

# Monthly Organ of Gandhi Smarak Nidhi Sansthakul

## **Bapu Had an Unlimited Compassion** **Acharya Vinoba**

“Who, indeed, can claim to know the mind of the Great?” is a famous saying of the Poet Bhavabhuti. Gandhiji was a great man; nevertheless, he had laid bare his mind in its fullness before the world. For his part, he had permitted no secrecy. Even so, I must confess, the last chapter of his life, which I have called ‘*Swargarohcparva*’, or the chapter of the ‘Ascent to Heaven’, remains a mystery to me. Indeed, in my eyes, it stands equal to the last phase of Lord Krishna’s *leelci*. To unravel its mystery, it may become necessary for Gandhiji himself to be born again....

Bapu used to tell the public that his body might be cut into pieces but he would not allow the vivisection of the country. Pyarelal has put it down in detail how intense was his pain since his own men had accepted Partition without consulting him. He only came to know of it later. There may be some reasons of which we are not aware and Bapu felt compelled to accept their decision. As a result of it, he, in a way, went against his words and we are still suffering from its consequences. That is why I called it *leela*, and said that he might have to be born again to unravel its mystery....

Bapu had an unlimited compassion. That is why he tried to preserve his relations with the Congress and his old colleagues during his last days.

You can see that even during those days when his colleagues had gone against him, he tried keep them together. In all this, we find him attaching more importance to compassion than to truth.

It is why he did not go against his colleagues even at that time after their final decision and acquiesced in it.

Bapu had said several times that division into two parts of Pakistan and Hindustan is like the vivisection of a living being. And yet he approved of it in the end. Though he had not given up his old view, he felt that if he persisted with it, it might have a very adverse effect. Hence he accepted Partition out of his limitless compassion.

Thus, at the end, a person with faith in truth became one with faith in compassion. The truth was violated to that extent. This is the tragedy of Bapu's life. Being shot dead is not a big tragedy.

It cannot be surmised as to what would have happened had he stuck to truth. Probably, even then he would have been murdered. But Bapu felt that if he did not accept Partition in those circumstances, his colleagues would be nowhere. Those helpless persons will be crushed between the British Government on one side and he on the other. With this compassionate view in mind, he at last agreed to the Partition. This is the For me patriotism is the same as humanity. I am patriotic because I am human and humane. It is not exclusive. I will not hurt England or Germany to serve India. Imperialism has no place in my scheme of life. The law of a patriot is not different from that of the patriarch. And a patriot is so much the less a patriot if he is a lukewarm humanitarian. There is no conflict between private and political law.

*(YoungIndia, 16-3-'21)*

Just as the cult of patriotism teaches us today that the individual has to die for the family, the family has to die for the village, the village for the district, the district for the province, and the province for the country, even so a country has to be free in order that it may die, if necessary, for the benefit of the world. My love, therefore, of nationalism or my idea of nationalism is that my country may become free, that if need be the whole of the country may die, so that the human race may live. There is no room for race hatred there. Let that be our nationalism.

*(Gandhiji in Indian Villages, p. 170)*

### **I want India's rise so that the whole world**

conclusion at which I have arrived after giving thought to it.

But let bygones be bygones. However, all this has to be understood. If we do so, we will be able to learn some lessons from past experience. Examination of ideas should always continue. All motivating ideas should be studied and irrational and indiscreet elements in them be got rid of. If such investigation of the ideas and motives constantly goes on, what appears to be a loss of dynamism, will disappear.

*(Courtesy : Selected Conversations of Vinaba Bhave, Page : 68-69)*

*may benefits. I do not want India to rise on the ruin of other nations.*

It is impossible for one to be inter-nationalist without being a nationalist. Internationalism is possible only when nationalism becomes a fact, i.e. when peoples belonging to different countries have organized themselves and are able to act as one man. It is not nationalism that is evil, it is the narrowness, selfishness, exclusiveness which is the bane of modern nations which is evil. Each wants to profit at the expense of, and rise on the ruin of, the other. Indian nationalism has struck a different path. It wants to organize itself or to find full self-expression for the benefit and service of humanity at large.

*(Young India, 18-6-'25)*

God having cast my lot in the midst of the people of India, I should be untrue to my Maker if

I failed to serve them. If I do not know how to serve them I shall never know how to serve humanity. And I cannot possibly go wrong so long as I do not harm other nations in the act of serving my country. *(Young India, 18-6- '25)*

My patriotism is not an exclusive thing. It is all- embracing and I should reject that patriotism which sought to mount upon the distress or exploitation of other nationalities. The conception of my patriotism is nothing if it is not always, in every case without exception, consistent with the broadest good of humanity at large. Not only that, but my religion and my patriotism derived from my religion embrace all life. I want to realize brotherhood or identity not merely with the beings called human, but I want to realize identity with all life, even with such things as crawl upon earth... because we claim descent from the same God, and that being so, all life in whatever form it appears must be essentially one.

*(Young India, 4-4- '29)*

Our nationalism can be no peril to other nations inasmuch as we will exploit none, just as we will allow none to exploit us. Through Swaraj we will serve the whole world. *(Young India, 16-4- '31)*

After nearly 50 years of public life, I am able to say today that my faith in the doctrine that the service of one's nation is not inconsistent with the service of the world has grown. It is a good doctrine. Its acceptance alone will ease the situation in the world and stop the mutual jealousies between nations inhabiting this globe of ours.

*(Harijan, 17-11 - '33)*

The highest form of freedom carries with it the greatest measure of discipline and humility. Freedom that comes from discipline and humility cannot be denied, unbridled licence is a sign of vulgarity injurious alike to self and one's neighbours.

*(Young India, 3-6- '26)*

There is no human institution but has its dangers. The greater the institution the greater the chances of abuse. Democracy is a great institution and therefore it is liable to be greatly abused. The remedy, therefore, is not avoidance of democracy but reduction of possibility of abuse to a minimum.

*(Young India, 7-5- '3)*

A popular State can never act in advance of public opinion. If it goes against it, it will be destroyed. Democracy disciplined and enlightened is the finest thing in the

world. A democracy prejudiced, ignorant, superstitious, will land itself in chaos and may be self-destroyed. *(Young India, 30-7-'31)*

I have repeatedly observed that no school of thought can claim a monopoly of right judgement. We are all liable to err and are often obliged to revise our judgements. In a vast country like this, there must be room for all schools of honest thought. And the least, therefore, that we owe to ourselves as to others is to try to understand the opponent's view-point and, if we cannot accept it, respect it as fully as we expect him to respect ours. It is one of the indispensable tests of a healthy public life and therefore fitness for Swaraj. If we have no charity, and no tolerance, we shall never settle our differences amicably and must, therefore, always submit to the arbitration of a third party, i.e. to foreign domination. *(YoungIndia, 17-4-'24)*

When people come into possession of political power, the interference with the freedom of the people is reduced to a minimum. In other words a nation that mns its affairs smoothly and effectively without much State interference is truly democratic. Where such a condition is absent, the form of Government is democratic in name. *(Harijan, 11-1-'36)*

Democracy and violence can ill go together. The States that are today nominally democratic have either to become frankly totalitarian or, if they are to become truly democratic, they must become courageously nonviolent. It is a blasphemy to say that non-violence can only be practised by individuals and never by nations which are composed of individuals. *(Harijan, 12-11-'38)*

The very essence of democracy is that every person represents all the varied interests which compose the nation. It is true that it does not exclude and should not exclude special representation of special interests, but such representation is not its test. It is a sign of its imperfection.

## **What do We Want to Achieve through Privatization Drive of National Education Policy: 2020?**

**D. M. Diwakar\***

Education being one of the important instruments for social reconstruction and social change, education policy is a reflection of a vision of a social order that a society cherishes to achieve. This vision is generally built on perceived ideals, which change with the growing consciousness of society. The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP2020) is a concised final report of about 65 pages out of 477

pages of the Draft NEP 2019, which was prepared by an 11 -member committee, headed by Dr K. Kasturirangan, a former Chairman of the ISRO, Bangalore.

This NEP 2020 in reference claims to be rooted in ancient Indian ‘knowledge’, ‘tradition’ and ‘ethos’. It is worth mentioning here that popular perception of ideals rooted in literature of Indian tradition (i.e., Shrutis, Smritis, Upanishads, etc.) may be traced broadly as peace and universalization of happiness, healthy lives, welfare, away from discrimination, scarcity, crises and sorrow ingrained in traditional value system. However, it was also the perception (in Subaltern and Folk literature,) that our society has been divided into several castes and class and a large section of a society remained historically discriminated despite having legacy of composite learning from Vedvyas, Valmiki, Shukracharya, Shambhuk, Kalidas, Buddha, Kabir, Narayan Guru, Jyotiba Phule and Savitribai Phule, Periyar, Sahuji Maharaj, Gadge, Ambedkar, Tagore and Gandhi, etc., who have their visions of social order. Although this NEP 2020 claims, a vision rooted in Indian ‘ethos’, surprisingly this wisdom of composite tradition has neither found a place in NEP 2020 nor there is clarity about Indian ‘ethos’.

Needless to say that Baba Saheb Bhimrao Ambedkar was influenced by the values of the French Revolution, i.e., Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, a vision of social democracy. These values of the French Revolution have become so universal that no society can now publicly refuse to acknowledge. These values were perceived long back by Mahatma Buddha and Kabir, Narayan Guru, Mahatma Phule and Jyotiba Phule, before Ambedkar took it up. Rabindranath Tagore advocated for inclusive vernacular education well connected with nature for local and global context. Viswa Bharati became a monumental experiment for modern education system. Mahatma Gandhi brought this vision into broader socio-political spectrum. He developed a vision of non-violent social order of Mahatma Buddha and a corresponding education system, i.e., *Nayi Talim*, a life cycle education. This vision was formulated during freedom struggle after national level discussion and deliberation at Wardha Conference in 1937 and subsequently a committee headed by Zakir Hussain was constituted to draft education policy for independent India.

The National Education Commission (1964- 66) headed by D. S. Kothari also commissioned many studies and after informed deliberations education policy was framed. However, Kasturirangan Committee lacks such exercise and informed basis of this NEP 2020. This report has been divided into four parts. Part one deals extensively with school education since early child care, pedagogy, teachers, inclusive and equitable education, rights and protection besides proposals for what to teach, how to teach, numbers, languages, curriculum framework, diversity, school cluster, accreditation, etc. Part two discusses higher education along with liberal arts, quality, learning environment, capacity building for teaching and research, hard and soft infrastructure, equity and inclusion, vocational education,

effective governance, leadership and regulations. Part three deals with additional key focus area, such as professional education, adult education and promotion of Indian languages, arts and culture, integration of technology, ensuring equity in digital education. And part four focuses on strengthening Central Advisory Board of Education, financing affordable and quality education to all, and implementation.

The policy claims that earlier policies were focused on equity and access but this policy is full of all good words for all round development of education, such as, recognizing, identifying, and fostering unique capabilities of student, achieving foundational literacy and numeracy, flexibility, integrated, multidisciplinary and holistic, emphasis on conceptual understanding, creativity and critical thinking, ethics and human and constitutional values, multilingualism, life skills, extensive use of technology, diversity and local context, full equity and inclusion, synergy, integrity, transparency and efficiency, autonomy, governance and empowerment, outstanding research and continuous review, rootedness and Indian pride, education as public goods, substantial investment for strong, vibrant and public education system, encouragement and facilitation for true philanthropic private and community participation in education. These bunches of good words sound extremely rhetoric without any direction of social order.

This NEP 2020 has many positive propositions. This claims to facilitate a liberal approach to education aimed at transforming the education system to bring in high quality education and research for national development aligning with global sustainable development goals. It accepts all good words with noble intentions for education, such as education as a public service, universal quality education, equitable, vibrant, not for profit and market, reforms in curricular, examination and restructuring pedagogy, breakfast in primary schools, recruitment of teachers and their capacity building, multiple language learning, school complexes, networking, curtailing drop out rates by ensuring 100 per cent gross enrolment ratio by 2030, etc.

However, this NEP 2020 is a mixed bag having many contradictory provisions as well. For instance, it proposes to replace 10+2 by 5+3+3+4 years without any appealing justification, advocates to group or nationalize with semi-autonomous status for curricular framework, pedagogy, and finance for education, which will necessarily promote marketization of education, where equity and social justice inevitably will be compromised. Proposal for pairing of public and private school is a dangerous proposition to access public resources. This policy did not forget to recommend emphatically: “private school must be encouraged”. However, this policy ignored Right to Education Act completely.

This policy for higher education demarcates universities into research intensive, teaching intensive and degree granting autonomous colleges with all subjects and thousands of students. It claims quality education with much more

dependence on technology and open and distance learning. It allows private players, setting their fees, self-accreditation and assessment, and still aspiring for education becoming public services. This policy categorically recommends to ensure all legal provisions to encourage private education.

It advocates world-class quality education with large number of students and independence for their pedagogy without making any reference to the ingredients for denoting parameters of world class. At the same time it argues for different categories of universities also. And still for a National Testing Agency and Higher Education Commission. Privatization of education and fund raising through philanthropic private partners has been emphasized. Needless to mention that corporate social responsibility (CSR) has enough vulnerability, knowing fully that CSR violation is not a crime now, as the government has already announced in *Atmnirbhar Bharat Abhiyan* package. This report on the one hand advocates for entry of foreign universities in India for global integration but it delinks research from teaching and under graduation. Moreover, commitment to excel in research a provision of direct admission to Ph.D has been proposed and there is the proposal to do away with initial training for research through an M. Phil programme, which prepares not only for Ph. D. but also for community based organisations. At the same time it emphasizes community participation in education too.

The Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) is conspicuously missing in the list of coordinating national agencies for research. Proposal for Higher Education Commission of India, National Higher Education Regulatory Council and proposal of a single National Entrance Test by a Central Agency is another paradox and efforts to centralize educational governance, particularly when the committee recognizes the need of autonomy and diversity in education in forms, contents, curriculum framework, pedagogy, regional language, art and culture. Thus, the NEP 2020 appears a bag full of everything with or without a logical end Lind informed direction. This is precisely why this report is broadly a bundle of good wishes and lacks the backing of evidence like earlier education policies.

The NEP claims to be inclusive but constitutional social categories, such as, SC/ST/ OBC/Minorities are conspicuously replaced by socio-economically deprived groups. This NEP 2020 claims that it has derived guiding light from the Indian rich heritage of knowledge, wisdom and truth. But surprisingly, sub-altern streams and heritage of knowledge, such as, Valmiki, Shambuk, Shukracharya, Buddha, Kabeer, Raidas, Jyotiba Phule and Savitribai Phule, Sahuji Maharaj, and Ambedkar, etc., who emphasize on inclusive education for liberation, are conspicuously missing.

Spread of vocational education is very poor in the country. Mahatma Gandhi emphasized education through vocational skills (i.e., learning by doing) and not vocational education, as such right from the beginning, but it is not vocational education in isolation. The Gandhian framework of education emphasizes on vocation skills for entering into the ocean of knowledge not letters and numbers. This NEP emphasizes on numeracy and literacy. Moreover, this NEP 2020 sets goal of reaching 50 per cent coverage of vocational education by 2025, which is merely 5 per cent today. No mechanism has been suggested for this highly ambitious target.

Proposal to spend 6 per cent of GDP on education is not a new recommendation. It has been pending since Kothari Commission and this policy also reiterated and acknowledged that in 2017-18 only 0.69 per cent of GDP was spent on research and innovation and 4.43 per cent on total education. Needless to say that the situation is quite bleak to increase funding on education, when

## **I Do Not Ask For Mercy**

### **Prashant Bhushan**

I have gone through the judgment of this Hon'ble Court. I am pained that I have been held guilty of committing contempt of the Court whose majesty I have tried to uphold — not as a courtier or cheerleader but as a humble guard — for over three decades, at some personal and professional cost. I am pained, not because I may be punished, but because I have been grossly misunderstood.

I am shocked that the court holds me guilty of "malicious, scurrilous, calculated attack" on the institution of administration of justice. I am dismayed that the Court has arrived at this conclusion without providing any evidence of my motives to launch such an attack. I must confess that I am disappointed that the court did not find it necessary to serve me with a copy of the complaint on the basis of which the suo motu notice was economic situation of the country has become worst ever after series of disastrous macro policy interventions, such as, Demonetisation, Goods and Services Tax, and unplanned lockdown of the economy after corona virus pandemic. The government is selling public enterprises one after another to run basic establishment cost. Rail, Civil Aviation, BSNL, ISRO, BARC, etc., have already opened for private players. Hence, privatization of education will go with higher speed, which will exclude deprived section from the access to quality education. Thus, this NEP 2020 lacks a proper vision as to what is to be achieved by implementing this policy and what kind of social order this policy wants to build up. It remains a mix bag of everything sounds good without a clear direction.

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issued, nor found it necessary to respond to the specific averments made by me in my reply affidavit or the many submissions of my counsel.

I find it hard to believe that the Court finds my tweet “has the effect of destabilising the very foundation of this important pillar of Indian democracy”. I can only reiterate that these two tweets represented my bonafide beliefs, the expression of which must be permissible in any democracy. Indeed, public scrutiny is desirable for healthy functioning of judiciary itself. I believe that open criticism of any institution is necessary in a democracy, to safeguard the constitutional order. We are living through that moment in our history when higher principles must trump routine obligations, when saving the constitutional order must come before personal and professional niceties, when considerations of the present must not come in the way of discharging our responsibility towards the future. Failing to speak up would have been a dereliction of duty, especially for an officer of the court like myself.

My tweets were nothing but a small attempt to discharge what I considered to be my highest duty at this juncture in the history of our republic. I did not tweet in a fit of absent-mindedness. It would be insincere and contemptuous on my part to offer an apology for the tweets that expressed what was and continues to be my bonafide belief. Therefore, I can only humbly paraphrase what the father of the nation, Mahatma Gandhi, had said in his trial: I do not ask for mercy. I do not appeal to magnanimity. I am here, therefore, to cheerfully submit to any penalty that can lawfully be inflicted upon me for what the Court has determined to be an offence, and what appears to me to be the highest duty of a citizen.

***(Bhushan is an advocate at the Supreme Court of India. This is his statement to the Court on August 20 after his conviction for contempt.)***

## **Go Not to The Temple**

**Rabindra Nath Tagore**

*(Is this a coincidence that exactly 120 years ago, on this very day (August,5) Rabindranath Tagore wrote a poem “ Deeno Daan”. It was also about a temple.*

*Here are the loose translation of some of the excerpts. Read it and get awestruck by the prophetic words of a visionary.)*

*“There is no god in that temple” , said the Saint.*

*The King was enraged;*

“No God? Oh Saint, aren’t you speaking like an atheist?  
On the throne studded with priceless gems, beams the golden idol.  
And yet, you proclaim that’s empty?”  
“It’s not empty, It’s rather full of the  
Royal Pride.  
You have bestowed yourself, oh King, not the God of this world”,  
Remarked the saint.  
The King frowned, “2 million golden coins  
Were showered on that grand structure that kisses the sky,  
I offered it to the Gods after performing all the necessary rituals.  
And you dare claim that in such a grand temple,  
There is no presence of God”?  
The Saint calmly replied, “in the very year in which, twenty million of your  
subjects were struck by a terrible drought; The pauperized masses without any  
food or shelter,  
Came begging at your door crying for help, only to be turned away,  
They were forced to take refuge in forests, caves, camping under roadside foliages,  
derelict old temples; and in that very year  
When you spent 2 million gold to build that grand temple for your God, that was  
the day when God Pronounced:  
“My eternal home is lit by everlasting Lamps,  
In the midst of an azure sky,  
In my home the foundations are built with the values:  
Of Truth, Peace, Compassion and Love.  
The poverty stricken puny miser, who could not provide shelter to his own  
homeless subjects,  
Does he really fancy of giving me a home?”  
That is the day God left that Temple of yours.  
And joined the poor beside the roads, under the trees.  
Like emptiness of that froth in the vast seas, Your mundane temple is as hollow.  
It’s just a bubble of wealth and pride”.  
The enraged King howled,  
“oh you sham cretin of a person,  
Leave my kingdom this instant”.  
The Saint replied calmly,  
“The very place where you have exiled the Divine,  
Kindly banish the devout too”.  
(*Courtesy: Banojyotsna Lahiri*)

## **Secretary’s Diary**

Mahatma Gandhi has said. If Village Industries do not survive, seven lakh Indian villages will be destroyed.” The present situation is that we have already destroyed

our villages. On 27<sup>th</sup> July ,2020, the Government of India has wound up All India Handloom Board. This has accelerated the total dereriation process. All India Handicrafts Board has also been wound up. Around 3.5 crore workers earned their livelihood from handloom and handicrafts production and now all of them are on the brink of severe crisis and starvation. Gandhiji associated our people with the national struggle for Independence and Charkha was the instrument of the twin principles of that struggle - Satyagraha and self-dependence. He showed the path of economic independence by reviving our traditional knowledge and skills. Now, the very idea of self-independence and *Swadeshi* being altered. Government is taking policy decesions to snatch away the livelihood of our manual workers and craftpersons. Corona crisis has already caused a financial crisis and nubers of unemployed have risen to crores.Village industries was a big succour in such times. During such calamity, winding up of Handloom and handicrafts Board is a cruel jolt. Government is gradually winding up many reputed institutions.

India has a magnificent history of handloom and handicrafts. Ajrakh, Khamir and Patola in Gujarat are famaous for its exquisite prints and sarees. Similarly, Pochampalli, Mangalgiri and Machhalipattnamanm are famous weaving centres. Jhangir(Chhattesgarh), Jagdalpur (M.P.) are also known for their craftsmanship. Chanderi of M.P, Phulkaree work of Panjab, Kashmiri Pashmina, Sambalpuri sarees of Odisha, Karnataka-Mysore silk, Assamese Munga silk and Kalamkaree work in Andhra - all these forms and apparels have captivated people from home and abroad and have established their exquisite craftsmanship brand value. All parts of India have contributed towards this glorious tradition. But, now cloth industry has been fully captured by mega industries. Condition of weavers is very precarious now and we are witnessing suicides by these craftpersons quite often. The thrust for decentralised economy through promotion of Khadi and Village Industries Board, Small Industries Commission and Board, Handicrafts Commission / Board has now become a thing of the past. This government has failed in its duty to create such atmosphere which is conducive to decentralised industries. This will widen the chasm between villages and cities. It is imperative to have inter-dependent, healthy and equitable relations between rural and urban India.

### **Fast Satyagraha to stir the conscience**

To highlight issues related to villages, poor people and the environment , individual *Satyagraha* has been started since 5<sup>th</sup> June - the World Environment Day. This will conclude on Gandhi Jayanti, this year. The objective of this *Satyagraha* is to stir public conscience on the issues concerning the plights of the labour force, the peasants and farmers, rural economy and the environment. Jaya Mitra, Trustee of the Gandhi Memorial Trust (Central) sat on fast on 15<sup>th</sup> June in Bengal. This was followed by : Asha Bothra (Trustee) on 10<sup>th</sup> July in Jaipur (Rajasthan); Shobha Supekar (Trustee) on 25<sup>th</sup> July in Pune (Maharashtra);

Amamath Bhai on 11<sup>th</sup> August in Varanasi(U.P), Senior Trustee Radha Bhatt on 15<sup>th</sup> August in Kausani (Uttarakhand) and myself, alongwith 25 colleges on 15<sup>th</sup> August in Chhatarpur( M.P.) . 28 persons, all along the country also observed fast to support our cause.

### **Remembering A Crusader of Communal Harmony Ram Chandra Rahi**

Those were the days of '*Mandir Vahin Banaenge - Ram Rath Yatra*' (We'll make the Temple at the very place in Ayodhya) campaign of Lal Krishna Advani, aggravating communal tension and vitiating social atmosphere everywhere. We were in Varanasi and chanting of '*Ayodhya ke Baad Kashi*' (First, temple at Ayodhya, to be followed by Kashi) were heard in full tempo.

The culture of Varanasi has always been inclusive - We have Lord Shiva, Kaal Bhairav, along with Kabir and Tulsidas; There are 'Peeths' (Seats) of Shaivite, *Shakta* and *Aghor* sects existing together - and in spite of sharp ideological differences and debates, the stream of all-inclusive (Ganga-Jamuni Tehjeeb (composite Indian culture flows incessantly in Varanasi.

We were worried to find out ways to stop this distorting, destructive, divisive and poisonous campaign and to ensure purity and flow of the all-inclusive socio-cultural stream.

The plight of the laborers, peasants and villagers does not find any place in the media. Situation is gradually worsening. Hunger and unemployment is taking lives of the poor people. In such circumstances, concerned people of the civil society, writers and poets, environment activists, students and artists have resorted to fast Satyagraha to awaken the conscience of the Government.

I got the opportunity to meet weavers and peasants of M.P. Their situation is dismal and needs to be controlled at the earliest. Otherwise, Government's indifference may totally destroy our villages and rural people. - **Sanjoy Singha**

Among us were the followers of Gandhian thought, socialists, ultra-left comrades and social workers representing all religions and sects. We had brainstorming sessions to chalk out strategy to ensure that communal poison might not pollute the pure Ganga-yamuna stream, symbolic of the composite and inclusive culture of Varanasi. Dr. Swati of Kashi Hindu University was deeply involved in such efforts along with her socialist colleagues. After much deliberations, we decided to launch '*Sampradayik Sadbhav Abhiyan*' (communal harmony campaign) in Varanasi.

We endeavoured to ensure that the campaign might not be appropriated by any particular organisation or institution, but provide an open platform of dialogue to the people. It should be a mass effort, with no single leader and not inclined to a

particular ideology. All colleagues should organise meetings focussed on social harmony in their own spheres and maintain dialogue for an inter-faith, homogeneous society to counter communal thinking.

Dr. Swati played a pivotal role in making and implementing strategy for the campaign and ensuring its dynamism. She was with us at every juncture, ready to face any hurdle. Being a socialist, she was always ready to put struggle; but along with that, she was committed and competent to develop collective leadership. It was not an easy task to take along a team of leaders belonging to different ideologies for a common cause, as all of them were mature and experienced leaders in their own areas. Being a seasoned teacher, she played a commendable role to launch an effective campaign.

### Press Clipping

#### **Ram, I will not Find you There Pratap Bhanu Mehta**

Ram. You can be properly addressed just with that name. Any proclamation announcing your triumph, like Jai Shree Ram, diminishes you. The necessity of proclaiming your victory implies you could have been defeated. I must also make a confession. You were the radiant and intimate presence in my life: The ground of our Being. You were the Mind and the Senses. You were the Virtues.

You were Compassion and Divination. Your name was uttered in the anguish of suffering and the ecstasy of liberation. You were the householder, the son, the brother, the disciple, the friend. You were the king, but also the renouncer. You were Dharma. You were occasionally cruel and unjust. But your anguish seems to recognise your own cruelty. You were divine. But your equivocations were human. You were the last Refuge I woke to, and slept to, the reassurance Tulsi gave us: *Raghuvar tumko meri laaj, sada sada main sharan tehari, turn ho garib naw az* (I seek protection in you, protector of destitute souls)".

Today, those who waged war in your name

Communal harmony campaign in Varanasi lasted long and remained successful. After demolition of the Babri mosque, there were riots, arsons and violence all along the country. However, Varanasi, considered to be the second most vulnerable flash point, was saved from the communal flare, except the outskirts of Lohta, where we could not reach by that time.

Dr. Swati was actively working for communal harmony till the very end. On 2<sup>nd</sup> July, 2020, she breathed her last in Varanasi. The body is no more, but memories survive.

Will consecrate your temple at Ayodhya. They are describing this as the ultimate act of devotion to you, the ultimate obeisance to your sovereignty. They are, they say, reclaiming hallowed ground, desecrated by barbarous invaders. They are describing this as a cathartic overcoming of Hindu humiliation. They are

describing this as a new renaissance for Ram Rajya. You will now be the symbol of a community united in strength, full of a new found pride. It will be said, secretly, this is restoring wholeness to a broken culture.

But I know I will not find you there. This is because what is being consecrated is a monument to a violent, collective narcissism. You know a temple to you is dangerous or superfluous. Superfluous if we understand your true meaning; dangerous if we arrogantly emulate you. Valmiki described you in human form as “nara chandrama” (moon amongst men). Your greatest chronicler could see right through you. He had the moon’s blemishes in mind. You are admittedly an epitome of sacrifice. You gave up a kingdom, to honour an unjust promise of your father. It is puzzling that our *itihasa* is about children fulfilling the unjust promises of their father and setting off a chain of destructive events in its wake. In the Ramayana and Mahabharata, there is not a single father, from Shantanu to Dhritarashtra to Aijuna, where the children don’t have to pay for the unjust choices of the father. Yours did too. Then there is Vali who you slayed like a coward, Shambuka whose penance challenging the caste order you unjustly punished, and Sita whose truth had to be sacrificed to opinion. You could reconcile these blemishes because you were divine. You could sin and still redeem them. “Svargata shambuka

samstuta Ram,” as it goes in the beautiful Nama Ramayana (you sent Shambuka to heaven who was apparently grateful to you).

But we mortals cannot worship your morals. We humans have to have a lesser morality, since we cannot redeem those we slay or banish. Vali, and Shambuka and Sita will require justice here, not eternal redemption. So we cannot emulate your maryada (integrity). It was appropriate to you. No wonder your greatest devotees, Madhusudhan Saraswati, Tulsi, Gandhi, never felt they needed a temple to discover their morality.

Perhaps we are consecrating a higher principle. “Shuddha Brahma Paratpara Ram” as the first line of Nama Ramayana goes — the purest Brahmana. But that never needs a temple. The beautiful Shiva- Uma-Rama of the Ramrahasya Upanishad cannot take the form of a singular representation. In consecrating you at Ayodhya, they want to dislodge the different forms in which you reside in our inner citadel, one no invader has been able to breach, and replace it with a new Teflon diety, manufactured by a political machine.

So the temple is dangerous or unnecessary. You know this temple is founded on something akin to an act of terrorism, the razing down of a mosque. You know this temple is not a product of piety, but retaliation and revenge for an event centuries ago. Kings and invaders of years past must have razed many temples to the ground and they likely destroyed a temple at Ayodhya too. But that is neither here nor there. History is a slaughter house that no divinity of any stripe has been able to redeem. All we can do is snatch snippets of a fragile justice here and there.

It is the ultimate hubris to think that we need to protect you rather than you to protect us.

Revenge does not help. Past conflicts are being used as pretexts to reconfigure contemporary power. The forces that will consecrate this temple converted your name into the very opposite of what it signifies. They made Ram synonymous with revenge, with an insecure pride, with a blood curdling aggression, violence towards others, a coarsening of culture, and the erasure of every last shred of genuine piety in public devotion and public life.

They will say Ram is a national symbol, a symbol of Hindu pride. But did you consent to being converted to something as banal and nasty as the symbol of an ethnic nationalism? You redeemed your devotees, those you wronged, but your opponents as well. But this temple is a monument to exclusion, a brute majoritarianism subordinating others. Look at the men, both political and spiritual, who speak in your name, and the blood, power and intimidation they have on their hands. Your name will be used to shore up the coarsest forms of personalised power; the entire liturgy is a display of the most corrupt of monarchical power, in a democratic garb. I understand that so many of my fellow Hindus will experience this as a great catharsis, as the weight of history being lifted. But deep down we need to ask: How did we become so insecure that we need a cowardly victory of razing down a monument to satiate out collective narcissism? And is this a kind of insecurity that is never satiated, it expands its circle until it colonises all sentiment? This temple is the first real colonisation of Hinduism by political power. I feel chained like never before.

You came to earth to lighten its load; this temple burdens us with evil. Like the last genuine devotee of Ram in modern India, Gandhi, we can only mourn in silence, as our garib nawaz forsakes us. Your radiant presence is gone. Only the oppressive yoke of zealotry remains.

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