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The India International Centre is a society promoting understanding and amity between the different communities of the world by undertaking or supporting the study of their past and present cultures, by disseminating or exchanging knowledge thereof and by providing such other facilities as would lead to their universal appreciation

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EDITORIAL

I find myself at a loss for words. What can I write after seeing the horrific images and reading accounts of the devastation and despair that defined the second wave of the pandemic over the past months. It will be a while before they fade somewhat, but will never be forgotten. Entire families were wiped out, children orphaned, and people were left gasping for breath. It was surreal; it felt like we were actors in a science fiction film on improbable diseases. The poet Christina Georgina Rossetti wrote this somewhere in 1855 and it rings true for us in the 21st century.

The Plague

'Listen, the last stroke of death's noon has struck—
The plague is come,' a gnashing Madman said,
And laid him down straightway upon his bed.
His writhed hands did at the linen pluck;
Then all is over. With a careless chuck
Among his fellows he is cast. How sped
His spirit matters little: many dead
Make men hard hearted.— 'Place him on the truck.
Go forth into the burial-ground and find
Room at so much a pitful for so many.
One thing is to be done; one thing is clear:
Keep thou back from the hot unwholesome wind,
That it infect not thee.' Say, is there any
Who mourneth for the multitude dead here?

Coming to the current issue, I hope readers will enjoy the diversity of this collection. The Dr. C.D. Deshmukh Memorial Lecture is a feature of the Summer volumes. This year's lecture, titled 'Indian Constitution: What it Ought to Mean Today', was delivered by

eminent jurist and former Chief Justice of India, Justice M. N. Venkatachaliah. This dovetails with an article on Indian democracy, followed by articles on literature and international relations. The photo essay by Sanjeet Chowdhury is on 'Chandernagor: Little Europe', which is a journey through this historic city.

The summer heat has finally broken and the much-awaited monsoon is here, bringing a little cheer. But the worst of the pandemic is far from over and collective memory is short. Let us learn from the past to limit the impending third wave.

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OMITA GOYAL

CONSTITUTION OF INDIA

What it Ought to Mean Today*

M. N. VENKATACHALIAH

The Homo-Sapien is not simply an improved version of his ancestors but a new concept, qualitatively distinct from them—a totally unprecedented entity.

—Ian Tattersall

The Principles Liberty, Equality, Fraternity form a union—a Trinity that to divorce one from the other is to defeat the very purpose of Democracy

—Dr. B. R. Ambedkar

Dr. Chintaman Dwarakanath Deshmukh was a charismatic personality and a visionary. After a brilliant educational career he entered the prestigious Indian Civil Service and made immense contribution to the nation as a scholar, administrator, economist, internationalist of great stature, educationalist, and served in various capacities as governor of the Reserve Bank of India, finance minister, member of the Planning Commission, India's representative on the executive boards of Bretton Woods institutions. He was the recipient of the Ramon Magsaysay Foundation Award. He was the Founder-President of the India International Centre.

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MAKING OF THE INDIAN CONSTITUTION

On 14 May 1787, Benjamin Franklin, who had toiled hard for four humid months for the Philadelphia Constitutional Convention, was waiting for the delegates to arrive. As there was a delay in their

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arrival, he looked at the picture of the 'half-sun' painted at the top of the chair meant for George Washington. He was reminded of the difficulty for any artist in distinguishing between a 'rising sun' and a 'setting sun'. After the success of the convention he remarked:

> I have often and often in the course of the Session, and the vicissitudes of my hopes and fears as to its issue, looked at that behind the President without being able to tell whether it was rising or setting: But now at length I have the happiness to know that it is a rising and not a setting Sun.

When the Constituent Assembly of India was completing its monumental work, it was again the metaphor of the 'rising sun'; a great republic was reawakening to its great glory and its tryst with destiny. A feudal society was grimly struggling to be reborn as a modern, egalitarian, industrial society.

They were the most disturbing times of our history. More than half a million people lost their lives in the communal strife following partition. The deliberations of the founders were concentrated on one thing: how to secure and protect posterity from the scourge of communalism. The debates rose to spiritual heights; the making of the Indian Constitution was indeed a sublime event for a country with every kind of diversity: linguistic, religious, cultural and ethnic. The choice and acceptance of the Republican model of democratic government was described as the 'Biggest Gamble' in history. The vast diversity of the country was both its strength as well as its weakness. It used to be commented that India lives concurrently in several centuries, past, present and future. It is also described as a great civilisation, but in an advanced stage of decay. Indian polity was also described as a functioning anarchy.

The Western press was cynical of the success of the institution of parliamentary democracy of the Westminster model in a country with large uneducated masses. But later, the same press praised Indian democracy as 'robust', although the 'rowdiest'. The difficult and the most important aspect in a democracy is its demands on every citizen. It is the reason why the highest office in a democracy is that of the 'citizen'. The government is the most potent teacher. It teaches its people by its own example. Cultivation of the intelligence of the people is high priority. Decorous political behaviour is another

source of public education in a democracy. There is an increasing discomfort that political leadership today merely emphasises the 'form' against the true 'spirit' of democratic values and is dominated by sheer political opportunism. This is a sure prescription for the fall and degeneration of democracy. Democracy has endowed human beings with great riches, but it is not indestructible if money becomes the measure of a person. Money is not the true measure of man, but really a measure of how small a person could be.

Constitutional documents, however lofty and elevating in their exhortations, do not work by themselves. They need the instrumentalities of human agency and institutions. The system of common law legislation, and equally importantly, constitutional conventions, are the agencies and instruments. Most important is the culture of the people to obey the laws—that is the single most important factor promoting constitutionalism. Political leaders have a great responsibility in that regard. A person's capacity for justice, it is truly said, makes democracy possible; their inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary.

India's Constitution became historic owing to the context of its times. The Second World War had just ended, leaving the world appalled at the brutality witnessed during the war. The concept of Human Rights came to the forefront of the debate. Even cultured Europe had seen the rise of Hitler and how street gangs had come into possession of the resources of a great modern state. Alan Bullock remarked that 'Gutter' had come to power. But Hitler never ceased to boast that it was through popular democratic vote!

The avowed objective of the founders of our Constitution was to make India a secular democratic republic. Article 25 enshrined religious freedom unanimously without any reservation or debate.

Democracy is the most precious political innovation of the human mind. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights equates 'Democracy' to a product—the result of a process of 'periodic free and fair elections conducted under an independent authority'. This seems to me to be the minimal attributes of the democratic principle, otherwise it could degenerate into a mere statistical interpretation of democracy. Democracy has spiritual dimensions and cultural pillars. Pluralism is one of them. Secularism is another. Fraternity is yet another. There is also an egalitarian element. You can have democracy or concentration of wealth in the hands of a few. You cannot have

both. The philosophical contemplations on the significance of the broader idea of democracy are that men, incomplete by themselves, seek the ordainment of their completion and fulfilment in the company of their fellowmen, and that democracy provides the highest and richest opportunities for such fulfilment.

Economic development without democracy has its problems. Indeed, there are two views of development itself. One insists on 'growth at all costs', ignoring and even consciously suppressing anything inconsistent with 'growth' in the belief that such growth will ultimately trickle down to benefit all. There again is the famous Lee Thesis named after the legendary maker of modern Singapore, that democracy and development do not go hand in hand. The other view of development is a more friendly version which holds that social reforms lead to economic progress and not economic reform to social progress. The report of the Sarkozy-appointed commission on 'Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress' raises the issue of the inadequacy of the 'GDP' as a tool of measurement. The *Human Development Report* (1999) described such 'growth' for its own sake as ruthless, rootless, voiceless, jobless and futureless.

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HOW IS A CONSTITUTIONAL DOCUMENT INTERPRETED FOR THE EXPANDING FUTURE?

Former British Prime Minister John Major aptly remarked:

> The British constitution is vibrant and robust. But it is not indestructible ....It is not a piece of architecture that one can re-engineer by knocking down a wall here or adding an extension there. It is a living and breathing constitution. Its roots are ancient but it has evolved. It embodies a set of values, a legacy of understandings that have developed year by year over the centuries. No one should lightly contemplate tampering with an institution that is so ancient yet so alive.

No constitutional document is frozen in time or etched in granite. A constitution, in the famous words of Chief Justice John Marshall, is 'framed for ages to come to respond to the needs of an expanding

future and to approach immortality as nearly as human institutions can approach'. Similar thoughts have been expressed by great judges on how a constitutional document is to be read, understood and expounded. In the interpretation of a constitutional document, words are but the framework of concepts, and concepts may change more than the words themselves. The intention of a constitution is rather to outline principles than to engrave details. The words in a constitutional document are 'empty vessels' into which anything could be poured according to the needs of the times. As Justice Felix Frankfurter reminded us, 'Constitutional Law cannot be confined to mere words of the constitution disregarding the gloss life has written upon them'. Constitutional idiom has a 'purposed vagueness' to leave room for the unfolding future. We must never forget, so goes judicial wisdom, that the constitution we are expounding is intended to endure for ages and to be adapted to the various crises of human affairs. The great generalities of the constitution have a content and significance that vary from age to age. A nation needs to grow as it expands. Formal constitutional amendments usher in sweeping changes; but courts achieve the same softly and gradually, often indirectly, by well considered steps to enable the 'past to join the future without strife in the present'. The task of the courts is not merely to find the meaning of the words, but also to supply new meaning to the words.

What then are our expectations by way of constitutional responses to the crises of political life and the economic predicament of our times? The manifestations of discontent are evident. There is an air of irreverence to values and to institutions. There is an increasing air of distrust and cynicism. Cynicism is the power of destruction. Dr. Ambedkar's caution in the Constituent Assembly has now acquired a new urgency:

> If we wish to maintain democracy not merely in form, but also in fact what must we do? The first thing in my judgement we must do is to hold fast to constitutional methods of achieving our social and economic objectives. It means we must abandon the bloody methods of revolution. It means that we must abandon the method of civil disobedience, non-co-operation and satyagraha. When there was no way left for constitutional methods for achieving economic and social objectives, there was a great deal of justification for

> unconstitutional methods. But where constitutional methods are open, there can be no justification for these unconstitutional methods. *These methods are nothing but the grammar of Anarchy* and the sooner they are abandoned, the better for us (emphasis added).

The idea of 'secularism' as variously propounded has raised more problems than solutions. A page from American history is worth recalling. In 1844, the Supreme Court of the United States declared that 'the Christian religion is part of the common law'. Again, in 1892, that 'this is a Christian Nation'. Bernard Schwartz spoke of how, just 30 years later, the famous case *State vs Jon T. Scope* severed that link between law and Christianity. Scope's case, as we know, was the prosecution of a teacher who taught Darwinian evolution which violated a State of Tennessee's law proscribing propagation of any theory which denies the divine creation of man as taught in the Bible.

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REFORMING POLITICAL PARTIES

Political parties are the medium through which the objectives of a democratic polity are pursued. 'They are the only way thus far invented by the wit of the Western world which, with some effectiveness, can generate countervailing collective power of the many individually powerless against the powerful.'

Representative or indirect democracies have in-built ideas of a microcosm and a filter. Volatile, raw, public opinion is refined through the electoral process. But then, a representative democracy must approximate as closely as possible to the image of the society it seeks to represent. Elections are a mode of such expression of the will of the people. Parliamentary democracy requires a representative government which will truly reflect the public opinion, or what John Stuart Mill called the 'General Will' of the people. In order to ensure this, elections should be free, fair and meaningful.

The institution of parliament is again the product of the great political sagacity and innovation of human genius. In Britain, parliamentary supremacy is supposed to be the symbol of the political sovereign, the people. Herbert Spencer recalled how the superstition of the divine right of the kings was substituted by the superstition of the divine right of parliament. Constitutions

with in-built Bills of Rights place certain liberties of the people above the reach of parliaments, and not subject to the result of any election. The Human Rights Act 1998 in England, while retaining the doctrine of parliamentary supremacy, provided a 'declaratory' remedy for alleged violations of rights under the European Human Rights Convention.

But the biggest dilemma is what happens if the electoral system becomes corrupt. John Stuart Mill lamented:

> Of what avail is the most broadly popular representative system, if the electors do not care to choose the best member of Parliament, but choose him who will spend most money to be elected? How can a representative assembly work for good, if its members can be bought, or if their excitability of temperament uncorrected by public discipline or private self control, makes them incapable of calm deliberation, and they resort to manual violence on the floor of the House, or shoot at one another with rifles?

There is presently no substantive plenary legislation dealing with the formation and functioning of political parties. 'Political party' was statutorily defined for the first time in 1989. Part IV A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, introduced in 1989, provided for registration of political parties in Section 29 A, but there are no worthwhile and effective sanctions provided in case of failure to adhere to Section 29 A. Section 29 B and Section 29 C, introduced in 2003, brought about only cosmetic changes. Section 29 B has enabled and legalised the acceptance of donations and contributions by political parties from individuals and companies, with the exception of government companies. There are said to be over 1,600 registered political parties. Some of them, indeed many of them, do not seem to be really concerned with political engagement. Some exist to pursue other interests. Corruption in elections is closely linked to the ethical standards of political parties.

The Supreme Court of India has from time to time issued specific directives to sustain the purity of the electoral process. In 2020, it directed political parties to upload on their websites information pertaining to individuals against whom criminal cases were pending and who were likely to be presented to the public as their nominees. It was on record that while in 2004, 24 per cent of

members of parliament had criminal charges pending against them, the figure rose to 43 per cent in 2019. It was increasingly being realised that 'instead of politicians having suspected links to criminal networks, as was the case earlier, it was persons with extensive criminal background who began entering politics' themselves.

Political experience suggests that the quality of elected persons has gradually been deteriorating. Over time, the voter succumbs to the din and buzzle of the electoral campaign and produces either a dictator or an insensitive or a dumb politician. There is thus democratic fatigue and a shrill cry for a strong leader emerges.

There are mainly two electoral systems: 'First Past the Post' and 'Proportional Representation'. All others are combinations of the two in some proportion. The system of proportional representation has the potential for tossing up coalition governments.

A Discussion Paper issued by the Centre for Standards in Public Life (of which I happened to be Chairperson) argued that there is an imperative need for electoral reforms to ensure free and fair elections in the real sense, and to make elections more meaningful and reflective of the will of the people. It also argued for a comprehensive law regulating the registration and functioning of political parties, alliances of parties, dealing with institutionalisation of political parties—their formation, party organisation and inner party democracy, party funding, maintenance of accounts and auditing, ensuring transparency and adherence to certain basic norms and requirements on pain of de-recognition and de-registration. Many countries have such laws regulating the affairs of political groups. A 2002 pronouncement of the Apex Court has made de-registration virtually impossible, except where the initial registration itself was obtained by fraud, misrepresentation, forgery, etc.

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POLITICAL STABILITY: FIXED-TERM PARLIAMENTS AND LEGISLATURES

The sovereign's prerogative power of dissolution of parliament to be exercised on the advice of the Prime Minister, and the Prime Minister's right to seek dissolution and a general election, have been two of the key features of the Westminster system. These conventions are also part of our Constitutional Law.

This long established constitutional position in the UK has been consigned to constitutional history with the passing of the Fixed-Term Parliaments Act 2011. Under the new law, the term of parliament is fixed. Even the dates of the successive general elections are determined to be the first Thursday of May every five years. Accordingly, the next immediate poll after the new enactment was set for and held on Thursday, 7 May 2015. The Prime Minister can provide by a statutory instrument that the scheduled poll be delayed by up to two months (justifiable in case of some emergency). An early general election would be possible at any time only if the House of Commons by a majority of at least two-thirds of its total membership votes for that, or if the House passes a vote of no-confidence in the government which is not reversed within 14 days. This gap of 14 days is to provide for the possibility of a new government taking office without the need for a fresh election. These are the only exceptions to the pre-fixed polling dates.

SHOULD INDIA CONSIDER ANY SUCH REFORMS?

The malady of hung legislatures and the uncertainty of coalition politics and governments are very well known. Many a time the whole system is brought to a halt. The Prime Minister/Chief Minister is reduced to less than a figurehead and parliamentary democracy becomes farcical. Everything other than national/public interest is the controlling factor.

The term of the Lower House is fixed by our Constitution at five years unless dissolved earlier. Such early dissolution is occasioned generally by bringing down a government by passing a no-confidence motion or by the government advising and securing dissolution. The National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution recommended in 2002 that the Leader of the House be elected along with the Speaker in like manner, and the person so elected be invited to form the government; that any motion of no-confidence against the government should have the support of at least 20 per cent of the total membership of the House; and it should be accompanied by a proposal of an alternative leader to be voted simultaneously. This is on the lines of the German constitution and was also suggested by N. A. Palkhivala in September 1979 while delivering the Madras University Convocation Address.

This can be achieved without amending the Constitution—by evolving conventions about the entire House electing the person to be appointed PM/CM, and by appropriately amending the relevant Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business as regards a no-confidence motion. The basic postulate of the parliamentary system—accountability and ministerial responsibility—would be kept inviolate while imparting greater stability to the government. In the present scenario it would be pre-eminently worthwhile to consider these reforms.

The worrying part is not that good ideas are not implemented, but that they are not even adequately debated. The time we are prepared to waste in hearing each other out, said Sir Oliver Franks, is the very essence of democracy.

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JUDICIAL REFORMS

About 30 years ago, the Law Commission of India circulated a consultation paper which contained a suggestion for the bifurcation of the nation's Apex Court into a 'constitutional court' and a 'court of appeal', a pattern familiar in civil law jurisdictions. The proposals were considered by a committee of judges of the Supreme Court. The committee was of the opinion that a strict bifurcation and water-tight compartmentalisation was not workable in the common law system as the jurisdictions have many overlapping areas, and many civil law issues admit of being expressed in terms of constitutional values.

However, in the matter of working, it was considered desirable to have a constitutional division as a functional arrangement. The judges of the divisions—constitutional, appellate and original—are interchangeable periodically. Such a functional arrangement would emphasise the importance of the primary concern of the Apex Court of the nation for constitutional adjudications.

Justice Felix Frankfurter had cautioned the Supreme Court of the United States that

> it was not Supreme Court of every case decided 'unjustly' by every court in the country. The court may be 'doing justice' in four insignificant cases it decided today; it certainly is doing injustice to the significant important cases on the calendar and to its own role as supreme judicial body in the country. Judicial reflection is a process that requires time and freedom from pressure of having more work to do than can be well-done.

This can be a meaningful message to the Supreme Court of India as well.

As of now, out of 3,67,47,098 cases pending in the district-level courts in India, 70 per cent are criminal cases. There is a dramatic reversal of this proportion in the 15,69,213 cases pending in the high courts, where criminal cases account for 30 per cent.

Well planned case-flow management should become professional and technology-supported. The potential of information technology to speed up and rejuvenate the judicial process is significant. Some of them are discussed in Richard Suskind's 'On-line Justice and the Future of the Courts'.

The 'Advocacy Paper: Rule of Law for the 21st Century' issued by the Foundation for Democratic Reforms contains very useful comparative information and statistics about the judicial infrastructure in the country. The World Justice Report Project's 'Rule of Law Index' places India 69th out of 128 countries.

Some important indices point to the great deficiencies of the Indian judicial infrastructure.

	US	UK	GERMANY	INDIA
1. Expenditure on 'Rule of Law' as % of GDP	1.99%	1.83%	1.56%	0.76%
2. Police per lakh population	238	355	388	156
3. No. of forensic labs	409	—	—	37
4. No. samples tested in a year in forensic lab	12,00,000	—	—	20,000
5. No. of new incoming civil cases annually	5203	3455	—	257

(*Source*: 'Advocacy Paper: Rule of Law For the 21st Century', Foundation For Democratic Reforms)

There is no further need to comment on the gross inadequacy of the judicial infrastructure in the country and on the urgency of reforms.

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EPILOGUE

At the end of the 200 years of the American constitution, a non-governmental group consisting of 200 eminent Americans—former governors, ambassadors, diplomats, academicians, civil society—took upon themselves to review the working of the American constitution and came up with a report titled 'Reforming American Government'. One paper titled 'Grass is Greener on the Other Side' fondly looked at the parliamentary system.

Today, in the context of the near explosion of disruptive technologies and their trend towards ethic-neutral civilisational, transformational influence, it is necessary to foresee, as far as possible, their potential for imminent civilisational demoralisation. Raymond Kruzweil believes that 'a moment will arise when computers will become intelligent and not just intelligent but more intelligent than humans. When that happens, out bodies, our minds, our civilisation will be completely and irreversibly transformed.' He believes that this moment is not only inevitable but is imminent.

Will Durant called civilisation a social order which promoted cultural creation. Four elements constitute it: economic provision, political organisation, moral traditions, and the pursuit of knowledge and the arts. It begins, he said, where chaos and insecurity end. For, when fear is overcome, curiosity and constructiveness are free, promoting the natural impulse towards the understanding and embellishment of life.

In every age, even after everything contentious and debatable is taken out of the way, there yet remains a remarkably wide and firm unanimity as to what is fair and just and good and beautiful. If wielders of power ignore this, divergence becomes marked and they fall out of respect. Although human beings have been amazingly creative in science and technology, they are equally amazingly non-creative in finding solutions for some of the deepest morally sensitive issues of human survival. The extraordinary exploits of science and technology will create unequal societies with concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a few. The new technologies may even compel political, social, economic systems and behaviour to change, adapt and become compliant. Voter choice and voter preferences will become predictable and controlled. It is for the leaders of public opinion to decide whether a standing national watch-dog body—'a civilisation sentinel'—is necessary to act as the collective conscience of society to retain faith in the liberal story and against a possible digital dictatorship, and to preserve the never fading fragrance of what humanity has always cherished as Truth, Beauty and Goodness that add savour to human life itself. A saint expressed his lament on man's predicament: 'Oh Lord Make me holy but not today'.

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* The 38th Dr. C. D. Deshmukh Memorial Lecture, delivered at the India International Centre, New Delhi, on 20 March 2021.

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GOVERNANCE

Role of the Polity and the Public Services*

N. N. VOHRA

India is the world's largest democracy. Since attaining freedom our people have been governed by their own chosen representatives, elected every five years in freely conducted polls.

While seven decades is not a particularly long period in the life of a nation, it would be beneficial to look back, even though fleetingly, to reckon how far we have travelled towards the attainment of the nation building goals envisioned by the founding fathers of our Constitution.

Among the mandated tasks of establishing a strong and caring democracy, built on the pillars of Secularism, Equality, Liberty, Justice and Fraternity, a crucial goal which remains to be attained relates to our failure to provide food, shelter, safe drinking water, healthcare, literacy and employment opportunities to millions of our people who subsist below the poverty line. Unfortunately, the continuing pandemic, COVID–19, has added millions more to the number of those already poverty stricken. Thus, by all accounts, we still have to travel a long way to eradicate poverty and inequality, alleviate the lot of the economically downtrodden and socially depressed segments of our population, and empower them to truly enjoy equal opportunities.

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In any discussion on the governance of India, it would be beneficial to remember that we are a vast country of sub-continental dimensions and a land of awesome geographical dissimilarities. We have large desert areas, the highest mountain ranges in the world, land and sea borders of nearly 23,000 km, over 1,200 island territories, and an Exclusive Economic Zone of several million square kilometres.

Even more daunting is the heterogeneity of our population. Our people, over 1.30 billion today, comprise over 4,600 communities which practise all the world's religions, speak 122 languages and nearly 2,000 dialects. Their vastly diverse traditions are imbedded in thousands of years of history. The lifestyles of our different communities reflect the myriad social, cultural, linguistic and religious diversities which comprise India.

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At the time of Independence, when the country was partitioned, millions were killed in the communal riots and millions more were uprooted and rendered homeless. Large parts of the country, from Bengal to Panjab, were devastated by widespread lawlessness, arson, loot and killings.

India faced a grave financial crisis and a horde of other complex challenges. The British, who ruled India for nearly two centuries for advancing their selfish objectives, had left behind a backward agrarian economy, huge regional imbalances, an insignificant industrial base, large-scale unemployment and widespread poverty.

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It was the selfless commitment of the tall leaders who had carried out the long struggle for freedom, and the strong determination of other front ranking political personalities of that time, which inspired the Interim Government—our first national government in 1947—to deal with the prevailing communal violence; restore law and order; provide food, clothing and shelter to millions of refugees; set up thousands of ration shops to distribute essential food supplies; fight droughts and floods; and, in the midst of the endless troubles on various fronts, to also counter Pakistan's aggression in Kashmir. The success of the political leadership in successfully tackling the endless challenges was in no small measure due to the devotion and extremely hard work put in by the limited cadres of the civil, police

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and other services, all of which had been badly splintered by the partition of the country.

While the Interim Government was working day and night to deal with the virtually insurmountable problems facing the country, the Constituent Assembly remained engaged in prolonged debates to finalise the Constitution of free India. Adopted on 26 January 1950, our Constitution provides the broad framework of cooperative federalism for the governance of the Sovereign, Democratic Republic of India, and lays down a largely socialistic pattern for India's economic development. It demarcates the respective jurisdictions and responsibilities of the Union and the States and, besides, the subjects which can receive concurrent attention.

Under our Constitution, the people of India set out to attain for themselves:

> JUSTICE—social, economic and political
> LIBERTY—of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship
> EQUALITY—of status and of opportunity
> FRATERNITY—for assuring the dignity of the individual and unity of the nation.

The Constitution contains specific provisions for safeguarding the fundamental rights of citizens, and the chapter on the 'Directive Principles of State Policy' provides the direction of the tasks to be carried out for building a strong and vibrant nation. The Constitution provides for the establishment of a uniform set of inter-related institutions which lay the basis for a common framework of governance across the country, and a strong Centre for guiding and supporting the States in the collective tasks of nation building.

It would be relevant to recall that, during the debates in the Constituent Assembly, Sardar Patel had repeatedly cautioned that the effective governance of free India and the harmonious working of Union–State relations would be crucially dependent on the collective pursuit of a national perspective. He strongly believed that the unity and integrity of India could be safeguarded by a federal administrative system in which the All India Services would be required to play a vital role. Thus, our Constitution provides for the establishment of All India Services of such kind and in such number as may be required. However, we have only three pan India Services,

viz., the Indian Administrative Service, the Indian Police Service and the Indian Forest Service, besides the stand-alone Indian Foreign Service. All these four services together comprise a total of about 12,500 officers.

For securing balanced human development and economic growth it was decided to implement five-year plans, which would be finalised by the Planning Commission and the National Development Council after discussions with the States and other stakeholders. It is fortunate that those at the helm after Independence recognised, right in the beginning, that any failure in bringing about orderly change to establish a stable environment across the country could lead to unrest and disorder on a scale which would not be easy to control. Thus, it was wisely decided that tackling the problems of poverty and unemployment would be among the government's first and foremost priorities. Another wise decision taken was to mobilise the local communities to render voluntary services for implementing rural development programmes in the villages. This approach engendered excellent results, at least in the early years. As a district officer in the early 1960s, I recall our significant successes in building village roads, wells, dispensaries and other infrastructural assets with the help of voluntary labour which we were able to mobilise from the beneficiary villages.

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Considering the severe financial crisis and the many other serious challenges facing the administrative system, all of which required to be dealt with at the same time, it could be fairly concluded that in the first two decades after Independence the successive Union governments were successful in laying the foundations for the future growth and development of the country. Briefly recalled, this period witnessed the enlargement of the educational and health systems; establishment of rural dispensaries, hospitals, schools, colleges, universities and science and technology institutions; expansion of civil aviation, sea ports, highways, railways and public transport systems; implementation of land reforms, consolidation of holdings and security of tenure to the actual tillers; construction of large dams and irrigation systems which later enabled the phenomenal success of the Green Revolution; enhancement of power generation

and steel and cement production; establishment of Space and Atomic Energy Commissions and many other visionary initiatives which paved the way for the many creditable advancements which our country has been able to achieve in recent years. During this period, besides Pakistan's intrusion into Kashmir in 1947, the country faced external aggression on three occasions. While we had to accept humiliation in the 1962 conflict with China, our military acquitted themselves with great honour in the 1965 and 1971 wars with Pakistan.

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Around the end of the 1960s the Congress party, which had continuously ruled at the Centre and in most of the States since Independence, was faced with serious internal feuds and dissensions. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's refusal to yield office and authority at any cost led to the enforcement of Emergency during 1975–77. This regrettable period witnessed the violation of the rule of law and the Constitution, and the cabinet system being severely damaged.

While there may have been no dearth of corruption in the earlier years, the period of Emergency saw the growth of an unwholesome link-up between dishonest politicians and the brand new breed of unprincipled officials, the so called 'committed' civil servants, who pledged loyalty not to the Constitution but to their political masters. The wanton abrogation of laws, policies and the well-laid down systems led to the emergence of extra constitutional elements who played unlawful roles in governmental functioning, both at the Centre and in the States.

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The post-Emergency period was marked by the growth of political instability and rapid changes in the ruling hierarchies at the Centre. During 1991–2004 the country faced five elections to Parliament and six Prime Ministers were at the helm in this short period. The 1980s and 1990s also witnessed the exposure of a series of murky corruption scandals which involved allegations against the senior most echelons in the polity, including the Prime Minister of India. In the States also there were shameful cases of corruption and gross

abuse of authority which involved high ranking civil and police officers, ministers and chief ministers.

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A look back at the evolution of the polity would show that even though the elections in the past decades have hardly ever related to contests between differing ideologies or to opposite positions in respect of important public issues, there has, nonetheless, been an enormous growth in the number of political organisations all over the country. In 1951, at the time of the first General Elections, there were only 54 National and State Parties and today we have eight National, 53 State and 2,538 Unrecognised Political Parties registered with the Election Commission of India! Another alarming phenomenon which has taken root relates to the highly deleterious role which money and muscle power have been playing in elections at all levels in the country. Among many other adverse consequences, this has enabled candidates with criminal backgrounds to gain entry into the State Legislatures and the Central Parliament.

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Among the vital organs of the Constitution, the Executive is perhaps the most important pillar as millions of our people, in their day to day existence, have to approach one or the other government office for the resolution of their grievances. The Executive comprises the elected representatives, i.e., the political Executive and the public servants, who are the appointed or the permanent Executive.

For the past several years now, the functioning of the Executive has been on the decline. Among the varied factors which have led to its continuing failures the most damaging have been those generated by manipulative politics, politicisation and interference in the working of the administrative apparatus, unchecked growth of corruption and unaccountability. The failures of the Executive have led to costly delays in the achievement of crucial nation building goals.

The unfettered inter-play of corrupt and unlawful practices has resulted in severely eroding both the capacity and the credibility of the governmental machinery. It is most regrettable that, leave aside ensuring the efficient functioning of the key institutions of governance,

even the management of the day to day public dealing offices has been invariably entrusted not to functionaries of proven merit and integrity, but to those who are generally selected on considerations of caste, community or proximity to their political masters. Continuing failures in the delivery of essential public services have led to anger and frustration among the people, but to no avail.

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Unceasing political meddling in the orderly working of the governmental apparatus has generated indiscipline, inefficiency, corruption and unaccountability among the employees. Functionaries who carry out unlawful behests and collect funds for their political masters, as well as for themselves, are not accountable to anyone, least of all to their hierarchical superiors who dare not question such elements. In such an environment, the common man, who cannot pay bribes, is the worst sufferer.

Political interference in the working of the police organisations in the States has caused irreparable damage to the discipline, morale and professionalism of these forces. Instead of being allowed to work unfettered and being held fully accountable for enforcing the law and maintaining public order, for which they were by law established, the constabularies have been misused for carrying out unlawful assignments and, over the years, they have got mixed up with the very elements whose criminal activities they are duty bound to check and bring before the law. A grave consequence of this situation has been the progressive deterioration in the maintenance of law and order and the virtually unchecked growth of criminality. The police has acquired a frighteningly negative image and the common man is mortally afraid of visiting a police station even when in need of urgent help.

With known criminals enjoying the protection and patronage of powerful elements in the ruling hierarchies, a 'criminal nexus' between the polity, corrupt public servants and the mafia networks has been functioning for the past many years now. In this context it may be recalled that, consequent to the serial bombings in Mumbai in early 1993, Prime Minister Narasimha Rao had directed the Union Home Secretary to take stock of the activities of Crime Syndicates and mafia organisations which were being protected by government

functionaries and political personalities with whom they had developed links. The Prime Minister was anxious to know the circumstances in which the mafia had been able to transport large quantities of explosives into the city of Mumbai for freely carrying out serial bomb blasts in the financial capital of India. The Home Secretary submitted his report in early October 1993. Nearly three decades have since elapsed. The action taken on the findings in this report, which has generally been referred to as the 'Vohra Committee Report', is not in the public domain. However, meanwhile, the criminal nexus has enormously extended its reach in several parts of the country and become many times more powerful.

It is equally unfortunate that the Enforcement Directorate (ED), Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC), the apex central agencies which deal with complaints of corruption against public servants, are no longer looked upon as credible professional agencies whose functioning is beyond the pale of political pressures and extra-legal influences. The sharp decline in the integrity of these vital institutions has led to the growing belief that the rich and the wealthy, who provide funds to successive political regimes at the Centre and in the States, and persons who hold high public offices, are beyond the reach of the law, no matter how serious the crime which they may have committed. In this context it may be recalled that in 1997 the Chief Justice of India (CJI), Justice J. S. Verma, while hearing a case involving a bunch of corruption scandals, had directed the Union of India to set up an Independent Review Committee (IRC) to examine the manner in which personnel were appointed to run the ED and CBI, and to also review the functioning of these agencies. The IRC Report, prepared by this writer, was accepted by the CJI and all its important recommendations were reflected in the Judgement in the well-known case of *Vineet Narain and ORs vs Union of India* (1997). The concerned echelons in the Government of India may do well to revisit this Report.

Successive governments at the Centre, irrespective of their political complexion, have failed to enforce an effective pan India law to curb corruption at the highest levels, including the Prime Minister of the country. The proposal to appoint a Lok Pal was mooted almost half a century ago. Several draft bills were examined and endlessly debated by successive Parliamentary Committees and

expert groups till the Lokpal Bill was finally passed. After delay and dithering for several decades, the incumbent government at the Centre appointed the first Lok Pal in early 2019. Sadly, till today, there is no indication whether and when this important institution is likely to become functional.

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Successive governments in the States have not been able to satisfactorily discharge their mandated role of providing clean and efficient governance. There has been failure to maintain public order and achieving steady growth and development for equitably promoting the welfare of all their people. It is shameful that, from year to year, even the outlays earmarked for executing poverty alleviation schemes and programmes have continued to remain unspent or have been embezzled and eaten up. Needless to stress, the Executive has failed its constitutional responsibility to provide clean and efficient governance for promoting the welfare of the common man.

The Legislature has also failed to effectively deliver its constitutional role of passing wholesome laws which would empower the people, specially the weaker sections of society; strengthen the framework of the rural and urban self-governing institutions; enhance the efficiency and accountability of the public services; and protect the common man from want and hunger. It has also failed to act as the parliamentary watchdog of the Executive's functioning. Another alarming development has been that almost one-third of the total strength of the Legislatures in the country is represented by persons of unseemly backgrounds and known involvement in criminal offences. This despicable phenomenon, generally referred to as the 'criminalisation of the polity', has degraded the Legislature and adversely affected its functioning.

The continuing shortcomings in the functioning of the Executive and the Legislature have resulted in delaying the achievement of crucial developmental goals. Among the many shameful outcomes of our failures: India ranks 129th among 189 countries in the Human Development Index, published by the United Nations Development Programme in 2019. Equally deplorable: India continues to retain an elevated position in the global ranking

of the 'most corrupt countries'. In the 2019 report of Transparency International, our country was at the 80th position among 180 countries listed under the Global Corruption Perception Index.

Besides corruption, which has damaged the very foundations of our society, growing inequality is cause for most serious concern. While the ten-fold increase in the per capita incomes achieved in the past years is a laudable achievement, we cannot overlook the fact that, as per a recent assessment, 1 per cent of the richest in our country possess 60 per cent of the total national wealth, of which only 2 per cent is owned by the entire bottom half of our population! Needless to stress, urgent steps require to be taken to timely reduce the stark socio-economic disparities which are continuing to increase.

Every year the annual reports of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India and of the Public Accounts Committees of the Parliament and the State Legislatures bring out substantive information about the manner in which scarce public funds, allocated for achieving important economic and human development goals, remain only partly spent or are mis-spent and even embezzled. It is indeed most regrettable that none of these reports have so far resulted in reducing corruption or in having the offenders sent to jail.

Social activist groups, NGOs and the media have been perennially exposing scandals and cases of corruption which involve political persons and public servants holding high positions. In many cases, the higher courts have also been passing strictures against the concerned governmental agencies for their failure to investigate and prosecute those involved in serious cases of fraud, embezzlement and corruption. It is unfortunate that these various interventions have not so far led to even marginally deterring the corrupt and criminal elements.

Recurring failures in the functioning of the governmental apparatus, corruption, criminalisation of the polity and the unchecked enlargement of the 'criminal nexus' could perhaps have been controlled and contained if the Judiciary had remained intact and effective. Unfortunately, alongside the downward slide of the Executive and the Legislature, the functioning of the judicial system has also got grievously impaired. Interference in the functioning of the judicial framework, side by side with the politicisation of the state

police organisations, has grievously affected the functioning of the entire system, particularly the effective delivery of criminal justice.

Governance cannot be effectively delivered unless the laws of the land are fearlessly enforced, public order is maintained and the safety and security of all our people is assured. And such an objective can be achieved only when the entire criminal justice system, including the police and the prosecution, functions with efficiency, speed and fairness. Sadly, today, the capability and the very integrity of the system are being questioned.

Reportedly, nearly forty million cases continue to await trial in courts all over the country, including the higher judiciary. As per the National Crime Research Bureau's Report (NCRB) of 2018: nearly 4.5 million cases were pending trial in the various High Courts. Justice delayed is not only justice denied but also breeds disregard of the law. No wonder then, as reflected in the aforesaid NCRB's Report: on an average, 289 kidnappings, 91 rapes and 80 murders are being committed in our country every day.

It is cause for even greater concern that besides the many serious organisational and logistical deficiencies which plague the functioning of the justice system, there have also been growing complaints about the inadequacies in the competence and integrity of the judicial cadres. In the recent past, the independence and integrity of judges, even up to the august level of the Chief Justice of India, have been the subject of serious allegations. This has generated a widespread perception that the gaps in the judicial apparatus have resulted in weakening both the will and capacity of the superior judiciary to fearlessly enforce the Constitution. In the context of the failures of the Executive and the Legislature, a weakened Judiciary, with cracks appearing in the highest echelons, is cause for great anxiety.

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It is the Union's crucial responsibility to ensure that national security is effectively managed at all times, and on all fronts. For the past several years now, the geopolitical environment in our immediate neighbourhood has been generating recurring security concerns. Pakistan's proxy war in J&K has now continued for nearly three decades and, side by side, terrorist groups and adversary external

agencies have been vigorously pursuing their agenda to destabilise our country by spreading religious fundamentalism, inciting communal conflicts and perpetrating violent disturbances. The recent engagements with China in Eastern Ladakh are cause for added anxiety.

It is regrettable that, despite the continuance of serious security threats to our country, the States have been recurringly questioning the Union's authority in the arena of national security management. Among other matters, the States have been perennially raising issues about the competence and jurisdiction of the National Investigating Agency (NIA), the only central institution which has been investigating and prosecuting terrorist crimes since its hurried establishment in 2009.

It may be recalled that following Pakistan's terror attacks in Mumbai, on our Parliament in Delhi and on the Air Force Base in Pathankot, there have been continuing demands, from varied quarters, for the enlargement and strengthening of the national security management apparatus. While the present Union Government has taken several welcome steps to strengthen the military, we are still in the process of formulating and finalising national security doctrines and establishing the required pan India legal and logistical frameworks which would enable the Union and the States to set up and efficiently operate a country-wide network of inter-connected institutions which shall be responsible for effectively safeguarding both internal and external security, which have got inextricably intertwined ever since Pakistan launched its proxy war in J&K.

It is necessary for the State governments to recognise that terrorist networks do not respect geographical or territorial boundaries; operating from long distances they can strike at their will, with lightening speed. It is necessary that the Union Government loses no more time in securing the essential understandings with the States to urgently establish the required security management framework and, particularly, to enact a comprehensive anti-terror law which has pan India jurisdiction. Side by side, we must have a competent federal agency, manned by highly trained personnel, which can take immediate cognisance and forthwith proceed to investigate any terror offence, no matter in which part of the country it takes place, without having to lose any

time whatsoever in seeking clearances from any quarter. Further, no more time should be lost in establishing a powerful central agency, and a country-wide network of competent counter-organisations, to combat cyber offences and protect all our vital establishments and national assets against cyber attacks from any quarter.

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Experience in the post-Independence period has amply demonstrated that, other things being equal, meaningful growth and development can be achieved only when there is political stability and public order prevails in the country. Needless to mention, domestic entrepreneurs and foreign companies shall make investments and be able to function profitably only if peace and normalcy obtains in the land. For such an environment to exist it is imperative that the governance apparatus works with fairness, speed and efficiency, law and order is effectively maintained, corruption is controlled and the well being and safety of all our people is safeguarded. Thus, briefly, if progress is to be achieved on all fronts and our country is to advance rapidly towards the attainment of its avowed goals, then it is of the highest importance that clean and efficient governance is delivered and an environment of trust, safety and security prevails across the land.

For calm and normalcy to obtain in the country the Union Government shall need to ensure that the States effectively maintain public order and particularly ensure that no incident occurs in their domains which disturbs communal harmony, triggers internal disturbances or impacts national security in any manner. However, in the arena of security management, as the situation has evolved over the years, the States have not been adequately mindful of the advisories which they may receive from the central intelligence agencies. In this context, the Union Government shall need to take timely initiatives for forging essential understandings with all the States in regard to security management, irrespective of the complexion of the political parties in power in various parts of the country. Towards this end, it would be beneficial if the Union, making full use of the constitutional instrumentality of the Inter State Council, initiates dialogues with the States for resolving all obtaining and arising problems. Side by side, the Union Government

should also proactively promote the settlement of festering inter-state water and other disputes which have been sapping the national strength for decades. For achieving tangible outcomes the Union Government would need to pursue fair, objective and clearly non-partisan approaches, particularly while seeking to resolve issues relating to the safety, security and welfare of the tribal and minority communities.

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Almost every other day we see media reports about the outstanding successes achieved by engineers, scientists, doctors, and others of Indian origin who are living and working in various parts of the world. These glorious triumphs are due not merely to the superior competence and high commitment of the achievers, but also to the fact that they operate in an un-interfering work environment which recognises merit and rewards performance. On the other hand, in our own country, the efficiency and productivity of our public servants and professionals is below optimum, even outrightly unsatisfactory in certain organisations, because the establishments in which they function are eroded, in varying degrees, by political interference, indiscipline, nepotism, corruption and unaccountability.

Notwithstanding our failures in various arenas, it is creditable that, in the period since Independence, India has been able to achieve growth on many fronts. For instance, our life expectancy has increased from 31 years in 1947 to 69 years in 2017; the literacy rate has risen from 12 per cent (1947) to 73 per cent (2011), and the infant mortality rate (IMR), which was very adverse earlier, now stands at 33 per every 1,000 live births (2017).

In the field of agricultural production: while in the earlier years we faced recurring famines and were almost wholly dependent on imported foodgrains, it is a matter for great rejoicing that today we are among the leading exporters of food commodities in the world. It is equally praiseworthy that our scientific and technical manpower pool is the second largest in the world and we are among the top in the arena of space and nuclear technologies. While we do not stand very high in industrial growth, it is noteworthy that we rank among the major world economies which have been achieving

the fastest growth rates. We also take pride in possessing the third largest military in the world.

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While I have referred to certain satisfying or even cheering aspects of India's growth trajectory in the past decades, it needs to be kept in mind that the size of our democracy or that of our fast growing economy may not, by themselves, be enough to enable our country to achieve its envisaged goals. If we aspire to emerge as a strong, prosperous and secure nation, all of whose people are free from hunger and want, then we shall need to take rapid steps to root out poverty and inequality, establish communal harmony, and foster a societal environment in which all our people, particularly the depressed and the far flung communities, live without fear of any kind.

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As it would not be feasible to dilate on all the varied problems which our polity must tackle effectively, I shall reflect briefly on certain concerns which demand urgent attention.

First and foremost, I would reiterate that if India is to gain timely advancement on all fronts and emerge as a powerful nation, then there can be no scope for recurring internal disturbances, particularly of the nature recently witnessed in the national capital, which resulted in violence, killings and large scale property destruction. It is cause for grave concern that, as widely reported in the media, these disturbances occurred because the beliefs and socio-cultural practices of one community were allowed to be questioned and derided by political elements of another community, essentially with the objective of creating religious divisiveness.

Besides resulting in the killing of innocent persons and large economic losses, every incident of communal violence also leads to many longer term consequences: it generates suspicion, fear and hatred among people of different castes and communities and lays the seeds of discord which may not be bridged for generations to come. Also, as was the case in the Delhi incidents, such occurrences create an irreparable divide among people of different religions who had been living happily together, in the same clusters and colonies,

for decades past. Sadly, it is almost impossible to eradicate the communal virus once it gets into the societal blood stream.

It is singularly unfortunate that certain elements have attempted to inject the cancer of discord and divisiveness in the functioning of educational institutions. In the recent past, two eminent universities in the national capital witnessed ugly clashes and unprecedented violence on the campuses, besides irreparable disruption of their academic schedules. It is regrettable that instead of providing the best opportunities to the student community and fully exploiting India's youthful demographic profile to achieve rapid economic gains, ill-conceived and misguided attempts are made to misdirect the youth to create separateness for securing electoral advantages.

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Whenever questions arise about the failure of governmental functioning, it has become customary for the Ministers, particularly in the States, to lay the entire blame on the misdeeds of the 'bureaucracy' and the 'civil servants', by saying which it is perhaps intended to refer to the failures of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS).

The IAS has about 5,200 officers who are deployed all over the country. While accurate figures about the total strength of government employees are not readily available, it is assessed that there may be about 40 to 50 million functionaries in the country who are employed by the Union Government, State Governments, Union Territory Administrations, Central and State Public Sector Undertakings, Public Sector Banks, Defence Services, Municipalities and Urban Local Bodies, Panchayati Raj Institutions and varied other institutions which are supported by State or Central funds. For the purpose of discussion I would call the entire lot of these employees as 'public servants' as all of them, from the village level Patwari to the Union Cabinet Secretary, get paid from public funds. Of the total strength of public servants in the country, perhaps less than 1 per cent are generalists, like the IAS and the State Civil Services, while the entire remainder represents professional cadres which comprise school, college and university level teachers, police forces, defence services, bankers, engineers, scientists, technologists,

doctors, foresters, judges and magistrates, and all those who work in various other professional arenas.

All public servants, belonging to different services in the States and at the Centre, are deployed in various departments and organisations, each of which functions under the control of a Minister, who is a member of the Union or the State Cabinet. Thus, briefly, it is the political Executive, headed by the Chief Minister in the State and by the Prime Minister at the Centre, which is constitutionally responsible for the governance of the country. The entire gamut of public servants, including the senior most IAS officers, work under the control and direction of Ministers, who may hold charge of one or more departments. Thus, if there is any default or failure in the functioning of a given department, it would be the concerned Minister who shall be answerable, individually and collectively as a member of the Cabinet. In case the Secretary or head of a Department or any other functionary is found to be at fault, he shall face due punishment, which could even include removal from service.

I have commented on the Minister–Public Servant relationship to particularly point out that the appointed Ministers who are in authority, at the Centre and in the States, cannot flippantly brush away their constitutional answerability merely by passing on the blame to the failings of public servants who function directly under their control and supervision. I would reiterate that, as per the constitutional framework, it is the bounden responsibility of the political Executive to effectively run the governance apparatus.

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Accountability is the foundation of the rule of law and constitutional governance. The working of the governmental apparatus shall become efficient only when the functioning of every Minister, and of all the officials who work in the departments under his control, becomes accountable. However, as it happens, barring a very small percentage, most of the elected persons who become Ministers have no earlier experience in administration, much less of formulating and implementing policies. Also, sadly, most of them do not have the urge, and perhaps not even the capacity, to put in the required effort to adequately understand the working of the departments placed

under their charge, identify problems which require resolution, take sound decisions and ensure the timely achievement of the targeted goals. Instead, from day one, Ministers get accustomed to exercising authority in an arbitrary manner and remain perennially engaged in ordering postings and transfers to favour functionaries who will collect funds and carry out their unlawful directions. Even worse, they pressurise and influence the officers working under them to see that contracts for sales, purchases or other matters which involve financial dealings are illegally awarded to persons whom the Minister wants to favour. It is this manner of unlawful functioning which has led to promoting corruption and failures in the functioning of the administrative apparatus and, besides, seriously eroding the discipline and accountability of the public services.

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Due to the politicisation of the administrative system, a certain percentage of officials, of almost all services, have climbed the political bandwagon and unabashedly flaunt their loyalties to powerful elected leaders. The honest officials are invariably side-lined and the functioning of many others is severely constrained by the signals which emanate from the 'criminal nexus' regarding the manner in which certain important matters should be processed. Corrupt public servants are not afraid of the law as they are protected by their political masters. Past experience has repeatedly shown that the existing punishment and appeal systems relating to the cadres of the various services in the country do not deter the dishonest functionaries. A speedier and perhaps more punitive approach is required to deal with corruption among government employees. However, the public services shall start mending only when the political Executive starts functioning constitutionally and every Minister starts enforcing accountability, answerability and timely achievement of the goals and targets of the departments which function under his control.

For reforming the functioning of the administrative apparatus it is necessary to create an environment in which every public servant functions fearlessly, discharges his duties with efficiency, and is enabled to gain advancements in service on the basis of his proven performance and integrity. Towards this objective it would

be beneficial if the senior echelons of all services—generalists, specialists, scientists, technologists, military leaders and all others who assist and work with Cabinet Ministers—are allowed to work with total independence, without being constrained by pressure from any quarter. Furthermore, for rendering sound and objective advice it is essential that the functioning of the senior most echelons among the public servants remains conspicuously objective and uninfluenced by political considerations.

Many of the worrying problems which face us today, particularly internal security challenges, arise from mismanagement and unaccountability. It is, therefore, of prime importance that the Executive functions constitutionally and takes special care to see that all developmental, welfare and poverty alleviation programmes are efficiently implemented and due attention is paid to ensure that the problems of the tribal and other communities who live in remote, difficult and unconnected areas of the country are handled with utmost care and sensitivity.

In the aforesaid context it may be recalled that Naxalism, which at one time was labelled by the Union Home Ministry as the most serious threat to the Indian state, took root in several parts of the country where the tribal and other local communities had faced neglect and severe economic deprivation for long years. Having been denied access to resources, even to the natural produce of the forests in which they were born, these people took to extremism and rose against the established system. Several decades have since elapsed and the Indian state is still combating with its own people, whom we call the Naxals.

No more time should be lost in putting our house in order. The millions of our long neglected, oppressed and poverty stricken people may not wait endlessly for their sufferings to end. Their anger and despair may lead them to the path of confrontation. And if such an unfortunate consequence emerges, it may not be possible to control the arising disorder merely through the application of force—an approach which has been ungainfully pursued for decades now.

As earlier observed, the numerous and far spread communities which comprise our vast population represent indescribable religious, linguistic and cultural differences which make India a land of unbounded diversities. These differences and divergencies were sensitively recognised by the founding fathers of our Constitution

when they set out the rights and privileges of citizens and the Directive Principles of State Policy.

In their public speeches and statements, political leaders of all hues invariably refer to the several thousand years of our country's civilisational past and express rightful pride in pointing to the enormous strength we draw from our 'Unity in Diversity'. However, as a people our sensitivities to the manifold diversities in our society have been progressively eroded, largely on account of the fact that leaders of certain political parties seek electoral gains by creating divisiveness among our communities.

As earlier noted, we need political stability and calm and normalcy in the country to achieve steady economic growth, which would enable eradication of poverty and, besides, India becoming a militarily strong and prosperous nation. In this perspective, we cannot bear with any disruption of societal harmony. Instead, we must strive to draw strength by reviving our traditional forbearance of the differences in race, religion, language and culture which embrace our vast population.

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In recent years, in the search of jobs, young men and women in different parts of our country have moved far away from their homes. Today, we have Mizo, Naga and Manipuri youth working in the mountains of J&K and in the deserts of Rajasthan, and Panjabis and Haryanavis working in Kerala and the Andamans. This is a most welcome development as it helps to promote cultural integration. It is our duty to educate our children about the background and cultures of the people they have never seen before and teach them not only to respect people of different religions, cultures and languages, but also their eating habits, clothing styles and even the haircut patterns of the many new faces they get to see and meet on the streets every day.

In recent years there have been ugly incidents arising from caste and religion clashes, kangaroo trials and road side lynchings. No government must allow such incidents to occur, under any circumstances. We must remember that intolerance provides an assured route to disruption and chaos.

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Our polity must recognise the dangers which lie ahead if the faults in the functioning of the governance apparatus are not remedied soon. Taking stock of the existing failures and the arising challenges, the Executive and the Legislature must urgently commence discharging their true constitutional roles. And the Judiciary must not wait any further to fully regain its supreme responsibility to defend, protect and fearlessly enforce the Constitution. The very long pending electoral reforms, which are required to remedy the many ills from which our democratic framework is suffering, must be implemented with the highest priority. Side by side, the polity must accept the need for self-purification, a thorough cleaning up of the entire administrative machinery, and reforming the functioning of the multitudinous minions of the state.

It shall require enormous political will and unflinching determination to carry though the required reforms, without which we cannot deliver satisfactory governance to the people of India. One hopes that our polity will muster courage and pick up the gauntlet and the millions of our public servants will not be found wanting on any score.

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* This is an edited version of the Sir Syed Memorial Lecture 2020.

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FROM THE CROSSROADS TO THE PERIPHERY

The Ebb and Flow of Cultural Currents between Afghanistan and the Indian Subcontinent*

RAGHAV SHARMA

INTRODUCTION

A nation stays alive when its culture stays alive.

—National Museum of Afghanistan, Kabul

This motto, etched at the entrance to the National Museum of Afghanistan, serves as a powerful reminder of the seminal significance of culture to the nation-building project. Afghanistan's political geography has contributed significantly to shaping the contours of its socio-cultural landscape. Located at the geographical crossroads of South, West and Central Asia, Afghanistan's cultural tapestry weaves in the ebb and flow of Persian, Central Asian, Indian, Sino-Siberian, European (Hellenistic and Roman), Turkish, Arab and Mongol influences (L. Dupree, 1980: 55). The earliest documented references to the area that comprises modern-day Afghanistan date back to the Vedic period. The Rig Veda talks of the Kubha (Kabul) river around 1500 BC, while the astronomical text *Bṛhat-saṃhitā*, written by Varāha Mihira at the beginning of AD 6th century, mentions Avagāṇa as an ethnic group (Kieffer, 1982; N. H. Dupree, 1977: 25). The Persian hymns of the *Avesta* mention Bakhdi, i.e., modern-day Balkh as 'the beautiful, crowned with banners' of Zarathustra Spitama (Zoroaster) who lived in Balkh between 1000 and 600 BC (N. H. Dupree, 1977: 25–26). These sacerdotal texts, along with archaeological remnants of the country's mesmerising Buddhist heritage at Bamiyan and Mes Aynak, serve as poignant reminders of the heterogeneity that underpins and represents the organic growth of civilisational contact between the Indian subcontinent and Afghanistan.

Consider in this context the fact that as early as AD 1st century the Kushana empire spanned North India, Afghanistan, Central Asia and parts of China. Buddhism flourished under Kushana rule and spread from India to Afghanistan, Central Asia and China. Begram and Surkh Kotal, along with Taxila and Peshawar, reveal rich archeological evidence of Kushana rule. In more recent historical memory, the Mughals at their zenith exerted control over Kabul, Kandahar and Ghazni, which were regarded as key forward defence positions of their empire, while the Safavid empire projected its power into modern-day Herat, and often jockeyed with the Mughals for control over the modern-day provinces of Kandahar and Helmand. The Khanates of Khiva and Bukhara controlled parts of north-western Afghanistan. It is only once these empires entered a period of relative decline that the first attempts were made at carving out an Afghan empire, intially under Mirwais Hotak in AD 1709, and subsequently under Ahmad Shah Abdali in AD 1747.

Thus, available evidence grates sharply against the conventional framing of Afghanistan as 'the graveyard of empires', and points to the historical fact of this region being long used to the ebb and flow of empires. This historical phenomenon has left an indelible mark on the country's complex yet fascinating socio-cultural landscape.

This article examines the changing optics that have characterised contemporary cultural interactions between the Indian subcontinent and Afghanistan. It is argued that the rise of modern nation states from the mid–20th century onwards has stymied cultural interactions between Afghanistan and the Indian subcontinent. This is reflected in the recrafted contours of contemporary discourse on Afghanistan and the increasingly circumscribed mediums for cultural engagement.

THE FLOW OF PEOPLES AND CULTURES

The most pristine impressions of cultural contact between Afghanistan and the Indian subcontinent are embodied in folkloric traditions of south-eastern Afghanistan. Composed mostly by women are short couplets known as *landay*. The theme of several of these landay consisted of the women's reflections on the long periods of separation from their menfolk who had migrated to the subcontinent in search of work. Reproduced here is one such landay, recited by a lady from Sarawza, Paktika province:

Za Ma De Gul Pa Shan Surat Wo….
Sta De Bilton Pa Khazan Mrawe Sho Mayana

I had a beautiful face but your [husband]
separation made it dry like the season of autumn (Daud, 2017: 15).

Even though the men migrated primarily from economic motives, they wove new patterns into the cultural tapestry of engagement between India and Afghanistan. Ties of matrimony between men from Afghanistan's south-east and women from the subcontinent were forged, and this practice offered a fascinating window into how seemingly crystallised ethnic boundaries were negotiated in the Afghan setting (Sharma, 2017: 45). These merchants[1] carried back with them not only money and new wives, but also customs from the subcontinent—seen, for instance, in the practice of purdah in these areas being similar to the *ghoonghat* donned by women in parts of northern and western India.

In India, this movement of goods, peoples and cultural nuances was first brought to life in Rabindranath Tagore's *Kabuliwala*, written in 1892. It captured popular imagination and came to define the idea of the quintessential Afghan, with the story's characters being brought to life on celluloid in 1961. Its impact has been pronounced, with the term being used generically even today to refer to communities of Afghans settled in India in West Bengal (primarily in Kolkata and around Kharagpur), Assam (in and around Guwahati), Uttar Pradesh (Etawah, Rampur), Bihar (Sasaram, Gaya, Patna), Madhya Pradesh (Bhopal, Indore, Sagar) and Punjab (Malerkotla, Mianwali).

While prospects of trade and commerce acted as a magnet for Afghans negotiating their journey to the subcontinent, the lure of classical Indian music led Amir Sher Ali Khan in the 1860s to settle communities of musicians from India in Kucha-ye-Kharabat in Kabul. Traditions of Indian classical music, also known as the Hindustani school of music, came to permeate and enrich Afghan classical music traditions. *Raag* and *taal*, which serve as the two main foundations of Indian classical music, also play a seminal role in the Afghan classical tradition. Syncretism, the hallmark of this cultural exchange, saw the Afghan instrument *rubab* make its way to the subcontinent, especially to Kashmir, and its modified version, the sarod, becoming popular in the northern plains of India (Esar, 2011).

THE RISE OF NATION STATES AND CULTURAL STEREOTYPING

This ebb and flow of peoples, ideas and cultures began to slowly peter out as frontiers of empires gave way to the rise of modern nation states whose boundaries soon began to crystallise. The partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 marked a historical watershed, for it brought about an abrupt rupture in the scale and momentum of economic and cultural contact with India as direct, unfettered land access ceased. The communal conflagrations that engulfed the subcontinent in the run up to Partition swelled the ranks of Hindus and Sikhs unable to cross over to India and who eventually found refuge in Afghanistan.[2] Geographical contiguity and the permeability of the Durand Line underpinned the extensive cultural and economic contact with the modern state of Pakistan. However, its texture changed notably over the years, given the demographic, cultural and ideological changes engineered by Partition, and the region being sucked subsequently into the throes of the Cold War, following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979. Among other changes, this development prepared the stage for supplanting Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan's creed of non-violence, rooted in Gandhian tradition, with a legacy of violence and ideological perversion, increasingly regarded as a cultural characteristic of the Af–Pak region.

For the greater part of the 20th century, cultural contact between India and Afghanistan at the popular level was kept alive through two principal mediums: Indian cinema, and the community of Afghan Hindus and Sikhs who lived across Afghanistan in Kabul, Jalalabad, Khost, Paktia, Kandahar and Parwaan.

The medium of cinema has, arguably, been extremely powerful in colouring in an almost utopian manner idea(s) about India in popular imagination. Bollywood makes its presence felt strongly in almost every nook and cranny of the Afghan cityscape. Mainstream Hindi cinema has also occasionally provided Indians a comprehensible, if at times a sterotypical, window into Afghanistan through films such as *Zanjeer* (1973); *Kabuliwala* (1961); *Khuda Gawah* (1992); *Dharmatma* (1975) *Kabul Express* (2006) and, more recently, *Bioscopewala* (2018). This filmography, while skewed in terms of the production and dissemination of cultural discourses, has captured the popular, if often romanticised, imagination of the masses. Bollywood offered an escape from the vicissitudes of conflict, and Afghans even learned Hindi by watching these films.

However, there has been a discernable shift mirrored in more recent productions: *Kesari* (2019); *Padmavat* (2018) and *Panipat: The Great Betrayal* (2019). The common thread running through these period films is their revisionist portrayal of history in which Afghan Muslim characters are crassly cast in the mould of 'otherness'. This mirrors the eclipse of India's socio-political landscape by the religious nationalism of the right, underpinned by the shrill rhetoric of religious polarisation (Foschini, 2020; Qazi and Mohmand, 2019).

Afghan Hindus and Sikhs had served as an important interface as well, embodying the cultural syncreticism so characteristic of both the Indian and Afghan ways of life. These communities had traditionally been relatively well integrated into the rythms of daily life in Afghanistan, and were particularly well represented in the spheres of trade and commerce. Notably, a few also held government office—Diwan Niranjan Das represented Afghanistan at the talks in Mussoorie, held after the Third Anglo–Afghan War (1919). Quite a few served in the police and the army. An informal survey conducted by the community in 1978 revealed that it had 58 members in the medical and engineering professions (Singh, 2017). Even the communities' annual *Vaisakhi* celebrations saw extensive participation by government officials from the 1920s (Foschini, 2013).

Estimated to have numbered between 300,000 and 700,000 in the 1970s, daily habits and customs amongst members of the communities reflected a unique assortment of their Indian and Afghan heritages. While they retained their distinct religious identities, they identified with and practised notions of honour, hospitality, food and dress[3] similar to other Afghans. For instance, prayer congegrations are gender segregated in places of worship, in line with local customs. Particular customs relating to marriage, such as the music played at important ceremonies as well as food consumed, remained everyday reminders of cultural syncreticism at play.[4] In fact, many members of the Afghan Hindu and Sikh diaspora have continued to retain, and consciously guard, their unique identity, most visibly at play among members of these communities based in India,[5] Germany,[6] the United States[7] and the United Kingdom.[8] These communities have constituted cultural associations and even places of worship distinct from those established by Hindus and Sikhs from India.

However, as a toxic cocktail of perverse political, military and ideological manoeuvres in the region cast a long and violent shadow

over Afghanistan, these communities found themselves uprooted. Numbering barely 3,000–4,000 today, struggling to survive (Kumar, 2017), this living embodiment of Indo–Afghan cultural syncreticism has become but a faint memory of the past. Few Afghans from younger generations are aware of these communities and their place in the country's history. Expressing anguish and distress at their situation, Afghan Hindus and Sikhs point to their dilemma: 'When we go to India we are asked when we are going back home to Afghanistan, and in Afghanistan we are asked when we will return home to India.' The fleeting reminders of their faint, lingering presence are the dilapidated temples, gurudwaras and *tabib* (herbal medicine) shops that remain, along with Afghan Sikh fortune tellers who sit along the banks of Kabul *darya* in the bazaar of Mandawi.[9]

Contemporary cultural dialogue between India and Afghanistan is predominantly shaped by commercial cinema and soap operas beamed through satellite television into millions of homes. Although the advent of satellite television has provided a powerful medium for forging cross-cultural linkages, it is, by itself, but finite in terms of its ability to lend itself to diving into the depths of trans-civilisational cultural interactions. Moreover, cultural exchange through this medium remains predominantly unidirectional, with Indians having no access to, or interest in, Afghan popular media or cinema.

Admittedly, however, there is a small but growing community of Afghans who have had relatively unmediated access to the Indian cultural mosaic in their capacity as students, tourists, medical tourists and, more recently, as refugees. This has opened up a small but significant window for dialogue and engagement. The practice of yoga has made its way into the daily rhythms of some youth in Afghanistan, adding another layer to its cultural milieu. In fact, some civil society actors have adapted the technique to help Afghans navigate the hardships of daily life in a conflict zone by conceptualising *sola yoga* (peace yoga) (Amanuddin Foundation, 2011; Wadsam, 2016; Indian Cultural Centre, Kabul, n.d.). Afghan refugees, who have over the years made India home, have enhanced the diversity of the Indian palate through their cusine.[10]

A HISTORICITY OF CONTEMPORARY DISCOURSES

Despite these nimble advances, however, Afghanistan continues to be viewed in India through a myopic prism. The Indian understanding

has ranged from one of romanticisation of the land and its people in the monarchical period, to construing a repugnant image of a land beset by religious extremism and brutal violence. The latter image has come to command nearly unassailable sway, reinforced through discourses in popular news media on the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan, as also the emergence of the country as a magnet for Indian Muslims inspired by reactionary Wahhabi Islam.[11] This seemingly timeless and strong sway of reactionary religious ideology in today's times is at odds with the oft-overlooked historical fact of the region serving as a stage for intense theological debates. This is exemplified by the *Roshaniya* movement (enlightened movement) led by Pir Roshan (Bayzid Khan), born in Jallandhar, India, and his principal adversary Mullah Akhund Derwaza. The Roshaniya movement grew out of a milieu conditioned by the interaction of Pushtun heartlands with Mughal power in the Indian subcontinent. It drew heavily from Sufi tradition and sought to overcome tribal divisions among Pushtuns. Pir Roshan would also be at the forefront of leading the resistance to the Mughals, with his sons and grandsons taking to the battlefield, only to be defeated in AD 1638. The movement also gave the Pushto language its first written script, 13 new alphabets, and inspired several Pushto poets. Derwaza, in contrast, followed a stricter Sunni–Hanafi interpretation of Islam. His followers were staunch supporters of the Mughal court (Siddique, 2014: 25–29).

The lack of receptivity to religious dogmatism is attested to by the dramatic failure of theocratic reaction to the rise of Sikh power in Punjab and its subsequent spread into the Peshawar valley by AD 1826, in the form of the *Tariqqa-i-Muhammadiya*, led by Sayyid Ahmed of Rae Bareilly. Inspired by Wahhabi Islam, followers of Sayyid Ahmed called for a strict interpretation of the Quran and Hadith and had a militant outlook as a result of which they came to be known as the Indian mujahideen or Hindustani fanatics. The town of Balakot in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was invoked as a symbol of jihad under Sayyid Ahmed of Rai Bareilly (AD 1768–1831) who fell in battle against the Sikhs on 6 May 1831. Ayesha Jalal attributes Sayyid Ahmed's fall in battle to the 'treachery of Pathan tribesmen' (2010: 1). Rajmohan Gandhi, in contrast, drawing upon the authoritative account of Olif Caroe, argues that Sayyid Ahmed's greatest undoing proved

to be his demand for Pushtun chiefs to end the practice of dowry and the perception of him assigning women to his Hindustani followers, coupled with the attempt to transfer leadership of the Pushtuns from tribal leaders into the hands of mullahs (2008: 26). What is striking in both accounts is the power of tribal honour and affiliations overriding calls to rally for jihad. More recent historical memory throws up the exemplary life of Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan who, inspired by the political philosohy of Mahatma Gandhi, established the *Khudhai Khidmatgar* (Servants of God) movement. He succesfully grafted the Gandhian philosophy of non-violence onto the socio-cultural mosaic of the frontier, the hallmarks of which were considered to be entrenched patriarchy and the deployment of violence for the realisation of the same. Khan, like Gandhi, would use the creed of non-violence as a potent tool for political resistance against the British Raj, much to the bewilderment of the British and Gandhi's awe. In direct contravention of the Hindustani fanatics, Khan put forth a deeper, philosophical interpretation of the concept of jihad. He regarded grappling with the internal 'greater jihad' (*jihad-i-akbar*) as indispensable to embarking upon the external 'lesser jihad' *(jihad-i-asghar)* against colonial oppression. The former, in Ghaffar Khan's conception, was seminal to the cultivation of virtues of service, restraint and patience (Jalal, 2010: 9; Banerjee, 2000: 148).

However, contemporary political events underpinnned by a rupture in movement of goods, peoples, ideas and cultures from the mid-20th century have so eclipsed these historical narratives that today the conceptualisation of Afghanistan's cultural linkages to the Indian subcontinent appears to be a distant, fleeting historical memory at best, and a historical abberation at worst. Engineering a qualitative shift in cultural engagement from the periphery to the centre would be challenging, given the complexities of the larger geopolitical environment, in general, and India's own domestic political environment, in particular.

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* This article has been developed from an address delivered by the author at the Afghanistan–India Joint Cultural Week, 29–30 November 2017, Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, New Delhi, India.

NOTES

1. They are predominantly made up of the Suleimankhel tribe in the south-eastern belt of Afghanistan and engage in money lending on interest, a practice opposed to the Islamic way of life in Afghanistan.
2. A notable exception to this were Pushtun Hindus known as *Sheen Khalai*, who inhabited villages in the Pushtun tribal belt that fell on the Pakistani side of the Durand Line, and managed to flee to India in 1947. However, in India they found themselves struggling to navigate the cultural landscape: 'We have changed our clothes (*pahnava*)…But our hearts and tongues remain Pushtun....We have always wondered what we are, since no one owned us,…Are we Afghan, or Pakistani or Indian or Hindu or Pushtun?' (Haidar, 2018). Also see L. Dupree (1980: 110).
3. This would be more applicable to male members of the community.
4. Based on the author's observations and extensive interactions with members of the Afghan Hindu and Sikh communities, principally in Kabul and Jalalabad, over the course of numerous visits between 2007 and 2017.
5. In India, most Afghan Hindus and Sikhs are to be found in the Delhi NCR region. A majority continue to speak Dari and/or Pushto and retain distinct Afghan culinary traditions. They came as refugees fleeing armed conflict in Afghanistan and have established their own support groups such as the Khalsa Diwan Trust, and have set up an Asamai temple. Originally located atop a hill, Koh-i-Asamai, in Kabul, legend has it that the temple, where an eternal flame has burnt uninterrupted, dates back thousands of years.
6. A large concentration of Afghan Hindus and Sikhs is to be found in Frankfurt and Hamburg. Frankfurt is home to an Asamai temple. Based on the author's interactions with the community in Hamburg in 2013. For more information, see http://www.aasamaimandir.de/index2.html.
7. In the United States, Afghan Hindus have established an Asamai temple at Hicksville, New York. For more details, see http://www.asamai.com/about-us/our-history/.
8. In the United Kingdom, Afghan Hindus have established an Asamai temple in Southall, London. For more details, see https://www.facebook.com/groups/139812566056475.
9. Based on the author's personal observations and interactions with members of the Afghan–Hindu and Afghan–Sikh community between 2007 and 2017.
10. India is home to an estimated 14,000 registered refugees from Afghanistan. Unofficially, the numbers are said to be larger—a majority being concentrated in four localities of New Delhi: Bhogal, Lajpat Nagar, Hauz Rani and Tilak Nagar. Several Afghan eateries have mushroomed here catering to refugees, medical tourists from Afghanistan as well as local food connoisseurs eager to sample authentic Afghan cuisine. See UNHCR (2016) and Venkatraman (2016).
11. The state of Kerala has in particular emerged as a fertile recruiting ground for IS in India. At least 22 Indian nationals, all hailing from Kasoragod, Kerala, are believed to have joined the IS in the Nangarhar province of Afghanistan. More recently, an Indian national from Kasoragod, affiliated to IS in Afghanistan, attacked a gurudwara in Kabul in March 2020, using the communal riots in

Delhi, the change in the constitutional status of Jammu and Kashmir, and the Citizenship Amendment Act 2020 as justification. The attack left 25 people dead. See Taneja (2020) and S. Philip (2019). See also Swami and Philip (2017), Babu (2017) and Reghukumar and Arunima (2017).

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THE DENIAL OF A PROPHECY AND A TRYST WITH HISTORY

Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children**

ATHER FAROUQUI

When *Midnight's Children* was first published in 1981, I was a student of grade 11 in Sikandrabad, India. Sikandrabad is a fairly commonplace name and there is more than one village, town or city in India and neighbouring Pakistan with this moniker. My hometown is in the Bulandshahr district of the politically inscrutable, electorally unwieldy, socially problematic and religiously charged state of Uttar Pradesh. This state, if one were to refer to the novel, is where the character Saleem Sinai is incarcerated by the Widow in the Widow's Hostel by the river in Benares (Varanasi). It is also where Dr. Aadam Aziz arrives from Kashmir via Amritsar to take up a teaching position at Agra University.

The news of the publication of *Midnight's Children* reached Sikandrabad through Punditji, the English teacher at my intermediate college (equivalent to the American 'high school' level). Much revered by the locals, Punditji was a loyal patron of the *Hindustan Times*. He was an old-fashioned man from the topmost rung of the *savarna* (the four-fold caste system) ladder. In typical Brahmanical fashion, he never offered me even a glass of water when I went to his house for lessons, because of my religious denomination. Yet he was clueless about notions of 'communalism' and class struggles. A staunch Congress loyalist, he had probably read of the Indira Gandhi–Salman Rushdie controversy in the newspaper and was curious about the book. Since it was not available in our town or district, I made a round trip to Delhi—some 80 km away—to procure the book for him. He took six months—designating an hour each day—to complete reading the book. The inventive vocabulary and the upending of his bible, *Wren and Martin*,[1] puzzled him enough to

prepare a glossary of references, as any diligent student is wont to do. The English fiction-reading experience of mofussil India had up till then been limited to the uncomplicated and wholesome texts of R. K. Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand. At best, one would have read authors along the lines of E. M. Forster in such towns. It was not surprising then that Rushdie was a complete shock to the system. When I read the novel with Punditji's help, I read it aloud and he helped me with the difficult words, which I jotted down in a glossary of my own.

Back then, as a young lad of 17, myriad interests distracted me, including a newly acquired obsession with Islamic studies. The novel was relegated to the back burner, and it was a year before I could finish it. Then I re-read it after my grade 12 examinations were done and dusted, and I had time to spare. It was the first English novel that I had ever read.

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Sixty kilometres from Sikandrabad is the picturesque town of Aligarh, where the eponymous Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) is located. The university and the university town around it were familiar to Rushdie as he had family there. Aligarh and AMU, therefore, served as models for Agra and Agra University, respectively, in the novel. It is to this vicinity that Aadam Aziz descends, bag and baggage, from Kashmir. But the real-life Agra University was not founded until eight years after Dr. Aziz would have arrived there. Saleem Sinai's 'all-knowing memory, which encompasses most of the lives of mother father grandfather grandmother and everyone else' perhaps confuses matters further, a frequent recurrence via the telling of his personal history (Rushdie, 2011: 47). Enough instances of garbled dates, layered myths and his memory 'refuses, stubbornly, to alter the sequence of events', establishes Saleem's unreliability as a narrator (ibid.: 129). Yet, the reader is invoked to either believe or willingly suspend disbelief:

> Am I so far gone, in my desperate need for meaning, that I'm prepared to distort everything—to re-write the whole history of my times purely in order to place myself in a central role? Today, in my confusion, I can't judge. I'll have to leave it for others. For me, there can be no going back; I must finish what I've started, even if, inevitably, what I finish turns out to be what I began (ibid.: 164).

Some of Saleem's mistakes are inadvertent, and some intended. Rushdie later confessed in an essay in his non-fiction book, *Imaginary Homelands*, that the 'novel does contain a few mistakes that are mine as well as Saleem's', but the mistake(s) 'feel more and more like Saleem's', and 'its wrongness feels *right*' (1991a: 22–25).

Memory by its very nature is selective and as History is often reconstructed through memory, History tends to be selective, fractured, subjective, and its validity depends on the point of view from which it is recorded. Predictably, before losing himself in obscurity and crumbling into 'six hundred and thirty million particles of anonymous, and necessarily oblivious dust', Saleem resolves to put pen to paper and record his memories, however unreliable they might be. Unlike Prufrock, he refuses to 'measure out [his] life with coffee spoons' (Elliot, 1920), choosing to moderate and control historical facts and promulgate his idea of preserving things 'from the corruption of the clocks' in a 'nation of forgetters' (Rushdie, 2011: 17). Already 30, and fated to spiral down the rabbit hole of adulthood, Saleem advocates—as does Rushdie—'memory's truth, because memory has its own special kind. It selects, eliminates, alters, exaggerates, minimises, glorifies, and vilifies also; but in the end, it creates its own reality' (ibid.: 211). But here, forgetting has as special a role as remembering. Both are tools for Saleem and Rushdie to repurpose History for the story; to refashion the past while depicting the present. While Saleem seems to emerge as 'the apex of an isosceles triangle, supported equally by twin deities, the wild god of memory and the lotus-goddess of the present', he also willingly sinks into 'insidious clouds of amnesia' (ibid.: 223). Edward Said tells us:

> Appeals to the past are among the commonest of strategies in interpretations of the present. What animates such appeals is not only disagreement about what happened in the past and what the past was, but uncertainty about whether the past is really past, over and concluded, or whether it continues, albeit in different forms (1993).

For Rushdie, the journey between the obfuscation and restoration of memory—regardless of how deformed it might be—is the arduous journey one must undertake in order to weave a story.

Midnight's Children blends the historical with the fantastical, illuminating India's eventful past and its tumultuous present, and argues for a modernism on its own terms. Rushdie fashions his own Original Myth and Adam (called Aadam Aziz here) who lives in an unsullied, pristine Paradise on Earth, one that he abandons when he acquires a partner for himself. He soon realises that he has a hole in the inner chamber of his now faithless heart. This scriptural reference is, however, just about all the conformity we can expect from a text that indulges in a serpentine odyssey, enveloping the topical in the sheer beauty of the literal; dangerously playing with the diaphanous line separating the sacred from the blasphemous; flinging the insecurity of pluralism into the prickly and resilient realm of dogmatism; and highlighting the ephemerality of reality contrasted with the tactility of the magic realism that Rushdie deploys. This is an Eden where the serpent does not adhere to the binaries of good and evil, but is instead subverted as a life-affirming entity in more ways than one. This is the upside-down world in which Rushdie is the White Rabbit urging the reader to hasten along, and the latter, like Alice, is compelled to follow.

Magical realism is employed in the book to demolish the sanctity of what is believed to be 'real', and in its place a world is constructed in which History becomes personal and memories take centre stage. The twin fears of disinheritance and disintegration lead the protagonist Saleem Sinai—and by extension the nation—to abandon the prophecy and the quest for greatness that were promised to them at birth. Saleem chooses to invest instead in a solipsistic revelation of History, only to spiral into disillusionment eventually leading to his fragmentation. He thus serves as a metaphor for the fracturing of the nation's corporeal form. He muses early on in the novel that 'there are so many stories to tell, too many, such an excess of intertwined lives events miracles places rumours, so dense a commingling of the improbable and the mundane!' (Rushdie, 2011: 3). Said has argued that 'texts have ways of existing that even in their most rarefied form are always enmeshed in circumstance, time, place, and society—in short, they are in the world, and hence worldly' (1983: 35). It is this concoction of the worldly and the improbable that allows Rushdie to interrogate, undermine, and, at the same time, disrupt the dominant historical narrative that seeks to silence the voices that inhabit the margins and are not allowed to partake of the 'Grand Narrative'.

After the publication of Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967), the genre of 'magic realism' emerged with the term interchangeably used with 'marvellous realism' and 'magical realism'. These terms trickled down well into the 1980s, and were repurposed by the post-modernist writer. According to Maggie Ann Bowers, *magischer realismus* (magic realism) originated in Germany in the 1920s 'in relation to the painting of the Weimar Republic that tried to capture the mystery of life behind the surface reality' (2004: 1). In Latin America of the 1940s, *lo real maravilloso* (marvellous realism) was seen 'as an expression of the mixture of realist and magical views of life in the context of the differing cultures of Latin America expressed through its art and literature' (ibid.: 1). *Realismo mágico* (magical realism) came to Latin American fiction in the 1950s, not as 'a simple or obvious matter', but as 'an ordinary matter, and everyday occurrence—admitted, accepted, and integrated into the rationality and materiality of literary realism' (Zamora and Faris, 1995: 3). This is a phrase that now holds within itself the power to encompass all forms of narrative that organically blend the magical and the factual realms. In the betwixt and between space lies the politics of the literary device that aims to limit as well as delimit the reach of reality.

For Zamora and Faris, 'magical realism is a mode suited to exploring … and transgressing … boundaries, whether the boundaries are ontological, political, geographical, or generic' (ibid.: 5–6). Since it refuses to accept the fascist rule of the real and introduces fantastical tales into the discourse of the real with gravitas, magical realism can be understood as being essentially disruptive by its very nature. Breaking away from the parochialism of defined limits of what is considered real and tangible, magical realism does not require validation for that which is being told, in a manner that it is accepted within the narrative as fact. A similar argument is made by Amaryll Chanady, who says that the narrative viewpoint relies upon an 'absence of obvious judgements about the veracity of the events and the authenticity of the world view expressed by characters in the text' (1985: 30). It is perhaps because of this idea of unconstrained imagination that magical realism is perceived as a means to subvert all oppressive orders by destabilising their central driving principles, seeking that which does not exist in Manichaean allegories of black and white, good and evil, right and wrong, real and magical. Bowers says:

> It offers to the writer wishing to write against totalitarian regime a means to attack the definitions and assumptions which support such systems (for example, colonialism) by attacking the stability of the definitions upon which these systems rely (2004: 4).

Postcolonial writers like Márquez and Rushdie have, using this tool, destabilised the very concepts that validate colonialism. They were able to write back with the audacity to change the realism that sanctions the violence inflicted by such regimes.

Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* has a special affinity with the subaltern school of writing because it seeks to capture the aspirations and anxieties of young people who belong not to the upper echelons of society but to its margins. The narrative shifts between the real and the fantastical in a manner so sincere that one readily acknowledges and even accepts the presence of the fantastical. In the beginning, Saleem Sinai declares in all seriousness: 'I admit it: above all things, I fear absurdity' (Rushdie, 2011: 1). However, that is not what happens in the book. *Midnight's Children* is a text that takes itself seriously and it exudes, in its disavowal of sanctioned reality, a sense of self-reliance and firmness in its own belief, which becomes apparent when the protagonist asserts: 'Sometimes legends make reality, and become more useful than the facts' (ibid.: 41). Rushdie has often emphasised the significance of India's rich oral traditions, something he has turned to repeatedly. What is interesting, however, is the absence of traditional myths in the narrative framework of *Midnight's Children*. What is conjured, instead, is the mythopoeia of modern and personal tales that the text helps establish as equally sacred.

Of the several recurrent themes in *Midnight's Children*, the overlapping of the personal and the political, i.e., Saleem and India, stands out as the most prominent. The destinies of Saleem and India are entwined in a manner so magical that only Saleem has knowledge of it. He strongly believes in his connection to the fate of India when he says:

> I was linked to history both literally and metaphorically, both actively and passively, in what our (admirably modern) scientists might term 'modes of connection' composed of 'dualistically-combined configurations' of the two pairs of opposed adverbs

> given above. This is why hyphens are necessary: actively-literally, passively-metaphorically, actively-metaphorically and passively-literally, I was inextricably entwined with my world (ibid.: 237).

Born at the exact moment of the nation's birth, Saleem becomes a symbol of it and in him can be ascertained its condition. Prime Minister Nehru writes him a letter soon after he is born: 'You are the newest bearer of that ancient face of India which is also eternally young. We shall be watching over your life with the closest attention; it will be, in a sense, the mirror of our own' (ibid.: 69). And what a mirror it turns out to be! Even the birthmarks on either side of his body symbolise West and the then East Pakistan (now Bangladesh).

Early in the novel, Rushdie presents the sheet with 'three drops of old, faded redness' which Saleem's Nehruvian grandfather preserves to mark his entry into wedlock (ibid.: 1). The sheet's pristine whiteness assumes macabre shapes, only to dismantle that very notion of purity to which it bears testimony. It is the same mark which Saleem cherishes as the 'talisman' to bless him in his writing. It pre-empts his own blood battles as also those of the nation, which would be written with the blood of its own people and would glorify not those who sacrifice their lives for the greater good, but those who pass off mercurochrome as blood.

Of the many familial structures sketched in the novel, none is loyal or true based on genetic compatibility. Blood ties are underplayed in the novel. David Birch notes that 'a hundred pages or so after the start of the novel what happened to be the family of Saleem turns out to be an illusion' (1991: 1–7). Saleem spends his life not with his biological family. He falls in love with Jamila, nicknamed the Brass Monkey, who is, not by birth but by social standing, his sister, thus making her unattainable and his feelings for her incestuous. He finds solace in the companionship of Padma in a chutney factory, faces disappointment when he seeks refuge in his uncle's home, swallows his aunt's spite, and even raises a son who is not his own. Love and loyalty in this novel are to be found where one does not look for them; and conceit prevails where one would expect warmth and tenderness.

Rushdie's larger-than-life characters display mythical moorings, with inanimate beings made to act magically and abstract ideas being assigned human traits. Therefore, panic acts like a

'bubbling sea-beast' coming up for air, poverty 'eats away at the tarmac like a drought', and fellow-citizens of Sinai exude 'flat boiled odours of acquiescence' (Rushdie, 2011: 179). The filthy, profane, drunken, all-encompassing figure of the ancient boatman Tai, an archetype borrowed from *The Boyhood of Raleigh*,[2] sets the Aziz family history in motion by ferrying Dr. Aadam Aziz to his first patient, Naseem, whom he marries to establish the clan. 'Nobody could remember when Tai had been young', a man with no beginning and no end. An ageless character, he claimed to have witnessed the birth of mountains, the fall of emperors, and a lively encounter with an old, wandering Isa (Christ) travelling through Kashmir 'to live it up a little', almost like Eliot's Tiresias in *The Waste Land* (1922). It is he who first articulates the motif of the Aziz family nose and identifies it as the point where the outside world meets the world inside. It is he who teaches the future doctor Aadam Aziz to identify the fine cracks in the ice beneath the lake's surface, cracks which come to symbolise the fatal flaws in India's fate, in Saleem's family, and later within Saleem. Tai represents the part of every soul that resists change: the symbol of permanence in the novel.

Equipped with knowledge of the Abrahamic faiths, Saleem believes he is a prophet when he first hears the voices of the other midnight's children in his head. He is naive and confides in his parents that 'Archangels have started to talk to me' (Rushdie, 2011: 94). For his blasphemous confession, he is rewarded with a blow to the side of his head, so hard that he is unable to hear properly with his left ear for the rest of his life. This is the first occurrence of the denial of prophecy to Saleem. With the awareness of the greatness promised to him at birth, which would catapult him into becoming a figure of national importance, Saleem comes to understand that 'secrets were not always a bad thing'. He thus goes about his telepathic way, but ensures that he keeps this esoteric knowledge to himself. He can hear people's thoughts and starts to control those around him by entering the very depths of their minds to extract their best-kept secrets. Saleem confesses to this rather candidly:

> Because the feeling had come upon me that I was somehow creating a world; that the thoughts I jumped inside were *mine*, that the bodies I occupied acted at my command; that, as current affairs, arts, sports, the whole rich variety of a first-class radio station

> poured into me, I was somehow *making them happen* … which is to say, I had entered into the illusion of the artist, and thought of the multitudinous realities of the land as the raw unshaped material of my gift. 'I can find out any damn thing!' I triumphed, 'There isn't a thing I cannot know!' (ibid.: 172–73).

Saleem and the other children of 'midnight', the reader is led to believe, are able to overcome the linguistic barriers of India's diverse languages. Neither do the 581 remaining children, 'black and brown and white … leaking into each other … like flavours when you cook', need the language of the erstwhile colonial master (ibid.: 17). Their interaction takes place in the realm of sensorium, spread across and contained by the nation's boundaries through neurons. However, as Saleem struggles through adolescence and as India strives to transform into a modern state, the tragedy of their destinies begins to unravel. On learning the truth about his parentage and the fact that Shiva, his nemesis and alter ego, was the rightful owner of everything that he has ever owned or cherished, Saleem banishes him from the Midnight's Children Conference as a ploy to obviate his own possible disinheritance. At the same time, residents of Methwold Estate internalise the daily routine and lifestyle of the Englishman Methwold such that the presence of the coloniser is felt even in their absence. Thousands of people protest on the streets, demanding the division of Maharashtra on linguistic grounds, and nonchalantly slit the throats of those from the opposite camp. When India goes to war with Pakistan and Saleem is taken there with his family, he loses his power of telepathy just as India loses scores of innocent people in the bloodbath. The spittoon—the 'talismanic … beauteous lost receptacle of memories …' that symbolised the innocuous vices of the Muslim aristocracy and is bulldozed in the destruction wrought at Turkman Gate—hits Saleem on the head and deprives him of all his memories (ibid.: 260).

Just as Nehru had promised in his letter, Saleem's life mirrors that of India. Saleem, who was once prophesied to rise to greatness, finds himself reduced to a subhuman existence. Devoid of his power of telepathy and deprived of his memories, he now sniffs people out for the Pakistani Army, of which he is made a member at Jamila's request. By the order of the Widow, a reference to the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, to castrate the nation by exploiting

the Emergency provisions of the Constitution, Saleem, along with all the other midnight's children, is 'drained of the past present future' and loses potency (ibid.: 260). Thus, a country, which had promised its citizens that they would awake to 'life and freedom', is seen forcibly sterilising its people to prevent them from reproducing and flourishing.

Both the individual and the nation find themselves disenchanted with the aftermath of the events. Saleem's Odyssean journey leads him to Bangladesh. His role is that of a dog, part of the CUTIA (Canine Unit for Tracking Intelligence Activity), a tongue-in-cheek reference to the common Indian slang for a female dog. He vows to save it, only to end up leaving the poor magicians to their fate in favour of his Uncle Mustapha who holds a prominent position in the Indira Gandhi administration. Through Saleem, and India by extension, neo-colonial elitism is seen plaguing a nation that was not meant to discriminate amongst its citizens. Saleem, who had earlier usurped the rightful claims of Shiva, now ends up as a man without any possessions. Towards the end of the novel, the Indian Army, led by Major Shiva, marches on, ravaging slums and razing the homes of thousands of innocent citizens. At the same time, Saleem pre-empts his death and feels the pain of bones cracking up inside his body. Later, in *The Satanic Verses*, one of the less controversial characters remarks:

> Society was orchestrated by what she called grand narratives; history, economics, ethics. In India, the development of a corrupt and closed state apparatus had 'excluded the masses of people from the ethical project'. As a result, they sought ethical satisfactions in the oldest of the grand narratives, that is, religious faith (Rushdie, 1988: 537).

Shiva's rise to power and magnificence is testament to the aporia in *Midnight's Children*. Saleem fears Shiva till the very end and has no means through which he can counter him. At the same time, the country, in its endeavour to become a modern state, relegates to the margins the very people to whom it had promised greatness. This promise to the person as well as to the nation is visibly disingenuous. Timothy Brennan argues that *Midnight's Children* is essentially a cosmopolitan work and is, ideologically, an exposé of false nationalism: 'Narrative never follows the emotional logic of the

characters' lives, but the brittle, externally determined contours of "current events"' (1989: 84–85).

The collapse of the Congress model of nationalism in India saw the rise of a new, more radically majoritarian avatar. With this shift, it became necessary for a self-absorbed narrative, especially in literature, to seek answers for the denial of the 'promised' greatness to its people made by the ruling party at the time of Independence. The annihilation of Saleem's self is a symbol for the condition that ailed a partitioned and fragmented nation. The cracks in his body directly relate to the political cracks the nation suffers. In keeping with his prescience, the decay over the years culminates in his final disintegration into 630 million particles, which was roughly the population of India when the novel ends in 1978. Saleem bemoans:

> Yes, they will trample me underfoot … reducing me to specks of voiceless dust … because it is the privilege and the curse of the midnight's children to be both masters and victims of their times, to forsake privacy and be sucked into the annihilating whirlpool of the multitudes, and to be unable to live or die in peace (Rushdie, 2011: 459).

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Rushdie's usage of a pan-Indian language, which 40 years ago was a novelty, liberated a generation of Indian writers writing in English. One could credit magic realism with enabling the usage of such innovative language. According to Brenda Cooper, it 'opposes fundamentalism and purity; it is at odds with racism, ethnicity and the quest for tap roots, origins and homogeneity' (1998: 22). However, the novel's major achievement is the masterful grafting of Hindi, Urdu, Marathi, Konkani and 'Bambaiyya' (the street parlance of Mumbai) upon English, and the weaving of the onomatopoeic texture of Indian languages with fantastical metaphors. Rushdie's special interest in inventing character names, perhaps emerging from his own (Rushdie from Ibn Rushd), finds perfect expression in *Midnight's Children*. Dr. Aziz probably arrives from and stands against the Forsterian tradition; Sinai from Ibn Sina, Sabarmati from Nanavati, and so on. Coined words—*nakoo*, *whatsitsname*—evoke worlds and truths completely the author's own. The novel's tools are

also disparate and not limited to stylised language and magic realism. Rushdie's cauldron bubbles with ancient traditions of storytelling, postcolonial moorings and post-modernist techniques, such as jump-cuts and selective focus, which are borrowed from the cinematic medium and are combined with narrative relief. All of this is patiently stewed, and what we are left with is an ambrosia of a novel.

In conclusion, the India of *Midnight's Children* is therefore not a country of the privileged, but a complex culture that can be understood only when the various fragments are pieced together and read in harmony.[3]

This 1981 magnum opus' timeless appeal and the success of Rushdie's later books, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1991b) and its sequel *Luka and the Fire of Life* (2010), proves that magic, rather than realism, is the more powerful ingredient in his writings. *Midnight's Children* continues to be discovered by newer generations of readers, ensuring that this epic work of art continues to defy the notions of certainty and homogeneity. This paper hopes that today's younger readers, perchance—like the 17-year-old me in a tiny mofussil town in the 1980s—will be blown away by this complex but richly layered text.[4]

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* Marking the 40th year of the publication of *Midnight's Children*.

NOTES

1. This was the go-to grammar guide for Indians at the time, originally written by P. C. Wren and H. Martin in 1935. It followed a structural approach for teaching grammar to high-school students in India and could be found in almost every middle-class home at the time.
2. See John Everett Millais, *The Boyhood of Raleigh*, oil on canvas, 1870 (Tate Gallery, London). https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/millais-the-boyhood-of-raleigh-n01691.

   In Millais' celebrated painting, young boys are shown enraptured by 'tales of wonder on sea and land' narrated by a Genoese sailor. Rushdie's Tai brings this archetypal character to life.
3. I am indebted to Nikhil Kumar for helping me finalise this article. In the last 10 years, each time I thought of getting it published, it underwent countless rounds of revision, but I was never satisfied with the result. Today, with his help, it has seen the light of day. Fortuitously, it marks the 40th anniversary of the novel's publication, which is a happy coincidence.

4. For interested readers, here are two detailed glossaries for the vocabulary employed in *Midnight's Children*, which I found useful as well:

   http://facweb.st-agnes.org/home/pmcfarlin/html/Midnights%20Children%20vocabulary.htm.

   http://www.subir.com/salman-rushdie/salman-rushdie-glossary/.

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CAN RHETORIC DECIDE AUTHORSHIP?

Sri Aurobindo and the Problem of the Mahabharata

SACHIDANANDA MOHANTY

Around the middle of November 1923, a talented English-educated Bengali poet lay dying at Calcutta, surrounded by close family members, including his two daughters Mrinalini and Lotika. A brilliant scholar educated at Manchester Grammar School (1881–1884), St. Paul's School in London (1884–1887) and Christ Church, Oxford University (1887), he was a close friend of Laurence Binyon, Stephen Phillips and Oscar Wilde. A contributor to *Primavera: Poems by Four Authors* (Phillips, et al: 1890), he was close to Oscar Wilde. While he was attracted to Indian themes and attempted five scenes of the play 'Nollo and Damayanti' (1916), he preferred a more distant Greek theme that resulted in 'Perseus, the Gorgon-slayer' (1972). In his parting poem, 'London', written on the occasion of leaving the city, anthologised by the eminent poet–critic Vinayak Krishna Gokak in *Golden Treasury of Indo–Anglian Poetry*, Manmohan Ghose expresses a deep sense of nostalgia and loss at the prospect of leaving London/England, so close to his heart (2006). The opening lines, indeed the entire poem, carries this spirit of loss:

> *Farewell, sweetest country; out of my heart, you rose,*
> *Wayside roses, nodding, the slow traveler to keep.*
> *Too long have I drowsed alone in the meadows deep,*
> *Too long alone endured the silence Nature espouses.*
> *Oh, the rush, the rapture of life! Throngs, lights, houses,*
> *This is London. I wake as a sentinel from sleep.*
>
> .....
>
> *Beautiful boughs, your shade not a human pang appeases.*
> *This is London. I lie and twine in the roots of things* (ibid.: 119–20).

In a way, Manmohan could never shake off this sense of loss upon his return to his motherland; his career as an English professor in the various colleges of Bengal and Bihar was not as eventful as he had hoped his homecoming would be. Always aware of the looming shadow of his younger brother Aurobindo, who had by this time carved out a place for himself as a nationalist poet deeply rooted to the Indic traditions, Manmohan steered clear from any controversy, political or otherwise, although he met his brother regularly in the house of Raja Subodh Mullick.[1]

He longed to return to England and would have done so had he not been afflicted by illness and a botched-up operation of his eyes that prevented the long journey (M. Ghose, 1926). Lotika Ghose's[2] summation of Manmohan's poetic talents is suggestive of a set of possibilities and opportunities lost:

> Had he remained in England his poetic fulfilment would have resulted. India then [could] have claimed one of the great English singers as a son of hers, and she could also claim that if England had enriched India's culture by opening the doors of Western culture to her, India too had donated one of her gifted sons to be one of the companies of English singers. As it is, Manmohan's poetry though it matured in isolation, cut off from contemporary trends of English poetry, bears in an ample measure the imprint of great poetry, though it may not have been able to attain the fulfilment that it would otherwise have been able to attain (1975: 92).

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As Manmohan lay ill, approaching the final hour, he desired to hear the Greek classics—Homer, Sophocles, Aeschylus and Virgil. Since none present knew Greek, he asked his daughters to read to him the English classics. As Lotika Ghose records:

> During his illness though so weak that he could only speak in the lowest of voices he desired to have Shakespeare read to him. Probably he yearned to hear his beloved Greek classics, Homer, Sophocles, Aeschylus and Virgil, but none of those about him could read Greek. His daughters took turn[s] not only to nurse him but also to read to him. Upset as they were if they made the slightest mistake in reading from Shakespeare, the poet would repeat the line correctly to himself (ibid.: 54).

In her insightful essay, titled 'Aestheticism and the Politics of Postcolonial Difference', postcolonial critic Leela Gandhi favourably quotes Oscar Wilde who sees in Manmohan Ghose's 'poetic negotiation of the East–West divide a form of relation that might come to dissolve the coercive bonds of imperialism' (2006). His verses show 'how close is the bond of union that might one day bind India to us by other means than those of commerce and military strength' (ibid.: 145).

Most sympathetic critics of Manmohan would not, however, endorse Leela Gandhi in seeing possibilities of the East–West union in aesthetic and literary terms in the efforts of Manmohan Ghose. Rather, they would find Manmohan's poetry, as many of his contemporaries and later readers did, greatly influenced by late Victorian and Edwardian literary taste and idiom, even when he dealt with Eastern themes. In contrast, Gandhi's chapter in the same volume titled 'Mysticism and Radicalism at the End of the Nineteenth Century' that considers the example of Sri Aurobindo and Mirra Alfassa (the Mother of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram) is far more persuasive, viewed from the angle of affective communities (ibid.: 115–41).

For, while English-educated Manmohan Ghose began with English and ended with the English classics, his younger brother, Aurobindo, who went through almost an identical educational experience at Loreto Convent, Darjeeling, and Cambridge University, England, had a remarkably different literary destiny (L. Ghose, 1975). Like his elder brother, Aurobindo began under the influence of the Victorian poets, but soon after his arrival in Baroda, towards the end of the 19th century, was attracted to the Indian Muse and Indic traditions. While he wrote 'Perseus the Deliverer' (1972a) and 'Love and Death' (1972b), which show the working of Irish and contemporary British influences, he soon broke away and wrote poetry and prose that were manifestly Indian in content and style. The difference in approach between the two brothers could not have been more telling; it has not been sufficiently studied and might serve as a metaphor for

Sri Aurobindo
Photo credit: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, Pondicherry

Manmohan Ghose with daughters: Mrinalini [standing] and Lotika [sitting]
Photo credit: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, Pondicherry

understanding not only the link between native upbringing and cross-cultural influences, but, more strikingly, the shaping of the artist's mind under the influence of a powerful, literary sensibility. In Aurobindo's case, I suggest, it was the Indian epic Mahabharata that would leave a lasting influence from the beginning of the Baroda days till the magnum opus *Savitri* (1950), which he wrote towards the end of his career. In between lay many seminal texts, including *The Essays on the Gita* (1959).

INDIAN MODERNITY: CREATIVE ENGAGEMENT WITH THE PAST

The powerful appeal that the twin epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata, had for Sri Aurobindo throughout his writing career is indicative of the fact that epics are not a thing of the past and of antiquarian value. Without being a blind adherent to an older model fixed in time and place, the epic Mahabharata, in Sri Aurobindo's case, reveals the workings of Indian modernity. This modernity does not discard the past entirely, but through creative engagement and adaptation comes up with innovative forms in literature. We may term it 'critical modernity', to use Ashis Nandy's term.

From Greek and Latin to Sanskrit and Indian languages within a span of a few years does not easily come to most; in Aurobindo's case, the excellence in translation of the Mahabharata and Ramayana was strikingly noticed by outsiders. When Romesh Chandra Dutt, the well-known poet, novelist and historian, saw some of these during a visit to Baroda, he is said to have remarked: 'Had I seen them before, I would never have published mine. It now appears that my translations have been child's play before yours.'[3]

Aside from two of his major texts, *The Essays on the Gita* and *Savitri*, the Mahabharata permeates through image, metaphor and argument as a large part of Sri Aurobindo's craft. *The Foundations of Indian Culture* (1953) is another volume that reveals the lasting influence of the Mahabharata on his writings. His treatment of the Mahabharata has not received in scholarly circles the attention it deserves. The epic itself was of considerable interest to him, both as a literary form and as a source of intellectual engagement with issues that continue to have contemporary relevance. These relate to the idea of authorship, single or multiple, the question of the cohesiveness of the text, the art of translation—issues that have contemporary resonance. Most of all, it brings in the question

whether rhetoric can decide the idea of authorship in the absence of historical documentation of sources.

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'The Problem of the Mahabharata' (or 'Notes on the Mahabharata') is a work by Sri Aurobindo that would interest students of the great epic (2003: 277, 345). Aside from this text, we may be drawn to the detailed notes of Udyoga Parva, Adi Parva and Drona Parva (ibid.: 770–71). Then there are the translations of a larger scheme of the Mahabharata that he contemplated and executed. 'Notes on the Mahabharata' was written shortly after September 1901, following the publication of Velandai Gopala Aiyer's 'The Date of the Mahabharata War' in *Indian Review* (Bhattacharya, 2007). It is important to note that

> Sri Aurobindo learnt Sanskrit himself without any help from anybody. He did not learn Sanskrit through Bengali, but direct in Sanskrit or through English. But the marvel is that he mastered it as thoroughly and entered as deeply into its spirit and genius as he had done in the case of Greek and Latin (Roshan and Apurva, 1993: 31).

The title of the essay is representative of the interest scholars and interested readers have traditionally taken in the historicity of the Mahabharata war, the heroic personalities in the warring factions, the birth and death of Krishna, and the geographical location of the sojourn of the Pandavas during their *vanaprastha* (retirement to the forest). As is well known, such travels of the Pandavas have been associated with different geographical locations such as the Vindhyas, the valley of the Mahanadi, Chitrakut, among other places.

In writing the essay, Sri Aurobindo was not trying to offer his own theory regarding the historicity underlying the epic, nor was he attempting a possible date—although he himself suggested that the date given by Aiyer was 'known beyond reasonable doubt'. Aurobindo does not give us the reasons for holding such a view. It is possible that he may have had his own rationale and logic.

The essay was not prepared for publication and therefore looks unfinished. It passes through his hands around 1909 without sustained attention. Again, it was brought to his notice in 1932 by

his secretary Nolini Kanta Gupta. The work did not receive attention then and, subsequently, was published posthumously in various other publications such as *Vyasa and Valmiki* (1956), in *The Harmony of Virtue* (1972c), in the *Supplement* (1973), in *Sri Aurobindo Archives and Research* (1989), and in *Early Cultural Writings, Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo* (2003).

Sri Aurobindo refers to 'an unusually able and searching paper on the date of the Mahabharata War', and declares that

> for the solution of the Mahabharata problem is essential to many things, to any history worth having of Aryan civilization & literature, to a proper appreciation of Vyasa's poetic genius and, far more important than either, to a definite understanding of the ethical gospel which Srikrishna came down on earth to teach as a guide to mankind in the dark Kali yuga then approaching' (1991: 4).

However, he is not convinced of the approach of the Madras Society to determine the date by looking closely at 8,000 lines from the War Purvas and writes:

> It is only by a patient scrutiny & weighing of the whole poem disinterestedly, candidly & without preconceived notions, a consideration of Canto by Canto, paragraph by paragraph, couplet by couplet that we can arrive at anything solid or permanent (ibid.: 3).

How is this goal to be achieved? Aside from 'heartbreaking labor', he suggests that there are three necessary requisites:

> The positions of certain sound and always applicable tests to detect later from earlier work, a reasonable chance that such tests if applied will restore the real epic roughly if not exactly in its original form, and an assurance that the epic when recovered will repay from literary, historical or other points of view, the labor that has been bestowed on it. I believe that these three requisites are present in this case and shall attempt to adduce a few reasons for [my] judgment. I shall try to show that besides other internal evidence on which I do not propose just now to enter, there are certain traits of poetic style, personality and thought which belong to the original work and are possessed by no other writer. I shall also try to show that these traits

> may be used and by whom they may be used as a safe guide through this huge morass of verse. In passing, I shall have occasions to make clear certain claims the epic thus disengaged will possess to the highest literary, historical and practical value (ibid.: 3–4).

Clearly, Aurobindo's observations are pertinent to the question of the whole versus fragments of a work of art, the 'integrity' of a work of art, the question of 'the origin versus later additions/accretions of a work of art'. He contends:

> European scholarship has shed no light whatever on the Mahabharata beyond the bare fact that it is the work of more than one hand. All else it has advanced, and fortunately it has advanced little, has been rash, arbitrary or prejudiced; theories, theories always theories without any honestly industrious consideration of the problem. The earliest method adopted was to argue from European analogies a method pregnant of error & delusion. If we consider the hypothesis of a rude ballad-epic doctored by 'those Brahmins'—anyone who is curious on the matter may study with both profit & amusement Fraser's history of Indian literature—we shall perceive how this method has been worked (ibid.: 4–5).

He next cites the example of scholarship in Germany that held the Iliad of Homer as really a pastiche 'or cleaver rifacimento of old ballads put together in the time of Pisistratus'. This is probably the reason, he adds, why 'arguing from Homer', Professor Weber maintains that the War Purvas 'contain the original epic' (ibid.: 5). 'But the Iliad,' says Aurobindo, 'is all battles and it therefore follows in the European mind that the original Mahabharata must have been all battles.' Similarly, there is a 'curious theory of some scholar that the Pandavas were a later invention and that the original war was between Kurus and Panchalas only', based on the selected readings of some slokas (ibid.: 6).

Sri Aurobindo offers, in contrast, his own approach for deciding the cohesiveness and organicity of the Mahabharata:

> One is struck in perusing the Mahabharata by the presence of a mass of poetry which bears the style and impress of a single, strong and original, even unusual mind, differing in his manner of

> expression, tone of thought & stamp of personality not only from every other Sanskrit poet we know but from every other great poet known to literature. When we look closely into the distribution of this peculiar style of writing, we come to perceive certain various suggestive & helpful facts (ibid.: 6–7).

The major difference between the Iliad of Homer and the Mahabharata of Vyasa, according to him, is that Homer concentrates on the battle. What precedes the battle in psychological and cultural terms in the Iliad is of marginal importance, whereas the battle of the Mahabharata cannot be sufficiently grasped without the drama which precedes it. As Aurobindo observes:

> But if we find a simple and unvarnished, though not necessarily connected & consecutive amount of the political conditions which preceded the war and of the men who made it and their motives, we may safely say that this also is an essential part of the epic. The Iliad deals only with an episode of the legendary siege of Troy, it covers an action of [about eight] days in a conflict lasting ten years; & its subject is not the Trojan War but the Wrath of Achilles. Homer was under no obligation therefore to deal with the political causes that led to hostilities, even supposing he knew them. The Mahabharata stands on an entirely different footing. The war there is related from beginning to end consecutively & without break, yet it is nowhere regarded as of importance sufficient to itself but depends for its interest on causes which led up to it & the characters & clashing interests it involved. The preceding events are therefore of essential importance to the epic. Without the war, no Mahabharata, is true of this epic; but without the causes of the war, no war [,] is equally true. And it must be remembered that the Hindu narrative poets had no artistic predilections like that of the Greeks for beginning a story in the middle. On the contrary, they always preferred to begin at the beginning (ibid.: 20–21).

After elaborating on many of these arguments in a scintillating manner, Sri Aurobindo concludes:

> What I wish, however [,] to emphasize at present is that the portions of the Mahabharata which bear the high, severe and

> heroic style and personality I have described, are also the portions which unfold consecutively, powerfully and without any incredible embroidery of legend this story of clashing political and personal passions and ambitions. It is therefore not a mere assumption, but a perfectly reasonable inference that these portions form the original epic (ibid.: 31–32).

Sri Aurobindo now brings his arguments to conclusion. He considers Vyasa as less broadly human than Valmiki, yet the former is

> a wider & more original thinker. His supreme intellect rises everywhere out of the mass of insipid or turbulent redaction and interpolation with bare and grandiose outlines.... The wideness of the man's intellectual empire is evident throughout his work; we feel the presence of the Rishi, the original thinker, who has enlarged the boundaries of the ethical & religious outlook (ibid.: 59).

It is unfortunate that modern India, regrets Aurobindo, has preferred Chanakya to Vyasa, and yet Vyasa had 'high ethical aim and an august imperial idea'. After all,

> he did not,[.] like European imperialism, unable to rise above the idea of power, accept the Jesuitic doctrine of any means to a good end, still less justify the goodness of the end by that profession of an utterly false disinterestedness which ends in the soothing belief that plunder, arson, outrage & massacre are committed for the good of the slaughtered nation. Vyasa's imperialism frankly accepts war & empire as the result of man's natural lust for dominion, but demands that empire should be won by noble and civilized methods, not in the spirit of the savage, and insists once it is won not on its powers, but on its duties (ibid.: 59–60).

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One wonders at the direction the 'Notes on the Mahabharata' along with the translations would have taken had Sri Aurobindo found adequate time during the Baroda period or later. As it is, 'Notes on the Mahabharata' represents an extremely fascinating treatment of seminal importance of the Indian epic form. That this epic, the great Mahabharata, influences an Anglicised Indian so deeply that it leaves a lasting impression on his philosophical, literary and political career, marks a relatively neglected but significant chapter in India's intellectual history. *Savitr*i, Aurobindo's magnus opus, becomes in his hand, towards the end of his career, a 'legend' and 'a symbol'. From being an interesting episode in the Mahabharata as an emblem of conjugal love, it becomes a symbol of human aspiration for the conquest of death. None of this would have been possible without Sri Aurobindo's indebtedness to the great epic; for clearly, it is the Mahabharata that shaped his thinking and contributed to the growth of his intellectual and spiritual self.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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NOTES

1. Most of the biographical details regarding Manmohan Ghose are taken from the excellent monograph on Manmohan Ghose published by the Sahitya Akademi. See Lotika Ghose (1975).
2. Lotika Ghose was the daughter of Manmohan Ghose and niece of Sri Aurobindo.
3. Quoted in www.searchforlight.org. Accessed on 20 April 2021.

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PHOTO ESSAY
CHANDERNAGOR
Little Europe

SANJEET CHOWDHURY

Somewhere around AD 150, renowned Greek scholar Ptolemy's Indian cartography depicted the Ganges entering the Bay of Bengal through a series of distributaries. The Hooghly, although not named, was one of them.

The accounts and goods brought back from India by early travellers and traders fired European imagination. The Europeans saw India as a land of wealth and opportunity, and were desperate to find a sea route. Christopher Columbus' 'discovery' of the American continent in 1442 gave European powers new impetus. Portugal and Spain, both great European naval powers, signed the Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494. With the Pope's blessing, the world was divided into two spheres of influence. Over the next few decades, European sea powers lost large numbers of ships and men and much money trying to find a route to India. In 1498, Vasco de Gama landed in Calicut (modern-day Kozhikode), and the route to India came to be known as 'Carreira da India'. The other European powers such as the English, Dutch and French soon followed.

In 1517, the first Portuguese merchant landed in Bengal. The very next year, an expedition was sent to look at the possibility of trade in the Bengal region. The Portuguese were the first to establish trade contacts with Bengal, building two points of trade—in modern-day Chittagong, in present-day Bangladesh; and Satgaon, in the Hooghly district.

French trade got off to a slow start in the Indian Ocean as compared to other European rivals. In 1664, the French formed the 'Compagnie française des Indes' (French East India Company), with the state's help. Their first venture was a textile factory in northern

Bengal, to take advantage of local silk trade. A few years later, in the late 17th century, a warehouse was set up in Chandernagor, which was immediately south of the Dutch settlement at Chinsura. The warehouse was extended to build a factory, quarters and a chapel in 1696. Walls were built around the factory, forming the 'Fort d' Orleans'. Despite Dutch and English resistance, the French managed a toehold in Chandernagor.

In about 50 years Chandernagor was a thriving business centre, with a number of houses with large gardens, mostly for the French, and a growing Indian population. Joseph Dupleix became Governor of Chandernagor in 1731. In the 10 years of Dupleix's governership, his trade practices and innovative ideas took Chandernagor to the zenith of its golden era. From Dupleix's time to 1756, Chandernagor was the main centre for European commerce in Bengal, with thriving centres of trade in opium, indigo, silk, rice, rope, sugar, etc.

In 1748, the Marathas raided Chandernagor, causing heavy losses. The seven-year-war—the global conflict between the English and the French, between 1756 and 1763—had its effect in Chandernagor as well. In 1657, British general Lord Robert Clive attacked Chandernagor. In the siege of Chandernagor, Clive attacked over land and Admiral Charles Watson by sea.

Fort d' Orleans fell, and Chandernagor was looted and virtually destroyed. Other than religious structures, most others were demolished. Anglo–French politics in Europe affected their relationship in the subcontinent as well as in Chandernagor. Under the Treaty of Paris in 1763, Chandernagor was handed back to the French. When news of the French Revolution of 1789 reached Chandernagor, a similar uprising took place locally. The British, with their dominance in the subcontinent, did not allow the French to regain their status in Chandernagor. A few attempts were made by the French to re-claim lost glory, but French power had dwindled while British power had grown.

Chandernagor continued to be a trade post with an independent local government. It became a 'Little France' within 'Little Europe', with the Danes ensconced in Sreerampoore, and the Dutch in Chinsura. The Portuguese, who were in fact the first to come, were also the first to go. Unlike the other colonisers, with a governor and administrative demarcation in Chinsura and Sreerampoore, the

Portuguese did not have a demarcated settlement for any length of time, except in Goa, from where they were eventually evacuated by the Indian armed forces in 1961. But by 1900, Chandernagor's former commercial importance had dwindled, and the town was reduced to nothing more than a quiet suburb of Calcutta.

Chandernagor's culture is unique owing to the mix of Bengali and French cultures. Its colonial bungalows, most of which are in a dilapidated state today, were built in the Indo–French architectural style. Even today, the town retains some of its Francophone culture. The local population of Chandernagor contributed to the growth of the town, with the Raquittes, Setts and Nundys being some prominent local families. During the long Independence movement, Chandernagor produced a number of freedom fighters and also gave shelter to many as it was French territory (outside British jurisdiction). On 19 June 1949, a referendum was held, with the vast majority deciding to join the Indian Union. Chandernagor was handed over to India in a phased manner. The transfer treaty was approved by both countries in 1952. In 1954, Chandernagor was formally merged with West Bengal.

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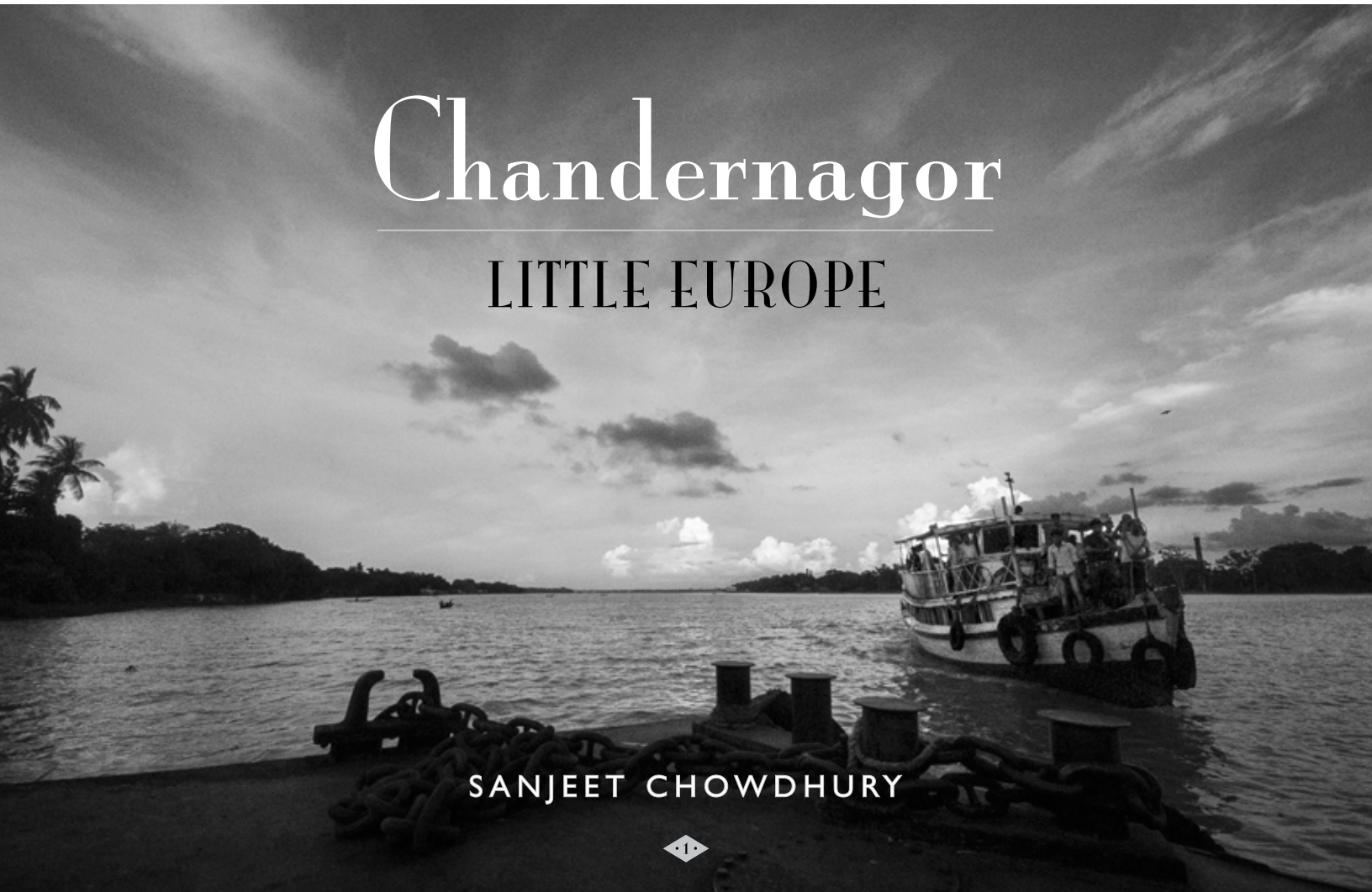
Chandernagor
LITTLE EUROPE
SANJEET CHOWDHURY

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REQUIESCAT IN PACE

CAPTIONS

The images in this photo essay are from a forthcoming book on European settlements along the Hooghly River.

1. This part of the river was full of ships during the heyday of trade. A little ahead, the river bends to form a half-moon. One theory is that Chandannagar got its name from the shape of the river (moon [*chand*]). The other theory/conjecture is that there was once a sandalwood forest (sandalwood [*chandan*]).

2. A gravestone (made of iron) in Sacred Heart Church. The text is in Latin, dated 1754.

3. The Strand. The canopy was built in 1921 by Shamachorone Roquitte in memory of his late father Dourgachorone Roquitte.

4. Gopal Chand Mukhopadhyay's (Mukherjee) house. He was known as a philanthropist and a patron of Hindustani classical music. Other than building the house, which he named Gopal Dham after himself, he also built ghats.

5. Rutton Lodge, the ancestral house of the Bose family, built between 1893 and 1897. It was sold to the government in 1950, and in 1965 became the premises of the Institute of Education (Post Graduate) for Women.

6. All the three houses in the image belonged to Harihar Sett. Harihar was a businessman, a prolific author and a philanthropist.

7. French Cemetery, built in 1696.

8. Nritya Gopal Smriti Mandir was built by Harihar Sett in memory of his late father. With a large public auditorium,

among other facilities, it was the equivalent of the Town Hall. The bust of Rabindranath Tagore is at the entrance.

9. Sacred Heart Church. The construction of the present church began in 1875. It was consecrated on 27 January 1884 by the Archbishop of Calcutta, Dr. Paul Francoise Marie Goethals. Father Eugene Lafont, pioneer of science in India, had preached the inaugural sermon.

10. Transom window, decorated with cast-iron grill. Banerjee House.

11. Entrance to the Roquitte residence, the house built by Dourgachorone. It is a palatial mansion with three courtyards. Awarded the Legion d'honneur in 1896, he was a textile baron and started a school, Ecole Durga, in 1885.

12. Ruplal Nandy Memorial Cancer Research Centre.

13. The portico of the Nandys' house. The Nandys were a prominent business family, trading mainly in iron. Donated to the government, this building is popularly known as *gala kutir*. It is assumed the previous owners were (gala [shellac]) traders.

14. A fountain in the lawn of the French institute. Once the French Governor's residence, it is now a cultural centre and museum.

15. Krishna Bhabini Nari Siksha Mandir (girls' school) was established by Harihar Sett in 1926, in the name of his mother Krishna Bhabini Dasi. Although Krishna Bhabini was not formally educated, she was a champion of girls' education.

16. One of the courtyards of Harihar Sett's house. This is where the Durga Puja takes place every year.

17. Gopal Dham. Cycles of students parked, as somewhere in the building a tutorial class takes place.

18. Roquitte House courtyard.

19. Roquitte House courtyard, where the annual Durga Puja takes place.

20. A tombstone inscribed in Latin, French Cemetery.

21. A courtyard in Harihar Sett's house.

22. Upstairs balcony, Nritya Gopal Smriti Mandir.

23. The L'Ecole de Sainte Marie (School of St. Mary), established in 1862. After a number of changes and expansion, it came to be known as College Dupleix. In 1948, it became Chandernagor College. Its school section was famed for one of its revolutionary students, Kanailal Dutta (1888–1908), who was convicted by the British for the assassination of Narendranath Goswami, an approver of the British, and executed by hanging until death in Alipore Jail on 10 November 1908.

24. Statue of Joan of Arc in front of the Sacred Heart Church. In the 16th century, she became a symbol of the Catholic League. In 1803, Napoleon Bonaparte declared her a national symbol of France.

25. French Cemetery, built in 1696.

26. Doorway, first floor, Nritya Gopal Smriti Mandir.

27. Inside Sacred Heart Church.

28. Doorway leading to the first-floor veranda of Rutton Lodge, now the premises of the Institute of Education (Post Graduate) for Women.

29. Interior of the Harihar Sett house.

30. Roquitte House. The structure had been built over many decades. The image shows how the two adjacent structures were built separately, over the years.

31. The courtyard of Khan Temple. Khan, a prominent Hindu family from Mankundu, a little outside French territory.

32. The Chandernagor gate. This is one of the two columns of the gate, the entry point to French Chandernagor.

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JAPAN AND SOUTH KOREA

Prisoners of History

RAJARAM PANDA

INTRODUCTION

In the post-War years, two north-eastern Asian countries—Japan and South Korea—developed a strong economic interdependence, with strong economic complementarities. After a phase of dictatorship, South Korea embarked on an economic growth path by adopting an export-oriented strategy, achieving remarkable economic growth in a short span of time. When Japan graduated from its labour-intensive sector of economic production and moved up the ladder to the knowledge-intensive sector of industrial production, it began to relocate its labour-intensive sectors of industrial production to nearby countries. This movement followed the so-called 'flying geese' pattern of economic development in which Japan remained the leader, with South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore trying to catch up, giving rise to the Four Asian Tigers (Kojima, 2000: 375–401).

Nevertheless, such a mutual win-win situation did not help erase the bitter memories of history. The experiences of 35 years of Japanese colonial rule over the Korean peninsula continue to haunt the relationship between the two states even today. For South Koreans, in particular, no amount of economic benefits accruing from economic interdependence has helped assuage feelings of hurt and distrust. The atrocities committed during the War—the 'comfort women' issue (the euphemism for sex slaves)—and the abduction of Japanese nationals in the 1970s and 1980s by North Korea are shadows of history affecting bilateral ties, continuing to threaten to undo mutual gains achieved by both states after the War (Panda, 2015).

The relationship between Japan and China, too, suffers from similar memories. In particular, China is unable to come to terms with its defeat by Japan in the 1894–1895 War (Paine, 2002: 425); nor can it forget the experiences of the Nanjing massacre.[1] Territorial disputes between Japan and China over the Senkaku Islands chain, and between Japan and South Korea over the Takeshima/Dokdo Islands (a couple of rocky islets which Japan calls Takeshima and South Korea, Dokdo) continue to strain bilateral ties. While South Korea continues to agitate loudly over these issues, but is unable to resolve them unilaterally, China seems determined to correct these perceived historical wrongs by using its newly acquired military power and the threat to use force to resolve the dispute if no negotiated resolution is possible.

This essay will discuss the complex nature of the bilateral relationship between Japan and South Korea. After the War, when Japan rebuilt its war-ravaged country and registered economic miracles in a short span of time, Japanese electronic products (Sony, Panasonic), cameras (Canon, Fuji, Pentax, Yashica) and automobiles (Toyota, Yamaha, Honda, among others), became brand names that brought Japan to global centre stage. Around the time the full impact of the flying geese pattern of economic development had yet to set in, workers in the Seoul marketplace would use their Japanese-language skills to eagerly court Japanese visitors. In May 2013, the same workers no longer appeared to care about Japanese buyers.

Had the Koreans lost their buying power or had South Korean business ethics changed overnight? What could explain this Korean indifference towards the Japanese? After all, South Korea too had progressed economically. It had graduated to democracy after a long spell of dictatorship, and adopted the Japanese model of economic development. Moreover, it had developed a strong economic partnership with Japan. But historical experiences returned to haunt the current ties between the two countries. These negative feelings stemmed from political issues, which often spilled over to economic areas. The question is: Do the people in both countries really understand each other, or is the prevailing bitterness because of the lack of understanding? There appears to be a huge trust deficit that remains in both countries. This essay tries to answer some of these questions.

In a recent publication, Kan Kimura of Kobe University has examined the dispute over the historical perceptions of Japan and South Korea, identifying the many independent variables that have caged the two countries as prisoners of history. From history textbook debates, to the Occupation-period exploitation of 'comfort women', to the Dokdo/Takeshima territory dispute and Yasukuni Shrine visits, the book traces the rise and fall of popular, political and international concerns underlying these complex and highly fraught issues (Kimura, 2019).

THE GENRON NPO OPINION POLL

Public opinion surveys in both countries confirm the continuance of hostility. In order to gauge the reasons for mutual suspicion, Genron NPO, a Japanese non-profit organisation, teamed up with East Asia Institute (EAI), a South Korean think tank, to conduct the first joint opinion poll. The poll results showed that 76.6 per cent of South Korean respondents held 'unfavourable' or 'relatively unfavourable' views of Japan. Similarly, a combined 37.3 per cent of Japanese respondents polled negative impressions of South Korea.[2] In particular, the perception of South Koreans towards Japan was intensely negative, demonstrating thereby that memories of the past continued to remain fresh (Aoki, 2013). The opinion poll results also revealed that South Koreans displayed more affinity towards China than Japan, despite China flexing its military muscle in order to settle bilateral disputes with a host of other Asian nations (ibid.).

The first joint survey found that the major reasons behind this negativity were the territorial disputes over Takeshima/Dokdo, and differences in historical perception. The reasons behind these unfavourable cross-border images are a lack of basic mutual understanding as a result of inadequate direct communication between its peoples, and the dependence of the citizenry on their respective domestic media for information about the other country. Kazuo Ogura, former Japanese ambassador to South Korea and former President of the Japan Foundation, with insight into the main ideological and political currents shaping the broader agenda of foreign policy making in Japan and Korea, observes: 'The problem is that even though cultural interaction between the citizens (of both countries) has deepened (in the past years), people get riled up by political issues....We need to nurture more citizen-level talks' (ibid.).

Bilateral ties were strained in April 2013 after more than 100 Diet Members, including Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Aso and other cabinet ministers, visited the controversial Yasukuni Shrine,[3] seen as a wartime symbol. The South Korean Foreign Minister Yun Byung Se cancelled a visit to Japan in protest at that time (Yoon and Hirokawa, 2013). China, too, lodged a diplomatic protest.

In 2014, the second year, an opinion survey was conducted jointly by Japan's Public Opinion Research Institute Corporation and South Korea's Hankook Research Company Ltd.[4] While the survey was conducted in South Korea between May and June, in Japan it was conducted in June. The objective was to monitor the state of mutual understanding and awareness of Japanese and South Korean publics in order to contribute to closing the gap in awareness to promote mutual understanding.

This time, the views of intellectuals in both countries were gathered in order to assess if those views were similar to, or different from, those held by the common man.[5] The survey showed that while the impressions of South Koreans towards Japan had deteriorated, with 70 per cent having negative impressions of Japan, the Japanese opinion of South Koreans had improved slightly. The percentage of Japanese respondents who polled 'favourable' or 'relatively unfavourable' impressions reached 54.4 per cent, 17.1 points higher than the previous year's result of 37.3 per cent. In contrast, the percentage of South Korean respondents with a 'good' or 'relatively good' impression of Japan was 17.2 per cent, an improvement as compared to the previous year's result. The percentage of those who polled an 'unfavourable' or 'relatively unfavourable' impression was 70.9 per cent—5.7 points higher than the previous year's result—yet, around 70 per cent 'had a negative impression of Japan'.[6]

In the first opinion survey results, historical and territorial disputes were the two main reasons that shaped mutual opinion, with political statements by either side further leading to spikes in negative opinions. Nevertheless, such negative opinions did not negate the positive influence of South Korean TV drama and music in Japan, and the Japanese appreciation of South Korea on account of the high living standards achieved by the latter. Interestingly, democracy—as a factor linking to positive impressions—was not an important contributing factor, with less than 20 per cent polling in favour.

It also transpired that while Japanese youth perceived South Korea through the latter's culture and contemporary events, perceptions of South Koreans towards Japan were focused on territorial and historical events as determinants shaping opinion. South Koreans also feared the possible revival of militarism in Japan, especially after former Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo made open his intention to revise the peace clause—Article 9—of the Constitution. Opinions hardened in South Korea as Abe Shinzo failed to amend Article 9—the clause was reinterpreted by passing the law for collective self-defence, thereby achieving his objective in a limited manner. There is also the mutual fear that owing to the threat perception in the region, both Japan and South Korea could be compelled to revisit nuclear options as the reliance on the United States as security provider has weakened.

Significantly, younger generations of both nations are not obsessed with historical issues, but are far more enamoured by such cultural issues as pop music, manga (Japanese comics or graphic novels), karaoke and other cultural traits. For them, politics and culture are to be viewed separately—and differently. Nevertheless, the prevailing mistrust did not prevent both countries from co-hosting the soccer World Cup in 2002. But matters nosedived by 2015, with both sides toughening their stances.

THE MOST RECENT GENRON NPO OPINION POLL

Ever since the inception of the joint Genron NPO opinion survey by the think tanks of Japan and South Korea in 2013, which assessed public perceptions of various issues, the percentage of respondents viewing the relationship negatively has only increased in both countries. For example, in the 8th such poll conducted between 18 May and 2 June 2019, 52.1 per cent of Japanese expressed a negative impression of South Korea because of 'South Korea's continued criticism against Japan on historical issues'.[7] Two incidents were cited: South Korea's Supreme Court ruling on wartime labour,[8] and the radar lock-on dispute.[9] As regards South Korean impressions of Japan, the majority of respondents chose 'no remorse over Japan's past wartime aggression' and the 'territorial conflict over Dokdo', with the former cohort increasing from 70 per cent in 2018, to 76.1 per cent in 2019. The results of the survey were presented at the bilateral Track II dialogue—Japan–Korea Future Dialogue—on 22 June 2019.

The results point to the mutual recognition of bilateral relations that 'comprehensively and rapidly deteriorated'. The percentage of South Korean respondents who owned up to either a 'bad' or 'relatively bad' impression of Japan was 71.6 per cent, an increase of 21.5 percentage points from the previous survey. The percentage of those who had a 'good' or 'relatively good' impression of Japan dipped from 31.7 per cent to a paltry 12 per cent. Making matters worse, 88.4 per cent of South Korean respondents perceived the current state of Japan–South Korea relations as being either 'relatively bad' or 'extremely bad', as compared to 66.1 per cent in the previous poll. This figure was the poorest in the past eight years from the commencement of Genron NPO's annual joint opinion poll in 2013 (Kudo, 2020).

The information that emerges from the various opinion surveys in both countries is that both have hardened their respective positions and views towards each other, with little scope for improvement. If such trends are analysed from the perspective of identity under the rubric of international relations, the theorising of identity politics in the context of Japan–South Korea relations falls broadly under cultural studies (Tamaki, 2010). Even though over a century has passed since Japan annexed Korea in August 1910, both countries tend to look at each other through the prism of the political matrix prevalent in 1910. This is despite the fact that both countries are alliance partners of the United States facing a common threat from North Korea, and now a new challenge from China. This is most unfortunate, because many countries in Asia and Africa—which were liberated from European colonial rule, including India—continue to maintain cordial relations with their past colonial masters. Unfortunately, Japan and South Korea still remain prisoners of the past.

There is another dimension to the mutual suspicions and hostile impressions of Japanese and South Korean peoples. Here, the role of the state cannot be overlooked. Although no direct connection may be ascribed to the involvement of the state in shaping the impressions of its people, political statements of leaders notwithstanding, there could be other instrumentalities—through education and textbook prescriptions for students, with distorted information—that could shape the fragile, impressionable minds of their youth. Over the longer term, opinions are formed that can impact future relations between the two countries.

Interestingly, while the older generation in either country might hold strong views, younger generations are more inclined to view the relationship from the perspective of business and cultural factors. While the liberal school of international relations might hold the view that economic considerations supersede political differences, contributing to mutual understanding and goodwill, history could negate such a stance. However, given the complexity in north-east Asia, realists might be compelled to revisit their arguments if those hold. Fortunately, it would be naïve to presume that younger generations, raised in a different environment and exposed to modern culture, are likely to continue to accept that the shadow of the past is a determinant that will shape the future of Japan–Korea relations in the modern era. They are more likely to hold the view that Japan's conservative politicians, despite their hawkish nature, are not the representatives of an Imperial Japan that would want to subjugate the Chosŏn peoples once more. And therein lies hope, as youth would take their countries forward in the future.

Although bilateral ties have progressed with periodic hiccups, differing perceptions about the past—despite the Kono statement,[10] the Murayama statement[11] and the Japan–South Korea Joint Declaration of 1988[12]—continue to plague bilateral ties. In particular, past history remains the crucial obstruction in the relationship, which is detrimental to both countries, affecting economic and security issues.[13]

The deficiency on both sides is mutual understanding and self-examination. Both sides are prisoners of past events, and neither appears able to move on. In order to overcome this, a new strategy, mutually agreed upon, needs to be devised that can help reorient problem-solving priorities. A promise between two sovereign nations is more than a promise between two individuals, as prescribed by international law. This is also stipulated in the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties. As Emer de Vattel observed over two centuries ago, concession and compromise are more important in finding convergence and restoring peace than to comply with rigid principles of justice.[14] Viewed differently, both sides are best advised to revisit the theory of 'reconciliation' in international politics, to understand the method of reconciliation, and to apply the yardstick to their own bilateral relationship. 'The triplet structure of institutional reconciliation such as treaties, materialistic

reconciliation through compensation, and notional reconciliation of memorials or commemoration brings about stability between the nations.'[15]

The promotion of soft power is often cited as an important tool to foster mutual understanding. As a concept, popularised decades ago by Joseph Nye, the promotion of soft power has gained currency and is cited as an attractive proposition that can be used to promote mutual understanding. Japan does possess enormous amounts of soft power, which it has been promoting through various government and non-government programmes and activities. Nonetheless, it is also proven that the application of soft power for the removal of barriers to foster goodwill is not always effective. Every country possesses soft power and its application could yield varying outcomes in diverse situations. There is ample literature identifying the soft power component of Japan (Panda, 2010: 144–54). The question that begs an answer is: Can the application of soft power by either side help clear some of the misunderstandings and remove the distrust that the peoples of Japan and South Korea have towards each other? Given the complexity of the relationship between the two countries, it seems unlikely that the use of soft power can be an effective tool in the Japan–Korea context.

EXAMINING ANTI-KOREAN PREJUDICE

Anti-Korean prejudice amongst the Japanese is rooted in history. Although the Japanese occupation of the Korean Peninsula for 35 years is one chapter in this narrative, it is significant that during the 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake that hit eastern Japan, thousands of Koreans were massacred, establishing that false claims were behind the acts.[16] The worrying fact is that hate speech, which outright rejects clear historical fact, has become more widespread. In an interview with *Mainichi Shimbun*, Naoki Kato observed that 'the same ideas of discrimination that existed 100 years ago remain today'.[17] This prejudice gained currency when, in 2000, Tokyo Governor Shintaro Ishihara used the term *sangokujin*[18] in one of his speeches.

In the meantime, amid heightened Sino–US rivalry that threatened a 'new Cold War', Moon Chung-in, President Moon Jae-in's special security adviser on diplomatic affairs, urged Seoul and Tokyo to persuade Beijing and Washington to refrain from escalating tensions. Moon Chung-in also called on the leaders of South Korea, China and Japan to hold a trilateral summit meeting to discuss the issue.[19] The hope was expressed that the Joe Biden administration would engage in talks with China—not rejecting China in all areas, but selectively accepting and rejecting—thus keeping the door to dialogue open.

There are many more such issues as the 'comfort women' controversy, the security burden sharing with the United States, the trade frictions between the two countries stemming from a court ruling in South Korea mandating compensation by Japan for Korean workers in the colonial period, revisiting the nuclear option because of the North Korean threat, etc., that are not addressed in this analysis, and are reserved for separate treatment.

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NOTES

1. See Nanjing Massacre, conventional Nanking Massacre, also called Rape of Nanjing (December 1937–January 1938), mass killing and ravaging of Chinese citizens and capitulated soldiers by soldiers of the Japanese Imperial Army after its seizure of Nanjing, China, on 13 December 1937, during the Sino–Japanese War that preceded World War II. https://www.britannica.com/event/Nanjing-Massacre. Accessed on 22 October 2020.

   New facts have emerged recently with proper evidence showing that China's claim of 300,000 being massacred was exaggerated. For details, see the two-part article: https://japan-forward.com/bookmark-ignoring-evidence-of-fewer-nanjing-massacre-victims-the-west-chooses-to-believe-china/, and https://japan-forward.com/bookmark-politics-keeps-the-west-holding-on-to-300000-nanjing-massacre-tally/.
2. See https://www.genron-npo.net/en/opinion_polls/archives/5263.html.
3. The Yasukuni Shrine was originally established in 1869 by the first emperor of modern Japan, Emperor Meiji, in honour of those who fought and died for the country. Approximately 2,500,000 names are enshrined at Yasukuni, amongst them the casualties of wars since 1853, including the Boshin War, the Seinan War, the Sino–Japanese and Russo–Japanese wars, World War I, the Manchurian Incident, the China Incident and World War II, known in Japan as the Greater East Asian War. See https://www.historyhit.com/locations/yasukuni-shrine/.
4. See the 2nd Joint Japan–South Korea Public Opinion Poll (2014), Analysis Report on Comparative Data, 16 July 2014. https://www.genron-npo.net/en/pp/archives/5142.html.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*
7. See https://www.genron-npo.net/en/opinion_polls/archives/5489.html.
8. See Shin and Lee (2018). The decision echoed the Supreme Court's landmark verdict that ruled in favour of South Koreans seeking compensation from

Japan's Nippon Steel and Sumitomo Metal Corp for their forced wartime labour. It upheld a 2013 appeals court decision that Mitsubishi pay 80 million Won (55,643 pounds) to each of the five labourers or their families in compensation. In a separate ruling, the court also ordered Mitsubishi to pay up to 150 million Won to each of another five plaintiffs or their families. While Mitsubishi called the verdict 'deeply regrettable', Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono quickly issued a statement saying that the court's decisions were 'totally unacceptable'.

9. See https://military.wikia.org/wiki/2018_Japan%E2%80%93South_Korea_radar_lock-on_dispute.
10. The Kono Statement refers to a statement released by Chief Cabinet Secretary Yōhei Kōno on 4 August 1993, after the conclusion of the government study that found that the Japanese Imperial Army had forced women, known as 'comfort women', to work in military-run brothels during World War II. The Japanese government had initially denied that the women had been coerced, until this point. In the Kono Statement, the Japanese government acknowledged that. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kono_Statement#:~:text=The%20Kono%20Statement%20refers%20to%20a%20statement%20released,work%20in%20military-run%20brothels%20during%20World%20.
11. See Togo (2013). The Murayama Statement of 1995 was the pinnacle of Japan's apology for its wrongdoing before and during World War II. The position it put forward has been inherited by all subsequent Japanese cabinets. It explains the holistic and unconditional character of the Murayama Statement, in which Japan as a nation was held responsible for its past colonial rule and aggression. It then clarifies this position by comparing the statement with the then West German President Richard von Weizsäcker's 1985 speech on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the end of World War II. The statement was released by the then Prime Minister of Japan Tomiichi Murayama on 15 August 1995. https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1057/9781137301239_1.
12. See 'Japan–Republic of Korea Joint Declaration: A New Japan–Republic of Korea Partnership towards the Twenty-first Century', 8 October 1998. https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/korea/joint9810.html.
13. '"Postwar" and "Liberation" of Korea–Japan Relations, and International Politics.' https://www.northkoreanreview.net/single-post/2020/08/22/-postwar-and-liberation-of-korea-japan-relations-and-international-politics?utm_campaign=c662888e-2cf4-4d47-aa94-fa24a4db5858&utm.
14. *The Law of Nations*, the enormously influential work by Swiss diplomat and jurist Emmerich de Vattel (1714–76) was first published in 1758, and is credited with shaping modern international law by applying natural law to international relations. Its argument for liberty and equality proved influential upon the American Declaration of Independence, with Benjamin Franklin commenting on its usefulness to the drafters. The book was translated into English in 1760, 1787 and 1797. There were 297 editions published between 1759 and 2019 in six languages, and available with 5,471 WorldCat member libraries worldwide. https://worldcat.org/identities/lccn-n82081604/.
15. '"Postwar" and "Liberation" of Korea–Japan Relations, and International Politics.' https://www.northkoreanreview.net/single-post/2020/08/22/-postwar-and-liberation-of-korea-japan-relations-and-international-politics.
16. 'Ideas Behind Anti-Korean Prejudice Unchanged in 100 Years: Japanese Author', 8 December 2020. https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20201207/p2a/00m/0dm/021000c.
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Sangokujin* is seen as a discriminatory word, referring primarily to people from Taiwan, China and the Korean Peninsula that literally translates to 'third country's' citizens.
19. 'Moon's Special Adviser Urges S. Korea–Japan Cooperation to Help Prevent "New Cold War".' https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20201126009900325.

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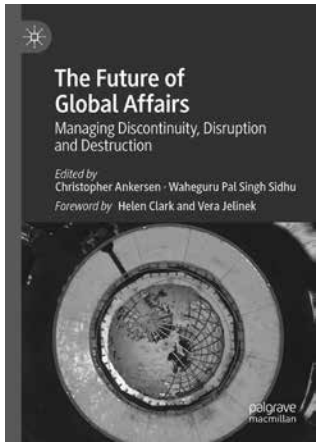
BOOK REVIEW
THE FUTURE OF GLOBAL AFFAIRS
Managing Discontinuity, Disruption and Destruction

RAJEN HARSHÉ

THE FUTURE OF GLOBAL AFFAIRS: MANAGING DISCONTINUITY, DISRUPTION AND DESTRUCTION
Editors: Christopher Ankersen and Waheguru Pal Singh Sidhu
Publisher: Switzerland AG, Palgrave Macmillan, 2021



With the onset of globalisation, diverse and multi-layered social processes are simultaneously at work, causing constant interactions between multiple actors in an increasingly interdependent world. Consequently, growing interstate conflicts, the burgeoning of transnational terrorist outfits, violent takeovers by extremist groups of hitherto ungoverned spaces, secessionist movements and civil wars have virtually started characterising contemporary times. Besides, proxy wars between major powers such as the United States and Russia in Syria, renewed nuclear competition between states, challenges stemming from climate change as well as the management of cyber technologies have made this world a turbulent place. Certain milestone events after the Cold War such as 9/11, the financial crises of 2008 and COVID–19 too have had global ramifications. After writing a solid introduction, the editors have chosen to address most of these complex issues that constitute global affairs which, simply put, signify activities that take place across the world outside the scope of a single state.

On the whole, the volume is a collection of thought-provoking essays that steadily promote the study of global affairs persuasively. Let me proceed to offer a few glimpses of this excellent collective travail.

Michael F. Oppenheimer, while shedding light on the turbulent future of international relations, draws attention to the Vienna Conference of 1815 which brought peace in Europe till 1914. However, what was the cost of such peace? Were the events such as the Opium War (1839–1842), the suppression of the Indian revolt in 1857 and the conquest of Egypt in 1885 integrated into the landscape of peace? Coming to contemporary times, the author is perceptive about the connection between nationalism and populism in the sense that both can be the cause and the effect. He argues that even if the process of globalisation will not end with rising nationalism, economic weakness and the emergence of multipolarity, it will profoundly alter its character and greatly reduce its economic and political benefits. Ankersen's deftly handled historical overview of international relations demonstrates how the world with a kaleidoscopic future lacks an enduring image. John V. Kane's systematic analysis demonstrates effectively with illustrations the manner in which empiricism can provide strategies to avoid the adverse impact of the post-truth/fake world and get at the truth. Christian Busch, while reflecting on the prospects towards enlightened capitalism, has argued that the resurgence of populism is a result of discontent and decreased trust in governments and institutions. He conceives unusually nationalistic policies as ways to consolidate power. While commenting on neo-liberal globalisation, the author has presented a more nuanced argument by discussing Stiglitz's penchant for welfarism and critique of neo-liberalism.

Jennifer Trahan's essay on international justice and International Criminal Courts (ICC) systematically analyses case studies of atrocities committed in Syria, Myanmar and Iraq. Despotic rulers in Africa such as Omar al-Bashir of Sudan and Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya refused to submit to either ICC or to accept the Rome Statue dealing with international crime. In this context, China's closer association with autocratic regimes in Zimbabwe (Robert Mugabe) and Sudan (Bashir) and implicit support to their atrocities could have illuminated the hindrances in delivering international justice through bodies like the ICC.

Anne Marie Goetz's spirited piece on how undiplomatic feminist foreign policy necessarily has to be makes refreshing reading. As Swedish foreign minister Margot Wallstrom launched a scathing attack on medieval countries like Saudi Arabia for denying women their basic rights, she was denied an opportunity to speak before the Arab League a month later. Besides, attacking an oil rich state(s) also had its cost on foreign policy. It is obvious that hierarchical regimes with masculine hegemonies and unequal entitlement make feminist social change projects relevant by standing against the systemic and global subordination of women. In light of several state- to gender-related conflicts, it is worth taking a look at Thomas Hill's essay on the significance of conflict transformation education if we intend to build peaceful societies and a peaceful world.

Jens Rudbeck's perspective on a changing agenda for development has not overlooked the traditional problems of poverty and malnutrition. However, the existence of these problems has been attributed to violent internal conflict and fragile state institutions. After dwelling on the UN's Millennium Development Goals (MDG) with the target date of 2015, and the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) with a target date of 2030, Rudbeck deals with poverty reduction efforts in the world. As the author's findings suggest, the forecast for Africa in this area is grim as its share of the poor will increase from 60 per cent of the total poor on the planet in 2016, to 80 per cent in 2023, to 90 per cent in 2030. By 2030, South Sudan will emerge as the most fragile state in the world. In the process of dealing with the impact of cybertechnology, Pano Yannakogeorgos has dealt with perpetrators of harm in cyberspace, including nation states, subnational actors, disgruntled employees and vulnerability hunters.

Carolyn Kissane's essay on the upending of geopolitics of energy is full of possibilities. If demands for deep decarbonisation, climate change mitigation and adaption are driving new policies, the rise of the United States as an energy superpower owning shale production is a noteworthy development. Factors including dwindling significance of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), the rise of Russia as a petro-state, and the role of China as a challenge and opportunity for global energy will conjointly shape the energy scenario. Michael Shank has underlined

the challenges of climate change and, in workman-like fashion, reflected on the required behavioural changes from the grassroots level to face the global problems of climate change.

W. P. S. Sidhu's thoughtful and comprehensive essay, at the end, while handling intricate issues related to peace and security, nuclear non-proliferation, development and human rights, has offered nuanced reflections on the UN's management of unrealistic expectations. I was struck by how he has mentioned changing realities in the world political economy. For instance, the adoption of the SDG coincided with the economic rise of the Global South and, for the first time in 150 years, the combined output of three leading emerging powers—China, India and Brazil—is about to equal the GDP of longstanding industrial powers of the Global North, including Canada, France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom and the United States. Besides, South–South cooperation is no longer a slogan but an actual reality owing to growing trade, investment, and finance and technology transfer among southern countries.

Having provided a few essential arguments of all the essays, I would like to add that former US President Trump's idiosyncratic style of functioning and the gloomy ambience within the United States during his tenure have inevitably shaped the texture of these writings. Furthermore, the fact that all the contributors belong to the Centre of Global Affairs of New York University is a strength as well as a weakness of the volume. On the one hand, it has helped colleagues to evolve and develop studies in global affairs with a sharper focus through cogent writings, and, on the other, it has, plausibly, robbed this effort of a diversity of perspectives. All said and done, this is a very competently produced work which will make essential reading for students and scholars of globalisation and global affairs.

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BOOK REVIEW
THE MAKING OF AADHAAR
World's Largest Identity Platform

V. SRINIVAS

THE MAKING OF AADHAAR: WORLD'S LARGEST IDENTITY PLATFORM
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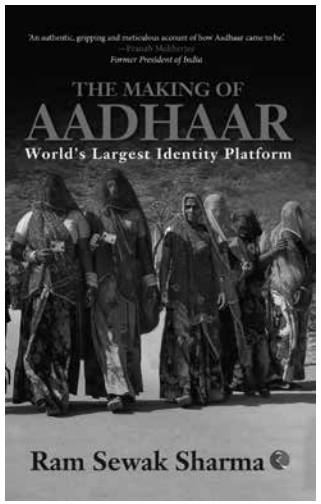

Today, it is difficult to envisage life in India without an Aadhaar number. Ram Sewak Sharma's leadership has ensured that India has shown the world how identity projects are done and other services built on the identity infrastructure. It is a truly 'Make in India' story as solutions were designed and implemented in India. Aadhaar remains the foundation of a citizen's empowerment, and the book reiterates that the citizen's needs are first and foremost.

The book is divided into three sections and 11 chapters. It provides the reader several insights into the remarkable success story of Aadhaar, which has withstood many battles and legal scrutiny. It presents a story of optimism, resilience and deep sense of commitment for improved service delivery. It fascinates the reader with the remarkable possibilities of a paperless digital world accessible to the most marginalised sections of society.

In Section I of the book on 'Making of the World's Largest Identity Infrastructure', chapter 1 is on 'A Unique Public–Private Partnership'. The Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) was created with

an organisational strength of 1,331 posts with a core team of 115 officials, with one director general and 36 deputy director generals, of whom 35 were located in the states and union territories. Several distinguished IAS officers served with passion, commitment and drive to make the UIDAI a reality, in addition to officers from other services like Indian Police Service, Indian Trade Service and Indian Defence Accounts Service. A number of technology team members were drawn from the private sector, and selection through consultants was based on merit. An ecosystem of alliances was forged as the UIDAI became a melting pot of government, private sector, civil society and academia. It was also a huge learning organisation without rigid hierarchies and divisions to ensure that the government and private sector worked together.

Chapter 2 is titled 'A Random Number by Choice'. The UIDAI decided to issue a random number and not a card, a decision that reduced costs and enabled inclusion of the poor. Aadhaar was smarter than a smart card. Quite unique in conception, the random number of 12 digits could accommodate up to 100 billion numbers. The Aadhaar number was not easy to guess and even if the number was available, it could not be directly used. Besides, Aadhaar is for a lifetime, and the number remains with the individual even after death. The UIDAI collected minimal information that was not used for any other purpose. In many ways, the UIDAI became the trusted third party to authenticate identities.

The third chapter, titled 'The Fallacy of Technological Impossibility', deals with the roots of Aadhaar, with the unique IDs to be given to below poverty line (BPL) families to better manage the benefits and subsidies administered to them through the department of information technology. The Registrar General of India (RGI) was also engaged with the task of creating National Population Registers (NPRs) and issuing Multi-Purpose National Identity Cards (MNIC) to citizens of India. The UIDAI was constituted in 2009 as an attached office under the aegis of the Planning Commission. The RGI and the UIDAI had a number of differences on the accuracy of biometrics and use of finger prints along with iris scans. Finally, the inclusion of an iris scan was left to the UIDAI. Parliament, too, opposed the identity bill. However, by the time the Parliamentary Standing Committee's report was published in November 2011, Aadhaar had become the world's largest system

in terms of daily processing rate with a massive database size. The UIDAI was designed for one million authentications per hour, and it was decided that failure to authenticate should not lead to denial of service. In January 2020, the authentications every month were around a billion. Aadhaar became an example for many countries looking to India for replication of this identity programme.

Chapter 4, 'Innovations on the Go', deals with the innovations in enrolment; use of enrolment agencies where payments were based on successful generation of Aadhaar for completed enrolments. Post-enrolment innovations included dedicated upload systems, and a custom secure file transfer protocol system to deliver real-time reports. There was emphasis on quality control at the back-end, with verification of biometric exceptions. Post-Aadhaar generation, the innovations included e-Aadhaar and checking duplicate Aadhaar issuance.

Section II on 'Coalition against Aadhaar' presents the complex range of legal, institutional and civil society challenges that Aadhaar faced. Chapter 5 on 'Concern for Right to Privacy' deals with the immense scrutiny that Aadhaar received regarding its impact on the individual's 'right to privacy', with several critical articles appearing in leading newspapers and public interest litigations being filed in the Supreme Court of India. The Aadhaar was a random number with no intelligence, with minimal data collection, restrictions on data usage, stringent data sharing policies, and kept residents informed on usage. Data privacy under the Act is the responsibility of the Authority. The Right to Privacy as a fundamental right was adjudicated by a nine-judge bench, and then Aadhaar related petitions were adjudicated by a five-judge bench. The Supreme Court concluded that Aadhaar empowers the marginalised to avail of the fruits of government welfare schemes.

Chapter 6, 'Civil Society's Punching Bag', deals with the UIDAI's engagement with civil society, whose outreach plan contained 12 rounds of meetings. The critics held that biometrics were unreliable, database insecure, technology was untested and deduplication not needed. Further, civil society asserted that no savings were envisaged, and the cost projection of the National Institute of Public Finance and Policy that Aadhaar costs ₹14,000 crore was dismissed. Civil society organisations maintained that Aadhaar is illegal, unnecessary, the ghost beneficiaries were

exaggerated, and Aadhaar implementation could result in the exclusion of beneficiaries and the end of welfare schemes. Today, most of the arguments have proved unfounded with nearly 50 per cent of the poor using Aadhaar to access rations, MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act) payments, social pensions, SIM cards or bank accounts, reposing trust in the usage.

Chapter 7 on 'Paranoia about Data Security' begins with the line, 'Aadhaar touches the most fundamental of human values: our need for an identity.' It addresses the important question, 'Should Aadhaar numbers be published?'. In comparison to Aadhaar, the electoral voter lists and NPRs provided a lot more information. Despite this, there was widespread panic that emanated from a story about a Common Service Centre (CSC) manager selling credentials for ₹500. The author explains that data linking by seeding Aadhaar with different data bases is intended to prevent leakages in the delivery of subsidies and entitlements by elimination of duplicates. He further emphasises that authentication footprints do not constitute surveillance, and disclosure does not increase vulnerability. Several national institutes and the International Telecommunication Union have scrutinised Aadhaar and additional security features have been introduced.

Chapter 8, 'The Struggle Within', deals with the existential crisis that Aadhaar faced. The UIDAI was at loggerheads with the National Advisory Council (NAC), the home ministry, the finance ministry, the Planning Commission and Parliament. The comments ranged from 'you have no authority to do it', to 'you cannot do it', and 'it is not worth doing'. The root of the battle was that the ministry of home affairs was the designated agency to undertake the ID project as the RGI was in the process of creating the NPR. Only after 100 million citizens were enrolled did the UIDAI receive the approval of the ministry of finance. The prime minister's support for Aadhaar was the ray of hope for its survival.

Section III of the book is titled 'Aadhaar Comes Alive', and presents success stories of the use of Aadhaar in delivery of services.

In chapter 9, titled 'Proof of the Pudding', the author states that Aadhaar-enabled applications have become absolutely essential to identify and authenticate a person in India's digital world. To sign a document in a digital world, to get a copy of a driving licence,

a utility bill, to make a payment—there are Aadhaar-enabled APIs for all these: eSign, Digilocker, Bharat Bill Payments Systems and UPI, respectively. Aadhaar-based KYC for mobile connections, linking IDs to bank accounts, Aadhaar for pensions, rations and MGNREGA payments are widely seen. Further, the use of Aadhaar-based authentication is permissible not only in government programmes, but also on a voluntary basis for obtaining services from the private sector. The first big impact of Aadhaar was seen when the Aadhaar Based Biometric Attendance System (AEBAS) was introduced in Delhi on 1 October 2014. It demonstrated that the authentication requests could be responded to in seconds using lightweight, inexpensive systems.

The next big step was Digital India, an initiative in which the prime minister has taken personal interest and has appreciated the role technology has played in governance. Jeevan Praman, the Digital Life Certificate—the biometric authentication of pensioners—was launched a week from conceptualisation. Online registration at hospitals was launched on 1 July 2015. I have vivid memories of the passion and the drive that went into the Digital India launch, with several rounds of preparatory meetings. The AIIMS (All India Institute of Medical Sciences) model has since been replicated in hundreds of other public hospitals. The online registration system has one of the largest digital footprints of Digital India projects, and is the precursor of the National Digital Health Mission. The Digital Signature Certificates, the secure digital key used to create the signatures, was issued by the certifying authorities and has become almost universal in nature. The Digital Locker, a private space on public cloud, has over 33 million users and stores 3.7 billion documents.

Chapter 10, titled 'Convincing the Partners', deals with the advances made in using the Aadhaar platform. The Aadhaar-based eKYC was possible because of coordination between the UIDAI, department of revenue, financial inclusion unit of the department of financial services and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). The National Payments Corporation of India has built the Aadhaar Payments Bridge (APB) to channelise government benefits and subsidies to rightful hands. Soon thereafter, linking Aadhaar to bank accounts became a reality, and both MGNREGA payments and National Social Assistance Scheme benefits could be transferred to bank accounts

using the APB. Today, not only the RBI but also Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority (IRDA), Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA) and Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) have adopted Aadhaar for their services. In 2016, TRAI and DOT permitted Aadhaar-based eKYC for acquiring new subscribers. States adopted Aadhaar-based service delivery systems with Andhra Pradesh being amongst the first to demonstrate the efficacy of Aadhaar for the public distribution system (PDS)/ pension/MGNREGA disbursement. The ministry of petroleum and natural gas successfully adopted Aadhaar for LPG subsidy and the scheme was implemented in 291 districts of India.

Chapter 11, 'JAM and Other Recipes', deals with transparency in PDS transactions, the birth of JAM (Jan Dhan, Aadhaar and Mobile) and its uses. The development of India Stack has enabled many paperless and cashless services to be delivered to India's citizens. The 2015 *Economic Survey* supported the JAM trinity solution to ensure targeted delivery of subsidies for PDS and kerosene. The government's move towards Direct Benefit Transfer has enabled huge transfers of funds using Aadhaar-seeded digital platforms. The benefits of using Aadhaar have been quantified at ₹90,000 crore every year, resulting from massive improvements in targeted deliveries.

Ram Sewak Sharma has been a tireless crusader for Aadhaar. He has fought a number of internal consensus building battles that needed to be fought and won, and established the resilience of Aadhaar, ensuring that it found universal acceptability. It can be said that Aadhaar and post-Aadhaar solutions have impacted the lives of ordinary citizens by making processes simpler. Aadhaar has ensured that ghosts and imposters have been eliminated from the system. The breadth of Aadhaar-based service deliveries will only increase in the coming years. The impact has already been breathtaking. A thoroughly enjoyable read.

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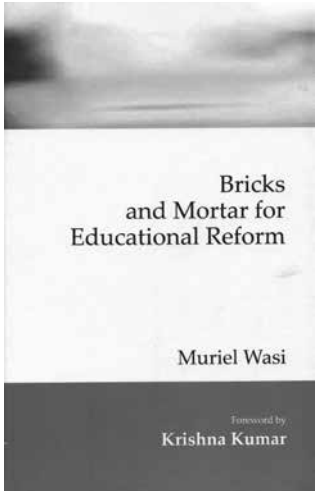
BOOK REVIEW
BRICKS AND MORTAR FOR EDUCATIONAL REFORM

PARTHA CHATTERJEE

BRICKS AND MORTAR FOR EDUCATIONAL REFORM
Author: Muriel Wasi
Publisher: L. G. Publishers and Distributors, 2021
Details: pp. 192; Price: ₹495.00 (Hardback)



Muriel Wasi (1912–1995) was a most unusual person. A First Class First Tripos from the University of Madras (1933), followed by a most fruitful stint at Oxford University, England, she was inducted as a Lieutenant in the Army Education Corps in the British Army in India. Having served with distinction as Senior Advisor to the Ministry of Education, Government of India, she later taught at St. Stephen's College and Jesus and Mary College, Delhi. The essays in this volume are, in the main, from her days as a teacher who taught her students to ask questions about a complex world, and whetted their curiosity to learn more about life by acquiring a sound education, especially through English literature and other branches of knowledge.

A former student and later Professor of English, Jesus and Mary College, Jayanti Kaul writes in a tribute:

> From Mrs. Wasi's first encounter with our class it was apparent that she fully intended to exceed her brief as Shakespeare became only one of the things she taught us. Each text that she lectured on ('worked on together' was her phrase) opened up vistas of discussions on all the issues that were relevant to 18-year-old minds. By our third year, she had performed a miracle of sorts—she had organized a group of us into a 'library seminar' where we actually read books not on our syllabus (unheard of), and stayed back for hours after college ended to discuss them (p. 7).

Her own curiosity about the world ranged far and wide. She was one of the founder-members of the Delhi Film Society, and a connoisseur of good international and national cinema. She always felt that history, for instance, could not only be taught and learned from text books but from other sources as well in order to be internalised. Being emphatically against rote learning, she insisted that a variety of sources be consulted in order to learn something meaningful about the near and distant past. Muriel Wasi was convinced that in order to understand history, students must also study geography.

Her subtlety of thought reveals itself in the essay, 'Teaching History in Indian Schools':

> The monument is a historical result; it is not a cause of history. The museum is an assemblage of things that does not necessarily reflect the thinking of an age, unless these things are superlatively well-organised, and our museums are not yet superlatively well-organised (p. 40).

Almost 60 years on, this observation continues to be largely true. In the same essay she says,

> If we are to revolutionise the teaching of history in our schools, it must be through sheer joy, for only a movement of joy in education will now lead our children to re-discover their country (ibid.).

She is delighted on seeing a 'panoramic pageant of ballet, music and drama to tell the story of the Gandhian era' by students of St. Thomas' Higher Secondary School, New Delhi. This is in consonance with her idea of broadening the horizons of a student through the performative experience of a time in (modern) history, apart from reading about it.

In the essay, 'The Essential Teacher', she observes with uncanny perception that,

> There was Rousseau who taught for his times the startling truth, that there is no mind that is not shaped by the emotions, that the child you teach is not a mere brain into which you instil willy-nilly the formulae and facts of academia, but a total person made of hands, organs, dimensions, feelings. And he, too, taught regardless of the consequences (p. 79).

In these times of circumscribed academic curiosity resulting from misleading nationalism, it is important to imbibe the invaluable lessons on education that Muriel Wasi had to offer. It is necessary to learn from, understand and appreciate the many glories of ancient Indic civilisation, but it is equally necessary to intelligently, sensitively imbibe from the seemingly inexhaustible treasure trove of eclectic knowledge that contemporary international societies have at their disposal, which they share, often willingly.

The educationist in her absorbed myriad sources of information and ideas with clarity, ease and speed. In 'Education and Traditional Values', she expresses distress and concern thus:

> It is not surprising that this background of poverty informs the lives of our children for many years after they have left elementary school. The slipshod is accepted; we can do no better. It costs money to have shining floors and clean walls. I returned recently from a tour of colleges in a big city. And can testify that every time I came across a good airy new modern building my heart leaped (p. 102).

She then proceeds to explore other related avenues of thought:

> Savings campaigns may be patriotic from time to time, but there is by and large and in the long run, no virtue in either saving as a technique of living or in poverty as a way of thought and life. Such attitudes breed meanness, deprive the mind of its elasticity and run the risk of translating themselves into mean human relationships (ibid.).

To the job-oriented, market-driven young citizen, more often than not forced into believing that idealism and an accompanying

aesthetic morality are burdens to be expunged forthwith from the consciousness, Muriel Wasi's ideas may appear to be obstacles in the realisation of 'cherished' aspirations. Her intellectual ideas that call for a purity of purpose and transparent honesty in approach will leave a person bewildered.

The relatively privileged student today who is reasonably well fed, clothed, with a clean space to live in, may find it difficult to respond with genuine enthusiasm to Muriel Wasi's ideas, not because of a lack of intelligence, but the pressures of having to earn a living in an extremely competitive society. India today has a population of 1.35 billion, of which barely 20 per cent have access to a reasonably good education either in the humanities or in the sciences. The economic resources are almost exclusively cornered by a privileged few. In this climate of moral and ethical expediency, there is time enough for the generation of seemingly endless amounts of information that may lead to the creation of boundless financial capital for the chosen few. But is there at all a place for ideas or emotions that may bring peace and happiness into the daily lives of ordinary citizens struggling for a dignified life? Muriel Wasi's book of essays may appear to the cynic to belong to a lost world, but it certainly brings a message of hope to the genuine seeker.

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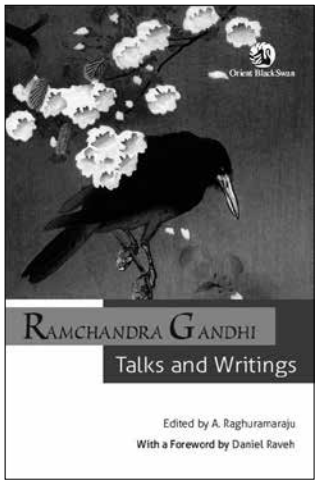
BOOK REVIEW
RAMCHANDRA GANDHI
Talks and Writings

ARVINDAR SINGH

RAMCHANDRA GANDHI: TALKS AND WRITINGS
Editor: A. Raghuramaraju
Publisher: Orient BlackSwan Pvt. Ltd., 2020
Details: pp: 274; Price: ₹995.00



The late Ramchandra (Ramu) Gandhi was a philosopher of high calibre. He set up the Philosophy Department at the University of Hyderabad and taught at Visva Bharati University, Panjab University and the California Institute of Integral Studies.

Apart from this, he made forays into the fields of journalism and social thought. His writings underline his commitment to pluralism, secularism, profound theological commitment of a broad order and pacifism. He came into his own, although his lineage as the grandson of the Mahatma and C. Rajagopalachari was undoubtedly distinguished. This book is a compilation of his writings and talks over the years, and it is perhaps appropriate that it is being reviewed in the *IIC Quarterly*; apart from being a regular at the Centre, it was at the IIC that he breathed his last on 13 June 2007.

It is fitting in my opinion to gauge the worth of this publication by asking a few questions and providing a few answers. Perhaps readers will get an apposite gist of the book through this.

Does the anthology give one a taste of Ramchandra Gandhi the philosopher?

Undoubtedly, yes. The volume covers a wide plethora of Gandhi's work in the field of philosophy over the years. It can be safely said, however, that Ramana Maharishi and Jiddu Krishnamurti occupy pride of place in the writings and talks reproduced. Be that as it may, others of learning or saints can by no means be called absent in this work, be it Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Sarda Devi, Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, Mahatma Gandhi or Dr. S. Radhakrishnan. About Krishnamurti he says, 'He died only a couple of years ago, a master like him or anyone is not really fully understood or even begun to be talked about exploratively until many, many years after his death.' He then goes on to express himself on the radiance and power of this great thinker. The perceptive reader will also find interesting Ramana Maharishi's discourse with a Westerner on the power of silence over speech and action in the chapter 'Indian Spirituality and the World'. Mahatma Gandhi too is well covered in the work; in one piece the complex relationship with his eldest child (and the author's uncle), Harilal, is dealt with tenderly. Like his assassin, Nathuram Godse, Harilal also did not understand the Mahatma's message and gave himself up to alcohol. However, the family showed Harilal, who had an intelligent mind, the compassion he deserved.

Does the book do justice to the social and political message of Ramu Gandhi?

The answer is yes and no. Metaphorically, he compares life to a holdall which rail and road travellers used to carry in the years gone by (p. 107), but as holdalls became redundant, has pluralistic thought also become redundant? To some it may be so, but as holdalls have been replaced by other forms and pieces of travel luggage, which are able to serve the same purpose, the pluralistic ideology which the writer believed in will not be outmoded; it might have some alterations in its form from time to time. Even though this aspect of Ramu Gandhi's ideological belief is covered fairly well in this collection, it is not given the import that it should have been, given the sway of certain ideologies in present-day India.

Do we find in these writings a reflection of what Ramu Gandhi would have thought or expressed had he been alive today?

In this regard the book does disappoint.

Coverage of his writings on the creed of secularism through more of his prose, or a powerful rendering of this belief which, after

all, forms a part of the basic structure of the Constitution would have been in order. I came across a quote from him: 'when policies become exclusive, India will turn genocidal' (Visvanathan, 2019). It is not difficult to judge what his opinion would have been on the various events in current-day India—the Citizenship Amendment Act, the events in the context of the Ram Mandir construction at Ayodhya, or the farm laws and the resultant agitation by farmers that would have found him speaking out or penning his views. He had also said, 'A file can destroy a million people while a gun is child's play' (ibid.). This comment sums up the sensitive thinker he was, and the book could have reflected on the relevance of Ramu Gandhi in the India of today.

Is this anthology a comprehensive work of note?

Barring the shortcomings pointed out above, the book is a good overview of the academician–philosopher. His thoughts as an anti-war believer and his opinion about nuclear stockpiles are well represented in the work, as also Partition, about which he says,

> I maintain that these two million who were slaughtered were no Indians or Pakistanis. They belonged to the Indian subcontinent, they didn't have Indian passports or Pakistani passports and we are responsible for their slaughter because we accepted the partition in one way or the other (p. 241).

Elsewhere in the book he says in a philosophical context:

> Shishya is the Sanskrit word for which the colloquial term in Punjabi is Sikh. In fact, the whole Sikh faith to my mind has redefined humanity in a way which inaugurates a new renaissance…when we are social or not, whether we are rational or not, we are seeking self-knowledge. So, to be a Shishya is to be a human being (pp. 243–44).

I think these two references from the book give an authentic impression of the basic stream of thought running through the omnibus.

These collected works cover a good range of interviews, speeches and articles. Ramu was not lacking in a sense of humour. For example, while writing on the demise of the Janata government, he remarks that the soft drink '77' was all that remained of the great revolution that year, a tribute to the prohibitionist prime minister who headed the government at the time which collapsed mid-term. Or when he refers to President Radhakrishnan's speech on the radio that dharma was on our side during the Chinese aggression, leading them to believe Burma was our new ally and making the Chinese withdraw! His comments on the Godhra riots of 2002 have also been included. Another interesting comment is about his feelings on what it means to be the grandson of the Mahatma. While dwelling on this he says the undeserved respect and affection he gets puts him in a quandary at times. However, given his independent views and contribution in his career as a professor so versatile, one can say this respect and affection was fairly his due.

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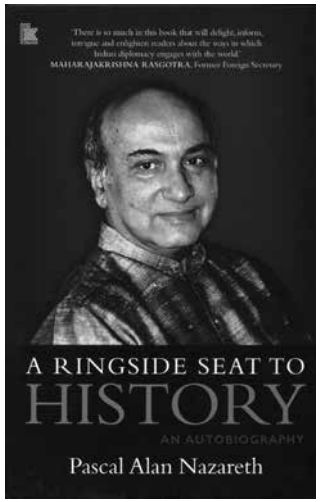
BOOK REVIEW
A RINGSIDE SEAT TO HISTORY
An Autobiography

CYRIL VELIATH SJ

A RINGSIDE SEAT TO HISTORY: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY
Author: Pascal Alan Nazareth
Publisher: New Delhi and Seattle: Konark, 2020
Details: pp. 280; Price: ₹800.00



Ambassador Pascal Alan Nazareth's autobiography is to me less a narrative and more a meditation—it is a spiritual introspection on life. In his 35 years in the Indian Foreign Service and 25 years of active retired life, he has dealt with presidents, prime ministers and royalty of many nations; yet, has penned a life history that is a good guide not only for diplomats, but for all who seek the path of truth as traced by Mahatma Gandhi. The reader will be struck by the self-assurance, insights, warmth and wit that attended his encounters with an array of unique individuals, ranging from spiritual giants such as His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the late Mother Teresa, to unassuming co-workers among his own consular staff such as Chinmaya Ghosh, who later attained global fame as Sri Chinmoy.

The resolve and composure that Nazareth manifested in tackling the many vicissitudes he faced in India, Africa and the whole world, his steadfast devotion to his family and loved ones, and his unyielding conviction that he was being ceaselessly led on by a higher power, all offer us lessons on life, lessons our young people would do well to learn.

Apart from Tokyo, which was his first post, he has served in diplomatic and consular missions in Rangoon, Lima, London, Chicago and New York; as India's High Commissioner to Ghana; and Ambassador to Egypt and Mexico. Since his retirement in May 1994, he has lectured at prestigious institutions such as the National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS) and Indian Institute of Management (IIM) in Bangalore; National Defence College, New Delhi; Stanford, Yale, and Columbia Universities in the United States; Moscow and St. Petersburg State University in Russia; Uppsala University in Sweden; and Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome.

This book comprises 14 chapters, followed by 10 annexures and a stunning collection of photographs of the author's encounters with such eminent people as the late Indian Prime Ministers Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi, Morarji Desai, and Rajiv Gandhi; British Prime Ministers Harold MacMillan and Alec Douglas Home; former Viceroy of India Lord Mountbatten; and Nobel Laureates Desmond Tutu and Rigoberta Menchú.

The first two chapters concern his birth and early life, his early trials and triumphs, and the training he underwent as a diplomat, all recounted with sparkle and hilarity, as on the occasion when he lived in a snake-infested bungalow in Bihar. Chapters 3 to 13 present us with the diversity of his experiences, both doleful and uplifting, in Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America, notably in Japan, Burma, the United States, Costa Rica, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Peru, Ghana, Liberia, Egypt and Mexico.

In Japan, he was witness to the Asanuma assassination. In the United States and Costa Rica, he had an exciting encounter with the infamous Dharma Teja of the erstwhile Jayanthi Shipping Corporation, for which he came to be lightheartedly referred to by Ambassador B. K. Nehru as 'Our James Bond.' While in Rangoon, he observed the economic and social turmoil created by General Ne Win's 1962 coup d'état, and the subsequent expulsion of people of Indian origin from that country. He presents a humorous portrayal of his arachnophobia travails in an Embassy of India bungalow teeming with large black spiders, and also writes of the harm which 'vengeful tree spirits' can cause to humans who disturb their abodes.

In Egypt, he set up links between the renowned Al-Azhar University and leading Indian universities. The Gulf War (August 1990–February 1991) took place during his tenure there, and he had a ringside seat to the hectic diplomatic and military activity in Cairo in the lead up to it. He writes about this with deep insight—of his strenuous efforts to prevent it, and then, when war broke out, of India being requested by Egypt and Iraq to handle their interests in the other country, as a result of which an Iraqi diplomat served as First Secretary (Iraq interests) in his Embassy.

He writes with deep emotion and gratitude to the Almighty of his son's cancer-afflicted left leg and life being miraculously saved by Mother Teresa's timely arrival and prayer at his bedside, during his tenure in New York as Consul General.

In Peru, when he and his wife Isobel attended Mass at a Catholic Church in Lima, the priest, on noticing a sari-clad woman coming up to receive Communion, anxiously enquired if Isobel was a Catholic. On receiving an affirmative reply, he gave her the sacred host. The following day, the local newspaper reported that Lima now had a 'Roman Catholic Hindu' couple at the newly opened Embassy of India.

At his first posting in India, first as Director in the Economic Division of the Ministry of External Affairs and then as Director (West Asia) in the Ministry of Commerce, he writes movingly of Bangladesh President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's visit to New Delhi in May 1974 and his assassination a few months later, of the Emergency declared by late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in June 1975 and of her tragic assassination in 1984 when he was Director General, Indian Council of Cultural Research (ICCR). He had close contact with her during this period, as also with many eminent Indians in the cultural field such as Pupul Jayakar, Kapila Vatsyayan, Mrinalini Sarabhai, Karan Singh and Khushwant Singh. He also mentions his providential escape 'by a hair's breadth' from the Air India Flight 182 crash (popularly known as the Kanishka crash) in June 1985.

The 10 appendices comprise messages by such celebrated public figures as US Presidents Ronald Reagan and Barack Obama, India's former President Pranab Mukherjee, former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Lord Mountbatten, and Nancy Zubin Mehta, along with press articles concerning the author and his wife.

Ambassador Nazareth is also the author of two books on Mahatma Gandhi, India's great apostle of truth and non-violence, whom he revered so deeply. These are *Gandhi: The Soul Force Warrior* (2018) and *Gandhi's Outstanding Leadership* (2006). These deal with all major aspects of, and events in, the Mahatma's life and his great impact on the contemporary world, particularly in the fields of non-violent resistance to oppression and non-violent conflict resolution. I recall here Martin Luther King Jr.'s tributes to Gandhi:

> Gandhi was probably the first person in human history to lift the ethic of love of Jesus Christ, above mere interaction between individuals and make it into a powerful and effective social force on a large scale.[1]
>
> … If humanity is to progress, Gandhi is inescapable. We may ignore him at our own risk (1983: 71).

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NOTE

1. See 'My Pilgrimage to Non-violence', The Martin Luther King Jr. Research and Education Institute, Stanford University. https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/my-pilgrimage-nonviolence. Accessed on 5 July 2021.

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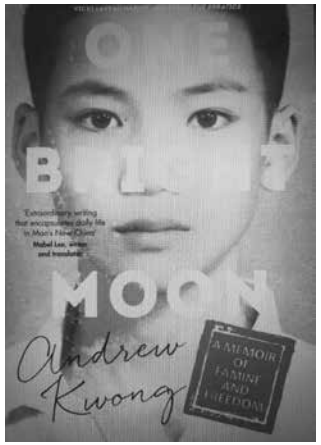
BOOK REVIEW
ONE BRIGHT MOON

MEENAKSHI BHARAT

ONE BRIGHT MOON
Author: Andrew Kwong
Publisher: HarperCollins AU, 2020
Details: pp. 352; Price: 34.99 AUD



While bemoaning the fact that memoirs are being 'disgorged by virtually everyone,' Neil Genzlinger harshly names the memoir as an 'absurdly bloated genre' (2011). Pleasantly, *One Bright Moon*, Andrew Kwong's heartfelt account of his family's tortured travails in the face of an oppressive and debilitating ideology and regime is one of those rare personal memoirs which legitimates and fortifies the form. Delving into singular life experience, the book is a deeply felt, well-articulated memory narrative which transcends the personal to give an inimitable insight into modern Chinese history, without any evident straining to extend the familial and the personal. Offering a significant commentary on the larger historical narrative of a nation and of the world, it achieves what copious historical tomes and extensive political and socio-economic commentaries labour to do. Contextualising his personal narrative against Chinese and world socio-political history, moving through events like the Vietnam war, the Great Depression and the continuing Chinese migration to other lands, his narrative takes on broader meaning.

One Bright Moon focuses on the rise of communism in China as a political and sociological ideology, which shears away personal wealth to the parallel accompaniment of a demeaning loss of identity and erosion of cultural capital. Cherished heirlooms are purloined; living spaces are vandalised and shrink as a result of the rise of enforced community living. Without sinking into cerebral posturing, the narrative dramatically unveils the ironic overrun of the rich fabric of Chinese life by rampant corruption, open thievery, violent lynching and victimisation in the new regime of 'equals'.

The book is witness to Kwong's elephantine memory, his ability to match research and archival detail with powerfully felt emotions. His power of observation and recall makes for finely detailed descriptions of spaces and events which build up a sense of location of rootedness. Notwithstanding the larger picture, *One Bright Moon* is a deeply moving personal narrative which engages without mawkishly swamping either the teller or his tale, awakening the audience to an appreciation of immense personal sacrifice, and of the resilience and fortitude of the human spirit against seemingly insurmountable odds. It traces the fortunes of the Kwong family of Shiqi, China, from riches to rags and its subsequent painstaking protracted resurgence from the depths of adversity and despondence. It is the wrenching tale of a family splintered by political and economic circumstances beyond their control, even as it resolutely hangs on to a sense of belonging with each other.

But the sentiment behind writing this memoir is not limited to the recovery of personal or familial history. Rather, this excavation of memory, with the aim of giving shape to it, underlies the author's attempts to come to an understanding of the self. The very act of writing about abject fear and utter disillusionment becomes an ironical vehicle for holding his 'head high' in proud recognition and consolidation of identity, making it, what Marya Schechtman calls, 'a narrative of self-constitution' (1996). From an oppressive 'suffocating' scenario, where 'no one talked openly', where even the child had 'learnt to keep [his] mouth shut and not discuss [his] own thoughts, hopes and dreams with anyone' (p. 232), *One Bright Moon* documents and represents the attainment of a space where he can, both physically and emotionally, breathe and think freely. The paradox is, and that is the signal takeaway from the book, that in

the midst of all the negatives, 'the most powerful feeling of love and belonging' is the ultimate winner. In this story of the disjunction between promises and hopes, and the reality under Mao, ironically named at the outset as 'auspicious times' (p. 8), Kwong traces his emotional and psychological journey from hope to dismaying, dampening times, yet never losing sight of a redeeming optimism heralded by the title of the narrative, *One Bright Moon*.

The unique perspective of a child which informs even as it learns and the singularity of his life's experience places *One Bright Moon* in the vicinity of *Night*, Elie Wiesel's pathbreaking memoir of his early life prior to and of his time in German concentration camps (1960). Ah-mun (Andrew) sees the increasing oppression and watches 'chaos set in'. Battered by the trauma of having his father arrested and imprisoned, with the distinct possibility of being executed, he has 'trouble sleeping' and is plagued by 'nightmares'. Made to witness public hangings at a tender age, in a climate in which 'suicides had been common in town' (p. 5), he is tormented by visions of his mother hanging from the lychee tree in the vicinity. In the childhood firmament of pain, fear, sorrow, hunger, starvation and separation from his family, his nights are restless and filled with 'fear and hopelessness' (p. 256), and his days subjected to physical and verbal abuse by Mao's Party operatives and supporters. Going through experiences that no child should have to, pushed to the depths of pain and despondence, the author and his family yet miraculously find strength and the key to sanity and identity within itself: 'We were isolated in our grief, but in that instant, as a family, we were also united forever' (p. 155). Veering away from the Wiesel 'night', the memoir comes to identify hope and optimism as its impulse and end, the memoirist exercise taking on therapeutic and epiphanic value.

But, most significantly, *One Bright Moon* represents the rare successful confluence of the autobiographical memoir with sophisticated narrative technique. Apparently many years in the making, this superlatively organised and edited memoir reads like a well-crafted Bildungsroman, following the struggles of a growing boy without losing out on spontaneity and immediacy. The narrative control showing his ability to turn a critical eye inward to himself and his life, manages to simultaneously draw the audience's sympathies and to exhort them to respond intellectually.

Neatly organised, encased between a prologue and epilogue, the memoir becomes a realised metaphor for his life. The comprehensiveness and tightness of the script—it is neither longwinded nor repetitive—transforms a historical account into a work of art of singular literary sophistication. Having learnt his 'English well' (pp. 174, 227), Kwong, the consummate storyteller, represents his struggle beautifully and lyrically in words, finding the answers to his many 'unanswered questions' through simple, direct language and extremely evocative metaphors to finally come to terms with his turbulent past and become 'happy'. Having lived 'without freedom' and having experienced 'living death' (p. 160), *One Bright Moon* realises his urge to find emotional and psychological peace by discovering his place in the world. It also fulfills the unspoken tortuous demands of personal and family responsibility to pass his story down as a personal legacy, to finally mark a Great Leap forward, to a clearing of the dark night and a bright new moon.

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BOOK REVIEW
PARESH MAITY
A Portrait of the Artist in the World

MALAVIKA KARLEKAR

PARESH MAITY:
A PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST IN THE WORLD
Photographs: Nemai Ghosh
Text: Ina Puri
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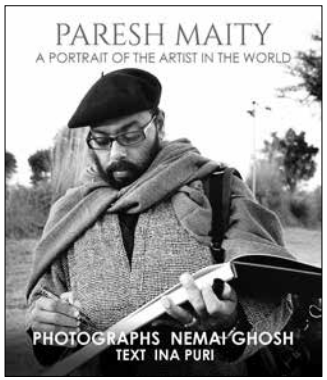

When legendary photographer Nemai Ghosh (1934–2020) collaborated with leading watercolourist Paresh Maity to document the latter's life and work, magic and mystery were surely on the cards. In *Paresh Maity: A Portrait of the Artist in the World*, art curator, collector and writer Ina Puri sensitively retraces this leisurely journey that was presumably spread over some years. As the viewer–reader turns the image-laden pages of the large-format volume, it is easy to forget that there is no table of contents and little information of when and over how many years the Ghosh–Maity collaboration took place. And as provenance and dates of the photographs are not mentioned, one journeys with the photographer and the artist, surmising, guessing and imagining along the way.

While visuals naturally dominate the over 300 pages, Puri's essay 'Imaginary Homelands: Nemai Ghosh and Paresh Maity' is neatly sandwiched between exhaustive, well-crafted interviews with the two artists. Her well-chosen prompts encourage the evocative re-telling of two lives: Maity's opening line, 'I am a restless traveller, forever seeking new horizons', helps the reader imagine a boy in Tamluk municipality (Medinipur district of West Bengal) who, in spite of family pressures to the contrary, was able to study art. He made a secret trip to New Delhi and to the National Gallery of Modern Art that charmed him. Maity was soon studying at Calcutta's Government College of Art, and as he could not afford the rent, was sleeping in an empty passageway of a house for paying guests. Things changed after a trip to New Delhi in 1989 and a successful show at the newly opened Gallery Ganesha.

There is a shift in gear, and Maity moves to talking about his collaboration with photographer Nemai Ghosh: 'As a painter, I was deeply impressed with Nemai-da's brilliant black-and-white pictures of Satyajit Ray's life and work' (p. 21). Puri revisits the Maity–Ghosh trips to Venice, London, Paris and then Rajasthan, Kerala and Santiniketan through several well-chosen reproductions of paintings and photographs. She writes, 'In his new innings, capturing Paresh at work, Nemai-da's role became that of director, composing and shooting to create a compelling visual narrative.' This was quite the reverse from being on Satyajit Ray's sets, where the great director would supervise minutely. As he travelled to new cities and countries, facing adventure and even danger, Ghosh said he 'began working on the idea of documenting not just the painter in his familiar environment but also in unfamiliar spaces' (p. 199). His modus operandi was to shoot unobtrusively.

And this he did with a brilliance possible when black-and-white photography is in the hands of a highly gifted professional: chiaroscuro melding with white light and indistinct horizons; the juxtaposition of unrelated background figures with the subject; the quizzical expression of two little boys as Maity chats with them; the artist in half-light, deeply immersed while history provides the backdrop—the Taj through a misty shroud, and Humayun's tomb in clear light. Or squatting, brush in hand, in the piazzas of Venice and the desert sand of Rajasthan, observing the *kumhors* (potters) at work before Durga puja, or just sipping a cup of tea. There is Maity drinking water at a hydrant, a tap, or drawing it from a well.

As Puri writes, each image was a pictorial story that brought people and their relationships alive. Ghosh's 'camera picked out subtle hints of expression ... and in that moment of intimate exchange, the outside world receded' (p. 111). To my mind, it was equally the

serendipitous photograph that conveyed the most, when Maity was at work, unmindful of the photographer or of the bystander/observer: in a double spread (pp. 96–97), the artist paints, sitting in front of what appears to be a tractor, left leg stretched out. A turbaned young man reflectively pulls on his *bidi*, watching Maity through half-closed eyes. Others are partially in, partially out of this busy photograph. Yet, it is its very busyness that conveys so much. It speaks of Maity's connectedness with the land, with people, with atmosphere.

Atmosphere pervades Paresh Maity's many landscapes, some without any human presence. It is there in 'Lowering Clouds' (p. 195) where indigo merges with azure, if not cobalt, and the earth reflects the burnished sky. Although it must have been cold, warmth is created in 'Winter in Shimla' by the smoke from a chimney and a miasma of dark shades against the terracotta of houses. In a double spread of 'Summer Hill', also in Shimla, red-roofed houses appear minute beneath an infinite swathe of greyish-white horizon, its texture so very different from the negative space of snow on the ground. While deep reds, shades of ochre and gold dominate Maity's oils and mixed-media work, a black-and-white rendering of a lone belfry—perhaps in London—through a delicate tracery of leaves reminds one of the work of Sanjhi artists. However, it is the luminosity of his landscapes, the bold earth tones of deserted fields, of trees that float amidst a turbulent horizon, that remind the viewer of the power and sheer beauty of the Indian countryside.

And now, a quibble—Ina Puri does not tell us what led her to this fascinating project, based on the re-creation of a relationship. Or how she chose and decided on images and photographs. Surely the making of such a book had all the ingredients of suspense, anticipation and even disappointment. A little about the mise-en-scène would have added to the reader–viewer's involvement in the trio's journey. In fact, Puri does fall somewhat short in chronicling her own significant role—that of *sutradhar* (loosely translated here as narrator)—who knew both subjects well. Perhaps, then, she wanted the performance aspect of her book to be centre stage, obviating the need to tether it too much in time, space and indeed, context.

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CONTRIBUTORS

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