

Nandini

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Voice For The Deprived

Dedicated to the cause of marginalised and downtrodden

VOL XII

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RS.10/-

**One should seek and search
for the deserving deprived person
to extend his support,
instead of waiting for one
to approach.**

THOUGHTS OF BHAGAVAN SRI RAMANA MAHARISHI

Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharishi had great compassion for humans and animals alike and he loved everyone around him.

Here are a few instances how Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharishi made animals feel comfortable with him.

The tiger of Pachaimman Kovil

One day while at Pachaimman Kovil, Rangaswami Iyengar saw a tiger in a bush. His body shook with terror, he began running towards Bhagavan, gasping for breath and shouting at the top of his voice, 'Oh, Bhagavan! Ramana! Ramana!'

When Bhagavan asked him what all the fright was about, he said imploringly 'Ayyo, tiger, tiger! Come, Swami, we must go into the temple and lock the doors, otherwise she will come in.' Pointing towards the bush he said, 'There it is, in that bush.'

Bhagavan said, 'You wait here. I'll go and see.' When Bhagavan went to have a look, the tiger was gone. Still, Rangaswami could not overcome his fear. Bhagavan assured him that it was harmless but he did not believe.

Another day, while sitting on the edge of the tank opposite the temple, the same tiger came for water and without any fear, roamed about looking at Bhagavan and then went its way. Iyengar, however, observed all this hiding himself in the temple, afraid of what might happen to Bhagavan. After she left, Bhagavan went into the temple and relieved him of his fear saying, 'Look! See what a mild animal it is ! If we threaten it, it will attack us. But not otherwise.'

The two peacocks

One day two peacocks walked into Bhagavan's presence, one white and the other multi coloured.

Catching Bhagavan's silent wish, the attendant nearby put out a handful of grain for each of the 'visitors'. The coloured peacock began to peck away at his 'prasad' while the white one, without touching his share, stood watching the other feeding himself with relish. Suddenly, the white one flew at the other and drove him away from his food. The one thus driven looked up helplessly at Bhagavan; one could easily feel the silent appeal in the bird's attitude.

Bhagavan smiled and spoke to the mischief-maker as a loving mother would to her mischievous little son: "Come here! You have your share so why do you trouble him?" The white peacock took a few dignified steps towards Bhagavan and gazed up at him with shining eyes. Bhagavan extending his hand said softly, "Yes. Eat your share. Let him alone. Go.Go."

Obediently, the white peacock retraced his steps to his share of food, while the other which had all this time stood at a distance, came back to his share of the grain.

It seemed as if a tensely coiled spring had been gently, yet firmly released. Nobody spoke. Silence had become more silent. Everyone, including the peacocks, understood.

Lakshmi in Samadhi

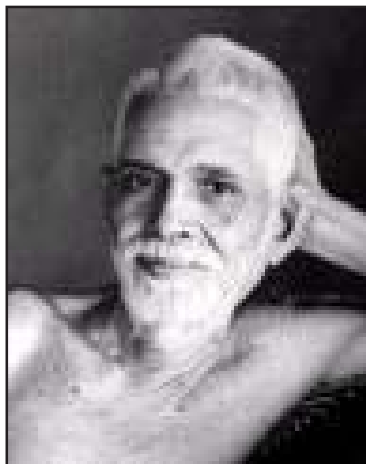
Lakshmi (a cow) came to the ashram each day, had her meals, grazed on the ashram land, entered the hall and sat contently near Bhagavan. In the evening, she would go back to town with the women.

One afternoon after lunch, when Lakshmi was pregnant for the third time, she came to the hall while Bhagavan was reading the newspaper. She stood near him and started licking the newspaper. Bhagavan looked up and said, 'Wait a little, Lakshmi,' but Lakshmi went on licking.

Finally, when his mild protests went unheeded, Bhagavan laid the paper aside and put his hands behind her horns and rested his head against hers. Remaining like this for a while, Lakshmi became motionless.

After about ten minutes, Bhagavan looked up at a devotee nearby and in soft voice, asked, "Do you know what Lakshmi is doing?" The devotee shook her head. "She is in nirvikalpa samadhi!" Tears were flowing in streams down her broad cheeks and her breathing had stopped, her eyes fixed on Bhagavan.

Courtesy: Mountain Path, January-March 2008



Desperate Calls

*You can enjoy your prosperity
only if you share your income with the deprived
and thus discover the satisfaction that it provides.*



Young lady needs to undergo surgery

Ms.S.Lakshmi Iyer, age 20 years is studying B.Sc., II year. She is suffering from recurrent dorsal myelopathy and bilateral optic atrophy (multiple sclerosis).

When she was studying in the 11th std., she fell down in her house. After one year, she was not able to get up from the bed and walk without any support. Twice she was admitted in the hospital and has undergone treatment. In the beginning of the treatment, there was some improvement and again the condition became worse. Now another neuro doctor advised her to undergo baclofin treatment. The cost of the treatment is Rs.2 lakhs.

The girl's father is working as courier boy and is earning Rs.3000/ per month.

The girl's father requests kind hearted persons for financial help for his daughter's medical treatment.

Contact address:

Sri.V.S.Narayanan Iyer

No.10, Mumtaj Nivas, Kattamanivali, Kalyan (East)

Pin:421 306 Thane District, Maharashtra

Disabled boy needs support for education

Mr.A.Alocious Regan, age 19 years is a poor disabled boy. He is studying teacher training course.

His father is a disabled man. His mother is an unskilled labour. The family is running with her meagre income.

Mr.A.Alocious Regan, requests financial help for his studies.

The cheque may be drawn in favour of Al-Azhar Teacher Training Institute, Thodupuzha, Kerala and sent to the following address:

Mr.A.Alocious Regan S/o.Mr.Anthony sami
Odiyathur (.P.O.), Kandachipuram (Via)Thirukovilur (Tk)
Villupuram Dist. Tamil Nadu

Visually impaired lady needs help for medical treatment

Mrs.K.Gnana Sundari who is a visually impaired lady from poor family got married to a visually impaired person.

On 11th December 2006 in an accident, she lost her husband and her right leg was fractured.

Immediately, she was admitted in General Hospital in Chennai and was there for two months and was operated.

She was shifted to Iswari Prasad Dattatreya Orthopaedic Centre, Andhra Mahila Sabha in Chennai. The first phase of surgery was done on 21.4.2007 by the centre raising funds and she was discharged on 5.6.07.

Now again, she was admitted in Iswari Prasad Dattatreya Orthopaedic Centre with infected non union of right leg tibia on 6.8.2007. She is under conservative treatment. The approximate cost of the treatment will be Rs.30,000/-

The cheque may be drawn in favour of Iswari Prasad Dattatreya Orthopaedic Centre, Andhra Mahila Sabha, Chennai and sent to the following address

Ms.Kalyani Chandramouli,
A-27, Luz Apartments, 146, Luz Church Road,
Chennai-600 004

All donations made to the centre is exempt U/S 80G of Income Tax act 1961.

Disabled person wants support for self employment



Sri.C.Venkatesan is a disabled married man. He has two daughters and two sons. At present, he is working in a fruit shop. He is not able to run his family with his meagre income.

Sri.C.Venkatesan requests kind hearted persons for donation of push cart to start fruit business himself.

Contact address:

Sri.C.Venkatesan, S/o.Sri.Chinnasami,
Mariamman Koil Street, Surapattu, Siruvallai-P.O.
Villupuram Tk., Tamil Nadu. Pin-605 402

Visually impaired person needs job

Sri.K.Gopi is a poor partially blind man. He has obtained post graduate degree in history. He has also undergone various courses like executive secretaryship, new write shorthand, telephone operator and computer operation etc.

Sri.K.Gopi requests for a suitable job in Chennai.

Contact address: Sri.K.Gopi,
No.2/98, Avadi Main Road,
Senneer Kuppam, Ponnamallee, Chennai-600 056

Readers' forum

Readers' forum provides space for the enlightened readers to give expression to their views on a variety of socio economic issues that is of relevance to the society.

Further enrichment of the journal with your thoughtful inputs would certainly go a long way in promoting the cause that the journal seeks to espouse.



Where is the growth?

Dear Sir,

Many people are living on road pavement or very close to railway tracks. The sky is their roof.

We watch them every day. We see the cradles with infants on tree branches etc.

They are not beggars. They work very hard and earn their bread by their own sweat. Alas! they cannot afford to have even a small dwelling. It is difficult to imagine how the new borns and aged survive in the rainy and winter season.

What is the contribution of society to help these people? What is the government doing? Most of the public do not seem to be even aware about the problems of these deprived people.

There was an incident reported on 14.12.2007 . Two construction workers were killed and six others suffered multiple injures, when a speeding car ran over them while they were asleep on the pavement along new Avadi Road in Chennai, around 2.30 a.m on 13.12.2007

It is shame that the government is not able to provide even the basic needs of its population - children with no schooling, sick without medical aid, people without shelters to live -even drinking water is too a big problem for them.

Government claims about development and growth. Indeed our roads are full of multi colour cars! People who have made politics their profession like olden days Maharajas have huge houses with 5 to 6 bed rooms etc. etc.

Brilliant financially challenged boys and girls cannot study even upto x std. while the boys and girls of rich families become doctors and engineers, failing which they become politicians to rule.

Is it the growth of a nation?

Chennai

Daniel Vedamuthu

Starvation deaths are national shame

Dear Sir,

That 1.5 lakh farm suicides had occurred between 1997 to 2007 in India (Nandini Jan.2008) reveals a sordid tale that reflects very badly on our self rule for 60 years.

Farmers are hailed as the back bone of the country but we are allowing them to suffer enormously as days go

on, by not addressing their problem with the result that starvation and suicide deaths among them are on the increase. The Government and the affluent people, who do not care to provide support to the deprived persons around them are the killers of these hapless tillers. Such state of affairs is a stigma on the governments and people.

Poet Bharathiar gave notice in one of his poems that even if a single person faces starvation, we will destroy the world.

But we are unconcerned about tragic deaths due to starvation and suicides of poor farmers.

Even if they had Rs.2000 per month, these 1.5 lakh farmers would require a total of Rs.30 crores per month to keep their soul and body in tact. This is a paltry sum for any exchequer. If the corporates and MNC's which proudly announce their quarterly profits in billions spare 0.1 percent of their profits, not only starvation death will be stopped but the percentage of people living below poverty line can be decreased drastically.

Coimbatore

M.R.Pillai

Show of shawls and gifts

Dear Sir,

It is seen that judges do not hesitate anymore to accept shawls and compliments during the meetings and the state functions and the scenes are captured by cameras of the press.

Judges instead of being role models, should not give an impression of succumbing to temptation. Bureaucrats both serving and retired are no exception.

Judges will lose the support of the commonman, if they would also start enjoying publicity and gifts.

Chennai

K.N.Narayana Pillai

Charity to liquor addict

Dear Sir,

I saw a beggar on the road and gave him Rs. 10/-. After a few minutes, I saw him buying a liquor bottle in a nearby liquor shop.

I felt disgusted and sad and decided that hence forth, I should never extend help in cash form to any one but should give only in kind.

Chennai

Radha

India of Gandhiji's dream

Contributed by K.N.Narayana Pillai

Gandhiji dreamt of India and his thoughts are given below

"I shall work for an India in which the poorest shall feel that it is their country in whose making they have an effective voice; an India in which there shall be no high class and low class of people; an India in which all communities shall live in perfect harmony. There can be no room in such an India for the curse of untouchability or the curse of intoxicating drinks and drugs. Women will enjoy the same rights as men. We shall be at peace with all the rest of the world. This is the India of my dream."

However, today we have governments in India of the families, for the families and by the families only.



CORRUPTION TOUCHING NEW HEIGHTS

It is highly disturbing to read the news item that jewels and cash to the tune of Rs. 44 lakhs were seized in a raid carried out in the residence of an official of road transport department belonging to Government of Tamil Nadu in Tiruchi. A few days back, there was another news item that in a thasildar's house, around Rs.50 lakhs worth of jewels, cash and property documents were seized. Such news item clearly indicate that corruption amongst the government officials have now touched the roof.

It is now well known to every common man that it is not possible to get any document registered in a registrar's office in any town in the country without paying pre fixed bribe amount. There was even an alarming news item earlier that the contents of property documents were changed in the government department because of the corrupt practices.

In such conditions, it is inevitable that the people are gradually losing faith in the government machinery itself. Before approaching any government department, people take extra money with them to pay the bribe money that would be demanded. Police stations, government hospitals

and every wing of the government are steeped in corruption and this is no more a news.

Certainly, the cabinet ministers should accept responsibility for such state of affairs. People vote for the politicians who come to power after winning elections and therefore they are primarily accountable for prevalence of such corruption in the government departments, which hit the common man hard. People have no power to remove the corrupt officials which only the ministers can do.

In such deplorable scenario where corruption is sweeping the government departments from one end to the other, the common men particularly belonging to lower income group feel helpless and wonder as to where he can turn to for help and support.

The situation is very serious and ministers and bureaucrats should take some corrective steps urgently and stem the rot.

Ultimately, common man only look upto ministers who are all powerful, to save the situation. If conditions would deteriorate further, ministers cannot escape from the blame.

DISGUSTING NEW YEAR CELEBRATIONS

Any civilised person who happened to be in Elliots beach in Besant Nagar in Chennai on the New Year eve to watch the celebrations in the midnight hours would have felt sad.

It was totally disgusting to see the almost riotous young men and women shouting at the top of their voice and dancing and hugging each other. Some were seen kissing. Obviously, most of them were drunk and were driving the two wheelers and cars at great speed. By the grace of God, nobody lost their lives by way of accident.

What sort of celebration it is? One cannot but think that these young men and women, who are obviously from affluent families are uncivilised and indisciplined people.

Celebration need not mean getting oneself inebriated and indulging in all sorts of activities.

Unfortunately, drinking has become necessary part of celebrations these days in India amongst the youth and such drinking habits are causing enormous harm to the health, character and value system amongst the young men and women.

The free run of liquor amongst young people can not do anything good for our society and it is sad that the government remains unconcerned. Even the social service organisations and right thinking people are unable to stem the rot.

For civilised people, the New Year eve became an occasion for introspection, disappointment and sadness.

CARDINAL URGES TO AVOID LIQUOR DURING FESTIVALS

In a bold step, Cardinal Varkey Vidyathil in Kerala urged Catholics of his archdiocese, Ernakulam Angalmaly in Kerala, to celebrate a liquor free Christmas this year.

In his message, printed in several Catholic publications, the cardinal regretted that alcohol consumption has become "an integral part" of all Christmas celebrations. "Whether it's Christmas, Easter or family celebrations, we serve liquor to enjoy the occasion," he noted.

This is not the first appeal against consumption of alcohol during Christmas. The Catholic clergy has often advised against serving of alcohol at Christmas celebrations, but this is the first occasion in recent times that a functionary as senior as a cardinal has spoken out with such fervour.

But the cardinal's message did not have much effect.

CRICKET MADNESS INDICATES LACK OF SENSE OF DIRECTION AND PROPORTION

The recent events in Australia involving the visiting Indian cricket team has been focussed by the Indian press and media, as if the country's honour has been wounded and the country has been humiliated. The commercialised media and press have written so much on the subject, as if nothing concerns India today more than cricket.

It is essential to keep in mind that cricket is only a sport and it is nothing more than that. Even as sports event, cricket is played only in a few countries in the world which were under British rule earlier. Cricket is not like events in Olympic, where almost every country in the world participate and where India has no worthwhile achievement in the last several decades.

Cricket as a game is not known in several countries. The so called cricket celebrities in India about whom the Indian media discusses day in and day out will not even be recognised, if they walk on the streets in most countries in the world. One thing that can certainly be pointed out about cricket hype in India is that it is a foolish exercise.

Cricket is supposed to be gentleman's game. But it is no more so, as the cricketers question the umpires and indulge in using abusive language on the field and out side.

What is there to feel so much excited about Sydney test, where the umpires were said to have given wrong decision? Is it not important that a disciplined and quality cricketer and Cricket Board should accept the decision of the umpires without question?

The matter of concern is that because of the hype created by the commercialised media, the nation's energy and time is being wasted in discussing about the worthless controversies in Sydney test.

There are other social and economic events and also achievements in the country which deserve far more attention and importance from the people and media.

Excessive focus on cricket in India today only makes one suspect that the country lacks sense of direction and proportion.

NAXALITE MENACE - ARE WE MISSING THE PROBLEM?

Government of India is said to be raising 37,000 man force to fight naxalism in the country.

While the Government of India may be justified in raising such force to defeat naxalites, it has to think carefully as to whether naxalism can be defeated by the mere military might alone.



It is necessary to realise that naxalites are somewhat different from terrorists who are motivated by communal or chauvinistic considerations. While naxalites can also be called terrorists, naxalism seems to be essentially a protest movement against exploitation of the poor and the disparity in national income in the country. Therefore, the naxalites may be people with all sorts of religions and castes, with anger at the exploitative social and economic systems alone being the common factor binding them together.

There is no doubt that there is tremendous exploitation in our society today, with the gulf between the poor and the rich expanding steadily. It is evident that affluent section of the society are largely self centered and most of them have no consideration about the plight and problems of

the oppressed and downtrodden. In such conditions, there is a strong case for the deprived section of the society to organise themselves and demand better opportunities and privileges

The governments all over India have largely become corrupt and dishonest in recent times, with even the confirmed thieves and murderers making their way to legislative assemblies and parliament and even becoming ministers. To some extent, the law breakers seem to be involved in making the laws in the country and therefore law enforcing agencies are losing the credibility amongst the general public.

In such conditions, if the poor people think that the only way that they can protect themselves to improve life conditions is by defeating the exploiters somehow, they need to be looked at with some understanding and even with compassion.

While the government can raise a force against the naxalites, the mere military force alone cannot defeat them without solving the basic problems of economic and social inequalities. Without solving the issues, if the government would kill one naxalite, another one would arise.

Those sitting in the government and enjoying the power and position should search their conscience first and reform themselves, which is a pre condition to solve the naxalite problem.

War cry against Naxalites

In a follow up action to Prime Minister's war cry of crippling the hold of Naxalite forces with all the means at its command, Government of India has decided to raise 37,000 personnel strong India Reserve battalions for the Naxalism affected states.

The Prime Minister had talked about urging the Home Ministry to consider establishing a dedicated trained force at the Centre either as part of an existing force or as a separate one. Such force would go a long way in assisting States tackle Naxalite groups, the PM had said.

With 26 battalions already under deployment, the new addition will increase the presence of central forces in Naxal states to a whopping 80,000 armed personnel, which in

ratio terms would mean almost 7 armed personnel after every single Naxal cadre. This would not include massive deployment in Naxal areas by the state police.

The proposal was mooted by the Naxal-affected states at the Chief Ministers meeting on internal security held under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister.

The Union Home Ministry will help eight main Naxalism affected states raise these 35 battalions on 50 per cent grant and 50 per cent loan basis. It would take about three years to train them in all aspects, including the guerrilla warfare techniques after which they would be posted in the affected areas of the eight Naxalism affected states.

BRAIN STORMING SESSION ON PROBLEMS OF VISUALLY IMPAIRED WOMEN



There are reported to be around 4.85 lakhs of visually impaired women in Tamil Nadu alone, most of them belonging to lower income group and they are living in stressful conditions.

While the problems of visually impaired women are discussed in various forums, rarely visually impaired women

themselves get an opportunity to express their views and represent their problems.

With the objective of providing an opportunity to the visually impaired women to express their feelings and provide a better understanding of their problems to the society, Nandini Voice For The Deprived, would organise a brain storming session from 10.00 a.m. to 1.00 p.m. on 26th January, 2008 (Republic Day) at Chennai.

A number of visually impaired women of various educational background and social status would be invited to present their thoughts during the brain storming session.

The highlights of the observations made by visually impaired women would be collated and published for the benefit of the government, social service organisations and research institutions.

It is expected that this brain storming session would give a new insight to the problems of the visually impaired women, so that suitable policies and action plans can be initiated by all concerned for the betterment of the visually impaired women.

RIGHT TO INFORMATION ACT - FACING HURDLES

Right to information activists point out that more than 12,000 second appeals are pending with the Central Information Commission (CIC), the final forum of appeal for pending complaints under the Act, even as around 1,200 appeals pour in every month.

The CIC is able to clear only 400 complaints every month. And though it is vested with the powers to penalise bureaucrats who do not respond to applications within the stipulated time frame of 30 days, it rarely does so - a mystery that only chief information commissioner can perhaps solve for thousands of exasperated applicants.

The RTI activists also point out that most people, especially in the rural areas, are still clueless about the Act, which came into being in 2005.

A recent review seminar conducted by the National Campaign for People's Right to Information (NCPRI) in 18 states revealed that only seven states have published guidelines for the RTI in the local language. To rectify this, RTI activists believe the procedure to file RTI applications must be simplified.

However, so long as bureaucracy continue to block queries from the ordinary citizenry, information will continue to be a closely guarded secret in the country.



SWAMI VIVEKANANDA SPEAKS

This is the gist of all worship - to be pure and to do good to others.

He who sees Siva in the poor, in the weak and in the diseased, really worships Siva and if he sees Siva only in the image, his worship is but preliminary.

He who had served and helped one poor man seeing Siva in him, without thinking of his caste, creed or race or anything, with him Siva is more pleased than with the man who sees Him only in temples.

MOLESTATION OF WOMEN

The molestation of women in Mumbai on the New Year Eve has received nationwide attention and has caused concern all over the country. Molestation of women and atrocities on them has become an all India phenomenon. While some incidents in metropolitan cities like Mumbai are reported in the national press and the media, there are many incidents of similar and more serious nature taking place in smaller towns and rural areas which are not reported. The life of an average woman has certainly become unsafe in our country today.

There are two main reasons for this deplorable condition.

One reason is the increasing habit of liquor consumption amongst the youth, both in the affluent and lower income group. In the case of affluent people, women also have taken to drinking to some extent though women taking to liquor still remains insignificant in lower income group. The government's liberalisation of liquor policies all over the country for the sake of boosting its income is the primary reason for the liquor habit amongst the youth going up by leaps and bounds. With the youth taking up to liquor in a big way, the value systems in their life inevitably suffer, as high consumption of liquor kills the sensitivity in the individuals to a considerable extent. Women taking to liquor is particularly tragic, since it demolishes the claim of women for superior and responsible conduct and behaviour as compared to men.

The second reason is the increasing corruption and nepotism amongst the law enforcing agencies and their not functioning with the level of responsibility and commitment expected of them. The irresponsible comment of the Mumbai police chief while reacting to the molestation of women on the New Year eve is only an indication of the extent of deterioration in the quality of performance and attitude of the law enforcing agency.

In view of such attitude of law enforcing agency, there is really not much fear of the police amongst the law

breakers and offenders. Perhaps, many of them think that they can get away by using their political influence and contacts or by simply bribing the police officials.

Drinking amongst the youth is a prevailing practice all over the world and it is not prevalent in India alone, though it could be considered as very unIndian particularly by the Gandhian followers.

But, the difference is that the quality of the police force in other countries, where the offenders cannot get away with such ease.

Further, the role of judiciary in India is also uncertain, as the judgements are still largely given on the basis of the perspective of the judges instead of being based on the severity of the crime, the judicial traditions and interpretation of the law in terms of spirit rather than letter. Unfortunately, even judiciary is sometimes suspected in our country.

The net result is that the women suffer who are certainly more vulnerable. The attack on women particularly in public places show that India is still far from being civilised and still has a long way to go.

The media also has a large role to play by being more responsible instead of painting the women molestation issues as if it is one of mere sensation. Some section of media publish the pictures of women in semi nude and in provocative postures almost everyday with a view to increase the sensation. Such media methods are largely responsible for trivialising womanhood in the country.



A SURE WAY TO CONTROL NATIONAL POPULATION

In several countries like USA and Singapore, hospitals and medical practitioners strongly recommend that the husband should stay with the wife in the labour ward as she delivers the child.

The Indian objective of limiting one child to a family to control the growth of national population, can be largely achieved by insisting that the husband should witness the wife delivering the child.

Most probably, the frightened and concerned husband would ensure that his wife will not deliver next time.

Impressions of an NRI

True spirit of Secularism in practice

Contributed by Sri. N.S. Sankararaman Email:- ns_sankara@yahoo.co.in

Sometime back, there was an interesting news item in the Toronto Star, about the Judicial pronouncement made by the Apex Court of Canada, on, what is to be considered as a sensitive religious issue.

What was particularly praiseworthy was the fact that this pronouncement of the Apex Court against the particular religion, was accepted without a murmur by the religious community in question, as if it were just one of those perfectly natural developments. As a matter of fact, the judiciary could justifiably be accused of violating the sensitivities of the particular religion, by someone in India fed with an overdose of the ideas of pseudo secularism over the years.

But the Canadian Judiciary did not blink an eye when it pronounced the judgement, as the issue was considered to conflict with the overall interests of the society.

Mind you, this is no ordinary religion. The members of this religion could be considered to have the greatest influence over the decision makers in U.S and Canada, if they are not the decision makers themselves. Many of them are the industrial captains and in Canada, many of the major industrial giants are owned and headed by people from this religion. It is perhaps needless to mention that the religion that I am talking about is Judaism and the people in question are the Jews.

The issue that went up to the Judiciary relates to the Jewish practice that the man is the one to divorce and the woman has no right. And it is the man who is supposed to give sanction to the divorced wife to remarry by what is known as GET, without which the wife cannot remarry. When, in a particular case, a man who divorced his wife with the promise that he will eventually give the sanction, refused to do so, as earlier promised, the Supreme Court of Canada had the courage to overturn a ruling given by the Subordinate Court that the contract on religious issues are not enforceable. By this, the Court unmistakably entered into what could be strictly deemed as religious domain. The Court clearly opined that even moral religious obligations could be converted into legal obligations.

On reading the news item, I somehow felt distinctly uncomfortable. A bitter taste in the mouth, so to say.

Uncomfortable, perhaps due to the subconscious reminder that I got instinctively about the way pseudo secularism is practised in my own native land. Strangely, was I, also reminded of what is known as the Shah banu case in India, when one of the past Governments in New Delhi chose to amend the constitution to placate the Muslim Mullahs, even though it went against the interests of the individual pathetic Muslim lady herself, deprived of her alimony. The great liberals and the well known women protagonists at the time did nothing worthwhile, to protest the actions of the Government, choosing rather to forget the hapless woman conveniently in a hurry.

The question has nothing to do with the religion itself or its members, as much as it had to do either with the spinelessness of the Government of the time at the centre or with its brazen and audacious politicking, even at the expense of one of the most fundamental values as cherished by the framers of the constitution, which is the spirit of secularism.

Presently, the concern is that while secularism as a concept remains in the Indian Statutes, the spirit in its true dimension is nowhere to be seen in its implementation in India.

It is indeed necessary to protect the interests of the minorities against the aberrations, such as the one in Gujarat that do take place from time to time. On the other hand, secularism, if it is understood and practised as only minority appeasement, would only end up alienating the majority community, which would certainly not be in the interest of the minority community itself.

The bottom line is that the Government of Canada did not choose to go in for a constitutional amendment which might have been palatable to the Jews. That it did not, is perhaps not so much due to the Government's own conviction, as much as to the fear of losing its respectability.

Hence, what is to be deduced is that the vigilance and enlightenment of the citizens is all that ultimately matters to keep any Government on the right track. Precisely what is missing in our ancient land.

CONVERTING AGRICULTURAL LAND FOR INDUSTRIAL PROJECTS A COUNTER PRODUCTIVE EXERCISE

Indian economy is essentially agricultural based and there is no way that this condition can be changed in the foreseeable future. As a matter of fact, any attempt to change this scenario would certainly end up as a counter productive exercise.



The present move to convert large tract of agricultural land for industrial use in several states in the country in the name of promoting Special Economic Zone or for the sake of setting up large projects such as steel , titanium dioxide etc. only amount to promoting industries at the cost of agriculture. Whether done knowingly or unknowingly, such move would upset the balance in the Indian economy and social conditions in the long run in an adverse manner with serious consequences.

In the highly populous India with over 70% of the working population being employed directly or indirectly in agricultural operations, any attempt to change the agriculture orientation of the country would not only lead to mass unemployment but also to tremendous frustration and social unrest amongst large section of population. This would further increase the disparity in income and opportunities and create a big gulf between the rural and urban India.

Unfortunately, the move to acquire large part of agricultural land for industrial purposes is being debated in the country today , as if it is merely a question of displacing the population and payment of adequate compensation and initiation of rehabilitation measures for the displaced population. While the displacement of population is a serious social issue, even more adverse factors are the loss of agricultural production and the

opportunity to create a strong agro based economy, in tune with the traditional strength as well as knowledge and practices in the country.

The total land area in the country is around 72 crore acres. In recent times, in the four states of Andhra Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Jharkhand and Orissa alone, some 1.97 crore acres have been acquired for setting up industrial projects, dislocating a population of around one crore. This consist of 51.45 lakh acres in Andhra Pradesh, 15.18 lakh acres in Chattisgarh, 1.1 crore acres in Jharkhand and 16.44. lakh acres in Orissa. The All India figure of land acquired for industrial use could be much more.

In Tamil Nadu, the State Industries Promotion Corporation of Tamil Nadu is reported to have identified more than ten thousand acres of land to set up the "land bank". Around ten thousand acres of land are sought to be acquired for Titanium dioxide project in Tuticorin region in Tamil Nadu. Similar moves for land acquisition are there in several other states.

Justifiably, all these acquisition moves have caused huge furore from the helpless and poor citizens living in rural areas who would be displaced and left stranded. The likely loss of agricultural production due to such land acquisition are yet to be carefully estimated by the government and the planning commission of several states, who seem to have totally ignored this aspect while acquiring land for the industrial projects.

The government agencies often try to justify the acquisition of land by terming them as dry land or barren land. This is not always true. Further, an agricultural scientist will know that with today's technology inputs, there is nothing like dry land and any land can be made cultivable for appropriate crops, as it has been convincingly proved in countries like Israel.

The issue in India is not one of industry versus agriculture but the gloomy estimates that India can well face serious food shortage in the coming years, in the light of near stagnant agricultural production and increasing population level. Even as on today, nearly one third of the population which is a huge figure of more than 300 million people are below poverty line, which means that they find it difficult to get one square meal a day of adequate protein

CONVERTING AGRICULTURAL LAND FOR INDUSTRIAL PROJECTS - A COUNTER PRODUCTIVE EXERCISE

and nutrition content. The country would face food shortage even today itself, if this one third of the population were to have the affordability to consume enough food that are required for healthy living.

With such alarming situation, one can well imagine the serious consequences if the large tract of agricultural land or potential agricultural land were to be converted for industrial projects or housing construction etc.

Vast segment of the country men do have the skill only for agricultural operations and when they would be displaced from such areas even after paying adequate compensation, they will have to necessarily remain unemployed or under employed that will only add to the social tension in the country.

There is no indication that any careful assessment have been made at All India level or policy approach worked out to decide what should be the level of agricultural production in the country in the next few decades and the agricultural land and technology inputs required for the purpose.

Any country has to primarily target on building up capacity for food production more than that of automobiles or steel or titanium dioxide.

Building up these industries at the cost of agricultural production would amount to not only lack of pragmatic forward planning but also an irresponsible attitude towards the millions of agricultural workers in the country who form the backbone of the nation as on date.

STAGNATING AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION IN INDIA

| Year | Production [Million tonnes] | Per capita availability [grams per day] |
|---------|-----------------------------|---|
| 1996-97 | 174.51 | 503.1 |
| 1998-99 | 178.16 | 465.7 |
| 2000-01 | 186.24 | 416.2 |
| 2001-02 | 186.24 | 494.1 |
| 2003-04 | 186.78 | 463.2 |
| 2004-05 | 179.03 | 444.0 |

EXAMPLE OF UNITS IN SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONE INVADING THE FARMLAND

| Developer | Area [ha] | Villages affected | Agricultural/waste land | Crops grown |
|--|-----------|--|-------------------------|---|
| Bharat Forge [Pune, Maharashtra] | 7,000 | 17 Villages of Khed Taluka | 70% / 30% | Bajra, jowar, rice, wheat, potato and onion |
| Reliance Industries [Raigad, Maharashtra] | 14,000 | 24 villages in Pen, 1 in Panvel and 22 in Uran | 100% / 0% | Rice, paddy, cultivation and salt |
| Reliance Industries [Jhajjar / Gurgaon, Haryana] | 10,117 | 23 villages in Jhajjar and 6 in Gurgaon | 90% / 10% | Jowar, guar, bajra, dhan, wheat, mustard |
| Nokia SEZ (Sriperumbudur, Tamil Nadu) | 323 | 10 to 12 | 80% / 20% | Rice, groundnuts and other cash crops |

RATES BEING OFFERED IN SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONE

[Rs. Lakhs per acre]

| Special Economic Zone | Land rate/Government offer | Market rate in adjoining area |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------|--|
| Bharat Forge [Pune] | 6 to 7 | 10 to 15 |
| Reliance Industries (Haryana) | 23.65 | 50 in Jhajjar; 23.50 to 100 in Gurgaon |
| Nokia SEZ (Tamil Nadu) | 1.5 to 3.75 | 10 to 30 times higher, depending on access and location from highway |



SCHOLARSHIP FOR POOR SCHOOL STUDENTS

During the academic year 2007-08, Nandini Voice For the Deprived extended educational scholarship to many poor students studying in the government owned and government aided schools in Tamil Nadu.

There were problems in extending the scholarships since many government owned and government aided schools in Tamil Nadu demanded fees more than the prescribed level under various pretext. Further, most of them refused to accept cheques and insisted on cash payment and refused to give proper receipts.

Nandini Voice For The Deprived complained about the situation to Government of Tamil Nadu and also held a protest meeting in Chennai on 2nd October, 2007 (Gandhi Jayanthi day) which was attended by large number of students and parents from poor families.

Government of Tamil Nadu provided details of the stipulated fees level in government owned and government aided schools which are very reasonable. Further, the Tamil Nadu government sent a circular to all government owned and government aided schools in Tamil Nadu that action would be initiated if any school would demand fees more than the stipulated level. The government was good enough to send copy of the circular to the Trustee, Nandini Voice For The Deprived.

Nandini Voice For The Deprived has sent repeated appeals to the Tamil Nadu government requesting it to

give wide publicity to the stipulated fees by providing advertisements in the press and media and insisting that every school should exhibit the details in the notice board. Unfortunately, till now, no acknowledgement or reply has been received from Tamil Nadu government for this appeal. If wide publicity would be given amongst the poor students and their families, then it would provide courage and confidence to the poor families to stand up to the school managements who demand unethical fees and also send complaints to the government.

Nandini Voice For The Deprived proposes to extend the scholarship for the poor students in Tamil Nadu during the forthcoming academic year 2008-09 also. All the students who were given scholarship during the last year have to be extended support this year also, since there is no improvement in their economic and social conditions. In addition, Nandini Voice For The Deprived desires to extend the scholarship to more number of poor students.

Those who want to join Nandini Voice For The Deprived in this efforts may kindly contact Trustee, Nandini Voice For The Deprived.

The poor school students who need educational help for the forthcoming academic year can also contact and register their names. They can collect the prescribed registration form.

THE HELPLESS CITIZENS



in power and by the bureaucracy.

In such conditions, citizens, particularly those belonging to the under privileged section of the society, suffer in variety of ways. One can clearly see such conditions in many places such as government owned hospitals and ration shops that are supposed to cater to the needs of the poor. Even cremation grounds are not exception, as one cannot even cremate a dead body without greasing the palms these days.

It is often said that such conditions exist because the average citizen of this country is indifferent and does not protest. This contention is not true, since whatever the protest that are made by the individuals are often ignored by those in power and authority.

What can a citizen do in the event of finding conditions where he is being exploited or subjected to unfair dealings either in the government offices or hospitals or police stations?

Day in and day out, we learn from media about the incidents of corruption in the various government departments and misuse of position and funds by the politicians

He can write to the government and to the Chief Minister but on most occasions such communications are not acknowledged or simply acknowledged after several months without initiating any tangible actions.

The next option is to send letters to the press. Sometimes, these letters get published but even in the case of letters published in well circulated newspapers and journals, the government rarely takes note of it.

The third option is to go for public protest by way of indulging in street demonstrations but this cannot be done by individuals or small groups effectively and requires the backing of an opposition political party or a non governmental organisation and it is very difficult to get such backing for an individual. Further, those indulging in public protests can be hauled up as law breakers and one cannot expect an average law abiding and suffering citizen to involve himself in such public protest.

Finally, the suffering citizen remains helpless and has no alternative other than submitting himself to injustice and even humiliation at times.

Unless we have a government and official machinery that has the commitment to govern adequately and honestly, the average citizen of this country will continue to remain helpless.

JYOTI BASU'S SOMERSAULT

The veteran communist leader Jyoti Basu has declared that "socialism is not possible now". He has further said "we want capital, both foreign and domestic".

Obviously, Jyoti Basu has reversed all his ideas and thoughts that he cherished and advocated for several decades and after having been the Chief Minister for such a long time in west Bengal implementing his communist philosophy and theories. With this statement, Jyoti Basu the tallest surviving leader of Indian communist movement has caused tremendous confusion amongst ardent admirers of communism in India

The present views of Jyoti Basu is difficult to accept, as communism is a glorious concept and still has tremendous level of relevance in India. The problem today is not with the communist philosophy but with those who claim that they are the torch bearers of communism in the country but have adopted the capitalist way of thinking.

The communist philosophy essentially calls for breaking the chain of oppression and suppression and protecting the proletariat from exploitation by the rich and the affluent. The communism obviously is not in

favour of wealth generation at the cost of equanimity in distribution of wealth and opportunities. Any difficulty in propagating and implementing the communist ideas cannot be an adequate reason for giving up the philosophy itself.

How can anyone say that communism has lost its relevance in India today when the gulf in income and opportunities are still wide and exploitation of the poor and deprived continue in various ways?

Perhaps, in tune with the modern trends of management and science and technology, the practices of communism can also undergo some element of modernisation but there is no justification for questioning the basics.

One feels that Jyoti Basu and Buddadheb Bhattacharjee have been hasty in conceding defeat for communism against the capitalist forces for whom wealth generation at any cost is the legitimate exercise. Such slant in economic policies towards mindless privatisation is already causing strain to the country's social structure by widening the gulf between the poor and the rich.

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