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AMERICA VERSUS CHINA

A SERIOUS THREAT TO WORLD PEACE

“When the elephants fight it is the grass that suffers,” says an African maxim. The growing verbal clashes between the United States of America and China and the diplomatic moves being made by both of them are ominous signs for world peace and harmony. Jessica Chen Weiss, Professor of China and Asia-Pacific Studies at Cornell University writes in the Centennial issue of *Foreign Affairs* (September-October 2022) expressing deep concern at the deterioration of the relations between the United States and China. It may ‘lead to catastrophic consequences for the American society and its global leadership’ says the author. Though the United States is making ‘calibrated efforts to deter Chinese aggression, enhance resilience against Chinese aggression and reinforce the U.S. alliances the deterioration in relationship with China will undermine both American interest and values. Professor Weiss suggests that ‘the United States must commit with actions as well as words to a positive-sum action rather than looking back nostalgically at its past pre-eminence, displaying an affirmative and inclusive global vision through enhanced resilience’.

On the other hand, the Chinese President Xi Jinping has taken the hard line ever since he took over the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party and headship of the government. Xi Jinping has been relentlessly and aggressively working for China’s dominance in world politics. In contrast to his predecessor Deng Xiaoping’s policy of gradualism, Xi Jinping has been focusing on ‘series of policy measures that would allow the market to play the decisive role’. He began to adopt a policy based on ‘Leninist politics and Marxist economics’ and his doctrine ‘Road to Rejuvenation’ is based on strong opposition to the policies of the western powers and Japan for their role in ‘China’s 100 years of national humiliation’. If the capitalist western powers led by the United States of America dominated the politics of the 20th century, post Mao’s China’s emerged under Deng as a force to reckon with the second largest economy. Xi Jinping has proudly declared that China is firmly committed to Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy, to Leninist politics and Marxist economics.

The year 2022 has witnessed a paradigm shift in world affairs. William Macaskill of Oxford University writes that ‘humanity today is barely an infant struggling to walk’ in the Age of Uncertainty. ‘From climate change to nuclear war, engineered pandemics, uncontrolled artificial intelligence (AI), and the other destructive technologies not yet foreseen, a worrying numbers risks conspire to threaten the end of humanity’ warns Macaskill.

The new year and the years that follow may witness the continuation, if not further deterioration in the relationship between China and the United States, particularly over Taiwan which the former cannot treat like another Hong Kong. An interesting development is the announcement of Donald Trump’s statement that he would contest in the next American Presidential elections. According to Kevin Rudd, President of the Asia Society and former Prime Minister of Australia, Xi Jinping is not ‘completely secure’. China’s business elites and domestic growth engines have slowed down. ‘The rapidly aging population, a shrinking work force and low productivity growth are among long term structural weaknesses’. There is a likelihood, according to some analysts, of China coming under pressure due to adverse economic factors. The world’s second largest economy will find it hard to satisfy the needs of the people in healthcare and pension entitlements and in pursuing national security goals and industrial policy on one side and the Belt and Road Initiative on the other. Still it is a testing time for the United States and its allies, according to the former Australian Prime Minister. The world no longer looks to India for trouble shooting. India led by Narendra Modi has, of course, neither the desire nor the capability to play the Nehruvian role of peace maker in world affairs.

- The Editor

Xi’s Marxist nationalism is an ideological blueprint for the future;
it is the truth about China that is hiding in plain sight.

- Kevin Rudd

WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOUR

Ukraine war offers lesson that military leaders must render unbiased advice

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AS the world awaits Vladimir Putin's next move in the Russia-Ukraine war, which is in its ninth month, it is obvious that he has blundered as a strategic leader. Questions are being asked, not only about the quality of military advice being rendered by Russian Generals, but also about Putin's rationality and receptivity to contrarian views.

While it is important for us to draw the right lessons from Russia's decision-making processes, there are other reasons, too, why this conflict should engage the attention of India's military. Firstly, it has shattered the belief that future wars will be 'short and sharp', and that our military can get by with war reserves adequate for just a few weeks. Secondly, since 70%-80% of India's military hardware is of Russian and Ukrainian origin, its performance in combat as well as the efficacy of tactics employed by both belligerents will be of vital interest. Lastly, there is a need to visualise how lessons of the war will be interpreted by a rejuvenated Xi Jinping in his third presidential term to advance China's territorial ambitions.

For us, the ongoing 30-month Sino-Indian standoff in Ladakh gives two reasons for concern. Firstly, it betrays a want of clarity about the strategic aims that have underpinned China's diplomatic and military belligerence towards India, and its territorial creep in Ladakh. Secondly, it is a reminder that not only does India lack a China-specific strategy, but also has yet to formulate a national security strategy (NSS) spelling out national aims and objectives that should guide its policies.

However, it is essential that the formulation of NSS be preceded by a strategic defence review; an exercise comprising of a military self-assessment as well as threat evaluation. In the absence of both, India's politico-bureaucratic establishment continues to deprive itself of a realistic picture of its own and adversary's strengths and weaknesses, thereby engendering complacency which could lead to flawed decision-making.

A more worrisome impact of these omissions is that they have left the military in a quandary about resolving its 'ends-ways-means' dilemma. Historically, the roots of this dilemma were seen to lie in the indifference of the Indian politician towards national security issues. A manifestation of this being the absence of any debate or discussion in Parliament on defence matters.

This seemed to change in September, 2018, when the present government deployed Special Forces to deliver a punitive strike inside Pakistan, breaching the self-imposed restraint of previous regimes. The air strike that followed in February 2019, targeting a Pakistani terrorist facility, reaffirmed the government's resolve. However, with rival political parties jockeying to extract mileage from these events, this new-found political interest brought with it some avoidable complexities for the military leadership. While not defending themselves could jeopardise their credibility, being too vociferous could attract the charge of becoming politicised.

There were several excellent reasons why India's post-Independence military leadership had decided to firmly exclude politics from the military ethos. Were the military to align itself with a political agenda, operational decisions could be skewed to please politicians and become a recipe for military disasters. If political loyalty were to become a criterion for advancement, military professionalism and combat effectiveness would suffer. Above all, as seen in our close neighbourhood, entry of politics into the military is sure to invite Praetorianism.

Selection for senior military posts remains the prerogative of the government and 'political acceptability' of the individual may tilt the balance in his favour. However, the selected individual must not consider himself indebted to the establishment, nor should the latter demand a quid pro quo. The military ethos requires the soldier to retain independence in professional matters and loyally bear 'true faith and allegiance to the Constitution of India', an oath he swears 'even to the peril of my life'. The fulcrum of military leadership is poised so delicately on the attribute of integrity that the slightest deviation from rectitude erodes the military leader's credibility within his command.

An essential element of integrity is having the moral courage to convey unvarnished views in a

Technology feeds our pleasure centres but is squeezing out our human spirit, intensifying our search for meaning.

- Mahatma Gandhi

frank and forthright manner to one's superiors. This can be difficult in a culture where respect for elders/superiors is ingrained and dissent frowned upon. The Russia-Ukraine conflict is, possibly, an example of how failure of sycophantic military advisers to render honest advice can lead to disasters. Thus, the ability to 'speak truth to power', especially when the truth is unpalatable, is an attribute which should be valued and encouraged by the military.

In the new institution of the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), we have not only a unitary head of the armed forces, and 'principal military adviser' to the Raksha Mantri, but also the first military officer to be recognised as a functionary of the Government of India. As the military's interface with the political establishment, the CDS is well-positioned to insulate the armed forces from political pressures by insisting that 'enhancement of combat efficiency' must remain the sole criterion for imposition of any change of military policies or concepts.

India's democracy requires that our armed forces must remain detached from politics, and our security situation demands that military leaders be bold enough to render unbiased professional advice to the government, without fear or favour.

'The Tribune' November 8, 2022

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AN EULOGY FOR SARDAR PATEL

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Ex-D.G.P., A.P. and

Former Governor of Tamil Nadu

1. In the context of the Amrit Mahotsav of India's Independence, nothing can be more appropriate than a homage to the memory of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the architect of Independent India, as it exists today.
2. Of the close lieutenants of the "Mahatma" during the independence struggle, Patel came from the humblest of circumstances. As his life would progressively reveal, he was a natural leader who combined in him a born rebel, an astute agitator, an organizer par excellence, a tough but shrewd negotiator, an outstanding administrator and above all, a memorable statesman. As a human being, suffice it to say, he hid behind his rough exterior, seeming

taciturnity and stern countenance; a tender and caring heart, a stoical temperament, which bore pain and tragedy alike, a keen sense of humour and a ready and unhesitating willingness for sacrifice.

3. Even as a student, Patel displayed glimpses of his future leadership. Never to suffer an insult or injustice, he brought three of his class teachers to account for their delinquencies. On another occasion, he accepted the challenge of a fellow patidar, contesting for a seat on the Nadiad Municipal Committee that he would shave his head if anyone could defeat him, by successfully fielding a teacher against him from his school.
4. "Slow rises worth, by poverty depressed", wrote Samuel Johnson. Because of his family circumstances, Patel could complete his matriculation only when he was 22 years old. For the same reason, he had to be content with becoming a district pleader, by passing the prescribed examination through self-study. To fulfill his ambition of becoming a barrister, he chose to practise in criminal law which offered quick returns, and made his mark in no time at Godhra and later at Borsad. Part of his interest in going to London was also due to his curiosity to know how a small Nation could rule such a large country as India from 7000 miles away.
5. Having earned enough to fulfil his ambition, he secured admission to the courts of Inn in London in 1905. However, his older brother, Vithalbhair Patel, wished to go in his place by availing the coincidence that both of them were known by the name VJ Patel. Vallabhbhai not only stood down in favour of his elder brother but supported the brother's family in his own house for the duration of the brother's stay in London. Five years later, he sailed to England and emulated his brother by finishing the course six months ahead and standing first in the examination. On his return home, Vallabhbhai moved to Ahmedabad and took no time to rise to the top of the Bar. Living like a western aristocrat, he made his presence felt at the club by his extraordinary skills at the game of bridge and dominated the social discourse.
6. When Gandhiji returned to India from South

So long as our pleasures dominate, it cannot be said that spiritual life has begun.

- Sri Sathya Sai Baba

Africa, Patel was at the peak of his profession and evinced little interest in politics. He pooh-poohed the credentials of Gandhiji to lead India to self rule with sarcastic remarks about his political and other precepts. But Gandhiji's address to the political conference of the Bombay Presidency, held at Godhra in October, 1916 and his success in Champaran, Bihar against the indigo planters made a deep impression on Patel. Also, a barb at him by a friend that the public could not be served from the club stirred his conscience. Therefore, when Gandhiji was elected in 1917, as the president of Gujarat Sabha he was able to persuade Patel to become the Secretary of the Sabha. At the turn of 1920-1921, the Saba was converted into Gujarat Provincial Congress Committee and Patel was elected as its first President, to continue in that position till 1946.

7. Because of his fearless willingness to look the Englishman in the eye, he was prevailed upon to get elected to the Municipal Board of Ahmedabad in 1917. Functioning as the chairman of the sanitary committee, he forced the exit of two British I C S officers as Municipal Commissioner and a white Municipal Engineer, for various acts of commission and omission. Later, during the various agitations he conducted against the colonial government, his frequent and successful confrontations with Frederick Pratt, a top British I. C. S. Officer, would have warmed the cockles of every patriotic Indian's heart. In 1924 he was elected, as a Congress nominee, to the office of Chairman of the Municipal Board. During his two stints in the Municipality, Patel displayed rare administrative acumen and outstanding leadership in crisis, by the way he twice tackled unprecedented floods in Sabarmati River as also two outbreaks each of famine and plague. In recognition of his good work in vastly improving the civic amenities and services as also finances, the Bombay Government gave a special grant of Rs.1.25 Crores to the Municipality, notwithstanding his discontinuance of water supply at concessional rates to the Cantonment and the Civil Lines where the white population lived. Jawahar Lal Nehru became the Municipal Chairman of Allahabad at around the same time but threw

his hands up after one year, with the lament that it was impossible to deal with a recalcitrant provincial government.

8. Patel's organizational excellence was also on full display during the two annual sessions of the Congress held in Gujarat. The first one held in 1921, on the banks of Sabarmati river in Ahmedabad, was draped all over in khadi, thereby benefiting khadi spinners and weavers. For the second annual session in 1938, held on the banks of Tapti River in Haripura village, Patel built a temporary village with every amenity possible, in 500 acres of land, to accommodate over 75000 delegates and visitors. It was a testimony to his imagination and planning.
9. Between 1917 and 1929, Patel conducted with conspicuous success, as many as six historic mass agitations/ satyagrahas against the colonial government, with or without the guidance of Gandhiji. These related to demands for : (a) discontinuance of the practice of 'Veth' i.e., free services from villagers to visiting officials; (b) postponement of collection of land revenue from farmers in Kheda district of Gujarat, on account of the distress caused by failure of the monsoon in the years 1915-16 and excessive rainfall in 1917; (c) freeing municipal schools from government control as a corollary to boycotting government schools which was one of the five planks of the ' Non Cooperation' movement launched by Gandhiji in 1920-21; (d) right to carry the national flag through the Civil Lines of Nagpur (1923); (e) withdrawal of punitive tax imposed on the people of Borsad Taluq in Kheda district, for their alleged failure to cooperate with the authorities in controlling heinous crime like murders and dacoities (1924) and, lastly (f) withdrawal of the increase in land revenue in Bardoli Taluq of Surat district in Gujarat (1927-28).
10. All these campaigns, particularly Bardoli, in their details, provide a classic and comprehensive lesson in planning, preparation, organization, communication, morale building and negotiating tactics- all ingredients of outstanding leadership. No other compatriot of Patel in the Congress hierarchy could claim to

Political changes produce certain results, but the essential changes are in the spirit and outlook of a nation.

- Jawaharlal Nehru

have toured as much as Patel did in his home turf of Gujarat. He did so mostly by foot and “ate what and where he could and slept where he could”. In the process, he collected and developed a large band of intrepid and tireless colleagues, who stood by him in whichever task he would undertake, within Gujarat and outside.

11. Out of Bardoli, Mr. Patel emerged as Sardar Patel and a popular candidate for the presidency of the Congress party, at the Calcutta session in December 1928. Motilal Nehru who had earlier conveyed to Gandhiji, his desire to see his son Jawaharlal as the Congress President before he passed away, wrote a letter to the Mahatma in July 1928, endorsing Patel's preponderant claim but with a proviso that 'failing him his son Jawaharlal would be the best choice'. Despite such compelling credentials, Gandhiji would choose Motilal Nehru for the presidency in 1928 and his son, Jawaharlal Nehru in 1929. As a result, Patel had to wait for the next chance in March 1931, at Karachi. A month earlier, Motilal would pass away.
12. At Lahore, full Independence and not Dominion Status, was declared as the goal of the Congress. In the 'Salt Satyagraha' launched on 6 April 1930, after Gandhiji's famous 'Dandimarch', Gujarat, led by Patel was again in the forefront and extended the defiance to payment of land revenue and picketing of liquor shops, as well as those selling foreign cloth. Their example spread to other parts of the Country. Patel was imprisoned thrice. To secure the participation of the Congress party in the Second Round Table Conference held in late 1931-- the First Conference in 1930 having been boycotted by the Party, Irwin, the Governor General, made a climbdown to release all the prisoners and negotiated the Gandhi-Irwin Pact under which he agreed to restoration of status quo ante. The Second Round Table was a failure too.
13. In the meantime, Willingdon, a high Tory and rank imperialist, succeeded Irwin and virtually repudiated the Pact leading to a threat by Gandhiji to revive the agitation. The Congress leadership was again put behind the bars. Gandhiji and Patel were sent to Yeravda Jail near Pune on 2 February 1932. While Gandhiji was released in August 1933 on a threat to go on an indefinite fast, the third one by him while in prison, Patel was released only in August 1934. The Congress suspended civil disobedience in May 1934 following the issue of a White Paper by the British Government.
14. Based on the White Paper, the Government of India Act was enacted in 1935. After passing the baton as Congress President to Rajendra Prasad in October, 1934, Patel plunged into election management. In 1935 he took over from an ailing Ansari, the position of Chairman of the Congress Parliamentary Board, responsible for management of the Party's affairs in the Provincial and Central Legislatures. Patel ran the electoral machine as effectively as he conducted the agitational movements. In the general election to Central and Provincial Assemblies, conducted in 1935-37, he looked after the selection of candidates; raised funds; guided the selection of legislature party leaders and tendered advice to them as Premiers, as and when it was sought. In spite of the controversies which surrounded him over the denial of premiership to K F Nariman in Bombay and the ouster of N B Khare as the Premier in Central Province, his actions were finally vindicated.
15. Keeping in view the propaganda needs of the general election to provincial assemblies under the new Act, Gandhiji would, for a second time, nominate Nehru in 1936 to succeed Prasad as President. In 1937, Nehru wished to continue as Congress President for yet another term. The Party, however, favoured Patel for the office. Once again, Gandhiji would ask Patel to stand down in favour of Nehru despite the constant friction between the working committee led by Patel and Nehru over his leanings towards socialism and his opposition to acceptance of power in the Provinces. Nevertheless, it was made clear to Nehru in a statement issued by Patel, but drafted by Gandhiji himself, that the Congress President had no dictatorial powers and was bound by the decisions of the majority.
16. Patel and Gandhiji were rarely in disagreement on the strategy and tactics of the Congress in its fight for Independence. Patel implicitly trusted Gandhiji's instinct. It was said in jest that Patel

had locked his mind and handed over the key to his 'master'. This was not true as Patel had a mind of his own and did differ with Gandhiji in the years before independence. Any occasional difference in point of view would be discussed frankly with Gandhiji, in private, and sorted out. Nehru, however, had fundamental differences with Gandhiji as their correspondence would reveal. Much against the thinking of Gandhiji, Nehru pushed the Congress into jettisoning Dominion Status in favour of full Independence during the years 1927-29. Patel was in favour of Congress contesting the General Election to Provincial Assemblies, held in 1936-37, under the 1935 Act as he was keen on capturing power in the provinces in preparation for ultimate independence. Nehru opposed him but was overruled by the working committee.

17. When Governor General, Linlithgow dragged India, without consulting Indian opinion, into the Second World War in September, 1939, Gandhiji and Patel were in favour of conditional support to Britain. But Nehru vehemently opposed the idea. In rebound, his proposal for immediate mass action against the government was rejected by Gandhiji, though, on his insistence, Congress pulled out its provincial governments from office, much against the thinking of Patel. This turned out to be a grave mistake. In early 1942, though Gandhiji, supported by Patel and others rejected Cripps' offer regarding constitutional advance, as a postdated cheque on a crumbling bank, Nehru advocated further negotiation. Later, when Patel fully backed Gandhiji on the 'Quit India' movement, Nehru fell in line most reluctantly.
18. In spite of such basic differences in outlook and thinking, Gandhiji, having already declared Nehru as his political heir, more than once, would help him to become Congress President for a third time in 1946, though 15 out of 18 Congress Committees favoured Patel. This step, ipso facto, made him the head of the Interim Government in August 1946 and thereafter, the first Prime Minister of Independent India.
19. At different times, Gandhiji had explained his preference for Nehru over Patel as his political heir, for the following reasons. Nehru

had a greater appeal to youth, than Patel. Notwithstanding their differences since they became fellow workers, Nehru would speak Gandhiji's language after he was gone. He would rein in the socialists in the Congress. He would be more acceptable to Muslims. He might split the Party, if denied the leadership. Better known abroad, he would carve out a role for India in the international arena. Most importantly, 'as a Harrow boy, a Cambridge graduate and a barrister,' he was best suited to negotiate with the British on transfer of power.

20. Not one of these assumptions had been vindicated by subsequent events. The crucial agreement for immediate transfer of power based on partition and dominion status was the achievement of Patel, advised and aided by V. P. Menon who was Reforms Commissioner. They were both convinced that the Cabinet Mission Plan for a Federal United India consisting of three groupings of autonomous States on religious lines, would leave India weak and exposed to constant communal clashes without ruling out the emergence of Pakistan at a future date. They did not want to lose time to build a resurgent India. Though, Patel was not very conversant with international affairs unlike Nehru, he read the Chinese tea leaves on Tibet and its border with India with greater foresight than Nehru.
21. Patel might have lacked the charisma, superior education and flowery English of Nehru but he had a stronger record of struggle, service and success. Considering the difference in age between them, Nehru could still have become the Prime Minister after Patel, even if the first chance had been given to the latter. As events turned out, he would not have had to wait for long. If Patel had chosen to contest, he would have won decisively. But he refrained from a showdown because of his unswerving loyalty to Gandhiji and his patriotic disinclination to create a division in the Party at a crucial juncture of negotiations with the British for Independence.
22. It was a testimony to the magnanimity and patriotism of Patel that he bore the same loyalty to Nehru as Prime Minister as he swore to

Man has in him the silence of the sea, the noise of the earth,
and the music of the air.

- Rabindranath Tagore

Gandhiji as his supreme leader. He did have serious differences with Nehru in outlook and on policy which he articulated with his characteristic candour and bluntness but had never let him down. To cite two important instances, Nehru-Liaquat Pact on the communal situation in the then East Pakistan and Article 370, according special status to Kashmir, were vehemently opposed by the Congress party rank and file. The former led to a public outcry in Calcutta. In both these matters, it was the intervention and help of Patel that saved the day for Nehru as Prime Minister. Though Nehru was not equally generous towards Patel forcing the latter to contemplate leaving the government, Gandhiji's death averted that step and he carried on relentlessly till his death, helping Nehru wherever he could.

23. Patel's success in integrating 562 Princely States with the rest of India in less than 15 months was an unprecedented achievement of monumental proportions in the annals of history. He employed every arrow in his quiver- persuasion, arm-twisting, allurements, generosity, intrigue and force to achieve his objective. It was a demonstration of great statesmanship and consummate display of strategic foresight and tactical wisdom in equal measure. In accomplishing this humongous task, Patel showed great sagacity in leaning on Mountbatten, the Governor General as much as he did on V.P. Menon, without at any time surrendering his own judgment to that of the former.
24. The credit for framing the Indian Constitution is given to Ambedkar by the laity. What is not known is that, apart from the signal contributions of such legal luminaries like Alladi Krishna Swamy Iyer, K M Munshi, Tej Bahadur Sapru, B N Rao and M. R. Jayakar, the brunt of the responsibility to push through the Constituent Assembly, important provisions like minority rights and reservations for SC/ST communities was borne by Patel who had chaired over half a dozen Sub Committees. Also, not many are aware that it was at the instance of Patel that non-congressmen like Ambedkar and Shyama Prasad Mukherjee were inducted into the Government. It is also little known that he was

the progenitor of "Amul" the brand name which symbolizes "the taste of India".

25. Patel chose his aides wisely; gave them trust and space and valued their advice. In every endeavor he undertook, he displayed prescience, perspicacity and pragmatism in measures not matched by any of his compatriots. He was candid and impartial in his dealings with colleagues. A vivid example of this was the continued intimacy between him and Rajaji even though he backed Rajendra Prasad and not Rajaji to become the first President of India. He died without the slightest blemish or whisper on his character. He left no property behind. He was a God fearing person who never failed to invoke God's will and grace in his speeches, conversations and correspondence.
26. There was not a single Indian nor a foreigner who had dealt with Patel and not acknowledged his pre-eminence as a leader, administrator and statesman. Even his worst critics like socialists had to admit after his death that they judged him wrongly. Patel's intense dislike of cant, double speak and opportunism as also his natural instinct to call a spade a spade did expose him to the criticism of being pro-Hindu. Even if it was valid, he was not anti-Muslim.
27. From times immemorial, the Indian subcontinent was united only culturally and not administratively. Even under the British rule, there was a British India and a congeries called Princely India. Today, these two Indias are one, thanks to Sardar Patel. This makes him, perhaps, the greatest Indian after the 'Mahatma' in modern times.
28. Patel was the best 'Prime Minister' that India never had. For whatever reason, his role and contributions in the Independence struggle and his unique achievement in unifying India, as we know it today, had not been sufficiently celebrated nor even acknowledged. The 'Statue of Unity' erected in his memory, apart from making amends for past neglect, will ever remind Indians of Vallabhbhai Patel as the builder of United India. But the real homage to him lies in the undeniable reality that whenever India is in crisis, every informed Indian wishes that Sardar Patel has been alive to solve it.

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We must be perpetual seekers of intellectual integrity and universal compassion.
These are the two qualities which mark out a true teacher.

Dr S. Radhakrishnan

GEOPOLITICAL RIFT AT G20 MEET

Major strategic dissonance in Bali was the tension between US and China

Cmde. (Retd.) C. Uday Bhaskar

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

The baton of the G20 president was formally handed over to PM Modi in Bali by the Indonesian President Joko Widodo on November 16 and the outcome of this summit is relevant to India at many levels that are interlinked. The G20 agenda, much to the dismay of the host, was overshadowed by the bilateral meeting between the US President and his Chinese counterpart, as also the long-drawn-out war in Ukraine and a missile strike on Poland. However to his credit, President Widodo was able to ‘herd the cats’, as it were, and steer the deliberations towards a final joint communiqué which is a remarkable demonstration of his resolve in dealing with all kinds of high-octane challenges and political minefields in the months preceding the Bali summit.

While India has the pedigree and potential to play a valuable global role, this cannot be at the cost of jeopardising its own core national interests.

The G20, as a group of major economies, has been meeting since 2008 when the global financial crisis jolted the world, and consequently, geo-economics and related development indicators that impact human security is the principal focus of the summit-level deliberations. Diplomats and domain experts (the sherpas) work diligently for months to ensure that there is a substantive consensus document at the end of such a meeting. But Bali was buffeted by many complex and strong geopolitical undercurrents that have convulsed the global geo-economic landscape and the security of the more vulnerable demography of the world.

The war in Ukraine, triggered by the imprudent Russian invasion in late February, is now poised to enter the 10th month and the impact of this military misadventure by Moscow has severely degraded food and energy security globally, and the rather disturbing reference to nuclear weapons has further muddied the waters. Concurrently, the deliberations in

Egypt, where COP 27 was being held, drew attention to yet another intractable global challenge — climate change: and the inability of the global elite to arrive at an effective consensus to address an issue whose urgency and corrosive enormity to irreparably damage the very vitality of the planet needs little reiteration.

Hence the geopolitical shadow in Bali was inevitable and the other major strategic dissonance was the increasing tension between the US and China, wherein the leaders of the two nations have been grappling with their domestic political compulsions and managing a complicated bilateral dependency-cum-security anxiety about the ‘other’ interlocutor, in a brittle major power dyadic relationship.

Thus the most critical part of the joint statement issued by the G20 Summit was more geopolitical in nature, and from the Indian perspective, there was also an implicit acknowledgement of PM Modi’s exhortation to Russian President Vladimir Putin regarding war not being an option in this day and age. The relevant section asserted: ‘The use or threat of use of nuclear weapons is inadmissible. The peaceful resolution of conflicts, efforts to address crises, as well as diplomacy and dialogue, are vital. Today’s era must not be of war.’

Whether this counsel will be hoisted by both Russia and Ukraine remains moot — but there will be an expectation that since the UN Security Council is paralysed (given that Russia, a P5 member, is the principal belligerent in the war in Ukraine), the G20, with India as the president, in tandem with other nations, could perhaps play a substantive role in brokering peace.

It is a slender hope, for China appears to be ambivalent about its role in the Ukraine conflict since the Sino-Russian bilateral has been cast as one that will seek to resist what Beijing and Moscow perceive to be US hegemony and perfidy in relation to the current global strategic framework.

Against this backdrop, the Biden-Xi Jinping meeting on the sidelines of the Bali summit elicited enormous interest and while the three-hour bilateral meeting did not lead to any significant breakthrough, it served the purpose of demonstrating to a weary world that there was no breakdown in the Wash-

An ignited mind is the most powerful resource on earth, above the earth and under the earth.

- Dr.A.P.J. Abdul Kalam

ington-Beijing engagement — however prickly and guarded it may be.

For India, these two bilateral relationships – the US-China on the one hand and the China-Russia on the other – and the manner in which their contours emerge will have a very significant relevance, both by way of assuaging Delhi's anxieties and helping realise its aspirations.

The Indian discomfiture with China, post the Galwan clash, is palpable, even if it is not articulated explicitly by the Modi government. Post Bali, any radical improvement or deterioration in the US-China bilateral will temper Delhi's options in dealing with the Xi agenda apropos territoriality and the non-negotiable historical Chinese claim to disputed regions. Can India aspire to have a meaningful and result-oriented tenure as the G20 president if it is locked in an intractable territorial dispute with China?

The ultimate denouement of the Ukraine war will define what kind of a Russia will emerge from the fallout of this tangled conflict and the degree to which it can be a credible partner for India, both by way of being a major military inventory supplier and an empathetic politico-diplomatic interlocutor on the global stage.

As India assumes the G20 responsibility on December 1, the historical recall with November 17, 1962, when Delhi had to face the ignominy of a national security meltdown in dealing with China cannot be ignored. While India has the pedigree and the potential to play a valuable global role, this cannot be at the cost of jeopardising its own core national interests that are abiding.

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WHAT IS CULTURE?

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Like Jestig Pilate's question 'What is Truth?', the question 'What is the Culture?' is not a trivial question and does not offer an unambiguous answer. The ambiguity arises from the fact that there are so many definitions of culture, and culture means so

many different things to different people and meant different things at different times that Raymond Williams, a distinguished cultural theorist, declared that culture is 'one of the two or three most complicated words in English language... mainly because it has now come to be used for important concepts in several distinct intellectual disciplines and in several distinct and incompatible systems of thought'. In the same vein, the Report of the World Commission on Culture and Development (1995) observed that both culture and development had become protean concepts with an elusive and bewildering variety of meanings. To compound the problem posed by polysemy the most common mode of usage of culture today 'overlaps to some degree with the meaning of other terms such as "tradition", "civilization"...', "worldview"...', and 'there is uncertainty and confusion surrounding all these terms'. Thus, the word 'civilisation' which often figures in the discourse on culture has an elusive and bewildering variety of meanings, so much so that it is rightly said that centuries-old confusing play of name switching and revisions has made the distinction between culture and civilisation difficult. Thus, the terms 'civilisation' and 'culture' are sometimes used as interchangeable terms and sometimes differently; Interchangeable usage is not incorrect if one adopts the anthropological definition of culture as a 'way of life' in the widest sense. Sometimes, civilisation is equated with means and culture with ends. Civilisation is taken to be the whole mechanism and organisation which man devised in his endeavour to control the conditions of life while culture is the realm of values, relationships, modes of thinking and living, and intellectual and artistic explorations. In other words, civilization represents the material aspects of culture and culture proper the non-material aspects. Sometimes the term 'civilisation' is restricted to 'advanced' or 'high' cultures; it is used 'instead of the term culture to denote social cultivation, improvement, refinement, or progress'. The etymology of the term traces it to the 'Latin words *civis* and *civitas* whose core of reference is political and urban: the citizen in an organized State as against the tribesman'. Some others believe that a civilisation is an ensemble of cultures with a few common features; from this perspective the much-touted unity in diversity of India comprises the co-existence of cultural diversity within a civilisational unity which had evolved over thousands of years. At the civilizational level the collective Indian

The crying need of the hour is self-discipline and self-restraint.

- Nani Palkhivala

consciousness was one, and it was possible 'to evolve norms of individual and collective perceptions which intermesh into a coherent civilisational system' even though India cannot be perceived as a homogenous polity or a homogenous, uniform society like many other societies.

I may give an example of the misunderstanding created by the polysemic nature of words like culture and civilisation. The last Director General of the Archaeological Survey of India during the British Raj was Mortimer Wheeler, a renowned archaeologist and more than that a larger-than-life personality who it was said had a penchant for coming out with dramatic scripts 'which he could have marketed in Hollywood'. He claimed to have found archaeological evidence for the 'massacre' of the inhabitants of Mohenjo-Daro by the invading Aryans, and went on to announce that on circumstantial evidence that the Aryan God Indra stands accused of destroying the Indus civilisation, and a little later announce that Indra won the battle but Siva won the war, implying that even though the invading Aryans destroyed the Indus civilization proto-Siva who figures along with bulls in Harappan seals came to be a part of the supreme Hindu pantheon. One of the first tasks which UNESCO undertook after it was established in 1945 was to undertake a project for writing a history of the scientific and cultural development of humanity as a whole, and to that end UNESCO set up an international commission. The pre-eminent historian R.C. Mazumdar was invited to be a member of that commission. The first volume of the history was devoted to prehistory and the beginnings of civilization. The section on the Bronze Age civilizations was written by the British archaeologist Leonard Wolley; based on Wheeler's announcement about the end of the Indus Civilization Wolley he wrote in his draft section that the Indus civilisation was overthrown by Aryan invaders, and that the Aryan victory seemed to have been involved wholesale massacre. He referred to the Aryans were as barbarians and describe, in a passing reference, the Rgveda as 'the epic of the destruction of one of the greatest cultures of the ancient world'. Mazumdar vehemently protested against Wolley's characterisation of the Aryans and the Rgveda. A lengthy correspondence between Wolley and Mazumdar followed, and Wolley sought to justify his referring to Aryans as barbarians by arguing that 'the very word "civilisation" by its etymology implies an urbanized society';

societies prior to urbanised societies were either primitive 'savage' societies or pastoral 'barbarian' societies. As Aryan society was well known to be pastoral it had to be characterised as barbarian. The argument between Wolley and Mazumdar was an acrimonious argument without an end because Wolley went by the connotation of 'civilised' meaning urban while Mazumdar went by the connotation meaning cultured. From the perspective that time provides, it comes out Wolley relied far too much on Wheeler's account of the end of the Indus civilisation, and Wheeler himself was carried away by his imagination and felicity with words. Following heavy criticism of his account Wheeler retracted his account by saying that he only expressed a tentative opinion and by conceding that concede that no single explanation can wholly explain the 'dissolution' of ancient civilizations and that the rise or fall of a civilization is 'a highly complex operation which can only be distorted and obscured by easy oversimplification' and that he 'light-heartedly blamed Indra and his invading Aryans' for the end of the Indus civilisation.

As a term, culture has several connotations. It has been used with reference to (i) an individual as well as to (ii) social groups and economic classes, and (iii) the nation. The original connotation of the word 'culture' was cultivation of land, and over time that cultivation was extended to encompass cultivation of the mind and refined tastes, and acquisition of aesthetic sensibility. A cultured person is one with a cultivated mind, refined tastes and aesthetic sensibility, and can appreciate finer aspects of life, intellectual works and artistic expressions of high quality; that being so like education culture has been conceived both as a means as well as an end in itself. Culture also denotes the way of life of a group comprising social relationships, traditions, customs, rituals, shared attitudes, values and beliefs; culture in this sense comes with mother's milk and the socialisation process. While some cultural values and behavioural patterns are considered to be universal many others are considered to be so distinctive as to constitute the core of the identity of groups, societies and nations. Culture also denotes artistic expressions; unlike intangible attributes of individuals and groups many artistic expressions are tangible objects like paintings and sculpture. Art is considered to be a universal language and creative masterpieces are considered to be the common heritage of mankind, and yet at the same time it is rare

Intellect, if tempered by humility, can contribute significantly to our aspirations for Truth. In fact, the most noteworthy discoverers of modern science instruct us to be humble.

Manoj Das

for art and artistic creations not to bear the distinctive stamp of the society and nation in which the creator lived. Even in the remote past when transport and communications were primitive few cultures could live in isolation. Thus in antiquity so many Greek ideas in science and philosophy are so similar to those of India that it is difficult to resist the conclusion that the Greeks borrowed them from the Hindus because of the existence of contacts between Greece and India for centuries; it should be said, however, that George Sarton the eminent historian of science mooted the alternative hypothesis that the human minds are essentially identical and given that definite problems admit only a few solutions wise men of Greece, India and China hit independently upon the same solution. In more recent times, the British philosopher David Hume, who wrote that the human Self is an illusion was influenced by Buddhism. Nearer home, Indian classic music was influenced by Persian and Turkish music. The majestic *Kalyani ragam* (a musical melody constructed with five to nine musical notes) of Carnatic Music, for example, is an offshoot of *Turushka raga*. Increased interaction between societies leads to fusion of artistic styles, lifestyles, ideas and beliefs, in other words to *syncretism*. Whatever, every culture gives and takes; cultural flows, trade flows, and migration are interconnected, and are an ineluctable feature of human societies; cultural purity, it is rightly said, is an oxymoron. And further, renewal, re-evaluation and critical choice are inbuilt in the concept of culture; at any point of time, any given culture is in a state of flux driven by the dialectical interplay of change and continuity. Suffice to say, culture and everything related to it such as identity, are not frozen for eternity.

The protean nature of culture was crisply brought out by Nehru in an intervention in the debate on official language in the Constituent Assembly:

People talk about culture, about *Sanskriti* etc., and rightly, because a nation must have a sound basis of culture to rest itself... that culture must inevitably have its roots in the genius of the people and in their past. No amount of copying and imitation, however good the other culture may be, will make you truly cultured because you will always be a copy of somebody else... Nevertheless, when you are on the threshold of a new age, to talk always of the past and the past is not a good preparation for entering that portal... There are many types of culture. There

is the culture of nation and of a people which is important for it, there is also the culture of an age, the *yuga dharma*, and if you do not align yourself with that culture of the age you are out of step with it. It does not matter how great your culture is if you do not keep step with it... There is a culture which may be said to be... absolute, unchanging, with certain unchanging ideas about which it must be adhered to. There is a certain changing culture which has no great significance except at the moment of that particular period or generation or age but it changes and if you stick on to it even though the ages change, then you are backward and you fall out of step with changing humanity.

Broadly speaking, there are two conceptions of culture, the first humanistic/ aesthetic and the second anthropological. The first conception of culture refers to 'Works and practices of intellectual, and especially artistic activity'. Artistic activity results in the production of a variety of art forms (or to use a neologism, cultural/creative expressions) such as literary arts, visual arts (such as sculpture, painting, graphics, architecture and so on) and performing arts (such as music, dance and theatre). Some art forms combine several artistic disciplines in a singular artistic experience. Thus, *opera* utilises sets (visual arts), costumes (fashion), acting (dramatic performing arts), the libretto, story (literature), and vocal and instrumental music. Cultural heritage is the accumulated stock of creative expressions, languages as well as knowledge about the traditions of literary and artistic creation, and musical and theatrical performance inherited from the Past. Knowledge and traditions could be codified and set out in books in which case they could be acquired through a study of the books. Not all knowledge and traditions can be fully codified. Tacit knowledge and traditions constitute intangible heritage which is lodged in the hearts and minds of human beings, and are transmitted through personal interaction, of which the *guru shishya parampara* (master-apprentice lineage) is a good example. In contrast to intangible heritage tangible, heritage coming artistic expressions embodied in physical objects. Tangible /built heritage could comprise immovable objects such as structures which have remained more or less intact, and ruins being remnants of structures marred by the ravages of man and nature. Tangible heritage also comprises moveable objects such as manuscripts, books, artworks, artefacts or other moveable

India's growing economic and security profile has found greater acceptance regionally and globally as the country is seen as a non-threatening benign power.

Shyam Saran.

objects of cultural significance, and dismembered parts of a structure such as sculpted pieces and architectural panels or artefacts excavated from an archaeological site.

The anthropological conception arose from the objectives pursued by anthropological explorations. Anthropology began as the study of the culture of 'others' ('primitive' societies as well as societies of the countries European countries had colonised); the objective of anthropological explorations and studies was to get to know *everything* about the community studied. Among those studied include (i) social relationships, traditions, customs, rituals, shared attitudes, values and beliefs, (ii) language, (iii) craft and artistic expressions of all types, (iv) traditional knowledge like medicine and technology, and (v) economy and other types of social and cognitive organisation. In short, culture connotes the total way of life of a group or society of which cultural expressions are just one part.

The two definitions of culture are not watertight compartments but are interrelated. The human condition as well as the great questions of life and death such as what the meaning and purpose of life is common to mankind. Art holds a mirror up to life and nature and explores the human condition and the great questions of life and death, and is therefore universal. Yet at the same time as life is conditioned by the society art forms bear a strong imprint of the society in which the artists live. Thus, literature is rooted in the socio-cultural-political milieu, a point eloquently made by Rajagopalachari in his Preface to his work *Mahabharata*:

Since literature is so vitally related to life and character, it follows that so long as the human family remains divided into nations, the personae and events of one national literature have not the same appeal to all... A word or phrase about Falstaff ... carries to Englishmen a world of significance which it does not to others. Similarly, a word or phrase about Hanuman, or Sita conveys to us in India, learned and illiterate alike, a significance all of its own, of which an English rendering cannot convey even a fraction to outsiders, however, interested in Indian mythology and literature.

Even after art ceased to be wholly integrated with community life, even when an artist or writer rebels against social conventions, and even when a

creative expression is predominately imaginary it retains vestiges of the cultural traits of the society to which the creator belongs; this is because of the fact that the condition of man is such that the individual can exist and act as an autonomous being only because he could first identify himself with 'something greater, as a member of society, group, class or nation'. This is in keeping with the sociological conceptualisation of identity wherein the identity of a person is formed in the 'interaction' between the self and the society. Every major socio-economic change impacts on the form and content of artistic expressions created by members of that society. Conversely art had been a harbinger of change; art does not merely represent the socio-political milieu *as is* but as it ought to be. Shelley's famous declaration that poets are unacknowledged legislators of the world captures the fact that many writers offer a critique of the society and suggest alternate visions; many writers, particularly those in authoritarian regimes, believed that it was their duty to express the aspirations of their society and protest against oppression. Conversely, authoritarian regimes considered writers as persons who need a good deal of watching since they deal in the dangerous commodity of ideas. More than any other art form, visual art is *avant garde* whose cardinal tenet is the denial of any limits or boundaries to experience and expression; the practice of dissent and the exercise of the right to shock are often the fountainheads of creativity. Dissent is not limited to artistic styles and extends to everything linked with the society and polity. Suffice to say, while form and expression (which are of as importance as content in art and literature) and some aspects of content might be of universal appeal. Artistic work has a special significance to the members of the community to which the artist belongs. Those experienced in promoting cultural exchange among nations would notice that when music or dance or drama is performed in another socio-cultural context diversity and dissension come to the fore rather than communication and dialogue; to paraphrase the famous observation of Stalin about Shostakovich's opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk District*, many a time fusion music is 'muddle instead of music'. All in all, culture in the sense of artistic expressions cannot totally be detached from culture in the sense of way of life; culture is not just *gaana bazaana* (song and dance) as vulgar perception holds, and artistic expressions and heritage are

The truth is that Nehru's extraordinary life and career is part of the inheritance of every Indian.
His legacy is ours, whether we agree with everything he stood for or not.

Shashi Tharoor.

manifestations of the deep-lying identity of a people and the continuity of their creative force. It follows therefore that cultural policy in respect of arts and heritage is not a matter of just aesthetics, and cannot be isolated from politics which in one sense is contest about ‘who we are?’ and ‘what types of society and polity we should have?’.

High Art v. Other Art

Even within a given conception of culture, opinions differ on how culture should be defined. Thus, with the first connotation the question as to what is art has been one of the most vexatious questions confronting aesthetes, art critics and cultural policy makers and administrators, and it triggers arguments without an end. Some of the key questions which loom large in the discourse on culture are what is art? Should certain art forms be considered superior to others, and given preference in cultural policies? These questions are related to the questions such as should art be for art’s sake? Or in other words, is creation of beautiful forms and expressions and savouring beauty the only purpose of art or should art serve other purposes? Should it also elevate the human spirit? Should art be an instrument for communion with God? Should art be edifying, and be a vehicle for inculcating ethics or promoting social or political transformation? These questions have a bearing on cultural policy for whatever be the modality of promoting arts culture policy would have to confront the question which activities and art forms it has to promote and regulate.

The conception of high culture, particularly Matthew Arnold’s exposition of culture in his seminal work *Culture and Anarchy* (1867-8), influenced cultural policy for the last century and half. In the Arnoldian conception, culture is confined to ‘high culture’ comprising certain art forms, and critically acclaimed works of art pertaining to such forms that would last forever. Some of the prominent criteria for differentiation between high culture, and other cultural forms called by various names such as mass art, popular art, and outputs of cultural industry (also referred to as entertainment industries and mass media) are : (i) high art has *canon* (a body of rules, principles, or standards accepted as axiomatic and binding in a field of study or art) , (ii) high art is not pure entertainment and requires cultivated taste for appreciation , and (iii) high art is not pure utilitarian craft. Creators of artistic expressions classified as high culture seek

to ‘explore and express the meanings of human existence in some imaginative form’ and represent existential situations which confront all human beings at all times through ‘expressive symbolism’ manifested through art forms like poetry, painting and fiction. The search for higher human values, for beauty and perfection can be discerned in critically acclaimed works of art; high culture cannot be appreciated by one and all. Only cultured persons with a cultivated mind, refined tastes and aesthetic sensibility can appreciate high culture. Given the elevating experience of savouring high culture, instilling refined tastes is considered to be an important objective of education. The idea of a *canon*, a body of works of the greatest literary and artistic worth which ought to be diligently studied as a part of liberal education was widely accepted by educationists for a long time.

Beauty, it is said, lies in the eyes of the beholder; the same can be said of high culture. However, much one attempts to develop objective criteria to judge what art and high culture are subjective elements cannot be eschewed in judging whether a new creative form or a new creative expression falls under the category of high culture. Tastes and appreciation of works of art even of aesthetes and critics change over time. To give a telling example, in his days, Shakespeare’s plays enjoyed great popularity with masses, but they were considered ‘low-brow’ by critics. His death went largely unnoticed, and no one proposed that he be buried in Westminster Abbey by the side of Chaucer or Spenser. Appreciation by literary critics steadily grew from the 18th century so much so that the noted literary critic Harold Bloom claimed that ‘the Western canon is Shakespeare’, and Shakespeare is considered to be the icon of Englishness as well as ‘a central feature of the American dream, in which the mirror of his great dramas gets held up to a society permanently in search of itself’. Or to give another example, Cinema, which is generally considered to be a vehicle for entertainment, generated a film canon analogous to the literary canon. Quite a few commercially produced commercially successful films like Alfred Hitchcock’s *Psycho* and Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen’s *Singin’ in the Rain* had made it to the film canon.

And further, artistic creativity cannot be hamstrung by subjective criteria of perfection and beauty; in fact, the history of art is ‘the story of exceptionally gifted, obstinate and wilful artists breaking free of

The history of independent India is one of fires being lit, doused and then lit again. It could not but be otherwise.

Ramachandra Guha

the canon and its restrictions, carrying society and the public with them- not necessarily immediately but in time- and thus eventually creating new canons'. An example is impressionism which was rejected by established art critics and the art establishment in Paris; it was only after impressionist paintings became very popular and began to be traded at high prices did the art establishment bestow its seal of approval on impressionism. Suffice to say, arguments about the relative merits of art forms and of works of art, like arguments about religion, are arguments without an end, a fact embodied by the Latin maxim *de gustibus non est disputandum* (There's no arguing about tastes and colours). In Western societies, cultural elites and their prerogative to determine what constitutes refined taste and high culture and make decisions about what get funded by Government and what do not, received a mighty challenge from assertive social groups such as feminists, migrant communities, and *lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender* groups; such groups began to demand democratising culture, not in the sense of 'ensuring that 'high culture is not the exclusive preserve of a particular social class or of a metropolitan location and that the benefits of the highest reaches of cultural excellence should be made available broadly and widely, but of providing 'equal opportunities for citizens to be culturally active on their own terms', and to that end support not merely high culture but 'popular entertainment, folk festival, amateur sports, choral societies, and dancing schools'

The history of culture does not justify looked down on art forms without a canon. Folk art is the supreme example of art without a canon; it is the relic of an era when art was an integral part of custom and ritual and not segregated from day-to-day life of common people. It is a matter of historical record that right from pre-history onwards most of artistic creation took place without being guided by any particular canon; forms, styles and canons appeared much later than say the cave paintings of Palaeolithic age or the ritual music of the Vedic era. There had always been two streams and levels of artistic experience, the classical and stylised patronised by the elites and the popular or common 'mass'; this fact is captured by the expressions *Margi* and *Desi* (of the path of the stage and of the people) and *Natya* and *Loka* (stylized and realistic). There is also ample testimony to the fact that the demarcation between the two categories was not watertight, and that the culture of temples and

courts and the culture of the masses constantly influenced each other and conditioned forms and styles. In India, classical music and dance are deeply rooted in the folk traditions of the region; around the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th centuries, at the behest of patrons of art, forms, styles, and a high literary or legendary content were imposed on the folk traditions to give rise to many of the present-day classical forms. It can be said that high culture is a progeny of folk cultural practices. The Indian experience validates the dictum of T.S. Eliot that high culture and popular culture are necessary parts of a composite culture and that 'fine art is the refinement and not the antithesis of popular art'. Suffice to say, the feeling that 'If it is art, it is not for all, and if it is for all, it is not art' is nothing more than snobbery. And further, cultural policies have increasingly tended to support cultural diversity, diversity of art forms and artistic expressions, with support being not limited to those forms and expressions which pass muster with the aesthetic criteria valued by the elites.

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SESHACHALAMATHYA'S NACHCHAR PARINAYAM

Dr. (Mrs.) Prema Nandakumar

The Andal experience in the Indian languages is wide and deep. In Telugu there is a vast literature that has been inspired by the life and Tamil verses of Andal who is also variously known as Andal Nachchar, Goda Devi and Amukta Malyada. When the sweet language of Telugu unites with the sweet legends of God-experience, the Anandanubhava that results is immeasurable. So many approaches to the theme! Here is a Tirunamamu, 'MellanaSevinchithi' sung in the countryside:

"I have seen Mother Goda Devi
Seated gracefully on the throne
In the jewel-encrusted Hall.
They have applied sampangi oil
To her tresses, combed them smooth,
And decorated them into a lovely bun."

The poet takes delight in enumerating her ornaments which include rings, nose-screw and ear-drops. And always the lovely parrot in her hand!

One of the brilliant gems in Telugu literature that speaks of Andal is the yakshagana,

Resurgent Hindu extremism could derail Modi's development strategy
and his hopes for India as the 'Viswaguru.'

- C. Raja Mohan

Nachchar Parinayam by Nandavara Bhaskara Seshachalamathyudu written in the 18th century. The work begins with a grand poem on the Dasavatara. Interestingly enough, of the ten, Krishna is missing. Instead Buddha follows Balarama. Of course, Krishna is the hero for this YakshaGana is about his marriage as Lord Ranganatha with Andal. Now we have a description of Srivilliputtur with its TriveniTatakam (Tirumukkulam) and the area known as Champakara-nyakshetra. Such a variety of trees and plants!

“Taala, rasaala, hintaala, tamaala,
Malati, jambheera, mandara, kunda
Kuravaka, manjula, kutaja, madhuka,
Sarala, dadima, nimbi, champaka, kramuka ...”

In this area blessed by Mother Nature, Andal incarnates “as Sita in days of yore when the earth was ploughed by her father.” Perialvar who finds her is delighted and so is his wife who places the baby in a golden cradle at an auspicious moment. The sumangali ladies who had come for the cradling ceremony sing a melodious lullaby:

“Jo jo Mahalakshmi, jo Jaganmata,
Jo jaganutaseela, jo chinnibaala!”

The Brahmin women who had come are given betelleaves and nuts. There is a regular list of gifts like sandalpaste, plantain fruits, new clothes and scents. Andal grows up with her friends playing with dolls, celebrating wedding of dolls, learning to recite stotras praising the Lord. In course of time she becomes a lovely damsel.

One day she is attracted by the garland that Perialvar had strung for the Lord. She wears it, looks at herself in the mirror and satisfied, she puts the garland back in the basket. When Perialvar discovers a strand of hair and comes to know of what had happened, he prepares another garland and takes it to the Lord in the temple. But God Vatapatrasayi assures him that he wants only garlands worn by Andal first. The familiar legend moves on thus in simple Telugu through several metres like ardhachandrika and yekathaali.

Andal becomes the darling of Srivilliputtur as all ladies praise her for her ways. One day a gypsy (erukatha) comes and wants to foretell Andal's future. Though she already has the Lord in her heart as her chosen bridegroom, Andal asks as if in fun about her future husband. The assurance comes from her

that Andal's desire would be fulfilled. The gypsy mischievously gives an oblique description of the Lord.

“Navapadmaloohanudu Nagendrasayanundu
Ravikotinibhatejarajavadanundu
Sujanarakshakudukausthubharatnabhushanundu
Sajalajaladhaneelasyamalatanudu ..”

At last comes the name. “Your bridegroom rests between the Kaveri streams, it is Sri Ranganatha!” As the days pass by Andal becomes restless and weak because of her love for the Lord. Her friends inform Perialvar of her love-sickness for Lord Ranganatha. So Perialvar takes leave of Lord Vatapatrasayi in the temple. At Srirangam the Lord takes away his beloved. Perialvar feels helpless and prays to the Lord in the sanctum of the temple. Though the Lord first denies taking away Andal, he is deeply touched by Perialvar's sorrow and prayers. He agrees to come to Srivilliputtur on Panguni Uththiram day, “Phalguna maasambunandhunauttarayandhulokot-taramagusubhamuhurthambuna”.

Periyalvar makes grand preparations and Lord Ranganatha comes riding Garuda. He is given a grand welcome by Perialvar along with his entire family. Great rishis come and give the Lord a ceremonial bath. The tirumanjanam is described in detail. On the bride's side Andal is given a tirumanjanam and the poet records all the traditional song-styles in this connection. There is the Suvvi song, sung in chorus as girls pound rice. Others sing ‘Alloneredlo”:

“Oho jambu fruits!
Nacharamma's wedding is on.
Born on earth in the Tulsi garden
She became daughter of Perialvar.
She marries the Lord Sridhara
To guard the entire world.
All people on this earth
Sing her praises. Listen.
Oho jambu fruits!”

The bridge is decorated with ornaments and the Lord comes to the marriage hall. Periyalvar washes His feet, offers madhuparka. The Lord ties the tirumangalyam to Andal's beautiful neck. The talambralu function performed with pearls is all joy and laughter. The screen between the two is removed, the corner of their garments is tied followed by saptapati, lajahoma and harati. The young girls have a lovely time teasing the newlyweds and presently sthalipakam ceremony

The Constitution of India- which is the Bhagavad Gita of all the people of India- concerns itself only with offices or organs of State, not the holders (for the time being) of such offices.

Fali. S Nariman

is performed. Then the wedding feast (puvvamu) which records innumerable items: so many varieties of cereals, pachadis, payasams, adirasams, manoharams, and of course, appalms and fruits! Seshachalamatha compares it to the feast given to Bharata by Bharadhwaja. So the revels, laughter and feasts continue for four days. Nalugu, Nagavalli, exchange of presents, grihapravesam. Finally the custom of 'apaginthalu'. A moving and meaningful advice comes from the father Periyalvar as he sees off his daughter:

"In the three worlds, the husband is God for the wife. Do the works given to you with care and devotion. The husband is life, relation, friend for wives. You must get in tune with his nature. If he gets angry, speaks harsh words, or complains, for sometimes you must use immense patience in being a housewife. Forgiveness is charity, forgiveness is dharma, forgiveness is Truth, forgiveness is good character, women need to forgive all the time. You must act to please your parents-in-law, the daughters of the house and other relations. Pativratas should perform vratas, upavasa, charity and the rest taking the permission of the husband."

The author of **NachcharParinayam**, Bhaskara Seshachalam, lived in Rajapalayam in Tamil Nadu. It may be mentioned here that he was the younger brother of Bhaskara Venkatachalam, author of **Sethu-Mahatmyam**.

(All translations from the Telugu original quoted in the essay are by PremaNandakumar)

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CLASSICAL AND THE FOLK HOW CONCRETE IS THE DISTINCTION?

Prof. Manoj Das

Extract from the inaugural Address by the author for the National Seminar on Folk Literature at Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi, in August 2011. Courtesy: Folklore and the Alternative Modernities edited by Dr. Nandini Sahu.

The theme of this significant national seminar, as is obvious, has two aspects: literature and the folk tradition. I represent, in a small way, the first. I am a writer who loves and is deeply interested in the folk tradition though I am not a folklorist. I hope, discussions that will follow this inaugural session will be

an authentic presentation on the second aspect of the theme.

Folklore, no doubt, became a systematic subject of study in several academic fora since the phrase was coined by W.J. Thomas in 1846. In the English-speaking world the subject assumed special importance with works by Edward Taylor and James Frazer, among others. The doyen of modern English poetry T.S. Eliot's reference to Frazer's Golden Bough woke up numerous poets to the treasure and symbolic value of the subject. However, under different names books had been written in several languages on the subject and collections of folktales, legends, riddles and proverbs were compiled before the subject was taken up anthropologically. My observation of course is limited to India.

I look at this seminar in the perspective of the changing times and life-styles of our people. Probably no individual or organisation had made any survey of the rate at which numerous deities and their humble shrines, numerous strictly local festivities, ceremonies that have disappeared from rural India during the past decades. Behind each of them, even behind some of the ancient trees there were folk legends. Along with the disappearance of these institutions, traditions and objects, anecdotes on their backdrops too have disappeared.

Indeed, so rapid has been the process of metamorphosis of rural India - at least of a major part of it - that something that was a matter-of-fact pattern of life the other day has become a remote memory for the current generation. In midsixties of the last century I had the occasion to visit a village in the district of Bijapur in Karnataka that was far away from any town. I reached there at night. In the morning as I looked at the village square where several lanes met, I was surprised to find dozens of peacocks moving about freely along with the residents -bracing past them without the slightest sign of hesitation. I asked my host, 'Why did you people domesticate so many peacocks?' He looked at me in a manner as if I could very well have asked why the peacocks domesticated so many human beings! Then he explained to me that the peacocks and men coexisted in the village all the time! There were several folk anecdotes based on their interaction.

I had an occasion to visit the village some thir-

Every nation is destined to go through periods of expansion and decline and none is destined to rise or fall forever.

Ruchir Sharma

ty years later. At first I could not recognise the landscape. Most of the thatched earthen houses lighted by lamps and lanterns had changed into electrified brick buildings; the school had become a college, so on and so forth. I asked a teenager, 'Where are the peacocks?' He cast a blank look at me;

He could very well have said that he had never been to any zoo!" Needless to say all the anecdotes too were gone.

The catalogue of items under the term Folklore such as folk song, folktale, folk dance, folk medicine, folk religion suggest that there is a clear distinction between the folklore and the classical or civil tradition of literature and culture. Once I took the distinction to be real; later I found it to be unreal. At this stage of my life I find it both real and unreal. It is unreal because we the sophisticated members of the society, the elite, are all descendants of the folks who were far from the sophistication that marks our life today. But we are bound to carry much of their beliefs as our subconscious inheritance. Besides, the world's most influential classics and epics are studded with folk traditions. The Ulysses, the Avesta, the Icelandic Edda and foremost of all, the Mahabharata, are teeming with folk legends and folktales. It is impossible to separate the folk from the classic in these works. While a profound idea depends for its elucidation on a folk legend, the legend itself gets elevated in the process.

But I realise that the distinction is also real, for the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Gita could not have anything to do with what we know as the folklore. There are two calendars at work in history: the chronological calendar and the calendar of consciousness. The first depends on the gradual evolution of human ideas and knowledge through experiences - the experiences of one generation leading to those of another, growing wider and sharper in the process and maturing into knowledge and wisdom. But there are geniuses who seem to have received wisdom straight-away. Their experience or realisation has not been dependant on the process of any gradual development.

In India we had simultaneous development of two streams of literature: the classical and the folk. Needless to say, the Vedas followed by the Upanishads, the latter followed by the epics and the epics followed by the Mahapuranas, the Upapuranas and

the Sthalapuranas constitute the first stream whereas the Brihatkatha of Gundhya later reincarnated as the Kathasaritsagara of Somadeva, the Panchatantra of Vishnusharma and the series of Jataka tales constitute the second stream. Between the two had developed an exclusive oral tradition - tales told by mystics. They were neither pure folktales nor legends, but pragmatic tales intended to solve knotty problems of practical life though emerging from spiritual prudence, narrated to householders by the wandering hermits or mendicants. While much of that lore has vanished, some of the stories belonging to that genre have been recorded and incorporated by the authors of the regional versions of our epics, the Mahabharata in particular.

Of the several approaches to folklore such as historical, anthropological and psychological, the last path has not been adequately explored. The most important issue for a researcher in this field is to remember that several of what passes as folktales today are revised versions of what they were in their lost original a projection of the primeval, pre-rational innocence. That was a faculty that was often enriched by intuition and a direct cognition of truth. If we could resurrect that, we could discover flickers of wisdom that was once spontaneous with an ancient race.

Of several other fields yet to be explored one is the strange, so far inexplicable influence of the epics on the folk life. Let me cite an example that has intrigued me. In the remote hilly region of Koraput in Orissa (I visited the region in the sixties of the 20th century) the women of the tribe known as Bondas refused to wear clothes and their garment for the lower limbs were some intricately knitted ornaments serving like apparels. The tradition, according to them goes back to the time of the Ramayana. Mother Sita lived for a while in the Dandakaranya, at the hermitage of the sage Valmiki who educated her twins. One day she was bathing in the sweet river Tamasa bare. Some tribal women who were passing by giggled at the sight. Sita told them, 'How is it that being mothers yourselves you forget that at this moment I am identified with Mother Nature - with no inhibition and no bondage of any kind?'

The women were so mortified of their own conduct that they decided to remain bare as a mark of penitence.

I still look forward to an explanation of this intriguing phenomenon. I wonder if any anthropologist or scholar of any other discipline can enlighten me.

(*Miracles and other Essays* Edited by Supriyo Bhattacharya 2018)

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A LOST OPPORTUNITY IN 1971: WHERE INDIRA GANDHI ERRED

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November 19, 2019 marked the 102nd birth anniversary of former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Thirty-five years after her death, she continues to be regarded as the most courageous and decisive leader India has had. Her time in office was marked by epoch-making achievements, including the swift and successful prosecution of the war with Pakistan in 1971. But there were also serious lapses of judgment, including the 1975-1977 Emergency and the storming of the Golden Temple in Amritsar in 1984, an ill-advised move that cost the Prime Minister her life.

Among her failures, the least talked about was also her worst. Until all official records related to the Simla Agreement signed on July 2, 1972 are made public, we will never know what led Indira Gandhi to conclude such a disadvantageous peace with Pakistan following the 1971 war. The Simla Agreement, and the subsequent Delhi Agreement, gave Pakistan everything it wanted: the territory it lost to India in the war and the safe return of all its soldiers without one of them being held responsible for the genocidal campaign unleashed in what is now Bangladesh.

The Simla Agreement reads more like a communiqué than a peace agreement with a country that had waged war on India. Nothing in the Agreement pinned Pakistan down to future good behaviour. It also included some laughable expectations, such as the clause requiring both governments “to take all steps within their power to prevent hostile propaganda directed against each other”.

Hardly had the Agreement been signed when the Pakistani Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto,

who had never hidden his intention to make Pakistan a nuclear power, began disparaging India. Indira Gandhi ought to have taken note. Writing in the *Foreign Affairs* magazine in April 1973, Bhutto disingenuously observed that “Pakistan had been the victim of unabashed aggression: her eastern part seized by Indian forces. It was this fact that made it difficult for our people to be reconciled to the fait accompli, more so because the invasion was not an isolated phenomenon. On the contrary, it was but the climax of a long series of hostile and aggressive acts by India against Pakistan since the establishment of the two as sovereign and independent states”.

What the Simla agreement failed to achieve for India could well have been obtained through the 1973 Delhi Agreement signed by India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. If ever there was an inflection point in India’s relations with Pakistan, it was the moment when India had Pakistan on its knees, holding over 15,000 square kilometres of its territory and 93,000 its soldiers — nearly a quarter of its army — as prisoners of war. It is mystifying why India so easily returned both. A former Indian diplomat, Sashanka Banerjee, provided an explanation, when he said that the decision to repatriate Pakistani prisoners of war “was taken to get Sheikh Mujibur Rahman back to his country alive and well”. But that doesn’t sound right. The repatriation of Pakistani prisoners of war occurred after the signing of the Delhi Agreement, long after Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had returned to Bangladesh in January 1972.

India ought to have rightly insisted that an international tribunal try those prisoners of war who had contributed to the well-documented genocide in Bangladesh. This would have also eroded the credibility of the Pakistani Army, eliminated it as a political force and led to a more enduring peace in the region. Indira Gandhi’s inexplicable failure to convert India’s victory in the 1971 war into a durable peace will remain a blot on her record. We will continue to bear its consequences, one of them being confronting a nuclear Pakistan.

*From (INDIA ON MY MIND) Reflections on
Politics, Democracy & History*

* * *

A more stable global order could rest on negotiation, not rules.

- Dani Rodrik and Stephen M. Walt

IMPORTANT ISSUES IN UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN INDIA

Prof. R. Sudarsana Rao
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Education is an important determinant of human resource development of a country. It facilitates the way for economic well-being and leads to social transformation. Several economists commended the importance of education in the economic development of a country. Recently Amartya Sen, the Noble Laureate opined that education is a constituent as well as an instrument of well-being of an individual. The importance of education has been emphasized by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the United Nations in 2015 in which the fourth SDG refers to quality education. India adopted this Goal-4 in 2015 and seeks to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” by 2030. The New Education Policy-2020 considered that education is fundamental for achieving full human potential to develop an equitable and just society and for promoting national development.

Education inequality leads to economic inequalities and reduction of the former certainly helps in reducing inequalities of income and wealth as the relationship between the two is mutually interactive and reinforcing. This calls for increased access for equal opportunities for education at different levels. As expansion of primary and higher secondary education takes place as a result of higher levels of economic growth and development, the number of young people aspiring higher education increases. In view of existing education inequalities and increased access at lower levels of education and for the development of the nation higher education needs expansion in India.

Expansion of Higher Education

Higher education was pursued in India by a few elite families even after Independence for a long time. At the time of Independence there were only 20 universities, 500 colleges with one lakh students in higher and technical education. The percentage of women students was very small. But since then the number of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) as well as the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) have expanded significantly due to the avowed efforts of

the Union and State Governments and also due to the active role of private sector participation. Today the number of universities is about 845 and 45000 colleges exist. GER is a good measure of accessibility of education and the GER in higher education increased from about 8 per cent at the time of Independence to about 28.1 per cent at the National level recently. Of course, this is far below the GER of BRICS nations except South Africa-Brazil (51.3), Russia (81.9), China (50.6), South Africa (22.4) and the Western nations of USA (89) and Canada (88). It may be pertinent to mention that the New Education Policy-2020 sets a target of achieving GER in higher education including vocational education at 50 per cent by 2035 in tune with the objectives of increasing accessibility, inclusiveness and equity of NEP-2020. It may be interesting to note that some of the States like Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Telangana have GER (18-23 Years) higher than that of all India level. It is happy to note that Government of Andhra Pradesh has set a target of 70 percent GER over and above the NEP-2020 target to be achieved by 2035. Similarly, gender gap in GER exists in States like Karnataka, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Odisha while it is higher in States like Himachal Pradesh, Goa, Kerala, Haryana and Punjab showing predominance of women enrolment though such gap does not exist at the national level. Further expansion of higher education should take into consideration the existing social and regional inequalities of higher education. Mere increase in the number of HEIs and GER is not just enough to realize the full benefits of higher education. What is more important is quality of teaching and research. But it is necessary to note that higher education in India has been facing several challenges and the important of which are briefly discussed below.

Shortage of Faculty

Faculty strength of an education Institute is the first pre-requisite for quality teaching and research. Without adequate qualified and well trained teachers, one cannot expect quality learning outcomes. Faculty shortage and lack of recruitment applies across all HEIs, both old and new and of Center and States though the older ones are the worst hit. It has emerged as a big challenge as there is no recruitment for more than two decades impacting teaching, innovation and research. The IITs, IIITs, IIMs and Central Universities have also been suffering with

The years ahead will be shaped by China's ambitions, the continuing struggles of liberal democracy, and the climate crisis.

- Richard A. Falk

shortage of faculty. As per an estimate of Union Ministry of Education, 11057 faculty members are on rolls against the sanctioned strength of 20532 in the premier HEIs under their jurisdiction constituting about 35 per cent. In fact the shortage of faculty in these premier institutions ranges from 25 per cent to 39 per cent. It is pertinent to note that the faculty gap in some specific institutes is much higher. For instance, the University of Delhi suffered the faculty gap as much as 50 per cent followed by University of Allahabad. The situation in State Universities has been much worse as almost all these universities in several States are run with ad hoc and guest faculty. For instance, in Andhra Pradesh 1100 faculty only are working against the sanctioned posts of 3864, 71 per cent of posts being vacant. About 1800 faculty at the entry level have been working on contract basis with different nomenclature across universities for a salary of less than half of the salary of an Asst. Professor as per UGC norms. The shortage of faculty has affected the pupil-teacher ratio in the universities and colleges, the All-India ratio being 29 against the ideal ratio of 10.

Another important issue to reckon with is scarcity of talented and qualified candidates as faculty for engineering colleges as bright and skilled students are being recruited by IT companies in India abroad. Further, the recruitment process was stalled several times due to multiple reasons like roster fixation, reservation issues, court stay orders etc. besides the priority and administrative issues of most of the State governments including Andhra Pradesh.

Any initiative by governments to enhance quality teaching, learning outcomes and research will be futile in the absence of filling up of the existing vacancies with qualified and competent faculty.

Infrastructure Deficiency

Infrastructure deficiency in HEIs is another important challenge in providing quality teaching, research, governance and student support services. The deficiency is acute and more pronounced in the new institutions compared to old ones of both the Center and States.

The National knowledge Commission (NKC) recommended establishing as many as 1500 universities in the country in order to achieve the objectives of accessibility, equity and inclusiveness.

Subsequently, several states established new universities especially in the rural and backward areas. The Union Government also established a large number of premier HEIs in different States in the last one decade. This policy of expansion of higher-general, technical and professional- education without proper preparation and adequate funding led to acute shortage of physical infrastructure of all sorts. Several State universities are suffering from lack of adequate class rooms, labs, office accommodation and toilets etc. impacting the enrolment, attendance, quality of teaching, research and governance. Lack of relevant books, equipment, computer systems and adequate space to accommodate them are serious problems faced by the newly established State universities. It is interesting to note that some of the aided colleges under the affiliating jurisdiction of these Universities in Andhra Pradesh are bigger, well equipped and furnished better than the respective Universities themselves.

The pandemic COVID-19 has exposed the deficiencies related to Information Technology (bandwidth and internet) both hardware and software, in several State Universities to attend as well as to conduct video conferences, Webinars etc, and to take up online classes even though the faculty exhibited commendable adaptability in shifting from the class room lecturing to online teaching. One of the important reasons for such kind of situation of the newly established universities in several States including Andhra Pradesh is lack of financial assistance from the Central Government due to non-fulfillment of statutory procedures and norms like obtaining UGC 12B status and NAAC accreditation and non-release of funds from the State Governments.

Financing

The Kothari Commission (1964) recommended that 6 per cent (Centre+ States) of GDP should be spent on education. But this target was not achieved even after more than five decades and public expenditure on education hovers around 4 per cent of GDP at present. The NEP-2020 states that 'there is no better investment towards a society's future than the high-quality education of our young people' upholds the same target of public investment on education. Financing of higher education is accorded less priority by both the governments. It may be noted that some States are giving relatively higher priority

I believe that love and friendship constitute the surest bonds in a world where everything is constantly changing, and that these should be cherished whenever and wherever they are found.

- Dr. Karan Singh

to primary education in recent years.

Financial crunch is a common problem experienced by all the HEIs but the State universities, especially the newly established ones are the worst hit. The premier institutions like IITs and IIMs are also not funded in the same manner as they were in the past, but still they are better than the State universities. Among the State universities also, the old ones have multiple channels of getting financial resources like grants from UGC, AICTE, DST, International Multi-lateral organizations and the Central Ministries besides their own resources and accumulated corpus funds. The State Government provides Block Grant for the payment of salaries and pensions besides earmarking of development grant. But the financial resource position of the newly established universities has been much worse leading to all kinds of problems discussed above. For instance, some of the newly established universities are not eligible to get any kind of grants-in-aid from the Central government or from its funding agencies like UGC, AICTE etc. unless they are accorded 12 B status of UGC which is mandatory. Similarly, some of these universities have not gone for NAAC accreditation due to shortage of faculty and infrastructure, lack of competence/ preparedness of faculty for accreditation and lack of necessary leadership. Some Universities got NAAC accreditation but obtained low grades and were awarded least amount of grant.

Therefore, they largely depend on the State Government both for payment of salaries and pensions and for infrastructure development. Though the State Government provides funds to pay salaries, the funds earmarked in the Budget for building infrastructure and equipment etc (Capital/Development Grant) are often either not released at all or reduced substantially resulting in severe financial crunch. Lack of sufficient permanent buildings for classes and office accommodation, truncated laboratories and libraries, inadequate and poorly maintained toilets and other low level campus amenities are the common physical characteristics in most of these universities. Renovation and maintenance of existing buildings, modernization of labs and libraries and replacement of obsolete equipment are the problems in the old universities. Most of the state Governments including Andhra Pradesh in the last few years have not been releasing the development

grant earmarked in the Annual Budgets. It appears that the State Governments are not according much priority to the funding of higher education compared to social welfare schemes and freebies though they set high targets of GER and often pronouncing about achieving academic excellence..

Quality Educations

The existing higher education ecosystem with all its constraints in India is unable to produce quality education at present. Inadequate number of teachers, some of them with less competence, lack of regular updating of syllabi and its timely implementation, acute shortage of infrastructure, especially lab facilities and lack of adequate thrust on skills and learning outcomes result in the production of students of less quality. This is one of the important reasons for the less percentage of employability of the outgoing students of different streams. For instance, it is estimated that only 45 per cent of the engineering graduates are getting employment immediately after completion of their course. The companies which make campus recruitments often complain that even the brightest students recruited are not able to do the job entrusted to them due to lack of necessary skills and training. According to National Association of Software and Services Company (NASSCOM) Survey, only 25 per cent of the engineering graduates working in IT sector have the necessary skills to take up the necessary job. It may be noted that without adequate funding, the goals of innovation, incubation and quality teaching and research will remain as wishful thinking. It is necessary to note that due to low quality of academic and research outcomes, Indian universities or HEIs are unable to find a place in the first hundred top institutions in the world. Therefore, quality of education needs to be improved in India.

Skill Development

Skill development and vocational education assume more significance in view of the potential of demographic dividend. The Twelfth Five year Plan estimated that about 5 per cent workforce only has formal education while the same is 52 per cent, Germany 75 per cent and South Korea 96 per cent. The NEP-2020 has suggested a frame work to impart vocational education at higher levels. The demographic dividend has set in 2018 in the country and lasts long almost for a period of 35 years. It is

necessary to train our young students with computer and communication skills. Therefore, there is a need to strengthen the existing IT infrastructure and recruit adequate and well qualified IT trainers for imparting necessary computer skills. If the states can implement the compulsory apprenticeship suggested by the NEP-2020 successfully by the colleges and Universities, it will increase the employability.

Autonomy

University autonomy means self governance or functional freedom without any conditions and lack of government interference in the administration. University needs autonomy to discharge its functions efficiently and to achieve the objectives for which it was established. It appears that HEIs like IITs, IIITs and IIMs under the jurisdiction of Central Government enjoy more autonomy than the State Universities. The Gajendragadkar Committee on Governance of Universities (1971) held the view that ‘their autonomy should be scrupulously respected by the legislature and the executive.’ Universities should have autonomy in matters like offering and designing of new courses, prescribing of curricula, admissions, appointments and promotions of teaching and non-teaching staff following the rules prescribed by the Executive Councils and approved by the Academic Senates. Almost all State universities largely enjoy freedom in preparing syllabi and in the conduct of examinations etc., but have been suffering from undue interference in several other matters including admissions. In the name of uniformity, equity and excellence, governments have been interfering in the university administration in almost all the States curtailing the initiative and freedom of vice-chancellors having dampening effect on the development and governance of the universities. The erosion of autonomy starts from the appointment of vice-chancellors wherein the role of the Governor and Chancellor is nominal.

In Andhra Pradesh successive governments, irrespective of the political parties in power, have been eroding the autonomy of the universities in the last few decades. University autonomy has been eroded in Andhra Pradesh, like in several states through (1) legislative changes (2) financial controls and (3) administrative interference. Over the period, the Government made changes in the Andhra Pradesh University Acts of 1987, 1991, 1994 and 2019

by bringing drastic changes in the procedures of selection of Vice-chancellors, discarding the practice of electing category-III members of the Executive Councils (earlier Board of Managements) and the 30 Member component of the Academic Senates. While the Academic Senates have not at all been formed in several new universities, the Executive Councils and Academic Senates have been filled with nominated members who are loyal to the ruling party in power. The government interference in the decision making process and administration has increased with the presence of Ex-officio members and nominated members in the Executive Councils affecting the university autonomy. The circle of government interference has become full after the recent amendment of the AP University Act facilitating the appointment of Chairman, APSCHE, the apex body of higher education in the State, to be an Ex-officio member of Executive Council of all universities. This shows the intention of the government to have full control on the universities.

The Finance Department exerts its control through budget allocation of grants and their release. All important proposals with financial commitment, even for utilizing own resources, need to be approved by the government. Frequent and undue interference by some senior officials of the Department of Higher Education in the academic administration is dampening the freedom and initiative of vice-chancellors and in turn affecting the developmental prospects and governance of universities

If the objectives of excellence in teaching and research and good governance are to be achieved in universities, university autonomy need to be restored through democratization of functioning of the universities. Persons with proven integrity, consistently good academic base and long experience are to be appointed as vice-chancellors. Similarly, experienced persons with integrity and sincerity are to be nominated as members of Executive Councils and Academic Senates. Then only Universities can emerge as agents of social transformation and contributes to the economic development of the State and the nation. Implementation of NEP- 2020 by the state governments with sufficient funding will resolve several issues in Universities and may help in enhancing quality of teaching, research and employability in the years to come.

* * *

The slogan ‘Minimum Government Maximum Governance’ suggested continuity in liberalizing the economy.

- Montek Singh Ahluwalia

GOD / RELIGION :

Dr.I.Venkata Rao

Eye Surgeon

Do you really believe in the existence of god? Read the ensuing text that conveys my understanding of God and Religion.

Religion can be considered as a faith/belief which should propel us all to walk on the righteous path. Similarly existence of god also is an individual conception. Our forefathers who lived in a relatively under developed society (by the present standards of science and Technology) had great belief in DHARMA. Be it Hinduism ,Christianity or Islamism who laid down good conduct and friendly environments. In a broad perspective the terms” God and Religion” are like bright light shining to show and enlighten us by driving away the darkness (Ignorance and superstition) so that our lives have a meaningful existence.

People who believe in God SEE HIM/Her even though they are invisible. In real life these gods may not exist in physical form.Sometimes a sense of fear haunts even those who are strong god believers. While this thought is largely untrue the belief itself creates a sense of self attainment and satisfaction. Irrespective of religious believes it all boils down to the relationship one has with other be it human or animal and mother nature. As late M.K: Gandhi said “ All faiths lead to one destination that most of us after death would like to be in the abode of HEAVEN. Is it because of the fear of Hell which none of us have seen??

Once Swamy Vivekananda asked his mentor if he ever saw the God. The answer’ My son you asked me very pertinent question. The counter question by swamy R.K was “ Did you ever see the air/wind in physical form? The answer would be NO. We breathe clean air to live. The leaves of a tree dance in joy as the wind moves. This is proof enough that air exists even though you dont see it.. Therefore , my son even though the Almighty God is invisible exists in every human being as ATMAN or ANTARATMAN which is the Divine driving force for us all. Friends, let me end this narration by saying that all religions are indeed the faiths that we cultivate over a period of time.

Suffice to say whether you are a God believer or Atheist try and do something useful to humanity

which in turn creates in you a feeling of joy that modulates BODY CHEMISTRY- THIS indeed is a true physiological phenomenon for body functions. Your comments and suggestions are welcome. I accept bouquets and brickbats with equal impunity.

* * *

WE NEED TO EVOLVE

Dr. (Ms) Ahana Lakshmi

Environmental Consultant

For the last couple of weeks, all eyes and ears have been on Sharm El-Sheikh where the Climate Conference (27th Conference of Parties to the UN Convention on Climate Change. COP 27)is going on. A big achievement has been the decision to adopt a loss and damage fund. According to the World Resources Institute, “Loss and damage” is a general term used in UN climate negotiations to refer to the consequences of climate change that go beyond what people can adapt to, or when options exist but a community doesn’t have the resources to access or utilize them.” It is very much a disaster situation. After all, a disaster is when the affected community is unable to respond on its own and needs external interventions.

Talking of disasters, in time for COP 27, the Centre for Science and Environment, New Delhi has released a report, an assessment of extreme weather events which says that India saw extreme weather events on 241 of the 273 days from January 1 to September 30, 2022. Record breaking temperatures, floods, heavy rainfall. Not surprising because even my parents’ home in the ancient temple town of Srirangam, located in a street that is supposed to be at a higher level and has never experienced flooding in the past was flooded twice in the span of three months this year; and it was not even during the monsoon. The rain that should have fallen perhaps over the span of a week was concentrated into just a couple of hours at night. An extreme event surely!

Coming back to the COP27, the negotiations are about how the money that developed countries need to pay up to compensate economies that are suffering because of global warming and climate change caused by those who used fossil fuel in the past and built their economies. But the negotiations seem to have hit a roadblock. In other words, those have climbed the ladder of development are quite ok leaving others mired in the quicksand of climate

Human history is a brief spot in space and its first lesson is modesty.

- Will and Ariel Durant

impacts they have created. This attitude took me back to the now defunct 'Loss of Ecology Authority' created way back in 1996 when environmental degradation of the Palar River was raised in the Supreme Court by the Vellore Citizens Welfare Forum. The authority was to implement the "precautionary principle" and the "polluter pays" principle and award, use expert opinion to assess losses, identify those affected and provide just compensation. A news report in 2014 referred to the affected farmers waiting for more than 18 years for compensation. Two decades later, the Authority was closed and the pending cases (28,000) were to be transferred to the National Green Tribunal. I've no idea what has happened in the interim except wonder what does one do while waiting for the compensation for losses that you have not contributed to?

One of the good things that happened after the 1999 Super Cyclone that hit Odisha and the 2004 tsunami is that the disaster management paradigm in India changed to being proactive. Rather than hand out relief after the event, slowly disaster risk reduction started getting included in the planning of various activities of both the government and non-government actors. The result has been fairly dramatic in terms of reduction in the number of lives lost, especially in the case of cyclones. Damage to property: that of course is a different story. Hopefully, that too will change. Identification of vulnerable locations, retrofitting, ensuring building codes and most important of all, environmental restoration must happen.

But it is not just environmental restoration. Yes, that is important – the nature based solutions that have been emphasised at the climate meeting. But why not be environmentally proactive? There are after all laws

that can be implemented. There is the Environmental Impact Notification that is supposed to provide clearances to projects BEFORE the project starts. But if are laid back and we dilute the notification and say ok, we know you have done wrong but just pay a fine and we'll regularise what you have done, that is NOT OK! We need to ask ourselves if we need more seaports along the coast or improve the efficiency of our inefficient systems.

We need to ask questions and take a tough stand on environmental matters instead of razing forests for some infrastructure which serves only big businesses and then saying bhavatibhikshaamdehi to get money to plant forests in unsuitable places (few such projects are successful). The original forests served not only protect millions of lives but also supported their livelihoods.

A decade ago, Conservation International brought out a series of short but powerful videos called 'Nature is Speaking' using the voices of famous film stars. In the film called 'Mother Nature', Julia Roberts' voice rings out: 'I am prepared to evolve, are you?'

Time we did. Evolve to be more careful and nurture we have. Evolve to be restrained in the use of natural resources and not say that, per capita, we are low emitters and what is wrong with using more energy. We should not wait till loss and damage funds flow in to support change; past experience shows that it is not going to happen soon. We don't really have time left. Instead, we should put in all efforts to evolve at being most efficient with what we have. Evolve to being leaders of thrifty living. Aatmanirbharta. That should be our Life!

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