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INDIA'S DECLINING STATUS

India's global status is on the decline. According to Freedom House, India has come down by four places, from 'free' to 'partly free' category of nations. The report says that "India's status declined from Free to Partly Free due to a multiyear pattern in which the Hindu nationalist government and its allies have presided over rising violence and discriminatory policies affecting the Muslim population and pursued a crackdown on expressions of dissent by the media, academics, civil society groups, and protesters".

At a time when world renowned think tanks and analysts explain the reasons for India's disturbing downward trend, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is embarking upon a plan for 'yearlong celebrations from August 2021 to commemorate 75 years of India's independence' by showcasing projects and programmes on 'development, governance, technology reform, progress and policy'. An exhaustive plan of action has been prepared by the Prime Minister's Office, according to which the Prime Minister will kick-start on August 15, 2021 the 'Platinum Jubilee Celebrations' from the ramparts of the Red Fort. The Press release also reveals that ministries and departments have been instructed to launch innovative projects and programmes during the next 15 months. The BJP government led by Narendra Modi is all set to jump on to the publicity bandwagon to blare the Prime Minister's agenda for India's development in the future. By 2022 August 15, when India celebrates its Platinum Jubilee, 163 projects worth Rs.20,404 crores identified under the Smart City Mission, will be inaugurated.

All these high voltage schemes are being planned against an uninspiring, if not debilitating, backdrop. The last seven years have witnessed an erosion of India's image as a role model third world democracy. The World Rule of Law Index puts India at 67 out of 128 countries. Canada's Fraser Institute reports that India has gone down from 93rd to 105th rank out of 161 countries. In the World Happiness Report India is ranked 139 out of 149 countries, as against Pakistan's 105th rank. According to the reports of these well known organizations, India's decline has been steep as 'those in power have little regard for democratic processes and functions, the Rule of Law, independence of the judiciary, freedom of Press and expression of dissent'. In short, there is a subversion of democratic institutions at all levels. Among the daunting tasks confronting the union and state governments of the 73 year old Indian democracy, are massive unemployment problem, miserable plight of migrant workers, gender bias and exploitation of the marginalized and disadvantaged sections of the society. A climate of fear has been generated resulting in widespread suspicion about the government's surveillance over individuals and institutions. Intolerance of criticism is on the increase and the 'patriotism' of those voicing their disagreement with government's policies is being doubted. Dissent and public protest are the 'sword and shield' against authoritarian rule and autocratic government. Free press, independent judiciary and vigilant NGOs/civil service organizations have always been regarded as the custodians of freedom. The Preamble highlights Justice, Liberty, Equality and Fraternity as the main Constitutional values. The importance of Justice, Liberty and Equality is enhanced when they are allied to Fraternity which is the soul of Constitutional values. The word had begun to acquire an aura at the end of the 18th century thanks to France and the fervor of its revolutionary leaders. The leaders of India's freedom struggle grasped the significance of Fraternity in the vastly diverse world's largest democracy and accordingly incorporated it in the Constitution.

While nobody intends to dampen the enthusiasm of the ruling party to celebrate the mega event of the Platinum Jubilee of India's independence, it is necessary to bear in mind that alleviation of the sufferings of millions of people across the country, most of whom have been devastated by the pandemic should be the top priority for the government, that too when the threat of the virus getting from bad to worse is looming ominously all over the world.

- The Editor

The main threat to India's unity and integrity comes not from outside the country. The present relentless centralization drive may eliminate millions. An authoritarian coercive approach will invariably erode political democracy. - Sarkaria Commission

WHAT DELHI MUST DO TO MAKE SURE IT ISN'T CAUGHT OFF-GUARD BY CHINA AGAIN

Relief at disengagement must be tempered by the fact that it is just the latest act in the ongoing drama being played out by China.

Admiral Arun Prakash (Retd.)

Former Chief of Naval Staff
Ex-Chairman, National Maritime Foundation

The nation heaved a collective sigh of relief as the Indian and Chinese armies commenced a process of “synchronised and verifiable disengagement” on banks of the Pangong Tso in eastern Ladakh. This mutual climb down came after 10 months of a tense and sanguinary armed confrontation, punctuated by talks between respective military commanders. It marks the beginning of a process that should lead to disengagement at other “friction points” along the line of actual control (LAC) in Hot Springs, Gogra and Depsang, and eventually, to a state of “de-escalation”, wherein, both armies will revert to pre-April 2020 force-levels and deployments.

Even as political analysts rack their brains about the motivation underlying China’s blatant territorial incursions, and its equally perplexing withdrawal, this traumatic event calls for deep reflection in South Block. Clearly, India’s swift military response, backed by firm political resolve, came as an unpleasant surprise to China, and influenced its eventual decision to disengage. Possible “loss of face” in Beijing may see some in the Party and/or the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) pay the price for miscalculation. But even in the (unlikely) event that the status-quo ante is restored, China’s periodic transgressions have imposed costs on India which cannot be ignored. While the political consequences of these intrusions are being managed through legerdemain, it is the price being paid, in terms of economic and security penalties, which calls for attention.

The expenditure demanded by an unanticipated redeployment of 50,000-60,000 soldiers and their sustenance in the high-altitude, arctic conditions of Ladakh would be substantial. While the rapid troop

build-up is testimony of India’s newly acquired, strategic airlift capability, it will extract a price in terms of wear and tear on the IAF’s transport and helicopter fleets. The cumulative costs of this military confrontation could, therefore, impose a significant burden on an already stressed defence budget and will impact on force modernisation plans. Relief at the ongoing disengagement must be tempered by the fact that this is just the latest act in the ongoing drama being played out by China along the LAC.

The notional LAC was described by the then Chinese Prime Minister, Zhou Enlai, in 1959, as conforming to “the so-called McMahon Line in the east and the line, up to which each side exercises actual control in the west”. In 1962, the PLA advanced to this claim line, before withdrawing, unilaterally, 20 km behind it. This left China in occupation of 38,000 sq km of the Aksai Chin plateau. In the east, China now claims, as part of “Southern Tibet”, 84,000 sq km of Arunachal Pradesh, which is well to the south of the McMahon Line. Having neglected for 59 years post-bellum to negotiate conversion of the 3,500 km disputed Sino-Indian boundary into an international border, India continues to pay a heavy price for this glaring omission. The mere existence of an undefined and un-demarcated LAC has provided an instrumentality for China to periodically intimidate and distract New Delhi, and damage India’s image internationally. History will judge the culpability of statesmen and diplomats, who allowed this situation to persist, but the Indian state must take note of other, equally egregious, lapses that have encouraged adventurism on the part of our neighbours.

Prime amongst these is the indifference of India’s politicians, bordering on neglect, towards defence preparedness. The 1962 military-debacle that resulted from Prime Minister Nehru’s order to “throw out the Chinese” from NEFA was a direct consequence of his total ignorance about the dismal state of the Indian army vis-à-vis the PLA and the adverse terrain that our poorly-armed and ill-clad troops were to fight in. In March 1971, PM Indira Gandhi, eager to march into East Pakistan, was, fortunately, restrained by General Manekshaw’s firm but principled dissent. The consequent six-month respite enabled our military to

However great the fury of storm, the sea does not abandon its calm.

- Mahatma Gandhi

make up for drastic weapon and equipment shortages through imports.

A manifestation of this political syndrome is the oft-heard statement in Parliament: “When the time comes, all resources will be made available to our gallant armed forces.” The absurdity of such statements seems lost on our political elite, because “when-the-time-comes” is too late to hand out guns to soldiers. Consequently, every crisis sees a panic rush abroad, for “emergency purchases” of items ranging from rifles to fighters.

Another cause for India being repeatedly caught flat-footed in crises situations is the strange and ostrich-like reticence, which prevents self-assessment as well as policy-articulation. Thus, no government has, so far, defined national aims, objectives, vital interests and “red lines” in the form of a security doctrine or strategy. One also wonders if the 60-year experience has helped the Ministry of External Affairs to evolve a “China-specific” strategy.

The MoD steadfastly refuses to undertake strategic defence reviews, which would clearly show up the yawning gaps that exist between the budget and military resources available, on the one hand, and the capabilities required to meet extant threats, on the other. This has created a dilemma for the Indian armed forces, wherein they are expected to discharge roles, for which the government has neither funded nor equipped them; two examples being “fighting a two-and-a-half front war” and becoming a “net-security provider for the Indian Ocean region”.

Finally, the term heard consistently in India’s national security discourse is “surprise”, used in the context of the 1947, 1962, 1965 and Kargil conflicts, as well as episodes like the IC-814 hijacking and the 26/11 terror strike. The phrase implies intelligence failures on account of flaws in collection, collation and analysis, as well as timely dissemination of information. The 1999 Kargil Review Committee in its public report had stated: “There are no checks and balances in the Indian intelligence system to ensure that the consumer gets all the intelligence that is available and is his due... each intelligence agency is diligent in preserving its own turf.”

The two decades since Kargil have seen reconnaissance and surveillance operations transformed by the induction of drones, aircraft and satellites and the inception of a dedicated “tech-int” agency. And yet, in April 2020, the PLA managed to sneak up on us.

(This article first appeared in the print edition on March 3, 2021 under the title ‘The costs of a face-off’)

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SUEZ CRISIS AND THE FRAGILITY OF GLOBAL TRADE

The closure shows how an accident can trigger a major fiscal and supply-side crisis. Instituting new protocols is essential

Cmde. (Retd.) C. Uday Bhaskar

Director of the Society for Policy Studies and
Former Director, IDSA & NMF

The closure of the Suez Canal, one of the world’s most critical water bodies, due to a large container vessel, the *MV Ever Given*, running aground on March 23 while in transit, has caused enormous disruption to global shipping. Sustained efforts by the Suez Canal Authority (SCA) and the Egyptian government to dislodge the vessel and refloat it have been less than successful.

More than 300 ships waiting to cross the Suez that connects the Mediterranean Sea to the Red Sea have piled up on either side of the canal. On an average, 50 ships transit the Suez every day and, as per SCA, in 2020, nearly 19,000 vessels with a net tonnage of 1.17 billion tonnes transited the canal, which is the second-highest load in the history of the Suez. The value of goods shipped through the canal is estimated to be \$9.5 billion daily — the *MV Ever Given*, for example, was laden with cargo worth \$1 billion. Annually, this is about 8% of global trade and the canal generated \$5.3 billion in revenue for the Egyptian exchequer in 2017.

The origins of the Suez Canal go back to the ancient period and the first waterway was dug during the reign of Senausert III Pharaoh of Egypt

I - Want - Peace, I is ego, Want is desire;
Remove ego and desire and you have peace.

- Sathya Sai Baba

(1874 BC). However, this rudimentary canal was abandoned due to silting and reopened several times in the intervening centuries. The modern Suez was built in the mid-19th century through efforts by the French and opened for navigation on November 17, 1869. This was a tectonic development for global maritime connectivity and impacted colonial history in a definitive manner. The rise of the British Empire was enabled considerably by this canal. Since its inauguration, the Suez has been closed five times — the longest period being the eight years from 1967 to 1975 during the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The current closure will be very expensive for global trade — the shipping industry and insurance companies — and it is estimated that the loss per hour is almost \$400 million. Some positive movement is being reported, and it is hoped that the Suez will soon be open for transit. In the event that the *MV Ever Given* remains wedged across the breadth of the canal for a longer period, the negative impact on the intricate and delicately balanced global supply-chain and oil prices will impose additional costs on the customer globally.

This aspect points to the fragility of global trade. While the worldwide logistic management chain has acquired a high degree of efficiency by way of manufacturing goods to tight schedules and keeping inventory/warehouse/shipping costs to the bare minimum, even while ensuring timely delivery to the customer, an unforeseen accident such as the Suez closure can lead to a cascading downstream disruption of trade with attendant economic consequences. This is bleak news in a Covid-19-scarred world.

The Suez along, with the Panama (that links the Pacific and Atlantic oceans), are the two most critical canals in the global maritime domain along with the Volga-Don and the Grand Canal (China). Each canal has its own navigational challenges and protocols, and in most cases, local pilots are deployed for every ship to ensure safe passage. Tug boats are used to enable the safe passage through restricted waters, and as the history of the Suez demonstrates, the kind of canal closure related to the *MV Ever Given* is an exception.

While the exact cause for the current accident

is yet to be ascertained, preliminary reports suggest that very strong wind conditions that occur often in the region may have exacerbated the complex transit of a large vessel. In shallow waters, when a heavy vessel displaces water, it is not replaced immediately as would be the case in deeper waters and a partial vacuum occurs near the propeller. Steering behaviour can then become sluggish and this is compounded by what mariners refer to as “smelling the ground” when a ship in a channel nears a shoal and then lurches from one side to the other, making it difficult to navigate.

Whatever the final verdict about why the *MV Ever Given* ran aground, it would be fair to surmise that the causes would be a mix of material failure, human error and unanticipated local conditions. Given the scale of the consequences — both fiscal and supply-chain disruption — the need to objectively review existing procedures and protocols specific to the Suez merits the highest priority.

Incidentally, the crew on board the stricken *MV Ever Given* are all Indians and while the resilience of merchant ships and maximum profit orientation of the shipping industry are under scrutiny, the welfare of the seafarer in these times merits policy review. Working conditions at sea for the crew are very exacting and this is an issue that warrants empathetic attention even as global attention is focused on ensuring that the Suez Canal is navigable again.

(Courtesy: *Hindustan Times*, March 28, 2021)

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THE INDIAN CHILDREN'S WRITER AT THE CROSSROADS

(Address as the Chief Guest at the National Seminar on Children's Literature on the occasion of the World Book Fair, February 2000.)

Prof. Manoj Das

Professor of English Literature
Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education
Pondicherry

At least a dozen seminars and workshops have been convened by different organisations during the past decade on aspects of the state of children's

Democracy has many virtues, but one of its concomitants is wastage of time and energy.

- Jawaharlal Nehru

literature in India today. Of the last two World Book Fairs in New Delhi (in the years 2000 and 2002), while the first one was devoted to an exposition of this genre of creativity in several countries of the world vis-à-vis India, the theme of the major discussions on both the occasions had been the problems and prospects of children's literature in India.

Can Indian literature for the young compete with the kind of Potters and potboilers churned out in the West? Is there any meaning in a conscious competition of that kind? Is there any promise of success in that regard for the Indian writer of this genre of literature even in a reasonably distant future?

A reflection on the issues will irresistibly remind us of a few guiding facts. Indian civilisation is credited with the world's most systematically developed literary tradition – the Vedas leading to the Upanishads, the latter leading to the Epics, followed by the Mahapuranas, Puranas, Upapuranas and the Sthalapuranas and, keeping pace with the two last genres of literature, the growth of the robust line of drama and poetry inaugurated by Vasa (not to be confused with Vyasa)

And Kalidasa as well as sublime didactic compositions, the classic example of which is Thiruvalluvar's Kural.

But this is only one aspect of the tradition. The other aspect, at a different plane, is no less formidable or significant. We can tentatively call that the pragmatic lore. That consists of Gunadhya's Brihat Katha written probably in the 1st Century and probably the world's earliest collection of fiction, but only a part of which is available to us as Kathasaritsagara, courtesy Somadeva of the 11th Century; the Panchatantra of the master storyteller Vishnu Sharma and the Jataka Tales, the genesis of which is traced to the time of the Buddha who is believed to have narrated a few of them, among a plethora of tales and verses constituting India's vast folklore. There was even yet another branch of literature, mostly oral, the tales told by mystics — at once profound in their content and absorbing for their construction as pure stories. We can call that genre the literature of prudence.

With this colossal heritage forming its backdrop, what was children's literature in India like? Every language had its stock of lullabies, nursery rhymes, nonsense verses, fairytales and simple stories of light and delight. But significantly, the major part of children's literature was made of stories drawn from the classical stock, both of the first and the second lines of our heritage, that is, from the epics and from the works belonging to the pragmatic lore. As we know, most of the modern Indian languages achieved maturity through a recreation of the epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. The Panchatantra tales had an incredible knack for sneaking into every literature. Children's literature, in most of our languages, was a judicious blending of the epic stories of valour, sacrifice and idealism and tales of wit and wisdom from the second and third lines of our literary heritage. These stories have a kind of uncanny quality in them so that they can be meaningful to both the grown up and the young.

It is a significant fact of history that long before the modern means of communication and the zeal for exchange and fraternity among nations had come into vogue, children in so many parts of the world had together started dreaming and enjoying exercises in imaginativeness of broadly the same variety. It was of course a one-way traffic — almost. The Indian stories flooded the Western world. If a scholar like Joseph Jacob says that at least one-third of the world's total treasure of stories is of Indian origin, there are folklorists to go to the extent of declaring that practically all the stories were born in India, barring some emanating from the Euphrates Valley. The most popular of the stories to be found in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales — the story of three young men entering a cave in order to kill a demon but forgetting their goal on seeing a heap of gems inside and destroying themselves in their bid to outwit one another in possessing the entire wealth, is a story from the Jatakas.

Take the case of the influence exercised by the Panchatantra. A physician named Burzoe translated it into Pehlevi in 6th Century A.D. A Syrian version prepared by Bud followed and that was translated

The criminal liberties of a few have to be curtailed to preserve the civil liberties of many.

- Vallabhbhai Patel

into Arabic by Abdulla Mogaffa in the 8th Century. This Arabic version became the source for several European renderings — Greek in the 11th Century, Hebrew in the 12th, Latin in the 13th, German in the 15th, Italian in the 16th and French in the 17th Century. As Hertel puts it, “The Panchatantra is a work which has made an unparalleled triumphal progress from its native land over all the civilised parts of the globe and which for more than fifteen hundred years has delighted young and old, educated and uneducated, rich and poor, high and low, and still delights them. Even the greatest obstacles whether of language or customs or religion have not been able to check that triumphal progress. It is not only the oldest extant work of Hindu artistic fiction, but it is also the one which has exerted a greater influence than any other work of India upon the literature of the world.”

Thus, for centuries, the great teacher Vishnu Sharma has been talking to the children at home as well as to the children in several parts of the wide world.

No doubt, the situation has changed. Innumerable new factors have come to influence the child and the children’s literature and among them are some of the epoch-making developments in science and technology, the communication revolution and the systematic presentation of violence and other aberrations through the electronic media. The unexpected has taken the traditional children’s writer by surprise; it has caused bewilderment. We can very well say that there is a crisis of conscience for many writers in several countries of the world and particularly in India. The essence of the question facing them is this: should we follow the trends set by some writers in the West? Some of the products of such trends have proved to be an impressive success by the market yardstick. They have no less an impact on the Indian market and, needless to say, consequently on the mind of the Indian child. What should the Indian children’s writer do? Does the dictum *Swadharmaṇidhanamshreyah; parodharmabhayavahah* (“Better to die clinging to one’s inner nature than to imitate someone else’s”) apply to him in regard to this issue? Or should he

try to renovate his ideas and remould his inspiration keeping with the exotic?

A formidable question indeed. But the right answer should emerge from a few unavoidable basic facts. First, no scientific or technological discovery or invention can alter the basic human emotions, sensations and feelings. Social, economic and political values may change, but the evolutionary values ingrained in the consciousness cannot change — values that account for our growth. W

Secondly, adults decide what to write and what to read. The child cannot do that. You have to decide what he should read, to an extent, as you decide what he should eat. “Be firm. You wouldn’t allow your child to eat garbage, would you? Why, then, let him put it in his head,” was the slogan with which an American journalist, Ann Landers, tried to mobilise parents against the dangerous effect of vulgarity and violence in the films and the TV on the child.

Needless to say, it will be fatal to dismiss the statement as moralistic. It concerns the child’s survival as a decent, intelligent, meaningful and happy individual. He can choose to go his way when he has grown up, but if someone else has the opportunity to influence the child, he cannot have the right to inflict on him ideas that have been repeatedly proved to be destructive. In other words — and honestly — the children’s writer does not have the kind of freedom, not to speak of license, which the writer for the grown up has.

Now I come to a truth which is even more important than this. Just as a child’s body hankers for the kind of nourishment that is indispensable for its growth, the child’s psyche also demands elements that are necessary for its growth. What are the qualities that nurture the child? We need not be pedantic about it; they are, simply, faith and love, to begin with. No infant can survive even the trauma of birth, not to speak of survival into childhood, without these two elements playing their role at the very dawn of its life. In fact, the very first cry the child gives out is an instinctive assertion of faith — the faith that there is help waiting for its utterly helpless state.

English for unity, say I, over and over again.
I shall plead for it as long as my breath lasts, for the love I bear for my country.

- Rajaji

Next, what the child needs — to stand up, to toddle on despite falls — is courage. Even a wee bit of exercise in such courage is a thrill, an adventure for him. Next, being innocent and helpless, he needs to be protected against mischief and crookedness. Hence an instinctive appreciation of such qualities is inherent in the child. Thus he is happy when the brave triumphs, when the wicked falls. It is not a question of our ethical patronisation of the child, but the child's psychic demand. Then, last but not the least, he demands joy - the secret of existence and the elixir of life.

If the magic of the writer can provide the child with these elements through the creative literature produced for him, it matters little what form, what innovation the writer had taken recourse to. An experiment with form is always welcome if it is not an experiment for the sake of it or if it is not something spurious in the guise of an experiment.

The child has an inbuilt faith in the writer. The writer too must have faith in the capacity for comprehension potentially present in the child — when the fare offered to him has in it the ingredients of faith, love, courage and joy.

The child today may be more intelligent, but let us not think that he is bereft of the need for the classical fantasy. His realism is different from the adult's. He does not look at the giant and the fairy from the angle of genetic possibility. They are a spontaneous exercise for his imaginativeness — a quality that alone can enable him to look at life as bigger and greater than what it is at the gross plane.

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A GRANDMOTHER'S DREAM

Dr. (Mrs.) Prema Nandakumar

“A good book is the precious life-blood of a master spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life.”

This was a mantra for our Professor when I was in the graduate class. Those were the days when the teachers not only taught but refueled regularly in the University library by reading classics as well as

late arrivals. So they bubbled with enthusiasm and drove us to read books by the dozen every month. I do not remember any Book Fair in our school or college at that time. But still books were being bought by elders for themselves or for children. When there were guests who had come for a short stay in the house, they would invariably gift us with illustrated books making us touch the seventh heaven of happiness. Those were the days before the advent of Amar Chitra Katha. But we had those illustrated classics which were referred to as Comics.

Comics taught me all about Superman's adventures. In fact the golden age of the comics was the 'forties and 'fifties of the last century and this coincided well with the years of my growing up. Mickie Mouse, Donald Duck, Tarzan and the rest became part of one's dreams. Comic books were hoarded like so many pots of money and, of course, one could boast to one's friends. The closeness with comics did not wear off even in this century and I made it a point to visit Disneyland in Florida during my first visit to the United States in 2001. Those huge cut-outs and animated figures in that land of make believe seemed to make my dreams of childhood very real, very charmed, in fact quite enviable.

I was not in the same mood to buy comics for my children who were growing up in the 'eighties for by then there were so many terrifying comics that had characters like Lobo that seemed to celebrate brutality. The graphic presentation of violence was not child-friendly at all. It was one thing to read descriptions of violence, but the comics brought them to the child's psyche as visuals. Soon events overtook the civilized world with the discovery of the television and now the Internet has made violence a way of life. Paris is bombed and within an hour the boy cannot avert his eyes from what is being shown on the television. He is either victimized by terror, fear or vengeful rage. Since he is young, he feels helpless and grows full of resentment. When I felt so bad about violence being picturised in comic books, right now I am beyond anger and wondering whether there is any way to bring back the children to the healthy habit of reading books.

Let come what comes, let go what goes. See what remains

- Ramana Maharshi

It is true there are no grandmamas and mothers to tell the children stories when they eat or when we are about to go to sleep. My elderly cousin sister used to tell us the entire story of the historical novel, Ponniyin Selvan, Kalki Krishnamurthy's classic, week after week after reading it in the Kalki, while we sat around her on the pial of the village house. But lifestyle of Indians has changed completely and the nuclear family has become the norm.

Yet, despite all digitalization and what not, books remain important for us as they help us know our culture well by retelling the Ramayana and Mahabharata, the Vetala and Tenali Rama stories. At the same time books from other areas of the globe also silently make us capable of integrating our selves with the changing rhythms of contemporary culture. Excellent retellings of classics like Shakespeare retold by Charles and Mary Lamb, Robert Louis Stevenson's Treasure Island, and King Solomon's Mines in an abridged version gave us entry into the western world. In fact, King Solomon's Mines by Rider Haggard took us to Africa as well.

If I resent the way the electronics age is taking children into dark corners of violence and away from the habit of reading classics, I am also happy that there are excellent electronic reading platforms like Amazon Kindle, Apple, Barnes & Noble, Android, ibookstore, iPad, iPod and so on. Again, the problem remains. How to get the child into reading books?

The parents and teachers can give some thought to this. The schools can arrange books fairs with the cooperation of local booksellers for a day or two. Children can be taught to describe books and sell them. Again, Book Fairs don't just have to be sales events, either. Schools can work with publishers to organise other fun literary-themed activities like writing and storytelling workshops and author readings so that children can interact with sellers and writers.

There's really no end to creative approaches in this matter. yvette caslin has several ideas in this matter. Speaking of book fairs to get children interested in reading, she says:

"A person's backstory can be very

enlightening. For example, a traffic-stopper was this woman dressed in a white wedding gown. Her name is Kontrena Clark, author of *The Day I Met a Wolf*. She wrote a piece of fiction, based on a true story, that reveals how she met a man with whom she fell in love. He swindled her out of \$55,000 in cash and credit."

Finally, the future. Long, long after, when the child is grown up, he can become the centre of attraction when speaking to a group of elderly people how as a child you went around helping set up this exhibition in the school, how some chance remark, an accidental look into the page of a book or a decision to read more on the subject of a book you had seen had made you go through life with a passion to achieve your target, become a great writer or sportsman or musician or bureaucrat or, a Mechanical Engineer! Remember, God gives the best to those who dream and work. We must be prepared to dream, not sleep. We must work, not laze around. One becomes an achiever easily in this manner. Three cheers for the world of books!

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HOW DO THINGS GET DONE IN GOVERNMENT?

Dr. R.V. Vaidyanatha Ayyar, I.A.S.(Retd)
Former Secretary, HRD, Govt of India &
Prof. IIM, Bengaluru

To every administrator... it seems that the entire population entrusted to him moves only by his efforts...What science can there be in a matter in which, as in all practical matters, nothing can be defined and everything depends on innumerable conditions, the significance of which is determined at a particular moment which arrives no one knows when?--- Tolstoy, War and Peace

Twice during my career, I had to assist the Central and State Governments in recovering autonomous public institutions they had set up from influential private parties who took advantage of legal provisions to hijack the institutions and run them as personal fiefdoms. The first of them was the Hyderabad Public School (HPS).

The mark of spirituality is not exile from the natural world but work in it with love for all.

- S. Radhakrishnan

In the year 1923, Mr. Wakefield, Secretary to Government, Revenue Department, in the Nizam Government, started Jagirdars College at Begumpet, Hyderabad, exclusively for educating the children of Jagirdars (feudal chiefs) in the Nizam's Dominions. About 185 acres of land was donated by jagirdars for construction of the buildings and the playground, The Nizam's Government used to collect education cess at two percent on the net income of Jagirdars and the proceeds of the cess were utilised towards expenditure for running the College. The College was managed by a Board of Governors comprising Education Member, Finance Member, Revenue Member, two Jagirdars (to be selected by the Jagirdars once in every three years). Education Secretary, the Director of Public Instruction, the Principal of the Jagirdars College (Secretary).

After the Police Action (1948) and the abolition of the Jagirdar system, the College was taken over by Hyderabad Government and run with the funds of the Government. During that period, the college was renamed as Hyderabad Public School and after two years of management by the Government, the Government took a decision that the School should support itself from the fees and boarding charges collected from the students as well as the interest on its investments, and that it should cease to be a liability on the Government. In October 1965, the Government registered the school as a society in order to fulfil the conditions of affiliation of the Indian Council of Secondary Education (ICSE). As required by the Societies Registration Act, the bye laws of the HPS society provided for a General Council whose members would elect among others a President. In all about twenty members were admitted to the General Council as members. In spite of there being a President of the Society, the bye laws stipulated that the Education Secretary would be the Chairman of the Board of Governors, and the Principals of the schools would be appointed by the Government. In 1972, a second campus of the school was set up in Ramanthapur with land granted by Osmania University and loan granted by the Government. As set out by Justice Swamy in his judgment in Diddi

Rambabu vs Principal, Hyderabad Public School gradually the members of the General Council who 'secured membership of the society ... because of their proximity to the political bigwigs' began to call the shots in important matters such as admissions. HPS ceased to follow the rule of reservation on the ground that HPS was a private educational institution affiliated to the ICSE, and hence the provisions of the Andhra Pradesh Education Act did not apply. In July 1979, the Government reiterated its reservation policy in the matter of school admissions and directed all recognised schools including the HPS to implement the reservation policy. Over years, HPS was enmeshed in litigation in the High Court for its failure to comply with reservation policy of the State Government, and for alleged irregular admissions and irregular appointments. In the face of the litigation, in December 1987, the members of the General Council tightened their hold on the School by drastically changing the bye-laws of the society so as to alter the basic structure of the society, divest the Education Secretary of the Chairmanship of the Board, and change the composition of the Board of Governors. Coming to know of the coup by the members of the General Council, the Government issued a directive to the Inspector-General of Registration not to register the changes in bye laws. On 5th September 1989, the Cabinet approved a legislation to undo the changes in bye laws and recover the public institution. Unusual for a cabinet meeting of NTR's Government, there was considerable discussion of the proposal, mainly because the Chief Minister was away for a while when the matter came up for consideration. A Minister wanted an assurance that the School would not go to seed after it was 'taken over' by the Government; this was a concern which was to manifest strongly later during the consideration of the legislation by the Legislative Assembly. In the words of a colleague who was present during the discussion, I 'hit out in Viv Richards' style', and pooh-poohed the view that Government educational institutions were per se inferior to private institutions. Which were the best engineering institutions in the country? Were they not IITs? Which were the best management institutions in the country? Were they not IIMs? Which were

Take care of the pieces well. The whole will take care of itself.

- M. Visvesvaraya

schools which perform best in public examinations in the State? Were they not residential schools? Then, how can it be said that HPS would go to seed if Government recovers it? Minister Daggubati Venkateswarao raised a technical question: why should the concurrence of the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) be obtained for the legislation when the land and buildings were those of the State Government? He was apprehensive that reference to MHRD might give scope for party politics to come into play. His apprehension was well-founded as all through the period NTR held power from 1982 to 1989, the State was caught in bitter political strife and nasty caste politics. The Congress Party was never reconciled to loss of its monopoly over power in the State and employed every ruse to discomfit the State Government. I clarified to Venkateswara Rao that the concurrence was required procedurally, and that every effort would be made to secure the concurrence. In a little while, NTR returned and there was pin drop silence and the Cabinet approved the proposal to bring in a takeover resolution. I worked on the Union Education Secretary with whom I had established a special relationship and I could secure the concurrence in a trice. Delay might have been fatal as the influential members of the Society could have worked on the Central Government, which was ruled by the Congress Party, and was engaged in a continuing feud with the NTR Government.

In the Legislative Assembly, there was a spirited attempt to stall the passage of the Bill, and the opposition to the Bill was superbly led by D.K. Samarasimha Reddy with whom I was very well acquainted from my Mahaboobnagar days eighteen years earlier. I was just four years old in the service and Samarasimha Reddy was a young fledgling lawyer. His father, D. K. Satya Reddy was a noted leader in Gadwal; whenever I visited Gadwal, which was quite often, Samarasimha Reddy would drop in for chat. When I went to the Legislative Assembly to watch the debate on the HPS take over bill, I ran into Samarasimha Reddy who as ever warmly greeted me, beamed a smile, and told me that he was opposing the Bill because of pressure from the leading lights of the

HPS Society who belonged to the Congress Party. He and those leading lights would be personally happy if I were to be the Chairman of the Board of Governors of HPS, but they were sure that the Government would not keep me long as Education Secretary. During the debate, many MLAs wanted an assurance that the autonomous character of the School would be maintained, and surprisingly even Narra Raghava Reddy of the Communist Party (Marxist) joined the chorus.

As the Assembly was about to break for lunch Samarasimha Reddy, figuratively, bowled a deadly googly by pointing out that as the government may have to incur expenditure after take over the assent of the Governor ought to have been obtained before introducing the Bill, and as no such assent was obtained the Speaker ought not to have allowed introduction of the Bill; that being so, the debate should forthwith close. The Speaker said he would examine the point raised and adjourned the House. When I consulted the Secretary of the Legislative he admitted that his secretariat had slipped up in admitting the Bill without the Governor's assent; he requested me to secure the Governor's assent before the Assembly resumed its sitting. His request put me in a fix as it was well known that the Congress Party had a great asset in the Governor who strongly believed that she was first and foremost a Congresswoman and acting on that belief took as her life's mission discomfiting NTR in every manner. Before being State Education Secretary I had been the State's 'ambassador' to the Delhi durbar (the Central Government), and in that position I had first-hand experience of the extent to which Her Excellency would go in pursuing her mission. The Andhra Pradesh Bhavan had a Chief Minister's Cottage, an earmarked accommodation for the Chief Minister which was superior to every other type of accommodation. Though earmarked for the Chief Minister, Governors of the State used to be accommodated in the Cottage when they visited Delhi. This arrangement did not present a logistical problem so long as the visits of the Governor were rare, and the possibility of both the Governor and the Chief Minister being in Delhi at the same time was rare like a blue moon. The Governor

Political freedom is not worth a great deal if one can't free oneself from mental bondage.

- Rabindranath Tagore

could be given precedence over the Chief Minister without raising the hackles of the Chief Minister. However, during my stint in the Bhavan what was rare became commonplace. What made matters worse was the persistent demand of the Governor to undertake large scale structural modifications and to change the interiors of the Chief Minister's Cottage to her taste, and for that purpose to go by the advice of her socialite cum political friend. Among the changes Her Excellency demanded was the replacement of NTR's photograph by that of Rajiv Gandhi. She was terribly annoyed with me when I sought to deflect her suggestion by saying that I needed the sanction of the Government for the changes she wanted. A couple of visits later, I arrived in the Cottage to call on Her Excellency, and was surprised to find her on the top of a ladder with the socialite-friend of hers holding the ladder firmly in place; Her Excellency was holding a framed photograph of Rajiv Gandhi in one hand and trying to take off NTR's photo with the other hand. My deputy came up with an ingenious solution to the battle of portraits. Whenever Her Excellency visited Delhi, just before she reached the Cottage, NTR's photograph would be hauled down and Rajiv's mounted in its place, and the moment Her Excellency departed NTR's photograph would be restored to its position, and Rajiv's stored in a vault. This anecdote is recounted not because it is juicy as it indeed is but to bring out what an immaculate misconception is the belief of the UGC and many distinguished academics that only the Governor ought to be the Chancellor of a State University as being a Constitutional authority a Governor would be apolitical and not politicise the university.

As I was agonising about securing the Governor's assent in so short a time a thought crossed my mind. One of my Deputy Secretaries was Gopala Reddy who had been Inspector General of Registration for over a decade and by virtue of that position had extensive network of contacts and enormous influence. But the catch was that no sooner did NTR assume office he was shifted from his post to the Secretariat and posted, not as Additional Secretary as his position demanded, but as a lowly Deputy Secretary. He had

every reason to be delighted with the discomfiture of a government which humiliated him. However, when I turned to him with a request to salvage the situation he told me, 'Don't worry, Sir. It is done'. He was as good as his word, and in about half an hour, he returned with the Governor's assent; he told me with glee that as he was walking down the steps of the Raj Bhavan he ran into Surendra Reddy, one of the leading lights of the HPS Society and that Surendra Reddy accosted him saying 'Anna, Bagunnavu' (Brother, how do you do?). Had Surendra Reddy been a few minutes earlier the Assent would not have come through. I was very much touched by Gopala Reddy giving priority to personal and professional loyalty over personal feelings.

With its numbers, the Ruling Party had no difficulty to prevail in the House, and the take over Bill was passed. As the MLAs and the officials were coming out I again ran into Samarasimha Reddy; as ever, he beamed a smile and complimented me and Gopala Reddy for acting so fast and added that try as you might Madame would not approve it. He was right on the dot. Soon after the HPS Bill was passed, General Elections were announced, the Governor instead of giving her assent returned the Bill with a few queries, NTR lost office and was succeeded by Channa Reddy, Gopala Reddy went back to his position of Inspector General, Registrations, and Samarasimha Reddy became the Revenue Minister and one of the closest confidants of Channa Reddy. The return to power of the Congress Party was like the Stuart Restoration, and the new Government was eager to undo every act of the previous Government including legislation. At a meeting organized by the National Students Union of India, a Congress Party outfit, to congratulate him on his return to power, Channa Reddy condemned the previous Government for subverting the autonomy of universities and suppressing democracy by forbidding elections to student bodies in educational institutions. His speech set me to wonder whether Channa Reddy would construe the HPS Bill to be an act of intrusion into the affairs of a private institution or an attempt to recover a public institution and property from illegal occupants. That was not my only worry. As

For the first time in human history we see a transcending concern – the survival not just of the people but of the planet.

- Nani Palkhivala

is commonplace after a ruling party loses elections there were wild rumours that all those close to the NTR government would be shifted, and my days in the Education Department were numbered. The main campaign plank of Channa Reddy was denunciation of NTR's misrule, and a promise to review and undo 'irregular' actions such as large-scale recruitment of police constables and teachers on eve of elections so as to infiltrate the Government with party men. That being so, I expected that I might be shifted to an inconsequential post. A few days later another rumour was in circulation, namely that I was among those Channa Reddy shortlisted for being his Secretary, and quite a few senior colleagues asked me how I who was close to NTR was also close to Channa Reddy. I was not surprised that Channa Reddy, being a shrewd judge of men, did not choose me as his personal aide; however, my continuance as Secretary, Education was assured, thereby hangs a tale.

II

To come to think of it, the Great Cyclone of November 1977, famous more for the tidal wave which engulfed Divi taluq, was followed soon by a political tidal wave of unforeseen intensity that swept away the Vengala Rao government and the Brahmananda Reddy Congress. Indira Gandhi's election campaign in Andhra Pradesh in January-February 1978 is historic. Her campaign trail was more like a triumphal procession. The mammoth crowds that greeted her all over the State confounded political pundits who wrote her off after her defeat in the 1977 elections and hypothesised that she would soon lose support in South India as she did in the North. A popular conjecture was that southern states were like a tube light which takes a while to glow after power is switched on; likewise, it would take a while for the political illumination of the aryavatha to spread to the benighted dakshinapatha. Another theory attributed the large crowds that attended Indira Gandhi's meetings to the inquisitiveness of people to see what she looked like when she was out of power. The poll results belied all such conjectures; Congress led by Indira Gandhi won a great victory, and Channa Reddy who cast his lot with Indira Gandhi emerged

as the Chief Minister of the State.

Channa Reddy reminds me of Ravana Brahma as portrayed by NTR in Bhookaliash. Ravana was great in all respects: in talent, accomplishment as well as faults. Channa Reddy was endowed with superhuman energy and stamina. I found that during Channa Reddy's three-day whirlwind tour of my [Prakasam] district from one end to the other, he would wear out everyone else in his entourage. He would be busy with his engagements till the wee-hours of the morning, and after a couple of hours' rest would swing into action once again fresh as a daisy. Someone joked that the State would have been better off if he slept a little. He was a great orator, equally proficient in English, Telugu, Urdu and Hindi. He had a fast uptake and could get to the root of a matter in a trice. When I first met him during his visit to Prakasam District, he had an enormously rich and variegated political and administrative experience. He made his political debut in 1948. After the integration of the Nizam's Dominions with the Indian Union, he was nominated to the Parliament in 1950, and became a minister in Burgula Ramakrishna Rao's cabinet in 1952. Thereafter, he held ministerial positions at the Centre as well as the State. In 1974, he was Governor of Uttar Pradesh, the largest state in the country, and during the President's rule he literally ran that largest State in the country. Above all, he was in and out of power, an experience, as he once told me, was very valuable and which civil servants can never have. He was disqualified for holding office for six years for electoral malpractices. The petitioner Vande Mataram Ramachandra Rao acquired fame as a giant killer for he felled V.B. Raju in an earlier petition. He would use all his time and energy for collecting evidence of electoral malpractices of his adversaries instead of campaigning, and then unseat the victor through an election petition. Never one to brook a superior, Channa Reddy was a mighty dissident in Congress politics, and lethal when once out of power. It used to be said that the greatest mistake which Brahmananda Reddy committed and which resulted in the 1969 Telengana agitation was to include V.B. Raju and to exclude Channa Reddy from his cabinet. Raju, it

To my mind three things constitute the Gandhi legacy: nonviolence as a weapon of struggle, the independent nation of India, and signposts for life today anywhere on earth.

- Rajmohan Gandhi

was said, burrowed inside the cabinet and weakened Brahmananda Reddy while Channa Reddy unleashed his volcanic energy to stir up the Telengana agitation in which about 369 students died in policy firings.. But for all his great strengths, Channa Reddy had his great flaws too. He was the very epitome of hubris, short tempered, could be rude , unleash a torrent of abuse for no reason or rhyme, and respected no propriety. He was Governor of four major states, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu. As Governor he sought to rule rather reign, thereby making life miserable for the Chief Ministers. And as Chief Minister twice, he would not recognise the existence of the Governor. He would make Chief Secretary I.J. Naidu wait for long hours, and if some junior officer he liked like me was waiting at the same time, he would first see that officer before Naidu, never mind that those officers got into trouble with the Chief Secretary.

I first met Channa Reddy on November 7, 1978, significantly, the day Indira Gandhi won from Chikkamagalur constituency. He had arrived in the district for a three-day tour of the district. I was extremely nervous about the visit, for in the past seven months that Channa Reddy was Chief Minister his visitations to districts were akin to the Divi tidal wave; the district officials were often overwhelmed by his torrent of anger and sharp censorious remarks. My intuition served me well; I felt that I would be better off if I had all the facts and figures about the district on my fingertips. I prepared for the visit as diligently as for my B.Sc (Honours) examination. From the moment Channa Reddy landed, he began to pepper me with questions. My preparation stood me well as my short-term memory had not yet deserted me. As my luck would have it, he suddenly asked about receipts of entertainment tax from theatres ; Collectors usually do not have an idea about those receipts, as entertainment tax administered by the Commercial Tax Department which is outside the remit of the District Collector. To draw upon a cricket analogy, for me, his question was like a full toss being bowled to Sachin Tendulkar who sure would hit it for a mighty six. I was in the Commercial Tax

Department before I was posted to Ongloe, and I had not forgotten the broad contours of the analysis I did before introducing the slab system of entertainment tax in the State. After addressing a mammoth gathering in Chirala, Channa Reddy retired to the Vadrevu ILTD Guest House for the night. That night Indira Gandhi was declared elected; next morning, I found him extremely testy. I accompanied him to a breakfast hosted by Vadde Nageswara Rao, the Minister from Chirala. A few hundred guests were present at the breakfast which was arranged in a huge shamiana. The tables, tableware, and the food were those one notices in most hotels in Coastal Andhra; they were utterly incompatible with the lifestyle of the Telengana gentry. And never one to conceal his emotions, his face was red with anger. He did not touch the food. He was mightily irritated with the attempts of many guests to introduce themselves to him. When someone introduced himself as President of the All India Razaka (washermen) Association, Chirala, he sarcastically remarked, ‘All India, and at Chirala!’ The volcano erupted when he was served tea in a cheap glass, the bearer added a spoon of sugar to the tea and left. Looking sharply at Nageswara Rao, he raised his voice and asked, ‘How do you expect me to mix the sugar? With my finger!’ Narayana Reddy, District Revenue Officer, who was watching Channa Reddy from a distance all along discreetly approached me and whispered to me that he better rush to Ongole and ensure that a proper lunch was arranged to Channa Reddy’s satisfaction. As later events proved, he could not have done a better favour to me, for I was generally insensitive in such matters. It is rightly said that IAS officers could be Board Members and not Tahsildars. Narayan Reddy was from Telengana and rose from the ranks; however, few direct recruit IAS officers could match him in honesty, integrity and executive grit.

After a little while, Channa Reddy looked at me and said, ‘Let us go’. The Chief Minister’s convoy began to proceed to Ongole. Unlike other Chief Ministers, Channa Reddy would not allow the Collector to travel with him. After a little while, the convoy suddenly stopped, and his gunman

Gandhi didn’t renounce politics, he redefined it.

- Sunil Khilnani

came rushing to me, and told me the Chief Minister wanted me. As soon as I reached him, he asked me to compose a congratulatory message to Indira Gandhi. He wanted to send it as soon as he reached Ongole. He gave a few tips. The message should copiously use appropriate expressions like ‘the hope of the nation’, socialism, garibi hatao, and secularism. Now I realised why Channa Reddy was extraordinarily testy that morning. No doubt, being a bon vivant he was irritated by the déclassé breakfast; of greater consequence was the storm raging within him as he tried to reconcile himself to the new political development. Indira Gandhi had come a long way from the dark days of her defeat in March about a year ago, and coming after Belchi, the victory at Chikkamagalur was a sure sign that her comeback to power was plausible. He foresaw that as she gained strength, his autonomy would get eroded. The task that Channa Reddy entrusted to me was not to my liking as I then despised Emergency and viewed any prospect of her returning to power as a nightmare. A few hours later, as the convoy was reaching Ongole, the convoy stopped, and I was summoned by the Chief Minister. I timidly handed over the message I scribbled; he had a cursory look, expressed his happiness. After touching it up a little bit, he handed it over to me, and told me that he wanted to go straight to my office instead of the Circuit House so that the message could be sent by wireless immediately to his office in Hyderabad for onward transmission. As soon as he reached my office, he looked at me and asked, ‘Do you have something to eat?’ Luckily for me, on the way to Ongole Channa Reddy had attended many engagements, and at every place he stopped the villagers offered tender coconuts, and my driver collected quite a few. Consequently, I could readily offer him tender coconut meat and sugar; as he began to eat avidly the coconut meat that I offered, Narayana Reddy appeared with rich Hyderabad lunch, and exquisite tableware. Only Blücher’s arrival with his army at the Battle of Waterloo could have been timelier. With his customary thoroughness, Narayana Reddy ensured that every Inspection Bungalow that lay on the roads that Channa Reddy would travel was

well stocked with good food and fine tableware. The very day after Channa Reddy left for Hyderabad, his Secretary, S.R.Ramamurthy rung me up and asked me ‘What did you do to make him so happy?’, and added that the Chief Minister was saying that the IAS had a few good officers. Ramamurthy congratulated me and said it was good that I turned the tide and got the Chief Minister to have a good opinion about the service. I wanted to tell him but did not, that it was plain dumb luck and Narayana Reddy’s perspicacity that ensured that the visit went off so well. The immediate outcome of Channa Reddy coming to like me was my displacement from the district. Just 2-3 weeks after his visit, I was informed by Ramamurthy that the Chief Minister had chosen me to draw up and implement a massive housing programme, and that I should hand over charge and come over to Hyderabad immediately.

(To be concluded)

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FOR NOW, ONLY TWO CHEERS FOR MODI

Dr. Uday Balakrishnan

Indian Postal Service (Retd.)

Former Member, Postal Services Board and
Chairman, Investment Board

Unreserved applause will come only when he leads an all-party effort towards peace with Pakistan

The terrorist attack in Pathankot, dastardly as it was, has had a positive outcome so far. After a long time, there is at last the hint of some civilian control over foreign policy in Pakistan. It is not every day that one sees a prime minister in that country preside over a meeting in which the heads of ISI and the army are present, and together unequivocally condemn a terror attack in India without conflating Kashmir.

It is quite possible that the ISI and the army are merely allowing Nawaz Sharif some temporary space at the table before resuming their covert offensive against India with even greater vigour. But it is also equally possible that the Pakistan army, whose morale is up after a highly successful Operation Zarb-e-Azb campaign that now has terrorists of all hues on

My humble plea to those in power is, ‘Shed the VIP Syndrome
– before the iron gets into your soul’.

- Fali S. Nariman

the run, realises that without taking on the so-called 'good' terrorists targeting India, its success against the bad ones will, at best, be pyrrhic.

These terrorists, as the Americans discovered with Bin Laden and his kind, would with equal ruthlessness turn on their patrons, as they once had taken on a common enemy.

Nothing has hurt Pakistan more than home-grown terrorism and perhaps something changed after the terrible slaughter of children in an army school in Peshawar in 2014. It may take Pakistan some more time to bring its terrorists to heel, and possibly decades to neutralise the extremists it has nurtured for so long.

However, without moving against those targeting India, it most certainly will not succeed in achieving peace or political stability at home.

Modi has done well to so far, showing uncharacteristic restraint after the Pathankot attack. The condemnation of Pakistan is muted. India has so far also not disengaged from the dialogue process that had gone into overdrive after Modi's unscheduled and unexpected visit to Pakistan.

There are enough extremist elements within Modi's own party who couldn't care less and shoot their mouths off, frequently embarrassing him. The BJP's sour ally, the Shiv Sena, continues to thrive on anti-Pakistan rhetoric. A carping Congress party is bringing up the rear, adding to Modi's woes. He is as handicapped by these elements as Sharif has been by the army, the ISI and the fundamentalists.

Never in the history of Indo-Pakistan relations have prime ministers from the two countries needed each other more than Modi and Sharif.

Both of them have so far had patchy domestic records in office after grandly succeeding in elections that brought them to power. Both of them badly need a significant success to take the wind out of their critics' sails and be assured of their place in history. What can be more spectacular than an enduring Indo-Pak rapprochement? One Gujarati liberated the country from colonial rule while another contributed to its split at creation; now

a third is on overdrive to reconcile the two parts and bring peace to South Asia and with it the promise of a kind of prosperity that the region has not seen in a long, long time.

Whatever our views on Modi, one needs to acknowledge that he has broken with the past and reached out to Pakistan in ways no Indian leader has ever done. He has shown an enormous appetite for risk and displayed a pugilist's guts to pick up the pieces every time one of his efforts has backfired and has come back into the 'peace' ring fighting.

But Modi cannot do this all by himself. If indeed he wishes to succeed, he would do well to make peace with Pakistan an inclusive effort, by bringing on board parties of all political hues — especially the Congress. The last is well worth engaging as it has brilliant, experienced people whom Modi and India badly need.

A sharing of credit is easier when it comes to foreign policy than any domestic issue. By doing so Modi will not lose any of his lustre; instead he will shine as those with him glow. For now, however, let us give Modi two guarded cheers and reserve a third for when he makes the pursuit of peace with Pakistan an all-party inclusive effort and not just one that so far has been driven by him alone to the exclusion of everyone else.

This article appeared in the Hindu Business Line on 19 January 2018 but has a relevance today when peace with Pakistan appears to be a real possibility

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OF SUICIDES AND YOUTH

Shri V.S.Ravi I.P.S.(Retd.)

Even though during the last few decades scientists have been rather optimistically talking in terms of 'life extension' and cures for many diseases including such dreaded diseases as cancer and AIDS (and now COVID -19, the most dreaded disease in human history) it is ironical and also sad that in our own age, particularly in some advanced countries, a very large number of youth are taking their own lives more frequently than even before in the past.

The real tragedy of the poor is the poverty of their aspirations.

- Adam Smith

In the last 30 years or so, there has been a disturbing and dramatic increase in suicides of young people all over the world. It is now believed that unless society commits more of its time, energy and medical resources to this serious and widespread problem, many people in the prime of their youth would not benefit from the gains made by medical science leave alone, experience the joys and pleasures of a full rich life.

IN AMERICA ALONE SOME 20000 YOUNG PEOPLE KILL THEMSELVES, AND THAT ABOUT 200000 OTHERS MAKE THE ATTEMPT'

It is estimated that in America alone in respect of which statistics are readily available), every year, some 20000 young people kill themselves, and that about 200000 others make the 'attempt'. The same situation exists in most of the other countries also. If we take suicides per hundred thousand, Hungary has the highest rank at 21, Finland at 16.5 and France at 14.6,

Greece ranks the lowest at 2.9, Mexico ranks second at 4.4, and Britain ranks third at 5: Constraints of space do not permit me to analyse the reasons for these scores.

Each of these stories is indeed a study in human suffering. Viewed together, the figures constitute a national tragedy. Now, however, that the advanced countries are awakening to the magnitude of the problem, the next task will be to go beyond mere concern and start formulating effective strategies to bring this strange mental ailment under control.

In the past little systematic research had not been carried out on the problem of suicide. People all over the world have been regarding suicide only as an individual family problem to be discussed in the privacy of one's home, not a burden to be treated scientifically and shared by society as a whole. The attitude, however, is likely to change in the future in view of the interest being shown in this regard by many right-thinking people, particularly scientists.

The intense social pressures generated by this age of anxiety weigh on youth, aggravating the general turmoil and insecurity. Many young people silently

endure the inhospitable atmosphere of discord-filled homes; they are abused either by their friends/ peers or by their quarrelling parents or meet with major setbacks at school or college or work(in the case of older youth) and run away from home, falling prey to easily accessible drugs and alcohol. Young men and women in the prime of youth resort to suicide because of a variety of reasons. Shakespeare made Hamlet say

**“Who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
The ‘oppressor’s wrong, the proud man’s contumely,
The pangs of dispriz’d love, the law’s delay,
The insolence of office, and the spurns
That patient merit of the ‘unworthy takes.”**

Indeed, the disruptive forces of society make an already unhappy youth a vulnerable and defenceless creature who is unsure of his future.

Moreover, the young people themselves watch in movies, youngsters committing suicide by hanging themselves, or taking an overdose of dangerous drugs or deliberately falling on the railway track in front of a moving train.

Taking a close look at such suicides, it would appear that a large number of them are the final results of psychiatric disorders, including depression and manic depressive disease. It is not unlikely that some kind of familial and perhaps genetic factor also plays an important role. It is believed that approximately 40 to 50 per cent of young people who kill themselves have a close family member who also had committed or had attempted suicide.

Scientists at Columbia University in the United States have been carrying out one of the most systematic studies on suicides ever undertaken. By carefully studying the lives of youth who had committed suicide and by reviewing the psychological and social factors involved, these scientists were able to uncover several individual problems that form the background of suicidal acts.

For example, they noticed that youth prone to impulsive acting-out behaviour (for a variety of

I don't think that it is accidental that India makes software and China makes hardware. Software requires a certain kind of literacy, and I think this was in part of Sanskrit literacy.

- Sheldon Pollock

reasons) face the highest risk of 'completed' suicide. Youth with a constant complaining attitude or irritable temperament and highly perfectionist personalities were also found to be at risk.

What then is the solution or the answer to this growing menace which is responsible for striking down many young people without even giving them a chance to enjoy the remaining years of their lives? Though the best means of preventing such suicides have still not been discovered, scientists feel that there are many steps we can take even now on the basis of our limited current knowledge.

We must look seriously and compassionately at each attempt. It must be recognised that anyone who has attempted suicide had been at substantially increased risk for actually committing suicide, especially during the preceding two years. Therefore, steps must be taken to monitor the person's behaviour and movements, particularly during stressful situations.

Serious efforts must be made by law and order enforcement agencies as well as by social thinkers to curtail drug and alcohol abuse among youth, as these two items are commonly used by suicide victims. Enlightened education in schools and colleges and systematic parental guidance can be of great help in this regard.

Further, since dramatic media presentations of suicides can be potentially disastrous, anyone preparing such material should seek prior consultation with mental health experts. Pharmacists should not sell anti-depressants and tranquillisers to persons (particularly young people) who do not have a genuine prescription given by a licensed physician.

Mental disorders such as depression are frequent precursors of suicide, so detection and appropriate treatment of such illnesses sufficiently early may be very helpful as preventive measures. It is believed that such illnesses are amenable to treatment in 85 to 95 per cent of the cases.

There is an urgent need for teachers, employers, families and friends, in fact, all those who

come in contact with the young people, to identify without hesitation at sufficiently early stage children in trouble. Young people who are isolated, or show less enjoyment of their activities, or have substantial difficulty in eating or sleeping and keep losing weight excessively would qualify automatically as possible candidates who need urgent attention, and early attempts to cure the condition.

Those who have the most frequent contact with young people, especially teachers and counsellors, have to be sensitive to the early signs of mental disturbance. They also need the skills to appraise the situation and raise the subject with a young person, and his family if that seems proper. Psychiatrists, preferably those who know the young person's family background would be of immense help. Treatment may include sessions of counselling and pressure, prescription of drugs like tranquillisers and anti-depressants for a few days a week for a few months under strict medical supervision. A sympathetic psychiatrist would be able to identify the precise factor which is causing depression or anxiety. Here I would like to make a pertinent observation. Many physicians tend to make a colossal blunder in assuming that a mental patient has no serious medical condition in the sense that a heart attack or appendicitis or a gastrointestinal is. In actual fact, a mental patient suffers more. In his mind, there is a hell that physicians do not appreciate. When a mental patient approaches him for treatment, he pays little or no attention to his tale of woe and prescribes a minute dose of a mild tranquilliser and gets rid of him. Sometimes the physician also ridicules the patient in front of patients who have come for a physical ailment, causing untold harm to the mental patient in question. This is an act of mental cruelty that goes against the Hippocratic oath.

But perhaps, more important than all that has been said earlier is the realisation that our society needs an increase in support for research on youth who commit suicide and the behaviour disorders that precede it. Early identification and scientific analysis of the underlying factors will improve both our understanding of the problem and our ability to

prevent it. For, ultimately, only such well-planned research can lead to the discovery of techniques to protect the mental health of disturbed young people who, if treated in time, may well prove to be an asset to any society or nation.

(Courtesy: *News Time Now*, December 20, 2020)

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THREE WOMEN AND FOUR DESTINIES

Rereading the Life of Mrinalini Devi

Prof. Sachidananda Mohanty

Member, Governing Board, Auroville Foundation, MHRD,
Govt. of India, Adjunct Professor,
School of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences,
Auro University, Surat Former Vice Chancellor,
Central University of Orissa and
Former Professor and Head,
Department of English University of Hyderabad

Prologue

Followers of Sri Aurobindo know that Mrinalini Devi who was preparing to come to Pondicherry, following the consent of Sri Aurobindo in 1918, fell a victim to the widespread influenza that was raging then in Bengal. We also know from the letter of Mrinalini's father Bhupal Chandra Bose that, after Sri Aurobindo's departure for Pondicherry, she had become a close disciple of Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother, who addressed her affectionately as *Bau-Ma* (daughter-in-law in Bengali) since the Holy Mother regarded 'Sri Aurobindo as her son'.

The sad and sudden passing away of Mrinalini Devi before her time in the 32nd year of her life on 17 December 1918, will always strike us as a particularly cruel blow delivered by the hands of destiny. She was a companion who doted on her husband, admired his steadfast sacrifice and dedication to the cause of the nation. She spent brief but memorable periods with him at various places: Baroda, Nainital and Calcutta, among others. She was blessed to have correspondence with Sri Aurobindo that revealed the inner working of his mind and consciousness. But for her, we would not have come to know of the 'madnesses'¹ as spelt out in his letters to her.

Mrinalini's father, Bhupal Chandra Bose (born 1861) graduated from Calcutta University in 1881 and, going by his own account, received an agricultural training as a State scholar at the Royal Agricultural College, Cirencester, England. He entered Government service in 1888 and served as an Agricultural Officer for 28 years in Bengal and Assam before retiring in 1916. He settled down at Ranchi after his retirement.

Mrinalini was born on 6 March 1887 in Calcutta, and spent her childhood there. She received her early education from a private tutor, and after her father's transfer to Shillong was sent to the Brahmo School at Calcutta where she lived as a boarder until the time of her marriage. At the school she became a close friend of Miss Swarnalata Das, several years her senior in age. Mrinalini's second close friend, in later life, was Miss Sudhira Bose, later known as Sister Sudhira in the Sri Ramakrishna Circles, who worked as a teacher at the Sister Nivedita School, Calcutta.

As Bhupal Chandra Bose recounts in his 'Reminiscences,' Sri Aurobindo first met Mrinalini at the house her uncle S. J. Girish Chandra Bose in Calcutta. The marriage took place in April 1901. She spent time with Sri Aurobindo at Baroda, and later with his maternal relatives at Deoghar, [now in Jharkhand], and with her parents at Shillong. [now in Meghalaya]. She was present with her husband at the time of his arrest at 48, Grey Street in May 1908 and always aspired to join Sri Aurobindo at Pondicherry. Alas, that was not to be. Fate willed otherwise.

After her passing, following her wish, her mentor at Calcutta, Sister Sudhira disposed of her ornaments. The proceeds of roughly 2000 Rupees, with Sri Aurobindo's permission were made into a trust for the education of poor and destitute girls. Some items, intimate in nature, were sent to Sri Aurobindo at Pondicherry.

Mrinalini who shares the same name as that of the spouse of Tagore, remains for her qualities of the head and heart, and her sense of unflinching dedication, a highly revered figure in the Aurobindonian circles. This is not to minimise the world of human sorrow,

In a world of increasingly diffuse global power,
no single player can drive the global health agenda.

- Ashish Jha

longing and loss that must have been her constant companion in life. After all, even the Avatars go through human ordeals of pain and suffering as the inescapable part of the human condition.

To understand Mrinalini Devi better we need to turn our attention to three small books that I would like to recommend to fellow seekers. These are: *Nivedita: As I Saw Her* by Saralabala Sarkar, first published in 1914, rpt.1999; *Sister Nivedita Girls' School*, Kolkata, Secondly, *Sri Sarada Devi: The Holy Mother Life and Teachings* by Swami Tapasyananda, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, and finally, *Sister Sudhira* by Pravrajika Prabuddhaprana. All three personalities played a crucial role in the life of Mrinalini Devi. They were mentors who were a source of inspiration to her. By the ideals they cherished and by the conduct of their daily life, they sustained Mrinalini as she must have battled her aloneness and longings steadfastly. Nivedita and Sarada Devi certainly offer us the example of the ideal servitor. Outstanding women as both were, though perhaps not of the same ranking, both took inspiration from Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda and carved out a path for themselves.

Sri Sarada Devi: The Holy Mother

We learn from Swami Tapasyananda's book that Sarada Devi was born on 22 December 1853 in a poor but cultured Brahmin family of Bengal in the village of Jayarambati in the Bankura district, situated about sixty miles to the west of Calcutta.² She was the eldest daughter of Ramachandra Mukherjee and Shyamsundari Devi. She had no formal schooling and taught herself to read and write Bengali in later years. She got married to Gadadhar, as Ramakrishna was known then. A child bride, she grew up in the village and at the age of eighteen, accompanied by her father in March 1872, travelled to Dakshineswar Temple at Calcutta to meet the ailing Sri Ramakrishna. Barring brief intervals; she remained by his side till the Master passed away in 1886. Swami Tapasyananda sums up her character thus:

The type of personality into which she was shaped through that training was one characterised by

inexhaustible patience and peace, extreme simplicity combined with dignity, a non-turbulent but compelling spiritual fervor, a loving temperament that knew no distinction between friend and foe, and a maternal attitude of a spontaneous type towards all that charmed and brought under her influence everyone who came near her.³

She lived in 'a small room in the northern side of the temple compound,' with a clear view of that of Ramakrishna. It was a 'small low-roofed room of about nine and half feet by eight with a verandah four and quarter feet wide surrounding it. Besides being her living room, it served as her provision store, kitchen and reception room as well.'⁴

We go through several sections of the books such as 'Spiritual and Secular Training', 'The Mother as a True Sahadharmini,' 'The Shodosi Pooja', 'Relationship of Mutual Love and Respect,' 'Pilgrimage to Brindavan' [after the Master's passing], 'Life at Kamarpukur and After,' 'The Exalted State of the Mother's Mind', 'Pilgrimage to Rameswaram,' and see the remarkable manner in which Sarada Devi led her life in a selfless manner, gave succor and initiation to the many who sought her out as their Guru and mentor. It is this heavenly personality that gave spiritual succor to Mrinalini Devi at the time of her needs.

Sister Nivedita

Next comes *Nivedita As I Saw Her* by Saralabala Sarkar, translated into English by Probhati Mukherjee. The book was earlier published in *Samvit*, the journal of Sri Sarada Math and is closely associated with the Ramakrishna Sarada Mission Sister Nivedita Girls' School. Saralabala had close contacts with Sister Nivedita on account of her association with the School founded by her mentor. She had in this book presented, in her own words an intimate portrait of the Sister's life.

Saralabala writes that right from the time Nivedita came to India in January 1898 till 13 October 1911 when she left the world, her one purpose life was to take care of the poor, needy and the destitute. Her compassionate self knew that no progress of India

True freedom requires keeping us free from the market.
Market dependence is a profound state of unfreedom.

- Mike Konczal

was possible without the welfare and upliftment of the Indian women. One of the main tasks she took up was to see that young girls and women grew up with 'truth, friendliness and noble ideals.' She took up a vow of renunciation and completely abandoned all sense of self. Aptly named as 'Nivedita,' (the Dedicated One), she started a small school in Bosepara Lane. She lived here with Sister Christine and carried out her mission.

Nivedita identified principally four sets of people who stood for the transformation of India: 'social progressives' who seek 'the destruction of ancient social customs', 'political activists' who advocate the 'adoption of a western political system', the third who believe in the need to 'revitalise the various religious centres' and the fourth who enunciate the removal of economic grievances from the body politic. Nivedita suggests that beyond all the four lay the question of the resurgence of the Indian culture, a new renaissance that is all-inclusive and would embrace all sections of Indian society. Two things, she said, were necessary to carry this out: an intense love for the mother land and or love for every Indian irrespective of caste, creed or community. Next came the importance of education that seeks 'the enhancement of our innate abilities through self-effort', and through sacrifice without a sense of egoism or desire. She wrote: 'For the person on whose heart knowledge reigns, education is no longer a process of acquiring external information; it becomes an inner experience of that which was previously not experienced.'⁵ Nivedita was convinced that her school would be the nucleus for the right kind of education for Indian women. She welcomed girls of all background.'

Nivedita's views are well captured in two of her books, *The Web of Indian Life* and *The Master as I Saw Him*. She ran the school with Sister Christine and Sudhira Devi. She gave preference to the running of the school and minimised all personal expenses. This took a toll on her and she became anemic day by day. The school faced a financial crunch and when no funds came despite her best efforts and despite

public appeals in the press, she was finally forced to close it down. Rabindranath Tagore wrote in his article, 'Sister Nivedita' that 'she did not maintain the school on funds received either from the public or from excess money. It was run completely on her sacrificing her own means of existence.'⁶

Art, Mathematics, history, flower painting, *alpana*, clay modeling — Nivedita taught all these with devotion to the young girls. Her classroom addresses were direct and inspired. As Saralabala recalls:

How often have we seen Nivedita in deep absorption at some thought! If any talk of India rose, she would become deeply meditative and say to the girls, Bharat Varsha! Bharat Varsha! Bharat Varsha! Mother! Mother! Mother! India's young girls, you must all repeat, Bharat Varsha! Bharat Varsha! Bharat Varsha! Ma! Ma! Ma! That India was the soul of her soul, the heart of her heart, even so dear and sacred to her, cannot be expressed in mere words.'⁷

Nivedita was fond of the Bengali language. One day she asked the student to state the word, 'line' in Bengali. She was disappointed when none could reply until one came forward with the word '*rekha*'. Her joy knew no bounds. She started repeating the word over and over again, '*rekha, rekha, rekha*'.⁸ She took the students on excursion to nearby places including to the Kali temple at Dakshineswar and the museums. She narrated to them the stories of her visit to pilgrim places like Badrinath and Kedarnath.

Although Nivedita spoke of the importance of conjugal love and the responsibility of the wife, she underlined the fact that the devoted wife Gandhari never compromised with ethical principles. Gandhari did not say to Duryodhana, "May you be victorious my son." Instead, she said, "Where there is dharma, there is victory." Nivedita signed her name invariably as 'Nivedita of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda.'

When Sarada Devi came to visit the *Udbodhan House* in Bagh Bazar, Calcutta, Nivedita used to be

Resort to peace and friendship when temporarily obliged to do so;
use war and defense as your actual policy.

- Prince Gong

overjoyed. Visits by the Holy Mother to her school were special occasions that drew the best in her. With the passing of Nivedita, Sister Christine managed the affairs of the school and continued to face a great deal of hardships. The latter passed away on 27 March 1930 in New York.

Sister Sudhira

At the instance of Sister Nivedita and Swami Vivekananda, the 'Ramakrishna School for Girls' was opened at No.16, Bosepara Lane, near Sarada Devi's residence near Bagh Bazar.

The daughter of Ashutosh Bose and Elokshi Devi of aristocratic background, Sudhira had three sisters and two brothers, her eldest brother Devabrata became a revolutionary and later became a disciple of Sarada Devi. He edited the Bengali monthly, *Udbodhan* for a few years. He later joined the Advaita Ashram of Mayavati in the Himalayas and became the editor of *Prabuddha Bharata*, the official journal of the Ramakrishna order. He encouraged Sudhira to be an independent and self-respecting girl. Not interested in marriage, she joined the Nivedita School near Bagh Bazar in Calcutta in 1906 when she was about sixteen or seventeen.

From Advaita Ashram at Calcutta he wrote to his sister:

You need a lot of patience and faith in yourself. You have to nourish love. How? Making your heart vast by faith and patience, always and everywhere, make a strong inward resolution that in any case 'I will love' whether or not I receive, I will give it. When going about my daily work with every breath, I will love, come what may. Don't pay attention to whether anything happens as a result, from all you hear about. Power or Samadhi or self-knowledge, love is the only thing that matters. Love is the only thing to get.⁹

The revolutionaries were inspired by the Ramakrishna Vivekananda order. Many of them including Jivantara, Nalinikanta Kar, Devabrata and others received the spiritual sustenance for carrying

out nationalist activities from the Ramakrishna Mission.

Sudhira had a special relationship with the Holy Mother: Sarada Devi always enquired about Sudhira's welfare as she did of Mrinalini. Sudhira did her best to earn extra money by giving singing lessons to rich households. Thus she spent the money for the upkeep of her girls in the school. Speaking of Sarada Devi, Sudhira wrote in a letter:

How can I tell you who Holy Mother is? Thinking of her one feels as though one has entered heaven. When we are Mother's daughters, what have we to fear? Her strength is working in us. We are fortunate that we have got a place at her holy feet. Yogis and devotees do so many austerities to get her Darshan; while we just by her grace have come to be known as her daughter. Indeed, it is only by her grace that we have become worthy of being her daughters.¹⁰

Sudhira's association with Mrinalini Devi forms a significant chapter in her life. She knew Mrinalini as her neighbor in her childhood days at Hatibagan. At the time of Sri Aurobindo's arrest by the police, it was Sudhira who came to Mrinalini's rescue in 1908. Sudhira would take Mrinalini to the Nivedita's school and she would be treated very well by the children as the revered wife of Sri Aurobindo.

Introduced to Sarada Devi, Mrinalini was welcomed most enthusiastically by the Holy Mother. She said to Mrinalini:

Do not be restless my child; it is no use being anxious. Your husband has totally taken refuge in God. By Thakur's blessings he will be out [from jail] since he will be found not guilty. But don't insist him to have a family life. That small mindedness is not for him.¹¹

Sarada Devi advised her to always read *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and visit her regularly. She thought that no initiation was necessary since Mrinalini was already under the guidance of Aurobindo.

Mrinalini visited Sri Aurobindo in jail in the company of her father. The letters that Sudhira exchanged with Mrinalini throw light on their close bonding and the importance both attached to spiritual guidance in life.

In her letter dated 30 July 1910, for instance, addressed to Menu (Mrinalini) after Aurobindo had reached Pondicherry, Sudhira reflects upon the need to set up an Ashram under the guidance of Sarada Devi for spiritual-minded women. A letter written from Benares, speaks of her own spiritual growth and advises Menu to be in constant touch with Holy Mother in a spirit of surrender.¹² Sudhira helped many young women like Parul to escape from their painful lives of being child brides and to seek refuge in the Nivedita School.

Sudhira and Christina developed some differences with Nivedita regarding the running of the school. On 13 April 1911, Christina left for Mayavati in the Himalayas.¹³ Despite Nivedita's entreaties, Sudhira did not return to the school as can be made out from Nivedita's diary noting dated 18 July and 1 September 1911. Soon Nivedita left for Darjeeling to improve her health. In October 1911, succumbing to her illness, she passed away at Darjeeling. Full of remorse, Sudhira fell ill. Sarada Devi took personal care to see that Sudhira recovered and travelled to Benares, Mathura and Brindavan on pilgrimage. All the while, she remained true to Sri Ramakrishna. Later she travelled to Shimla and stayed for a while with her brother Priyavrata.

In 1914, with the support of the trustees of the Belur Math, a boarding house for women called the Matri Mandir was set up in 1914 at a rented building at 68/2, Ramakanta Bose Street. The boarding was home to young women who wished to dedicate their lives for the spiritual cause. Sarada Devi stayed here for a month in a room upstairs. The building was an attempt to build a Math for women.

In 1917, Sudhira took the initiative for setting up an old Women's section at the Ramakrishna Mission

Home of Service in Benares. In 1918, Nivedita's school became a part of what came to be known as the Ramakrishna Mission Sister Nivedita Girls' School. In 1919, Sudhira was asked to start a girls' school in Conulla in East Bengal. Similar schools were set up in Hatibagan and Bally in Hooghly. These became the nucleus for the future Sarada Math of the Ramakrishna order.

In 1918, Sudhira lost two of her closest friends: Devabrata and Mrinalini. Devabrata passed away at the young age of 39. Mrinalini was given permission by Sri Aurobindo in 1918 to come to Pondicherry, when she suddenly fell ill. Realising that her end was near, she handed over her jewellery to Sudhira for the creation of a trust for girls' scholarship to a poor student of the Nivedita Girls' School. Meanwhile, Sarada Devi too fell ill and passed away on 21 July 1920.

Holy Mother's departure was a big loss for Sudhira. On a journey to Benares, the latter met with an accident and fell from the train. Despite the best medical treatment at the Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service at Benares, she left the earthly abode at the age of 32.

Epilogue

Thus, the lives and destinies of three outstanding women in colonial Bengal intertwined with each other through divine dispensation. Sri Sarada Devi, Sister Nivedita and Sister Sudhira were three iconic women who carved out paths for themselves in the field of education, women's emancipation and spirituality in colonial Bengal. As has been noticed, each of them also played a pivotal role in the life of Mrinalini Devi. Through the example of their lives and through their teachings, they inspired Mrinalini to live a life of courage and fortitude. Rereading Mrinalini's life through the prism of the three narratives thus gives us insights hitherto unavailable; they add new meaning to the lives of outstanding spiritual women.

* * *

Autocrats, long focused on bare survival, are now on the offensive.

- Yascha Mounk

Book Review:

A History of Visakhapatnam

Navuluri Venkateswara Rao

Prajasakti Book House, Pg.238, Rs.200/-

Visakhapatnam has been a city that came close to the heart of anyone who lived or lives there. The goodness of hardworking people, an enchanting seascape skirted by the Eastern Ghats are its eternal features. Idyllic rural and tribal getaways in two to three hours of drive have been its endearing USPs.

The Port City has been the seat of higher learning with Andhra University led by stalwarts and nurturing and producing stalwarts. While the agitation for the public sector steel plant brought it into national limelight, the sinking of Pak submarine Ghazi in the Bangladesh war hit international headlines.

The industrial face of the city, skilled workforce, the Naval might, its cosmopolitan culture and rural hinterland with rich human resources made it an ideal destination for entrepreneurs. With it poised to play an important role again being termed the executive capital, it would be worth the while to look at the history and gradual growth of the city.

Writer Navuluri Venkateswara Rao looks at the past of the “ancient habitation” through major historic events. The 238-page “A History of Visakhapatnam,” brought out by Prajasakti Book House, is the result of three years of labour by Mr. Venkateswara Rao.

While bringing out the major catalytic factors that went into the emergence of the city, he observes that it is certain that the place is more than 2000-year-old but the story of Visakhapatnam started from some point of time prior to the 11th century, the date of the Draksharamam inscription which he relies upon and closely analyses drawing from various sources. He makes an interesting link between Yarada and the present day city with pride of place for the former before the focus gradually shifted to “Vizagapatam.”

In tracing the growth of Vizagapatam and to put in perspective the history of Andhra, Kalinga, and the North Circars, Mr. Venkateswara Rao draws upon

more than 200 books, journals, the accounts of the British, studies of inscriptions etc. Apart from trade, he gives an elaborate account of the struggle for supremacy by several dynasties and subsequently the aggressors from across the border and finally the colonisers. He also deals with the religious dimensions of the time, notably the Buddhist sites in and around Visakhapatnam, the importance of the Simhachalam kshetra. He seems to be veering around to the view that it was a Buddhist shrine turned into Siva temple and finally to a Vishnaite shrine with the intervention of Sri Ramanuja. He interprets the celebration of ‘Nijarupa Darshan’ in that light.

The Dutch Connection

Forced by the Portuguese from the West Coast, the Dutch emerging as a trading power looked towards the East Coast and founded a foothold in Bimilapatam and Vizagapatam by 1616 and were trading from there.

Later vexed with the harassment by the representatives of the Nabob of Golconda at Masulipatam from where they traded and problems from interlopers the English East India Company’s Vizagapatam settlement came into being in 1668.

However, the English settlement faced a barrage of problems from the Seer Lascar of Chicacole and the local rulers also playing a role.

The powerplay involving the Nabobs of Golconda, the French forces marching as far as Chicacole and the local zamindars and the trading interests of the English with shoestring budget and having to report to Fort St George at Madras make an interesting reading.

His narration of the surrender of English Chief at Vizagpatam William Perceval to the superior French forces headed by Marquis De Bussy-Castellane on the Sand Hill in June 1757 is gripping.

The Port Saga

With economic development being the mantra and globalisation a buzzword, the teething troubles faced for the construction of the harbour and laying the railway line from Raipur to Vizianagaram should

Fixating on past glories will not help develop the ideas and policies needed in an increasingly dangerous time.

- Walter Russell Mead

be of immense interest to today's readers. It was a different point that even the Portuguese, the Dutch and the British were initially adventurous traders in dangerous times without the aid of sophisticated navigation technologies though their role as colonisers brought the country to great peril.

The making of the inner and outer harbours is not known to the layman. The author dwells upon the technicalities involved drawing from various sources and presents a detailed account on the pros and cons of scuttling ships to create breakwaters. To avoid delay in the execution of the work and making good use of the global economic slump that had kept ships idle and maintenance dear, following the idea of Vizagapatam Harbour Works Engineer-in-Chief W.C.Ash two ships "Janus" and "Willesden" were scuttled in early January 1933. This particular technique had been discussed for its efficacy.

Mr. Venkateswara Rao quotes W.C. Ash making an honest admission at a discussion at the Institution of Engineers, London, that it was not a suitable method of creating permanent breakwaters and preferred an all-weather breakwater rubble. After a cost overrun, the Vizagapatam Harbour was completed spending Rs.2.5 crore and against the scheduled 1929 was ready by October, 1933. It was an historic occasion when the steamship Jaladurga entered the Port on October 7, 1933. The Raipur-Vizianagaram railway line cost Rs.5.7 crore.

Port stands tall

Mr. Venkateswara Rao tells us that in the first year of operation the harbour handled a cargo of 1.3 lakh tons out of which exports accounted for 1.2 tons. See the phenomenal growth since then with the Visakhapatnam Port handling 72.72 million tons of cargo in 2019-20 and standing third at all-India level.

People's city

Since the country became independent, the city has been held aloft by the commanding heights of the public sector and several major industries have come. In his Preface, the author says in writing the history of Visakhapatnam one need not feel the revulsion of intrigue, treachery, bloodshed, loot etc though it had witnessed battles nearby. One remembers the words of epochal Telugu poet Sri Sri "Ee desa charita chusina emunnadi garvakaram....." The city has grown with the sweat and blood of its people, drew entrepreneurs from all over the country and its ecosystem spurred growth.

Yet another chapter was added, and promises to continue, with its return to power in 2004 the Congress Government headed by Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy chose Visakhapatnam as Tier II city for development.

Civic amenities, mass transport and measured growth policies have to be followed if the Happening City has to retain its pride of place without sliding into an overpopulated concrete jungle.

Shri G.V. Prasada Sarma

Formerly Senior Assistant Editor, *The Hindu*

CENTRE FOR POLICY STUDIES

Dwarakamayee, 50-52-19, T.P.T. Colony, Seethammadhara, Visakhapatnam - 530013.

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Website : www.centreforpolycystudiesvizag.com Email: ayyagariprasannakumar@gmail.com

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