



Fear Begets Fear

Acharya Vinoba

Communalists like to dig up the past. They arouse hatred in the people by reminding them of forgotten incidents. However, we do not really know the true history. It is, therefore, better to leave the history aside and see what is advisable in the present.

Rigid position about historical matters and their vehement assertion would block progress. Sense of discretion weakens when we blindly cling to history. History records only the attacks on humanity. Hence it cannot be a reliable guide for comprehending human nature.

What is now known as history is nothing but dross. And children are subjected to the torture of remembering it! This was started by the Westerners. People in India do not know history. Thousands of kings ruled and departed; people do not know even their names. They know only one king: Rama.

Do not be under the impression that king Rama was an Aryan king. There is no Aryan-Dravid conflict in the Ramayana. That is the invention of the Westerners. They tried to create as many differences as they could. They tried to drive a wedge between the North and South India. There were some differences between Hindus and Muslims, but the British exacerbated them. The glory of Rama has been sung by both Northern and Southern saints alike. But the British painted the story of Rama with the colour of Aryan-Dravid

conflict. The greatest literary work in Tamil is Kamban's Ramayana. Ezhuthachan's Ramayana is the greatest work in Malayalam. Were Kamban and Ezhuthachan out of their senses?

History testifies that the Hindus and the Muslims were learning to live together. Shivaji's navy had Muslim officers. In the famous Panipat battle (1761), Sadashivrao and Ibrahim Khan cemented Hindu-Muslim unity with their blood. Hindus and Muslims fought side by side in the struggle for Independence in 1857. Muslim kings had patronized Hindu poets. Babar has written in his memoirs that cows should not be slaughtered if they (the Muslims) desired to live in India; Hindus' sensibilities should not be hurt. Tipu's collection of books had Sanskrit treatises. Pandit Sunderlal has cited many such facts. We read the history written by the British only, and take it as the final word.

In the course of time, wise individuals in both Hindu and Muslim communities established conventions whereby the two communities would come together. Hindu and Muslim crafts mingle with each other and so did the architecture. But we are not taught this in history.

Obscurantist Hindus look upon the Muslims as demons. However, no human community can be demoniacal. Persons from all the countries and societies have committed evil deeds under the

spell of fear and greed. Had not orthodox Hindus oppressed the untouchables? Before and after the Partition of India Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs competed with each other in doing demoniacal deeds. Society gets affected occasionally by such waves of madness. But, on the whole, society is normally on the right track. We look at events with a prejudiced mind and build an imaginary history. That escalates misunderstanding and heightens fear, and pushes us in the grip of passions. One cannot then have a balanced outlook.

Danger from within

People ask me, "is it wrong for the followers of a religion to organize, if it is under attack from the followers of another religion?" Hindus, even though in majority, are afraid that the Muslims would annihilate them. Muslims also have the same fear. Fear begets fear. If we confront even a wild animal fearlessly, it senses fearlessness in our eyes and does not attack us. It is our fear that is frightening us. Hindu dharma is quite strong; it has assimilated all and reshaped them in its own image. Why should we give up this process?

Hindus feel that India belongs to them; that the Muslims have come from outside. But, it is said, Hindus also had come from outside. Now the country belongs as much to Muslims as to Hindus. In fact, the Muslims are our kin. How many of them had come from outside? Most of them are converts. They are a reflection of the bitterness in our hearts. We mistreated the untouchables, hence many of them got converted to Islam. So, they do not have goodwill for us. However, the Muslims in other countries deal with us fairly. This shows that the narrow outlook of Indian Muslims is a reflection of the narrowness in the Hindus. Parochialism and caste differences are encamped here since hundreds of years.

Untouchables were barred from entering temples. All these are signs of disintegration.

Some people say that Christians serve the people, but with an eye on proselytisation. Whatever may their intention be, but they do serve the people.

India has nothing to be afraid of others; if it is facing a danger, it is from within. Our religion (Hindu dharma) is in danger only if we discard faith and liberal outlook, avoid reforms and do not approach others fearlessly.

Service with a universal outlook

If a mother has a broad outlook, she can attain spiritual liberation through the service of her child alone. On the other hand, if someone has a narrow outlook and hatred for other countries, his service to the nation will not lead to spiritual liberation. It is the spirit behind the service to even a child that can virtually turn it into service to the whole world. I believe that service to a segment of society can verily become service to the whole world. But looking to the present condition of society, I will not recommend service to a section; I will rather prescribe service to the whole of humankind.

If Hindus and Muslims are shivering in the cold and I am asked to distribute blankets to either Hindus or Muslims, I will rather throw away the blankets. I do not blame those Hindus, who work exclusively for the Hindus. But I cannot countenance any discrimination in humanitarian matters. *Jnanadeva* has said that if someone is drowning, you should save him irrespective of his caste even if you believe in caste differences; not to do so would be a grave sin. Anything that fractures humanity should be unbearable to the heart. Identification with a particular community constricts the Self. Thereby I gain little and lose much. One must never lose the feeling that one is pure Self.

(Courtesy: All Religions Are Mine, Page 81-84)

Bharat Jodo Abhiyaan

Resolution adopted by the founding National Convention
6 February 2023, Constitution Club, New Delhi

Today We the People of India embark upon a mission, a seven year long journey, to defend the future of India. Today we launch a movement, the **Bharat Jodo Abhiyaan**, that can reclaim our republic, renew our Constitutional values, rescue our democratic institutions and rekindle the spirit of our freedom struggle. A movement of resistance to the unfolding assault on our constitution, our nationalism, our civilization – indeed, the very idea of India. A movement of national reconstruction that extends its horizon from helping political change to fostering socio-cultural change and indeed combating climate change, that offers a credible hope to secure the Constitutional promise of justice, liberty, equality and fraternity for every Indian.

We are a group of citizens who have worked with various peoples movements, voluntary organisations and political formations. Many of us have participated in the historic **Bharat Jodo Yatra** from Kanyakumari to Srinagar, from despondency to optimism, from keeping quiet to expressing ourselves, from finger pointing to taking personal responsibility and from apolitical stances to explicit assertion of our political role as citizens. The unprecedented success of this yatra places an extraordinary responsibility on everyone who shared this journey with their body, mind or soul. We launch **Bharat Jodo Abhiyaan** to fulfil this responsibility, to exercise our right to protect our hard won freedom and to discharge our sacred duty to defend our Constitution.

The preamble to the Constitution of India defines our ideology. It is incumbent upon us to redeem the pledge of securing for all our citizens “social, economic and political justice, liberty of

thought, expression, belief, faith and worship; equality of status and of opportunity; and fraternity”. This commitment to constitutional values entails some concrete non-negotiable positions that we all stand for:

1. A secular state that has no affiliation of any kind to any religion, and that offers equal respect to and maintains principled distance from all religions;

2. Social justice via state policies to recognize, monitor and neutralize caste and gender based inequalities, oppressions and institutional violence, and uphold rights of the children;

3. Participatory, transparent and decentralized democracy free from the stranglehold of money power that ensures freedom of expression and values independent functioning of all democratic institutions;

4. A welfare state envisioned by the Directive Principles of State Policy of the Constitution, that puts people before profit, places wellbeing of the last person first and rejects unthinking privatization and crony capitalism;

5. Policies that recognize peoples’ right to natural resources and our responsibility to promote climate resilience by balancing the interests of environment and economy;

6. Positive nationalism, that focuses on achieving national unity, promotes dialogue with our own citizens in conflict zones and seeks peace with external neighbours; and

7. Pride in our cultural and civilizational heritage in its glorious multiplicity that entails a responsibility to filter out caste, gender or any other oppression in its name.

These values are under an unprecedented assault today. For nearly nine years now, we have witnessed a brick-by-brick dismantling of our republic. We have seen brute majoritarian takeover of democratic apparatus through horse-trading and dubious instruments like the Electoral Bonds, subversion of institutions including judiciary, Election Commission and investigating or enforcement agencies, suppression of free media, choking of freedom of expression, communalisation of educational institutions and curricula, criminalization of dissent, breakdown of rule of law and use of state and street power to crush political opponents. We have seen rolling back of the secular state, de facto demotion of religious minorities to a second grade citizenship, campaigns of hate, hate speeches, propaganda, social boycott and bigotry in connivance with state, retreat from affirmative action and sanction of caste-based oppression and exclusion, and blatant endorsement of patriarchal norms and practices. We have seen ordinary people facing the brunt of economic recession, unemployment and inflation, while the present regime is busy favouring its bloated cronies, defending their financial frauds, siphoning of public funds and plundering of national assets. Diversion, distraction and division are the favourite political tactics of this regime. We have seen the rise of a diabolic propaganda machine, led by mainstream media that has turned into a megaphone for the government, to cover up the current regime's criminal indifference to handling the Covid pandemic, professional incompetence in managing the economy and dereliction of the national duty to safeguard the country's borders. We have seen and had enough.

During this period we have witnessed, and drawn inspiration from, peoples' movement that led to reversal of amendments to the land acquisition law, restoration of provisions in the SC/

ST Atrocities Act and reservations policy, popular resistance to the Citizenship Amendment Act that halted its implementation and the historic farmers' movement that forced this government to retreat. Besides these, various women, Dalit and adivasi groups have won many battles at the state and the national level. In general peoples' movements and organisations have played a stellar role, though *sangharsh* and *nirman*, in legislating and defending peoples rights so as to create a just and sustainable society. Trade unions and workers organisations have fought relentlessly against this regimes onslaught on workers rights and for securing rights for unorganised workers that form the core of our economy. All these are our inspiration and sources of our strength.

We have noticed, at the state level, several electoral reversals for the ruling party despite its money, muscle and media power. We have witnessed umpteen instances of social resilience that give us confidence that the legacy of the freedom struggle still lives on. We have learnt from the *Bharat Jodo Yatra* that a majority of the country's majority community has not given in to the divisive politics of the ruling dispensation, that bigotry and monumental lies can be held to account, that the country yearns for a language of love and compassion. We have seen a narrative shift and the possibility of a political change.

Today we stand at crossroads. The 75th year of India's independence is a moment of reckoning in our collective tryst with destiny. The country's future hangs between hope and despair. Another term for the BJP-RSS at the centre could mean formal rewriting and de facto abrogation of the Constitution. Dethroning the current regime by democratic means is a necessary to keep alive a functional democracy that provides space for dissent, opposition, struggle and resistance. At this juncture in history, we cannot practice routine

The Gita and Satyagraha

Mahatma Gandhi

I have admitted in my introduction to the Gita known as Anasakti Yoga that it is not a treatise on non-violence, nor was it written to condemn war. Hinduism, as it is practiced to-day or has even been known to have ever been practiced, has certainly not condemned war as I do. What, however, I have done is to put a new but natural and logical interpretation upon the whole teaching of the Gita and the spirit of Hinduism. Hinduism, not to speak of other religions, is ever evolving. It has no one scripture like the Koran or the Bible. Its scriptures are also evolving and suffering addition. The Gita itself is an instance in point. It has given a new meaning to karma, sannyasa, yajna, etc. It has breathed new life into Hinduism. It has given an original rule of conduct. Not that what the Gita has given was not implied in the previous writings, but the Gita put these implications in a concrete shape. I have endeavoured, in the light of a prayerful study of the other faiths of the world, and what is more, in the light of my own experiences in trying to live the teaching of Hinduism as interpreted in the Gita, to give an extended but in no way strained meaning to Hinduism, not as buried in its ample scriptures,

but as a living faith speaking like a mother to her aching child. What I have done is perfectly historical. I have followed in the footsteps of our forefathers. At one time they sacrificed animals to propitiate angry gods. Their descendants, but our less remote ancestors, read a different meaning into the word 'sacrifice', and they taught that sacrifice was meant to be of our baser self, to please not angry gods but the one living God within. I hold that the logical outcome of the teaching of the Gita is decidedly for peace at the price of life itself. It is the highest aspiration of the human species.

The Mahabharata and Ramayana, the two books that millions of Hindus know and regard as their guides, are undoubtedly allegories as the internal evidence shows. That they most probably deal with historical figures does not affect my proposition. Each epic describes the eternal duel that goes on between the forces of darkness and of light. Anyway, I must disclaim any intention of straining the meaning of Hinduism or the Gita to suit any preconceived notions of mine. My notions were an outcome of a study of the Gita, Ramayana, Mahabharata, Upanishads, etc.

(Harijan, 3rd October, 1936)

⇒ oppositional politics. We need nothing short of an all out unity encompassing all democratic forces of resistance. We must unite the energies of opposition parties with that of peoples movements and peoples organisations. While we work towards a regime change in 2024, we must simultaneously start the long-term ideological, cultural and political struggle against these forces.

This is why we are launching the **Bharat Jodo Abhiyaan [BJA]**. Our immediate objective is to ensure a resounding defeat of the anti-people and anti-India politics represented by the BJP in the Lok Sabha elections of 2024. At the same time, acutely conscious of the challenge beyond regime change, we are embarking on a seven year

mission, till January 2030, to protect and promote constitutional values and democratic institutions. We shall do so by:

- Articulating a vision of India for our times in line with the Constitutional vision;
- Amplifying this vision through mainstream and alternative media;
- Creating a community of believers in the constitutional idea of India by recruiting and training a battery of volunteers to shape public opinion on the ground;
- Supporting movements and launching campaigns; and,
- Engaging with political parties that are committed to defending the republic.

Survival of The Richest

The richest 1% in India now own more than 40% of the country's total wealth, while the bottom half of the population together share just 3% of wealth, a new study showed.

Releasing the India supplement of its annual inequality report on the first day of the World economic Forum (WEF) Annual Meeting here, right group Oxfam International said that taxing India's 10 richest at 5% can fetch entire money to bring children back to school.

"A one-off tax on unrealized gains from 2017-2021 on just one billionaire, Gautam Adani, could have raised Rs. 1.79 lakh crore, enough to employ more than five million Indian primary school teachers for a year," it added.

The report titled "Survival of the Richest" further said that if India's billionaires are taxed once at 2% on their entire wealth, it would support the requirement of Rs. 40,423 crore for the nutrition of malnourished in the country for the next three years.

"A one-time tax of 5 per cent on the 10 richest billionaires in the country (Rs. 1.37 lakh crore) is more than 1.5 times the funds estimated by the Health and Family Welfare Ministry (Rs. 86, 200 crore) and the Ministry of Ayush (Rs. 3,050 Crore) for the year 2022-23" it added.

Gender, Caste Inequality

On gender inequality, the report said that female workers earned only 63 paise for every Re. 1 a male worker earned.

For Scheduled Castes and rural workers, the difference is even starker – the former earned 55% of what the advantaged social groups earned, and the latter earned only half of the urban earnings between 2018 and 2019.

"Taxing the top 100 Indian billionaires at 2.5 per cent, or taxing the top 10 Indian billionaires at

5 per cent would nearly cover the entire amount required to bring the children back into school," it added.

Oxfam said the report is a mix of qualitative and quantitative information to explore the impact of inequality in India.

Secondary sources like Forbes and Credit Suisse have been used to look at the wealth inequality and billionaire wealth in the country, while government sources like NSS, Union budget documents, parliamentary questions, etc have been used to corroborate arguments made throughout the report.

Since the pandemic begun to Nov 2022, billionaires in India have seen their wealth surge by 121% or Rs. 3,608 crore per day in real terms, Oxfam said.

On the other side, approximately 64% of the total Rs. 14.83 lakh crore in goods and Services Tax (GST) came from bottom 50% of the population in 2021-22, with only 3% of GST coming from the top 10%.

Oxfam said the total number of billionaires in India increased from 102 in 2020 to 166 in 2022.

The combined wealth of India's 100 richest has touched \$660 billion (Rs. 54.12 lakh crore) – an amount that could fund the entire Union Budget for more than 18 months, it added.

Oxfam India CEO Amitabh Behar said, "The country's marginalized – dalits, adivasis, Muslims, women and informal sector workers are continuing to suffer in a system which ensures the survival of the richest.

"The poor are paying disproportionately higher taxes, spending more on essentials items and services when compared the rich. The time has come to tax the rich and ensure they pay their fair share."

48th Sarvodaya Samaj Sammelan

Sarvodaya Samaj is completing 75 years of its establishment. In the year of Amrit Mahotsav, the 48th conference of Sarvodaya Samaj is going to be held from March 14 to 16, 2023 at Sevagram Wardha. Sarvodaya Samaj was founded on March 15, 1948 at the Constructive Workers' Conference at Sevagram, Wardha, Maharashtra. Vinoba Bhave, Jayaprakash Narayan, Dada Dharmadhikari, JV Kripalani, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, among others, participated in the conference, which was presided over by Dr. Rajendra Prasad (the first President of India).

In Hind Swaraj, Gandhiji raised a question mark on modern civilization. He warned that the seeds of destruction lie in modern civilization itself. This civilization itself is perishable and is going to destroy others as well. Today Gandhiji's words are proving true. The world today is burning in the heat of war and violence. The environmental crisis is getting deeper. We have embarked on such a development journey which has increased the temperature of the earth. Rivers are drying up, forests are fast disappearing and land is becoming barren. Due to climate change, the series of untimely floods, droughts and cyclones have started. Due to the deepening environmental crisis, a question mark has been raised on the existence of civilization.

This conference is being held at a time when democratic values and democratic institutions have weakened in the country. Efforts are also being made to subvert the Indian Constitution built on the values of liberty, equality and fraternity of the Indian independence movement. Economic inequality, unemployment and corruption are at its peak. Communal and fascist forces are posing a serious challenge to democracy and national integration.

Against this background, the 48th convention of Sarvodaya Samaj is going to be held from March 14 to 16, 2023 at Sevagram Wardha. Gandhiji wanted such a Swaraj in which the thought of the last man of the society has importance in the development of the country, such a Swaraj is yet to be achieved. Sarvodaya Samaj to take steps in this direction.

The conference is an opportunity for all of us. The theme of the conference this year is NO WAR, NO VIOLENCE, WE WANT PEACE AND NON-VIOLENCE. The registration fee for the conference is Rs.100 (one hundred) only.

We request your active participation in this conference. You are expected to include 50 percent youth (boys and girls) and women in the team of people joining from here. The facility of Railway concession is not available in this year for conference. That's why you have to arrange the travel expenses yourself or with the help of your friends or local organizations.

Wardha has direct trains from places like Delhi, Mumbai, Howrah, Kolkata, Chennai, Bangalore, Lucknow, Patna etc. You can come to Wardha or Sevagram railway station by train. From there arrangements will be made to bring to the conference venue.

Your participation is important for the successful arrangement of the conference of Sarvodaya Samaj. This will give momentum and energy to the conference.

With warm regards

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Secretary's Diary

Gandhi Smarak Nidhi South Zone Conference

Gandhi Smarak Nidhi South Zone States' Conference (21-22 January 2023) was organised at Gandhi Bhawan, Bangaluru. Delegates from Tamilnadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, besides representatives of various Gandhian institutions participated in the conference. This conference was aimed at review of the present functioning, interaction for new directions and experiments and chalking out future plans, in consultation with the representatives of these states.

The conference started with inter-faith prayer. It was inaugurated by eminent Gandhian thinker and theatre personality Shri Prasanna Hegodu and presided by Shri Ramchandra Rahi, Chairman of Gandhi Smarak Nidhi. Welcome speech was delivered by Dr. Udai P. Krishna, Chairman of Karnataka unit of Gandhi Smarak Nidhi. In the inaugural session, Shri Sanjoy Singha elaborated upon the aim of Gandhi Smarak Nidhi as to build the nation based on Gandhian ideals and to serve the nation with constructive work. In other words, aim of the Trust is to establish 'Poorna Swaraj' with the means of Truth and Non-violence. The Trust aims to ensure total independence to the masses and also to ensure respect, security, basic rights and welfare of all citizens. The Trust also endeavours to focus the society and the nation towards Gandhian path rooted in non-violence. Present state of national affairs is disturbing with the shadows of violence, hatred, unemployment, pollution and uncontrolled exploitation of nature are looming large. We have to be more alert and pro-active to combat such circumstances. Shri Prasanna Hegodu pointed out that the entire world is facing crisis right now. "There is a crisis of

environment endangering the existence of our planet. On the other hand, there is political crisis of the prevalence of untruth and violence. To solve these crises, Gandhi is the only alternative. Theatre is a tool for me to inspire younger generation. Being a theatre personality, I understand that our youth quite easily understand the complexities of our times with the help of theatre. We must resort to arts to take along the youth power with us". Shri Ramchandra Rahi said that the present concept of development promotes violence. "It tends to perish the nature, as well as human values. We have to strive for humanatarian and democratic values. Truth and non-violence are pivotal to our journey towards an ideal society. Violence is inherent in the character of the nation. Ongoing Russia-Ukraine war is also an outcome of blind nationalism. Gandhian ideals still pave our way". Senior Kannada writer Nadopa Hampa Nagorajaiah addressed in the conference as the Chief Guest.

Second session was devoted to the reportings of state-wise activities. Shri Rangarao, Secretary, Telangana Gandhi Memorial Trust elaborated the efforts of publishing Gandhian literature and spread of Gandhian ideas in Telugu language and constructive works in rural areas. Shri Sendil Kumar, Dr. Nandarao and Shri Annamalai elaborated upon the activities of Tamilnadu Gandhi Smarak Nidhi. These include publication of Gandhian literature in Tamil language by Gandhi Literature Centre, activities of local Gandhi clubs, training of youth for peace, research and studies on Gandhian ideas, activities of Madurai Gandhi Museum and innovations in Khadi promotion etc.

Shri Gopal Krishnan, Secretary, Kerala Gandhi Smarak Nidhi, informed about efforts towards rural development through organising Swadeshi fair, promotion of organic farming, Khadi, self-help groups and naturopathy etc. He also elaborated

efforts towards promotion of Gandhian ideas and peace.

Secretary of Andhra Pradesh Gandhi Memorial Trust had put forth the scheme related to Gandhi Hills. He also elaborated upon the efforts related to youth camps, Gandhi Study Centre, awareness programmes related to various social groups, Khadi etc.

Shri Udai P. Krishna, Chairman, Karnataka Gandhi Smarak Nidhi, informed about many Gandhian publications in Kannada language. He also informed about convening of many youth camps, Khadi exhibitions, demonstrative exhibitions through *Gandhi Ghars*, organising various activities in collaboration with various social organisations and progress of the efforts to establish *Gandhi Bhawans* in each district of the state.

Vice Chairman of Andhra Pradesh Gandhi Memorial Trust present future roadmap to promote Gandhian ideals in the state. Shri Narahan, Retired High Court Judge, said that Gandhian ideals are the only alternative for the society and these ideals need to be implemented in the domain of education. Shri Sanjeev Kulkarni elaborated upon environment crisis and its Gandhian solutions. He also informed about the country-wide effective Gandhian efforts and also about the future plans in this direction. Prof. B.S. Srikanta presented a slide show to elaborate how the younger generation be associated to Gandhian work and how the organisational structure be strengthened. Shri Annamalai put forth a powerpoint presentation outlining strengths and weaknesses of Gandhi Memorial Trust. He also elaborated upon future prospects and opportunities to work in various fields.

Presenting the concluding remarks, Shri Kumar Prashant, Chairman, Gandhi Peace Foundation, emphasized the need to stand fearlessly with all sections of the society. "Violence can be countered with non-violence only. This country belongs to all citizens, not to an individual only. We have to strengthen humanity, justice and

brotherhood. We also know who are weakening these values. We have been hearing about the efforts of our institutions since last two days. We are proud of you and also have high respect for your courage and determination. We have to use all resources to take the youth along with us. Different art forms are among such important resources. We have to go to our youth power and have dialogue with them. We have to find ways and means to further strengthen our association with the society at large". Shri Hanuman Thapa, former MP and Smt. Sushelamma also expressed their valuable views.

Future work plans chalked out in the conference –

1. As proposed by Shri Gopalkrishnan, Secretary Kerala state unit, next South Zone Conference will be organised in Kerala.

2. National Youth Camp will be organised in May 2023 in Karnataka.

3. For better coordination in Southern Zone, a team will be set up.

4. Gandhi Study Centres and Youth Cells will be established at various places.

5. To foster fraternity and goodwill in society and to educate people clearing toxic propaganda and spreading the truth about Gandhiji's assassination, a mass campaign will be organised from 30th January to 12th February 2023.

Shri D.G.V. Shivraju made untiring efforts in convening the conference. He was associated since the beginning of these efforts. Shri Udai P. Krishna, Chairman, Karnataka Gandhi Memorial Trust, Shri N. R. Vishukumar, Vice Chairman, Ms. Indira Krishnappa, Secretary, Shri Tripan Gauda, Member, Prof. Prasanna Kumar, Mysore and all local Gandhian workers made devoted arrangements for the guests. They deserve our special thanks.

Shri G.V. Shivraju proposed vote of thanks at the end of the conference. On 23rd January, a visit to Kasturba Ashram, Arsikere was arranged.

- Sanjoy Singh

(Translated from Hindi by Rajendra Bha.)

A Baffling Silence

Rajmohan Gandhi

Is it really that difficult, in today's India, to speak out? Is it that tough, even in private conversation, just to utter the simple truth that our current government refuses, in Parliament or outside, to answer the most obvious of questions? Questions like, "Was it merely a 'survey' (to employ the official word) when, in the course of continuous raids, scores if not hundreds of the BBC's journalists in India (most of them Indian in origin) were asked to hand over their phones and computers for copying?"

Is it too risky to say that the government seems to be turning off the switches of India's democratic institutions? Being a student of history, I am reminded of earlier incidents by today's happenings. On June 9, 1942, for example (more than 80 years ago, that is), by when Gandhi had begun voicing his intention to launch the Quit India movement, Louis Fischer, an American journalist visiting India, marvelled at what he thought was Gandhi's audacity. For, by then, the mighty US had entered the Second World War as England's ally.

Fischer told Gandhi: "If you look at this in its historic perspective, you are doing a novel and remarkable thing — you are ordaining the end of an empire." Replied Gandhi, "Even a child can do that." (*Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. 82, *Old Series*.)

It was the most obvious thing, Gandhi was saying in 1942, to ask the British to quit the business of commanding India. Even a child could do it, he said. Today, 81 years later, even a child in India can similarly ask, "Why are the leaders of our government not answering simple questions?"

And since hundreds of thousands of young Indians aim today to study in this or that nation across the world, they should be concerned that talk of the raids on the BBC's offices in India is

major news in many countries. Thus, America's CNN reports: "Indian tax officials continued their search of the BBC's offices in New Delhi and Mumbai for the third consecutive day, two sources with knowledge of the matter told CNN, weeks after the country banned a documentary from the British broadcaster that was critical of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's alleged role in deadly riots more than 20 years ago." <https://www.cnn.com/2023/02/13/media/india-tax-raid-bbc-office-intl-hnk/index.html>. adds CNN:

"The searches come nearly a month after the Indian government said it banned the two-part documentary, 'India: The Modi Question', from being aired in the country and used 'emergency powers' to block clips of the film from circulating on social media domestically. Twitter and YouTube complied with the order, the government said. The documentary revives the most controversial chapter of the Indian leader's political career, when he was the chief minister of the western state of Gujarat in 2002."

It is no secret that a great many Indians now see the world as their home. They are unwilling to restrict their thoughts, hopes, and activities to places within the map of India. Reports of proceedings by New Delhi against a global media giant like the BBC — a giant, moreover, who in many eyes is friendly, reliable, and trustworthy — will not make life easier for the millions of Indians who presently live abroad or hope soon to do so.

For more than seven post-independence decades, India has persisted with democratic institutions and thereby impressed the world, which expected India's diversity and inequalities

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It was the most obvious thing, Gandhi was saying in 1942, to ask the British to quit the business of commanding India. Even a child could do it, he said. Today, 81 years later, even a child in India can similarly ask, "Why are the leaders of our government not answering simple questions?"

And since hundreds of thousands of young Indians aim today to study in this or that nation across the world, they should be concerned that talk of the raids on the BBC's offices in India is

major news in many countries. Thus, America's CNN reports: "Indian tax officials continued their search of the BBC's offices in New Delhi and Mumbai for the third consecutive day, two sources with knowledge of the matter told CNN, weeks after the country banned a documentary from the British broadcaster that was critical of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's alleged role in deadly riots more than 20 years ago." <https://www.cnn.com/2023/02/13/media/india-tax-raid-bbc-office-intl-hnk/index.html>. adds CNN:

"The searches come nearly a month after the Indian government said it banned the two-part documentary, 'India: The Modi Question', from being aired in the country and used 'emergency powers' to block clips of the film from circulating on social media domestically. Twitter and YouTube complied with the order, the government said. The documentary revives the most controversial chapter of the Indian leader's political career, when he was the chief minister of the western state of Gujarat in 2002."

It is no secret that a great many Indians now see the world as their home. They are unwilling to restrict their thoughts, hopes, and activities to places within the map of India. Reports of proceedings by New Delhi against a global media giant like the BBC — a giant, moreover, who in many eyes is friendly, reliable, and trustworthy — will not make life easier for the millions of Indians who presently live abroad or hope soon to do so.

For more than seven post-independence decades, India has persisted with democratic institutions and thereby impressed the world, which expected India's diversity and inequalities

to deflate the tyres of the immense convoy of our democratic vehicles. That convoy continues to roll forward, and its progress, though uneven, continues to make an impact.

At times, countries that reject democracy also impress the world's mind with successes in rocketry, bomb-making, and such. With us, it's different. It is in debate and discussion that Indians have always felt at home. In our long history, we may not spot too many long periods when democracy was actually displayed. Yet, that record has never dulled India's millennia-old appetite for argument and debate. By the same token, it is hard to imagine Indians entering with any enthusiasm a global race for success with autocracy.

Surely, the Press Club of India was right in holding that the raids on the BBC's offices "will damage the reputation and image of India as the world's largest democracy". Many will agree with the Press Club's view that "this latest instance appears to be a clear-cut case of vendetta, coming within weeks of a documentary aired by the BBC", and with the Club's exhortation to the government to "restrain its agencies from misusing its powers in order to intimidate the media".

Indians love an argument and are bored by uniformity. Those who are aware of the Gandhi-Tagore debate of 1920-21, which newspapers and periodicals took to all corners of India at a crucial moment of the freedom struggle, also know of the enrichment that debate produced. Likewise, the intellectual and political story of 20th-century India would be dull without the sharp Ambedkar-Gandhi debates of the 1930s, or without the debates and discussions involving Gandhi, Jinnah, Nehru, Bose, Patel, Azad, Rajagopalachari, MN Roy and others.

Students of politics, debating eloquence, and democracy would similarly profit from a study of the post-independence interventions in Parliament or the public square by, among others, J P, Lohia, Kripalani, Jagjivan Ram, Minoo Masani, Aruna Asaf Ali, Amrit Kaur, Hiren Mukherjee, Syama Prasad Mookerjee, A K Gopalan, Piloo Mody, Vajpayee, and Advani.

Free, vigorous debate is part of India's essence, and the death of debate will turn India into a fossil. Pointing out the obvious, such as the current elimination of Q and A when it comes to the leaders of our government, can be the first response of any child or adult.

*(Courtesy : Indian Express,
20th February, 2023)*

Nachiketa is No More

Gandhian worker, senior journalist Nachiketa Desai passed away on Feb. 5, 2023 in Ahmadabad after prolonged illness. He was 72 years old.

A grand son of Bapu's close associate Mahadev Desai and son of Narayan Desai, Nachiketa joined with Sarvodaya Movement during his student life as a worker of Tarun Shanti Sena. He was associated with J.P.'s Total Revolution Movement also. A man of simplicity, Nachiketa maintained his humble character until his death, while he suffered with a cocktail of complicated illness.

Our heartfelt tribute to departed soul and may God give strength to his family to bear the irreparable loss.

- Ed