democracy may be chronic but are not insurmountable. There are still many able leaders eager to put the system back on the rails. More encouraging is the fact that the people of India have displayed remarkable ability to adjust and to put up with severe hardship. Our young men and women 'have rich potential, if they feel frustrated it is the responsibility of the ruling class and the older generation to identify the causes and provide the remedies.

Jawaharlal Nehru said that "democracy requires many virtues; it demands ability, devotion to work, cooperation self-discipline and self-restraint." Today I/A/DP so/s that 'good governance' implies the capacity to eliminate poverty and ensure equity and justice. The ten characteristics of good governance, according to UNDP, are — participation, Rule of Law, Transparency, Responsiveness, Consensus orientation, Equity, Effectiveness and efficiency, Accountability, Strategic Vision, and Respect and Tolerance.

Good governance enhance the credibility and of democracy. At 53 Indian democracy is mature enough to ward off threats to its political stability. But the task of eliminating poverty and unemployment and ensuring social justice to all classes of people continues to be a daunting one. Government is either overburdened or incapable of tackling the many challenges before Indian polity. The people of India must strengthen the sinews of democracy by active participation and constructive criticism. Long ago the great Greek philosopher Plato wrote that "The heaviest penalty for declining to engage in politics is to be ruled by someone inferior to you. This is the case the world over wherever decent persons and persons of intelligence and moral fibre have shunned politics." May the many good and wise people of India ponder over those words of wisdom!

Emancipation before Empowerment

Empowerment of women assumes special significance in the light of some recent developments, prominent among which are the pledge by the United Nations on its fiftieth anniversary to strive for gender justice, and the government of India's policy declaration of providing 33% reservation of seats for women in the country's legislatures. It has taken womankind more than a hundred years to reach this stage of development... from a situation in which women were barred from entering legislative bodies and the portals of universities - to a position where women are accepted, though in principle mostly, as equal to men. Feminists and social activists are optimistic that gender inequality will end sooner than later.

Frequently changing perspectives on feminism and the lack of a clear and coherent plan of action accentuate the fragility of the empowerment process. Chronic poverty, growing female illiteracy and social backwardness of women in the poor countries of the world render the scenario gloomy. Heinous practices and crimes continue to be perpetrated on women. 'Dowry deaths' or 'bride-burning' in some countries, purchase and sale of girls in some other countries for the purpose of flesh trade and kidney removal (trade in human organs), and clitoridectomy in some societies are just a few instances of the shameful conditions of the world on the threshold of the millennium. Not just the poor but even women belonging to the middle and lower middle classes in these third world countries tend to "subordinate their cultural and educational accomplishments for a roof over their heads."

In pursuance of the objectives of Sankar Foundation and the Centre for Policy Studies this small book "Emancipation Before Empowerment"—A Study of Women's Problems in Visakhapatnam is being brought out after a similar study on Street Children in Visakhapatnam was published. The authors have made a careful study of some of the problems of the women of Visakhapatnam and its neighbourhood. The Foundation and the Centre, like the authors, will feel rewarded if this small yet insightful work will prompt further and more indepth studies enabling policy makers and NGOs to tackle the many problems of women at the local level. This work has been undertaken by ladies of academic competence and social commitment in the hope that such studies at the local level will be followed up by necessary remedial measures and appropriate action. Great rivers, it is rightly said, begin as small streams. Emancipation of women, the authors assert, must begin at home, in the village and the town for a real and meaningful empowerment of women. The Centre congratulates the authors and their team on this commendable effort.

(April 1999)

Section 4

Let us move from Ritual to Reality.....

Another August 15. Another tedious harangue from the ramparts of the Red Fort. A ritualistic infliction on a captive audience! The only difference — interestingly an annual feature since 1995 — is that India has a new Prime Minister to deliver the sermon. Political uncertainty coupled with economic downside is the cause of pessimism bordering on gloom. Three questions seem to dominate public debate today. How long will the government at the centre last? Who will form the next government? And how will it be formed? Everyone's fear is that another general election will be forced on the people though such a huge exercise may not pave the way for the much needed stability.

In diagnosing the ills of our beleaguered democracy we often point our accusing fingers at the unprincipled conduct of our selfish politicians and the insolent and insensitive bureaucracy as being mainly responsible for the collapse of democratic norms and institutions. As a Constitutional expert recently lamented Gandhian selflessness and the principle of total professionalism both of which provided inspiration for our polity at the time of independence have been thrown overboard. The credibility of our leaders, guarded by the gun-toting securitymen, and of our highly protected and pampered public servants was never lower than it is now. Parliament, like any state legislative assembly for that matter, often is a babel of raucous voices and at times a battleground for the display of muscle-flexing and object-hurling feats of our elected representatives. A system that glorifies power and legitimises corruption seldom evokes public sympathy and support.

Nor can the elite classes claim immunity from the degeneration afflicting our society. The opulence of the affluent and their insatiable greed for money, in the midst of growing poverty and unemployment, are shocking as pointed out by the world famous thinker and activist, Noam Chomsky. "Can India prosper" asks an Indian writer "in the long run in an enduring manner if the privileged sections of its society refuse to see any interest or priority beyond their narrow self-interest?" The widening gap between the haves and the have nots could lead to more dangerous consequences than those unleashed by the tragic partition of the subcontinent that took place this month fifty-one years ago. Democracy, more than any other form of government, requires able leaders at all levels. Leadership, like power in a democracy, must grow and travel upwards from the grassroot level. Leadership in a democracy cannot be confined to politics alone. The ability of the Indian people is beyond doubt. They can excel in any walk of life as they do in America, Britain and Singapore, they can help in transforming a tiny Mauritius into an economic giant. The Indian scientist can help in bringing about a green or white (dairy) revolution, in detonating a nuclear device and in putting a satellite in space. An Indian administrator could transform the plague ridden Surat into a model city. The young Indian wins global honours in software and medical research in the United States, in chess at the highest level, in tennis in Atlanta and in cricket at the Lord's and elsewhere.

Back home we cannot strive to eliminate poverty and unemployment, provide education for our children and health care for the suffering millions. Typical Indian paradox! Time it is to ignore the seekers of pomp and pelf and wielders of power. August 15, 1947, heralded a new dawn for India. The 'tryst with destiny' cannot elude us forever. It is for us to act, act at once and act unitedly and firmly to make India a great nation and as the Mahatma dreamt a "land of eternal freedom and peace". August 15 reminds us of a great legacy and beckons us to be worthy of it.

(August 1998)

Keeping the 'Tryst'

As India moved from bondage to freedom at the historic midnight hour of August 15, 1947, our 'tryst with destiny' was made, heralding a new and glorious dawn for the 330 million people of the great country. As many people are today living below the poverty line, fifty years after we made a pledge 'to wipe every tear from every eye'. Every year 18 million new mouths are to be fed, a number equal to Canada's population. On January 26, 1950 India's Constitution, a product of unremitting toil and luminous intellect, came into force, promising to provide free and compulsory education to every boy and girl under 14 years, within ten years of the making of the Constitution. Forty seven years and eight months after that there are 90 million children under 14 who have not stepped into a school. Worse still many of them have become homeless giving India the dubious distinction of having the largest number of street children in the world by the turn of the century.

Hundreds of women were in the forefront of the freedom struggle, themselves making personal sacrifices or inspiring their menfolk to make unparalleled deeds of service and sacrifice. Today India is on the verge of having the highest female illiteracy in the world. In the world's largest democracy the share of women in legislatures is a pitifully low 4.3%. Every six minutes a woman is dying in India for want of medical aid in pregnancy or child birth. India's Maternal Mortality Rate at 540 per 100,000 live births is higher than that of neighbouring Pakistan and Sri Lanka and Gender Development Index rank is a shameful 103 out of 137 countries. Only 2.3% of our officers, administrators and managers and less than 1/5 of the technical personnel of the country are women.

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.

Still, fifty years of survival as a democracy is no ordinary achievement in a volatile region and troubled world. Four wars, caused by events beyond our control, have not broken our will. Nor has natural disaster dampened our spirit. The people of India have stoically put up with all these travails, retaining their faith in the democratic system. Their patience is admirable but certainly not inexhaustible. To the millions of such people goes the credit for making Indian democracy survive and succeed at least to some extent. It is the duty of those who have been chosen to seats of authority and positions of responsibility, as much as that of the better-off sections of the society whose number is burgeoning, to ensure that equality and justice do not remain mere Constitutional canons but become vibrant and effective instruments of progress and national reconstruction. Governance is too serious a matter to be left entirely to politicians and bureaucrats. Everyone of us owes it to the nation. In the year of the Golden Jubilee of India's independence let us rededicate ourselves to the 'pledge' India had made around this time fifty years ago. The dawn will arrive fulfilling 'substantially' (as Nehru hoped) the dream of the architects of our freedom.

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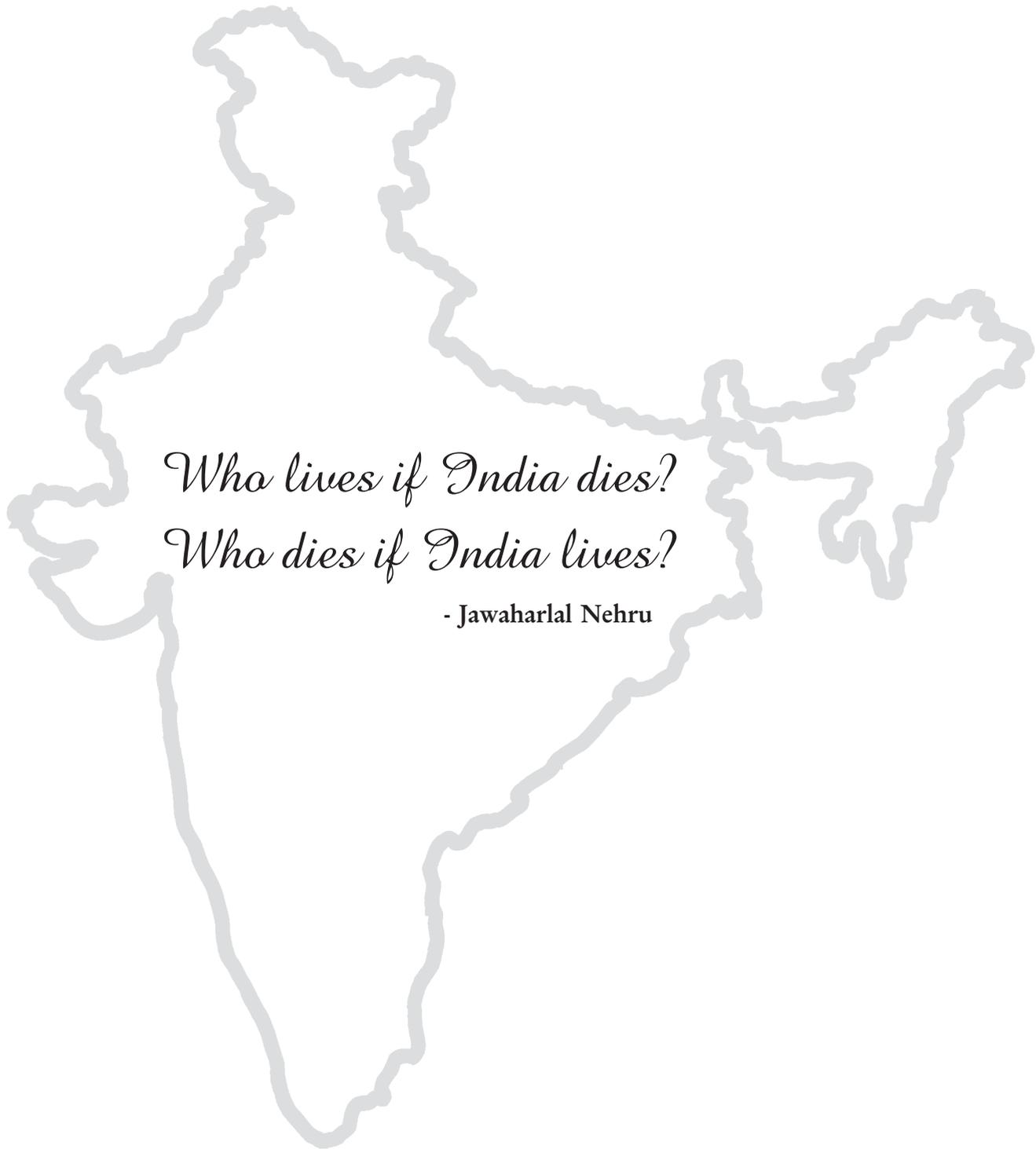
Dialogue on Administrative Ethics

It is now universally agreed that “Government should be made more open to the public” and that professional public administration “must remain intellectually open to global dialogue on shared values, norms and structures” observe Stuart C. Gilman of the U.S. Office of Government Ethics and Carol W. Lewis of the University of Connecticut in a recent article [courtesy : American Centre Library, Chennai) that sums up the proceedings of the international Conference on Ethics in Government attended by over 100 participants from 53 countries. The authors show how there is growing mistrust of individuals as well as institutions as revealed by the World Values Survey. Corruption remains a universal problem in countries that are rich and poor, developed and developing. The need for an active administrative ethics programme has been emphasised. In the United States formal ethics structures have grown in both the public and private sectors. Professor Enrico Zanelli of Italy remarked that “preventive medicine always is preferable to surgery..... that is the job of ethics offices.” A suggestion made at the conference was to “minimize rules and maximize values” in view of the ‘inadequacy of relying solely upon formal-legal remedies.’ Stating that credibility and confidence are the ethical foundations of democracy a participant suggested that development of institutions and active public opinion constitute components of an effective strategy to fight corruption.

Back home debate has been generated by the initiative taken by the Union Government last November when a conference of Chief Secretaries was organised at Delhi on reforms in public services. The Union Cabinet Secretary in his introductory speech referred to the ‘grave crisis of identity and role definition’ confronting the civil services. How to ensure a responsive administration which is accountable to the people and how to explore ways and means by which civil services can be cleansed from within were among the many points raised by the Cabinet Secretary “Reforms are now imperative” he added. Since then seminars and debates have been held at state and district levels in several parts of the country.

The Civil Services in India have, as the Union Cabinet Secretary observed, played “a significant and indeed a critical role in maintaining the integrity at the country and in bringing about all the major developments in post-independent India”. Yet it is an undisputed fact that the quality of administration has declined. Though Jawaharlal Nehru felt that it was “still a colonial administration” he could do little to change its mind-set. His successors too could not check the decay of the system. Instead of shaping into an instrument of change helping in the social and economic development of the nation, 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 government institutions and public servants’.

Let us also concede that civil servants are a part of the larger social system and the evils of an unstable society overflow into the polity. Let us also accept that there is still a significant percentage of honest and dedicated civil servants who can be looked upon for resurrecting it. All is not lost yet. What is at stake is not just the credibility or image of the civil service. The legitimacy of the political system that was carved out fifty years ago is being questioned in some quarters. There is, therefore, an urgent need for national debate and collective reflection. As the experts, with whose words this article began, rightly stated the dialogue centres on “the political values of freedom and justice and the administrative values of efficiency, effectiveness and responsiveness”. The dialogue should be constant and meaningful...



*Who lives if India dies?
Who dies if India lives?*

- Jawaharlal Nehru

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