

# THE SECULAR CITIZEN

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A NATIONAL FAMILY WEEKLY

## Collaboration Between Government & Church?

By Ladislaus Louis D'Souza

**W**ay to go Governor R.N. Ravi! On 19 April 2021, "Amid surging COVID-19 infections in Christian majority Nagaland," says a report on the news portal Matters India, "Governor R.N. Ravi requested Church leaders to influence people to follow Coronavirus protocols"! Wow! Now isn't that something really!

### Of statistics and protocols

On that very day, Nagaland is said to have reported 13 COVID cases, raising the state's tally to 12,568, while the country recorded some 260,000 cases. And so His Excellency, reminding the church leaders of various denominations about the moral and spiritual authority and influence they wield over people, urged them to use that capital to save the state's citizenry from the killing effects of the pandemic by making people more aware of the challenges of the disease and the need for strictly adhering to all COVID protocols besides educating and encouraging eligible persons to get vaccinated as soon as possible.

That was quite a deft move on the part of the government of Nagaland to have got the State Governor to convene a meeting of Church leaders to seek their support in tackling the marauding virus and to instruct them on various related matters like prevailing upon people to get themselves vaccinated. Good, Your Excellency, Governor Ravi! Kudos!! But there ends the salubrious part. Now, what about the government's own attitude and contribution towards the fight to genuinely get rid of the virus?

### Church responsibility v/s civic governmental duty

Just in case Raviji may not be aware, the Christian community as a whole has been not only cooperating wholeheartedly with the civil authorities in terms of the observance of COVID protocols but has been in the forefront of the battle against the virus right across the country, opening its hearts and institutions to COVID patients and their families. Take a good

look at the examples like major states such as UP and Maharashtra. His Eminence, Cardinal Oswald Gracias, Archbishop of Bombay and President of a major conference of Catholic bishops in India, has been crying hoarse, coaxing his priests and flock to observe COVID restrictions and protocols which have unwittingly included the closure of churches and the suspension of live participation in the Church's Liturgical Services, with all bishops across the country following suit. Christian hospitals and other medical centres have been on their toes round the clock, treating patients unstintingly. But what has the government these two states or any state in India for that matter, done to ensure its own members follow the necessary rules? How concretely has the central government too contributed to the ongoing effort at overpowering the virus?

Innumerable are the black sheep in the government who've held or attended major gatherings both religious and social in nature. It appoints Protocol Marshalls by the thousands who are nowhere to be seen even by the tens, except in twos and threes at vantage points like junctions and garden corners to promptly penalize those found not wearing masks in moving autorickshaws while the bulk of the hawkers and vendors crowding public thoroughfares go Scot free. Municipal officials sporting the municipal logo on their expensive looking masks are found travelling in public transport with their masks either below their chins or dangling from one ear. Policemen and porters at railway stations imagine they rule the world and so feel no need to mask their ugly mugs. The list of such misdemeanours on the part of our so called public servants could just go on and on. But the point is, what is the government doing to genuinely reign in the virus apart from using public money, i.e. **our money** to protect itself, kursi, table et al?

And given the government's bravado, **on what ground was that the massive mela of ugly half-naked sadhus and other devotees allowed to take place in Haridwar with billions providing the world**

(Contd.. on p. 3)

## India - a land of sages or surges?

Answering the critics, the BJP brigade went ga-ga over the fact that under the very able and dynamic leadership of the Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the pandemic has been tamed despite the population. The critics had spoken about the harm done when some insensible decisions were taken in an insensitive manner. The indefinite lockdown was announced without any notice. Perhaps if the people were given three or four days notice, their misery could have been minimal. Mind you, the cases then were below 500 while today we have over 25 lacs. Yet today the PM says lockdown is the last resort. How interesting! Wish he had to use this logic last year before he announced the lockdown himself.

The PM had declared that India has defeated the pandemic for the world to see. Everybody lowered their guard including the government. Whether this was a game plan, it is hard to say but the subsequent events suggest that indeed, it was. Smelling electoral gains, a rosy picture was painted to facilitate full-fledged canvassing in the five poll-bound states; West Bengal being the most important for the BJP. This allowed the political parties to campaign throwing all caution to the wind. The surging mask-less crowds helped the BJP and the TMC. The CEC is supposed to have laid down some SOPs but for unknown reasons looked the other way. Ironically, just when the campaigning was about to come to a close, the EC calls an all party meeting. Doesn't it sound funny and amazing? Being in election mode, the centre failed to see the second surge coming with their obsession to win in Bengal at all costs [repeat all costs]. Is it that EC could do nothing since the likes of Narendra Modi and Amit Shah were in the forefront? The courts had to question the EC. It raises some doubts in the minds of the discerning citizens of the country and rightly so. If, as the Prime Minister claims nation comes first, should he not have asked the entire mask-less people to leave the rally? Did he insist on social distancing?

What could be worse than allowing some lakhs of people taking the holy dip in the Ganga over a period of one month? Who allowed it? Who takes the decisions – the government or the Akhadas? The CM of Uttarakhand was brazen enough to say that since it is held

## IEWS on NEWS

in the open it is safe. Then why are we closing down swimming pools, parks, beaches et al which are all open. Why do you punish someone with no mask with lakhs of mask-less people at election rallies and the shani snan rituals? You deny permission to the Muslims to have namaz. You order closure of Churches. The Church authorities obey the government diktats without grumbling. Why this brazen discrimination against minorities?

Frankly, at this point we should have had someone like T.N.Seshan - the man with guts who brought all political parties to their knees. When you have everything virtual, why could you not have virtual election campaigning? Seshan would have done just that and shown who the boss is during elections. Such a person may not have been appointed in the first place. Holding the Khumb Mela in Haridwar is a case of blatant appeasement of the majority community when the BJP talks of minority appeasement. The Akhadas will decide whether the Mela is to be called off. But who cares so long as we win elections? Now with health infrastructure crumbling at a rapid pace, we are vying with the United States for the top spot for maximum cases. The picture is grim with acute shortage of oxygen, medicines, vaccines etc. By the way, an immature politician Rahul Gandhi had to take a lead to call off election rallies in Bengal. Modi cancelled his Portugal visit weeks in advance. He called off election rallies on April 23 after the court pulled up the EC which has let the nation down. Amit Shah went ahead with his rallies. Now the PM has taken control from Amit Shah it seems – he hardly speaks of pandemic of late. The world is laughing at us. If Narendra Modi was given full credit for 'controlling' the pandemic, should he not be fully blamed for the present situation? Think about it.

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### Electoral Bonds

This is one issue which refuses to die down. With every major election, the issue raises its head. The Supreme Court refused to accede to the request of the petitioner to stop the authorities from opening the window for sale of bonds for the current phase of elections. No matter what the arguments put forward by the government, this is generation of unaccounted money by business houses.



by Marshall Sequeira

Which loss making Corporate will 'willingly' donate funds to the political party [read ruling party]? There is too much of secrecy behind the whole scheme that it gives a feeling that it has been devised solely to hoodwink the public. You have simply replaced cash donations by electoral bonds. In the past the companies were donating to parties of their choice and they had no problem about their identity being known to the recipients, Election Commission and the tax authorities. The architect of this scheme late Mr Arun Jaitley [may his soul rest in peace] has done a wonderful job for his party. Hats off to him! Only the State Bank of India knows who the buyers of these bonds are. Only that bank [on which the government has some control] is empowered to sell these dubious instruments called the Electoral Bonds. Only the Central Government will know which entity has given how much not only to themselves but to the other national as well as the regional parties. Even the Election Commission has no access.

No money is black in colour. It is a misnomer. Such money is unaccounted which can be in the form of cash or kind [read election bonds]. The governing party has the power to award huge contracts which invariably involve kick-backs – respectable term for bribes. In the past political parties had no idea how much was collected by the ministers/bureaucrats concerned. Now the amount is given to the party. BJP is cash rich today. Yet it does not become accounted money because it does not even reflect in the company's balance sheets? What sort of transparency is this? By celebrating Good Governance Day, such money does not get purified. The whole nation is hoodwinked into believing that black money is being wiped out – far from it. These bonds must be scrapped or at least the full donor list must be made available to the EC, RBI and Tax authorities to give it some semblance of transparency.

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a spectacle that one could do without, social distancing and masking thrown to the winds and the risk of those filthy devotees carrying the virus across the country! Had the PM of the country and the CM of Uttarakhnad no qualms in subjecting the millions in the country to the hard risks involved? Shame Namol! Shame Baby Rani Maurya!! Shame Tirath Singh Rawat!!!

### Whither vaccine?

As for getting church leaders to prevail upon their flock to get themselves vaccinated, where the heck are the vaccines anyway Mister Ravi! Probably the Raj Bhavan you are ceremonially accommodated in is safely ensconced in luxurious surroundings that include security of every type, not excluding medical. Moreover, it may not even have occurred to you that with the PM bragging about being part of the world fight against the virus by way of exporting vaccines, the *hum-doh*, *hamare-doh* foursome [HD4] have apparently taken their shots and probably exported the rest of the stock to impress the world community obviously thinking that nobody else in the country needs to be vaccinated. Indeed, for the treatment of the common man, are HD4 even aware of how difficult it is to get

ambulances on the one hand and, on the other, how impossible it is getting a hospital bed, be it in a general ward or in an ICU? So on what moral grounds do governors, chief ministers and other government officials [most of them either ill-educated or uneducated] dish out such platitudes and advice to our respectfully educated Church leaders? **Sadly, the media is rife with reports of Christian priests, Religious and even Bishops being claimed by the virus with impunity but hardly any politicians. How come? I'm inclined to think that this rascal of a virus is not merely partial but totally corrupt, so much so I've begun wondering from whom and how it accepts bribes.**

### Governmental priorities

It is more than obvious that the Government of India is far from seized of the situation. And therefore, rather than bother about oxygen, ICU beds, vaccines, life-saving drugs and the like, fabulously topping the government's list of priorities are:

- 1.Ram has no roof over his head. Not to worry, a grand temple at Ayodhya is under construction!
- 2.Ram and his innumerable avatar's have no holiday homes! No worry! The ASI is working on providing for the same at Varanasi and elsewhere!
- 3.Parliament House [PH] built by the

British is too small and pokey! So construction of the most modern hi-tech PH, with luxurious secretariat precincts well under way!

- 4.Our Parliamentarians and legislators are among the poorest of the marginalized in society. And so an annual multi-percentage pay raise is ever on the cards, no matter what the calamity the country may be facing at any given point of time.
- 5.As for food, the emoluments earned by our excessively hard-working representatives in Parliament and the State legislatures being abysmally low despite the handsome increments and perks, the food that keeps their well-filled at our expense is conscientiously enhanced. Thank God for small mercies! What would we have done if our poor representatives and netas had fainted due to lack of energy otherwise!?

### Extracting our pound of flesh!

Enough is enough! Methinks its time the Church in India as a whole not merely stood by its resolve to support the government in principle and practice in its public show of caring for the welfare of its citizens vis-à-vis the virus by making suggestions (which Ravi said would be forwarded to the government for follow-up) but also ex-

(Contd.. on p. 5)



# Beyond a Point, Bluster Does Not Work

by Don Aguiar

**T**he most important thing to overcome in the Current situation is Fear, even if Covid-19 does not get us, Fear will & the only way to trick fear is to keep a Happy Mind. Stop discussing the nail biting numbers and exchange kind words, good food & jokes. We don't only need to be happy at building parties over a glass of Scotch or Wine. Life is limited so indulge yourself with happiness as we can't do anything about our worldly worries but yes we can live to our fullest without much wants & concentrate only on our needs specially our need for Mental Health, but with the current situation and with gossip and news from the TV and Whatsapp university it makes it difficult to overcome this fear.

**We've been conditioned to think that only politicians can solve our problems. But at some point, maybe we will wake-up and recognise that it was the politicians who created the problems as the administrative listlessness of the government can be seen in its inability to take stern measures even in the face of the second wave.** Why else would have permission been given to the Kumbh Mela celebrations at Haridwar, where some 40 lakh sadhus and devotees took the plunge in the long-suffering Ganga? All norms of social distancing or masks were thrown to the wind, even as our netas smiled at the devotion of what they assume is their "vote-bank". Hinduism certainly does not sanction this abdication from duty.

There is a picture from World War II, of a soldier carrying a donkey. It is not that the soldier loves donkeys or has some sort of perversion. What's happening is that the field is mined and that if the donkey was free to wonder as it pleased, it would likely detonate a charge and kill everyone.

The moral of the story is that during difficult times the first ones you have to keep under control are the jackasses who don't understand the danger and do as they please.

**A similar Covid-19 handling situation presently exists in India with the Kumbh Mela participants free to do as their worship requires without the soldier (the Modi government) failing to keep the pilgrims in control resulting in the infections skyrocketing because the government isn't willing to anger Hindus, who are the party's biggest supporters.**

The same lackadaisical approach holds true for the government's defence of political rallies in the ongoing state Assembly elections. By holding mass meetings in a pandemic, politicians are demonstrating their disregard for both voters and democracy. Both leaders and the crowds they want so desperately to get seem to believe that Covid-19 does not exist. **The Prime Minister lectures to the nation about "do gaz ki doori" and "mask hai zaroori", but when it comes to electioneering all such advice is thrown out of the window. If you are in the hot seat you have to set the benchmark for Covid-19 appropriate behaviour and uphold it through your actions.**

The time has come to call a spade a spade. And, this spade is about the government's spectacular unpreparedness in anticipating the second wave of the pandemic, and the woeful absence of strategy and planning to cope with it. It is not as if the unexpected happened. Global experience shows that a second wave — more vicious and infectious than the first — was to be expected. A responsible government, not lulled into complacency by its own propaganda of how well it had handled the pandemic,

would have — beyond dramatic gestures — diligently prepared for it. The truth is that the government did not.

The government hypocrisy and double standards are very evident in this. Schools, colleges are closed. Night curfew is on. Shops are open only for few hours but the Hindu religious fair in Haridwar must go on. The Uttarakhand government has also aeri-ally showered flower petals on the pilgrims.

**Amid concerns the Kumbh Mela festival could turn into a super spreader event, Uttarakhand state's chief minister, Tirath Singh Rawat, last week said, "The faith in God will overcome the fear of the virus."**

Health experts had appealed for the festival to be cancelled, but the government went ahead saying safety rules would be followed. There are concerns that pilgrims could get infected and then take the virus back to their cities and villages in other parts of the country.

It also seems to show either the state's complicity or ineptness when it comes to handling of mob pressure and the government's suggestion that they weren't able to control festival goers wasn't true. Photographs showed large crowds gathering to bathe in the Ganges, with police powerless to enforce social distancing measures.

The Kumbh Mela, which runs through April, comes during India's worst surge in new infections since the pandemic began, with a seven-day rolling average of more than 130,000 new cases per day.

This milestone came as thousands of Hindu devotees, many of them mask less, gathered at the city of Haridwar on the banks of the River Ganges to

(Contd.. on p. 14)



## Shame on the U.P. government

When festivals of other religions are not allowed to take place in the country because of the Covid-19 situation, how come the Uttar Pradesh government allowed the Kumbh Mela to take place this year with over a lakh seers and sanyasis in Haridwar? The U.P. government is answerable for this and he should be punished

—*Jubel D'Cruz,  
Dombivili, Mumbai*

## On double-masking

It is more than certain now that the present spurt in the number of Covid positive cases and deaths in the country is because of Covid-19 in its new avatar, as a 'double mutant' strain, that is wreaking havoc and infecting and killing even youngsters and babies in its virulent form and speed of transmission. Probably it is time to rename the virus as Covid-20, instead of Covid-19. Secondly, medical experts are now beginning to doubt the efficacy of wearing a single mask, given the airborne and dangerous nature of the new strain. Even the surgical N-95 mask is now found to be only 35% effective in offering the wearer protection. Double-masking on the other hand, offers around 80% protection, leaving the user still at a risk of 20%, besides being more suffocated. Vaccinations are also not the panacea against the new mutant strains. What next is therefore the million dollar question. From here to eternity, I guess.

—*A. F. Nazareth,  
Alto Porvorim, Goa*

## Vaccines must be free for all

The health ministry's Covid vaccination policy of setting aside 50% of doses produced in the country for private hospitals and states from May 1, will hit the poor masses severely. Already there is shortage of vaccines in many parts of the country, including Mumbai and this move will make it even more difficult for the poor to get access to the vaccine. Moreover, if private hospitals are allowed to purchase the vaccine on their own, the possibility of corrupt practices will increase--- at least in some hospitals. People will be willing to pay a premium, as usual, for jumping the queue.

India is a poor country. If you keep out the top 1% of population (who own half of the total wealth), our country is really very poor. I am of the opinion that the vaccine must be free for all, except for the top 1% of the population. The govt needs money to fund this project. The rich must help. These wealthy folks are now reportedly flying to Dubai by their own or chartered jets to get vaccinated there, as Dubai allows vaccination to those who have residency visas. Apparently they have a predilection for the Pfizer vaccine. They think nothing of spending tens of thousands of dollars for the trip for a vaccine costing about \$15. These are the rich Indians who holiday in the Maldives and other such exotic locales. They own properties in various countries. I also believe that they are good humans and will not mind paying back to the nation and the people who helped make them rich. I suggest that these folks be encouraged to

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—Editor

take the vaccine (Pfizer or any other which may be imported) at some top end hospitals in India for a donation card of Rs 50,000 per head. I'm confident that they will willingly agree.

Incidentally this 1% of population translates into 13 millions people including family members. This, incidentally is more than the population of Greece, Portugal or Belgium! The revenue generated will be around Rs 65,000 cr, enough to vaccinate all people in the country free of cost.

—*Prof Robert Castellino,  
Mumbai.*

(Contd.. from p. 3)

tracted certain rightful benefits like allowing the numbers permitted to participate in church services to be proportionate to the size and seating capacity of each given church structure rather than a blanket limit at 50. Besides, the Church must also use the "moral and spiritual authority" referred to by Governor Ravi, to pull up any government in the country (including the central government) found violating any COVID related norm or regulation. If that does not bring in results, nothing will! And if I may dare say so, the time to strike is now! Perhaps the Church in India needs to get on the offensive, even if that means courting arrests – Amen!

# No Respite From A Tsunami Called Covid-19

**A**mid reports of the alarming spread of the disease and dedicated COVID care centers running out of beds and ventilators, the startling news that India's daily rise in cases outnumbers US-Brazil total is yet to be understood for its incisiveness.

With India overtaking Brazil as the second worst-hit country from COVID-19, the abject failure of the government in handling the pandemic as it assumes unmanageable proportions is starkly evident.

The problem with India has always been that politics in the country has got the better of any situation, no matter what its enormity.

With India as one of the major 'exporters' of the vaccine to poor countries, it comes as a surprise that the accusations against, and denials by the government, over the shortage of the vaccine is grabbing headlines now!

But why is India floundering in its 'COVID-Combat'!

The view that 'the capacity of a state and the degree of economic inequality among its residents will determine how successful it is in coping effectively with a pandemic like COVID-19' therefore attains greater significance.

This disparity quite obviously undermines people's compliance with epidemic containment policies of the country such as social distancing and staying at home. The government ought to have envisaged ways to manage the pandemic from that perspective.

One can well understand the reticence shown by those from the weaker economic strata of the society in defying the safety protocols put in place by the administration - they have to go

out and work!

While showing concerns for the lives and livelihood of its citizens, mere rhetoric by its leaders will not serve the purpose. Though earning bread and butter is important; in the present situation, saving lives of its citizens in these harrowing times should gain precedence over everything else for the government.

Lockdowns are never an answer and the cascading effect of the one imposed in March last continues to be felt even today. This is amply evident in the government's reactions as well. A lockdown is a very unpleasant option and one that the government will not rush into.



by Pachu Menon

If it is the apprehensions of a failing economy that is compelling the government to open up all vistas of business in the state by easing restrictions to pep-up its revenue generation; the news that amid a massive spike in COVID cases across the country, several key cities are staring at exodus of migrants as new restrictions in some States to contain the pandemic have stoked fears that they will be left jobless again.

Similar sentiments will no doubt echo in Goa as well and have its own repercussions. Can Goa afford such a situation!

But it is amazing that despite COVID fear, the government has had no qualms in permitting public gatherings and allowing the staging of special events which have been appealing to the people of the country for centuries now.

It is all the more consternating to have many of the participants not adhering to COVID safety norms at the venues. Amid the viral backlash, has the government got its priorities mixed-up!

It is a wonder that even after a year of its overwhelming global presence, people have failed to take the threat of COVID-19 seriously.

In any case, rather than feel stunned by the rising number of cases, it is time the nation realized that it is well and truly in the grips of the second wave of COVID-19.

Besides sportsmen and other celebrities, ministers and top bureaucrats are testing positive for coronavirus.

As the demand for Remdesivir surges in view of increasing cases of infection from across the country, Modi-sarkar has fast-tracked seven companies' applications to manufacture the critical anti-viral drug in order to ensure its smooth availability.

Night curfews and partial lockdowns are being imposed in many parts of the country as a measure to control the rampaging virus.

Amid rising COVID concerns, the Centre has announced the cancellation of CBSE Board exams for class 10 and deferred class 12 exams both scheduled for May-June.

Yet, the scenario where lakhs of devotees have been taking a holy dip in the Ganga on the occasion of Kumbh Mela flouting COVID norms despite the best efforts by the government to ensure wearing of masks and social distancing, is sending across wrong signals.

Considering the graveness of the situation, it is however ironic that while the government has no compunctions about canceling Board examinations, elections in the country have seemingly got out of the ambit of cancellations and postponements!

With half the phases in the Bengal

(Contd.. on p. 7)



(Contd.. from p. 6)

polls remaining, the opinion that the virus management measures appear to be missing on the ground needs to be given due consideration.

The countrymen are by and large consumed by a sensation of apprehension with a chilling feeling of horror at the government's ineffectiveness at decisively managing the pandemic which has come a full circle after having been controlled initially to an appreciable level.

These fears have magnified all the more with the dismal disregard shown by various state governments against clamping down on mass public events and gatherings.

Crowded situations are inherently disaster-prone. While a proactive, contingency approach to crowd control and management when it comes to stonewalling the widely contagious virus is a remedy to the problem, the complete disregard shown for observing the basic safety precautions is indeed perplexing!

In the meanwhile, Goa trudges the solitary path of indifference even as the whopping count of new infections set alarm bells ringing among the medical fraternity and the state government's COVID-19 response think-tank!

Wearing masks, social distancing and washing hands frequently appear to be compulsions that the masses are not willing to oblige the administration with.

But is it any different in other countries!

While admitting that governments across the world, without exception, need to show urgency on the matter, a certain amount of sloppiness in disrupting the transmission of the rampaging virus continues to cause miseries all around.

As a global phenomenon which has had multidimensional effects, COVID-19 demands a sustained effort by world governments to bring it under control.

## Reaction to new CORONA Crisis

**T**he national anguish over the giant second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, amid widespread reports of fudging infection figures and deaths rooted

in government complacency and public recklessness, has exploded beyond control perhaps. The second surge of COVID infections in India accounted for 38% of the cases reported worldwide last week, amid a severe shortage of medicines, vaccines and oxygen supplies that the government has been generously exporting despite criticism and has precipitated a holocaust here.

"The country has been too complacent and relaxed, after the first surge ended in 2020. Now we are paying the price for that negligence," Archbishop Prakash Mallavarapu, chairman of the Healthcare Commission of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI), says. However, it is noted that the Churches following the Govt and medical advice has been lackadaisical and negligent too. The various feasts celebrated and rituals organised inside churches and in open spaces have turned a nelson's eye to basic SOP norms - not to speak of the number and size of retreats, rituals, weddings, funerals, ordinations, final vows, Sunday masses, daily masses and cultural events too. So, blaming others of poor administration is meaningless and uncharitable to say the least. When pointing a finger at others surely more are pointed at us. Huge gatherings for ritual prayers and ceremonies in church groups and religious melaas are not the solution.

The infections soon started rising sharply, with the daily count high on April 1; in less than three weeks, it has spiked to more than 314,000 cases on April 21— the highest one-day national tally recorded anywhere since the pandemic began last year. And on April 20, the government's conservative count of daily deaths crossed the 2,000 mark for the first time. As this COVID-19 "tsunami" lashes across the nation, a cho-



rus of protest has erupted from opposition parties, social-action networks and the media, challenging the government's lack of

foresight. One of the most prominent accuses the government of "floundering" in the face of the giant surge in cases. Another account accuses the Indian government of indulging in "vaccine diplomacy" by exporting more than 60 million COVID vaccines to 84 countries at the cost of Indian citizens while the country's own vaccination centers are crippled by vaccine shortages.

With infections rising meteorically, hospitals are packed to capacity, beds are seriously short with malpractices rampant and fatal shortages of oxygen to save the lives of critically ill COVID patients. And similarly too the situation with vaccines, media reports indicate the government allowed escalating exports of oxygen despite the domestic shortages. Meanwhile, 22 COVID patients died April 21 following an oxygen leak at Nasik in western Maharashtra state. Fires in hospitals with high death rate in several hospitals are strange. Today the situation is horrific.

Knowledgeable sources state that many are dying due to lack of medical infrastructure. Necessary medical supplies are unavailable. Ambulances do not come on time. There are huge lines of ambulances in the crematoriums waiting for the corpses to be cremated. Among over two dozen Christians who have died of COVID in Gujarat were six Jesuits, who died on one day alone. A week earlier, another eminent Jesuit, Father Varghese Paul, former president of the Indian Catholic Press Association and mentor of dozens of writers in Gujarat, also died of COVID. It is said in "Job 11:18 And you will feel secure, because there is hope; you will look around and take your rest in security', only God can help all.

- **Compiled : Ivan Saldanha-Shet.**

# The Turning Point

**A**t times life throws us a challenge. We follow our usual set daily routine to include time for work, studies, fun, play and prayer. Everything seems honky dory. And then out of the blue a life changing incident occurs – an accident, the sudden demise of someone close to us, an unexpected failure, a worldwide pandemic. Our usual road is blocked. We have reached a pivotal point in our lives. There are other roads to follow and it depends on us which road we choose.



by **Monica Fernandes**

ball shattered his right leg. He had to undergo a series of operations and as he lay recuperating in his father's castle, he kept on reading and reflecting on the religious books that were his sole reading matter. He could have spent his life wallowing in self pity but these books changed his entire perspective on life.

On June 7, 1893, a young Indian lawyer, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (later known as the Mahatma or 'great soul') was forcibly evicted from a Whites only carriage on a train in South Africa. Till then he was a regular brown sahib. But this eviction was a watershed moment in his life. He began to lead protests against segregation via a passive resistance movement called Satyagraha which means 'force which is born of truth and love and non-violence'. The Mahatma drew a lot of inspiration from the bible and would often quote, from Mathew 5: 39, 'Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you and pray for those who treat you badly. To the one who strikes you on the cheek, turn the other cheek; to the one who takes your coat, give also your shirt.' The father of our nation went on to galvanise an entire country to shed the oppressive shackles of colonialism through non-violent methods. Amazing! An entire nation had reached a turning point. He was the inspiration for other leaders such as Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King. If the Mahatma had chosen to just grumble about injustice and not act after that fateful day in South Africa, the entire history of our nation may have been different.

We have all heard motivational speakers whose lives took an about turn after a major operation or a serious accident. One such iconic lady is Arjuna awardee Deepa Malik. She became a paraplegic at the tender age of 29. This lady with a fighting spirit is proud of her military background as both her father and husband are army men. On September 12, 2016 at the age of 45, Deepa made her country proud by becoming the first Indian woman athlete to win a medal at the Para Olympics.

Some of you, dear readers, may be facing roadblocks in your lives. At the end of the day, it is not what happens in your life that matters, but how you react to it. Following the footsteps of his father and older brother, young Anurag was bent on joining the Indian Institute of Technology. He prepared hard for the entrance exams but disaster struck on the day before the exams when he was hospitalized with a serious infection. Not one to quit, Anurag decided to try his luck the next year but had a bad fall and landed up with a fractured hand and, as luck would have it, his left hand with which he wrote. Anurag was very despondent but his mother, who is a teacher, pointed out to him that there are many roads to success. Anurag went on to study at the London School of Economics. Today he is happy and successful in his career.

But a traumatic event has not always been the turning point. Gautama Buddha was Prince Siddhartha from the Shakya clan. His father protected him from being exposed to sickness and disease. It was during chariot ride outside the palace that the young prince first beheld suffering and death when he saw an old man, a diseased man and a decaying corpse. After years of meditation, he began preaching the eightfold middle path between extreme sensual indulgence and severe mortification.

Mother Teresa joined the Loretta order of nuns as a teacher. She witnessed two very traumatic events – the Bengal famine of 1943 and the bloodshed before the partition of India. She also saw poverty and suffering on the streets of Calcutta. This prompted her to start the Missionaries of Charity so that the poorest of poor could live and die in dignity.

A twist in fate could happen to anyone. The death of the main bread winner of the family, a failure in exams, loss of a job, an accident or sickness, being jilted and last but not least, the strain of living during a pandemic – these are some of the challenges being faced. But do not despair for there is always a way forward.

How do we condition ourselves to find another road during a roadblock in our lives?

- We all have ups and downs in our lives but some of us seem to have more downs. Let us not waste pre-

(Contd.. on p. 9)

St. Ignatius of Loyola (born 23.10.1491, died 31.7.1556) was a Spanish Catholic nobleman. He is remembered as the founder of the Jesuit order of priests and for his book on Spiritual Exercises for he felt that just as a person exercises his body, he is also in need of spiritual exercises as well. The Jesuits have made tremendous strides in the field of education, among others. This foray into the field of education was started by Ignatius himself. But Ignatius had not planned to become a priest. His first choice of profession was that of a soldier. The Battle of Pamplona in May 1521 was the pivotal point in his life when a cannon-

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# Go Tell Them, I Am Alive!

Once again there is lockdown imposed. Churches are closed. The faithful are not allowed to gather together for divine worship. Roads are deserted. We priests of the Parish concelebrate the Mass with the Sisters, behind the closed doors at 7 o'clock in the morn-

ing. I miss the company of parishioners. After the Mass I take a short walk on a lane in the vicinity of our Nambhat Church to share the joy of the Eucharist. Of course I go in cassock. All my life I have rejected cassock in the name of inculturation; but now it serves me to be a sign of God in the multi-religious world afflicted by Corona! Keeping the safe distance I just say, "Hi, Hello" to those who pass by on the road or those who are peeping out of their windows or front doors. One such woman who was calling me out from her house, exclaimed, "Father, I am reminded of Jesus! His frightened disciples were hiding in a closed room. Jesus appeared to them and said, 'Peace be with you!' So you appear on our road. May we be filled with the presence of the resurrected Christ!"

good work. Do not forget to call me for the *Vasushanti* (Home blessing)!"



There is a fisherwoman who sits at the corner of our church gate to sell fish, very regularly. I asked her, "Are you not afraid of Corona?" And she said, "Why to be afraid? Maui is there!" I replied, "You are a woman of great faith! You deserve to sit at the gate of the church and do your business! God bless you and your family!" Her customers standing by got the message of resurrected Jesus: "Fear not of Covid-19! I am with you!"



Fr. Michael G. Vasai

In one of such lanes I met our Nagar-sevak with his social workers. "Get into your houses, you rascals and be safe!" And they answered we were out to take one patient to the hospital. "great great friends, may God protect you from all evil!" It cost me nothing to bless them raising my hand in cassock!

The other day a family obliged me to come in the house and have a cup of tea. I gave in to the pressure (Please do not reveal this to my Parish priest!). I went in the house, chatted with them and had a nice cup of milk with turmeric seeds (*Oli hallad*) obtained from their own Wadi (Garden)! As I was leaving, the Father of the family said, "Thank you, Father; but do not move out too much!" And I said, "In case tomorrow if I die, tell the people that Father had just yesterday visited our house. He was so hale and hearty! What happened?"

The mother said, "Father, don't talk of death so lightly!"

I replied, "Why not? I am 79 now. For me death and life are the same, life in Jesus Christ!" Am I boasting? So did Jesus when he said,

**HE IS ALIVE! HALLELUJAH !!**

(Contd.. from p. 8)

cious time bemoaning our fate. Nor should we compare ourselves adversely with others, envying them for being luckier than us. Negativity and seeking sympathy results in us being blind to other alternatives.

- Develop our Spiritual Quotient. We could read the precepts and lives of great spiritual leaders and sages. The parables of Jesus Christ all have a message to strengthen us mentally. Spend some time in prayer. Through personal experience during difficult times, I believe this approach helps.
- Reach out to others. This approach makes us less likely to think that nobody has seen the troubles we have seen.
- We should not neglect our physical wellbeing and make time for yoga, walking and exercise.
- Surround ourselves with positive people who truly care for us. Who are our friends? Can you rely on them in good times and in bad?
- We should not hesitate to seek advice and help from those wiser than us. There is no loss of ego in seeking help.
- Be proactive. You may have lost your job due to the pandemic. Is it possible to attend on line courses to hone your skills? If your particular job profile is no longer of relevance in the current scenario, is it possible to change your line entirely, considering your strengths and talents?
- Above all, we must believe that we are made of sterner stuff and we SHALL overcome. In the words of Swami Vivekananda, "faith in ourselves and faith in God- this is the secret of greatness", "All power is within you; you can do anything and everything."

I exclaimed, "Praise the Lord! He is alive!"

On another day I met on the road a man who was collecting plastic from dustbins. He was clad in dirty rags. I greeted him, "*Namaskar! Aapki diname kitanee kamaai hotii hai* (How much do you earn per day?)" Seeing me in cassock he honestly confessed, "400 rupees per day." I said to him, "God bless you! Yaha aapki sachchi kamaai hai! You are working honestly. Take this little gift from me." And I handed him over just a hundred rupee note! Too little, no? I am still very stingy! God forgive me!

There is a poor man, struggling to rebuild his house. That morning he was watering the walls. I congratulated him, "Nice to see your house coming up!" And he responded, "Yes, it is because Mother Theresa is overlooking my construction work." My face conveyed to him that I was puzzled. He pointed out a huge picture of Mother Theresa installed by his neighbour at the top of his bungalow! I blessed him, "Vah vah! May she help you to complete the

# Election Commission to Rise to 'Sheshan' Standards!

The 'High Court of Calcutta', I am sure, caught the attention of the entire country, and even much beyond, on 22 April 2021, for having given a 'slap on the wrist' of Election Commission of India, as regards its failure in the 'enforcement of corona health safety norms' during the ongoing process of West Bengal Assembly elections.

In response to the public interest litigations (PILs) concerning the matter above, a Division Bench presided over by Chief Justice T. B. N. Radhakrishnan sharply affirmed that the 'issuance of circulars and holding meetings on corona safety' were not enough. Further on, the Chief Justice ordered an 'affidavit by the ECI' on steps taken to enforce the norms.

The PILs brought to the attention of the court that 'people participating in the ongoing election campaigns were not holding on to the corona norms' and articulated its anxiety that the same might cause an upshot in the corona cases in West Bengal, especially in the wake of the second wave of the pandemic that is finding its way in the whole country.

The displeasure of the court was grounded in the fact that the ECI and its officers on duty in West Bengal have not proved their commitment to their duties by enforcing their own circulars. The court cautioned that ECI officers that responsibly managing its guidelines to the ground is equally important to showing the route map and protocol for the related quarters.

Obviously, the implication of the verdict of the court is that stringent measures have to be taken against persons who

fail, neglect or refuse to obey corona protocols, may they be political leaders from any party and on any level, as campaigners, organizers and participating masses, including officers and facilitators.

It has been too appalling to observe that in all the five states where election has been conducted, rules and protocols, for the most part, were ignored. In this regard, the situation of West Bengal was highly conspicuous in relation to the high voltage violation of all logic, sense and sensitivity, along with severe defiance of the protocol regulations.



Fr. Dr. M. D. Thomas

The irony as well as the seriousness of the matter increases several times when one sees the home minister and prime minister of the country also, along with many other important central ministers and party leaders, involved in the process of violating the corona protocols and thus contributing to the danger of the explosion of the pandemic, who knows how many times.

One can very well understand the sad predicament of the Election Commission of India, which finds itself bereft of its ethical fibre and backbone at the topsy-turvy of affairs in the country. But, to forget that ECI is a Constitutional institution and that it is the most powerful body when it a question of conducting elections and to reduce it to a mere 'parrot' or a 'mouse', I believe, is nothing less than a crime against the very Constitution of India and its people.

It is such a time when one would remember with reverential sentiments T. N. Sheshan, who was at the helm of affairs at the 10th Election Commis-

sion of India from 1990 to 1996. He knew his routine powers, like giving recognition to the parties, allowing them symbols, limiting poll expenses, preparing electoral rolls, updating voter's list, and the like. He could only be removed by the president of India, backed by two-thirds of the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, on the grounds of proved misbehavior or incapacity.

Mr Sheshan is indeed a synonym for 'electoral reforms', mainly by way of 'model code of conduct'. He made sure that the parties and candidates take it seriously. He cleaned up the electoral system. Elector's photo identity card was one of the related measures, too. He made sure that the respective party cleans up the posters they have used for their propaganda. He demonstrated to the outside world that his post was no pushover.

Until Mr Sheshan hardly anyone knew that there was an Election Commission of India and that it had some clear-cut and decisive powers. He assumed his office and understood his powers in the light of the Constitution and for the welfare of the country. He did exercise his powers and the result was acclaimed by one and all, not only in the country but world over, as well.

Being born in Kerala, being an alumnus of madras Christian College, being an IAS officer, doing management course in Harvard University, along with long years of eventful experience at state and central governments, all those milestones stood in good stead for the brilliant job he performed at the Election Commission of India.

Mr Sheshan meant business. 'Discipline' was in his blood. A responsible 'conscience' was his strength. An 'ethical fibre' was his policy. He demand-

(Contd.. on p. 13)

# Matrimonial Proposals

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28 years Mangalorean spinster C.A., Ht. 5'6" Wt. 49 kg Fair., Beautiful. well cultured. Affluent society. Belongs to established business family in Maharashtra (REF:MM105)

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40 years Mangalorean bachelor doctor (Ph.D) Ht. 6' Wt. 75 kg Fair., Handsome. no bad habits. High affluent society well connected. Belongs to highly placed business family in Mumbai (REF:MM103)

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## Proposals are invited for

Vasai based affluent business family R.C. East Indian Spinster, 33, years Ht. 5' 2", very beautiful and pretty. MS General Surgeon, Doctor by profession. (REF:106)

Mumbai based now in Dubai Mangalorean Roman Catholic Spinster, 33 years, Ht. 5' 7", Fair Complexion, Edn. BMS, profession: a Senior Merchandiser (REF:107)

Mumbai based Mangalorean Roman Catholic Spinster, 29 years, Ht. 5' 4", Wt. 72 kgs, Wheatish Complexion, Edn. B.Com., C.A., Holding a managerial post. (REF:108)

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Doctor : Your Liver is enlarged  
 Patient : Does that mean it has space for more whisky ?  
 (This is called "Positive Thinking" )  
 Lady to her dietician :- What I am worried about is my height and not my weight.  
 Doc :- How come???  
 Lady :- According to my weight, my height should be 7.8 feet...  
 (Now this is called "Positive Attitude" )  
 A Man wrote to the bank. "My Cheque was returned with remark 'Insufficient funds'. I want to know whether it refers to mine or the Bank".  
 (This is self confidence in its peak )  
 This one is classic !!  
 A cockroach's last words to a man who wanted to kill it : "Go ahead and kill me, you coward. You're just jealous because I can scare your wife and you cannot..!!!!"  
 Always be positive even in difficult situations

\*\*\*\*\*

**Some beautiful answers and way of thinking of Turkish poet Jalaluddin Rumi....**

**What Is Poison ? ? ?**

He Replied With A Beautiful Answer - AnyThing Which Is More Than Our Necessity Is Poison. It May Be Power, Wealth, Hunger, Ego, Greed, Laziness, Love, Ambition, Hate, Or Anything.

**What Is Fear ? ? ?**

Non Acceptance Of Uncertainty. If We Accept That Uncertainty, It Becomes **Adventure**.

**What Is Envy ? ? ?**

Non Acceptance Of Good In Others. If We Accept That Good, It Becomes **Inspiration**.

**What Is Anger ? ? ?**

Non Acceptance Of Things Which Are Beyond Our Control. If We Accept, It Becomes **Tolerance**.

**What Is Hatred ? ? ?**

Non Acceptance Of Person As He Is. If We Accept A Person Unconditionally, It Becomes **Love...!!!**

\*\*\*\*\*



Just stumbled upon an old text by **Osho**, unbelievable how exactly he described the situation and somehow comforting...

**"How do I avoid pandemic?"**

This question was asked to OSHO about 40 years ago during the AIDS period!

You're **asking the wrong question**

Osho replied, the right question should be:

"How to avoid the fear of dying caused by the epidemic (pandemic)?"

Because it is very easy to avoid the virus, it is very difficult to avoid the fear in you and in the world.

"People will die more from this fear than from the epidemic (pandemic)." There is NO virus in this world more dangerous than FEAR.

Understand this fear, otherwise you will become a dead body before your body dies.

It has nothing to do with the virus. The scary atmosphere you feel in these moments is collective madness...

It has happened a thousand times and will continue to happen.

And it will continue if you don't understand the psychology of crowds and fear.

You usually keep your fear at bay, but in the moment of collective madness, your consciousness can be completely lost.

You won't even know when you lost control of your fear.

Then fear can make you do anything. In such a situation you can also take your own life or the lives of others.

So much will happen in the coming times:

Many people will kill themselves and many people will kill more.

Attention, be mindful.

Don't watch news that trigger fear.

Stop talking about the epidemic, repeating the same thing over and over again is like self-hypnosis. Fear is a kind of self-hypnosis. This idea will cause chemical changes in the body.

If you repeat the same idea over and over again, a chemical change is triggered that can sometimes be so toxic that it can kill you.

During an epidemic, energy around the world becomes irrational.

This way you can fall into a black hole anytime.

Meditation then becomes a protective aura into which no negative energy can penetrate.

Have a fearless journey of life.

\*\*\*\*\*

**Prayers Answered**

God is happy! He has cleared all the backlog of prayers of his devotees.

1. Kids: I wish we had no school and could play all day. "Done".
2. Wives: I want the undivided attention of my husband. "Done".
3. Husbands: I'm sick of this traffic, I wish I could work from home. "Done".
4. Working Moms: I wish I could spend some quality time with my kids at home. "Done".
5. Students: I wish I had no exams. "Done".
6. Old Parents: I wish our kids could spend some more time with us rather than being busy everyday. "Done".
7. Employee: I'm slogging too much. I need a break. "Done".
8. Employers: I have no life of my own. I wish I could relax. "Done".
9. Earth: I cant breathe, I wish I could get a break from all this pollution and chaos. "Done".

Beware of what you wish. You might just get it without a warning!

\*\*\*\*\*

**J Rocks**

I read a signboard in Dombivili at a shop which said, 'J rocks'.

I spent the next 30 minutes trying to figure out who or what J was and why he was rocking.

Then I realised it was 'Xerox'.

---- Jubel D'Cruz, Dombivili, Mumbai

\*\*\*\*\*

(Contd.. from p. 10)

ed certain principles and policies in the behavior of political persons and candidates. He wouldn't 'compromise' it, as officers and people often do. Election Commission has to abide by electoral laws, irrespective of the party, ruling or ruled. As a seasoned umpire, he did not hesitate pulling up anyone violating the rules of the game or influencing the voters.

The greatest contribution of Mr Sheshan is that he emerged as a 'trend-setter' in the Election Commission, as regards electoral reforms. Some 150 malpractices in the elections he listed became a process that got improved during the times of his successors. The observation of his successor T.S. Krishna Murthy speaks volumes, 'the tenure of Mr Sheshan was a 'turning point' in the history of ECI', as 'pre-Sheshan and post-Sheshan', in terms of a 'department of the government' and an 'independent Commission'.

No wonder, Mr Sheshan won the 'Ramon Magsaysay award' for 1996, for his crusade against corruption and electoral malpractices. He emerged an icon of the middle class, too. Manifestly, Mr T. N. Sheshan made 'history' in India and beyond, by 're-writing the history of the Election Commission of India' with a new 'identity and dignity', in line with the provisions of the Constitution of India.

Coming back to the current Election Commission of India, it has a paramount challenge before it, i.e., not allowing the Commission to sink into the pre-Sheshan era of being a tail of the government. It has a great duty to maintain the identity and dignity of the Election Commission of India as an autonomous institution, in line with the Constitutional mandate.

The Election Commission of India should never remain a vegetative body as a 'parrot' or a 'tail'. It has 'teeth' to bite and it should when required. The teeth can get dysfunctional by non-use. Rather than remaining satisfied with giving pious instructions, it has to en-

#### Ingredients:

100 gms basmati rice  
150 gms moong dal  
1.3 litres warm water  
1 tsp turmeric powder  
A pinch of asafoetida  
3 tbsp vegetable oil  
2 whole green cardamom pods  
2 bay leaves  
1 tsp cumin seeds  
8-10 curry leaves  
2 onions finely chopped  
2 green chillies finely chopped  
1-inch piece ginger blended to a paste  
4 cloves garlic blended to a paste  
3 tomatoes finely chopped  
1/2 tsp chilli powder  
Salt to taste  
1 cup water  
Coriander leaves to garnish

#### Method:

Soak the rice and dal in plenty of water for 20 minutes. Drain and add both in a vessel along with 1.3 liters of warm water, turmeric and asafoetida.  
Bring to a boil and simmer over low heat cooking the dal and rice for 35 minutes with the lid half on. Make sure to stir often so it doesn't stick to the bottom of the pan.  
Once cooked, put off the gas. Cool slightly and using a potato masher, mash roughly.  
In a large vessel, heat the oil over medium flame. Add the cardamom pods, bay leaves and cumin seeds and fry for a few seconds.  
Now add the curry leaves followed by the onions. Fry for 3-4 minutes until it becomes light brown. Stir well and add the green chillies followed by the ginger paste and garlic paste and fry for a minute.  
Add the tomatoes and continue to fry over a low heat for 4 minutes. As they begin to soften, add the chilli powder and stir well.  
Add the mashed dal and rice and season the khichdi. Stir, add water and simmer on a low heat for 2 minutes. Turn off the gas and garnish with coriander leaves. Serve warm with crispy papad, mango pickle or yoghurt.



## Dal Khichdi



Sweta D'Cruz

sure that it enforces the policies and guidelines to the ground. To say the least, the Election Commission of India has to rise above its current state of affairs to the 'Sheshan standards', not only in West Bengal elections, but also even the entire process of elections in the country.

*The author is Director of Institute of Harmony and Peace Studies, New Delhi, and has been committed to cross-cultural perspectives, interfaith relations, constitutional values, national integration and social harmony, for the past over 40 years. He contributes to the above cause through lectures, articles, video messages, conferences, social interactions, views at TV channels, and the like. He could be contacted at 'mdthomas53@gmail.com'.*

# “Hail St. Teresa of Avila”

Pope Francis on 13 April 2021 hailed St. Teresa of Avila, as an exemplar of courage and spiritual motherhood! – In a letter to her Bishop Jose Maria Tamayo of Avila, regarding an ‘International Congress’ that took place livestream April 12-15, he commented:

“Despite five centuries that separate us, the flame that Jesus lit within Teresa continues to shine in this world; always in need of brave witnesses capable of breaking barriers, be it physical, existential or cultural.”

“Through her courage, intelligence and tenacity, she united her sensitivity for the beautiful and spiritual motherhood – as an exemplary example of the extraordinary role that women have played throughout Church history and society. So, I encourage priests, religious and laity involved in the ‘International Congress’, to continue spreading her teaching.”

“St. Teresa had a great devotion to St. Joseph. She took him as a teacher, advocate and intercessor. She en-

trusted herself entirely to him, having the certainty that she would receive graces. Saints always go hand in hand; and they sustain us by our trust placed in their intercession!”

St. Teresa was declared Doctor of the Church by Pope Paul VI on 27 September 1970. After her, three other female Saints had been declared Doctors! – St. Catherine of Siena, St. Terese of Lisieux, and St. Hildegard of Bingen. (A Doctor of the Church is a honorary title given to saints who have made a significant contribution to theology of doctrine, through their research, study or writing). There’s been a total of 36 Doctors so far!

—Dr. Hazel Colaso,  
Vienna, VA. USA.

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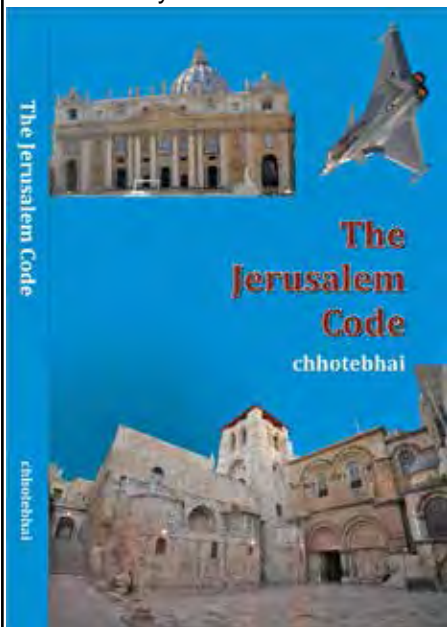
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(Contd.. from p. 4)

mark the Maha Kumbh Mela festival. Health experts had called for the festival, one of the largest religious gatherings in the world, to be cancelled. But authorities said the pilgrimage would go ahead for those able to produce negative COVID-19 tests.

**When people are driven by excessive religious fervour their reason usually gets clouded, something similar is happening at the Kumbh Mela where strong religious motif guide people’s behaviour, all norms of safety and security are up in the air.**

India became the country with the world’s second highest number of confirmed Covid-19 cases on Monday, surpassing Brazil, and now second only to the United States. But experts say that the low testing in the country suggest the real total is far higher than both.

If accurate, that math would put the real number of COVID-19 infections to date in India somewhere around 400 million — more than the entire population of the United States. 400 million infections in a country the size of India still means that a billion people are not infected. So there’s still plenty of room for infection, even with a lot of people already being infected.

The surge in India comes as the country’s vaccination drive appears to be struggling. Multiple Indian states have reported a shortage of doses even as the federal government has insisted that there’s enough in stock.

What can we make of a health minister who expostulates that states are indulging in cheap politics when they ask for vaccines which are verifiably in short supply? Beyond a point, bluster does not work.



# Migrancy, The Bane Of Societal Order

So the migrant issue is back with good souls like Sister Sujata Jena, a Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary nun, pleading for help from Church and society to reach out to the “poor migrant labourers”. The bus accident that triggered this appeal is certainly unfortunate and sad. Nevertheless, methinks it’s time all concerned, i.e. those in the government and the municipality, in NGOs, churches, convents etc took a clear stand on the issue of migration from a wider perspective, such a stand calling for a national debate in the interests of all concerned.

## **State government v/s state government**

No state government calls labourers from other states to work in their territory. Rather, it is the labourers who resort to migration of their own accord and for their own personal reasons. Considering that those reasons include lack of job opportunities in their state of origin and the prospects of a better life in some other state, they are certainly not doing any state or city a favour of any kind as such. Indeed, they are not doing it because they feel that God’s own country, Kerala, needs cheap labour to work on its farms, or because Maximum City aka Mumbai or Slumbai, needs ‘domestics’ for its households.

Take a look at the employer-employee situation in general. Businesses whether big or small can well survive with even mediocre staff, but the staff hold on to jobs because whichever way one looks at it, jobs being difficult to come by, one cannot afford to be choosy. Of course, employers who get manpower from distant places generally do so with adequate provisions in terms of job security. How fair is it then for anybody to expect migrants in general to be helped REPEATEDLY to dance between states, cities and

villages each time there is an emergency?

Truthfully, given the present COVID-19 scenario, if all was hunky dory in the states they have migrated from, why would they have migrated at all? It is more than obvious that the states to which they now desperately intend returning within less than a year of their return and re-return are all infested with the virus at practically every level, not excluding mental and moral. And then we expect church and society alike to promptly spring into action, getting back into the groove of providing food, shelter, clothing, medical aid, transportation – the works! And to talk of such expectations within less than a year of the massive exodus that took place since the nationwide lockdown on 23 March last year! Let’s get real! Indeed, how long and how often ought this to go on?



by Ladislaus L D'Souza

## **Whither migrants’ responsibility?**

I think we’ve now reached a stage where **it’s time we decided that those who want to help the migrants should do so entirely at their own cost and emotions whereby anyone who feels sorry for a migrant takes him/her home and looks after them, sheltering, feeding and clothing them for free, and transporting them around in their personal transport vehicle/s.** Maybe some religious [men and women] could also consider leaving their respective congregations and together starting either a separate religious or a secular institute specifically dedicated to the care and comfort of migrants.

**It is also time the proponents of unhindered, free migration gave a thought to the question of governments creating jobs and employment opportunities within their respective states.** If one may recall, the

CM of UP had brazenly bragged about setting up a special commission for labourers from his state, asserting that he’d ensure registration of ‘requests’ from governments of other states and monitor the employment of his bhaiyyas in other states. If I may ask, whatever happened to the proposed commission? Why, in spite of their CM’s bravado, have they returned to their jobs in Mumbai and in other cities? The same is the case with migrants from other states. It is precisely because they have no scope of earning a livelihood that they migrate to obviously greener pastures.

## **From national drain to individual fulfilment**

If Easter celebrates the joyful fact that Jesus came, suffered, died and rose from the dead precisely that we may all “have life and have it to the full” (cfr Jn 10:10), it is imperative that the likes of Sister Jena and others, with obviously good intentions at heart, put on their thinking caps and, stringing their hearts together, come up with better and more practical ways and viable means to tackle the issue. Perhaps they could consider proposing concrete plans for getting the various state governments in the country to create job opportunities, backing those plans with viable entrepreneurship schemes. And if the focus of these plans and schemes is self-empowerment of the labourers in/of any given state coupled with a serious effort to forthwith stop being a drain on the national exchequer by means of getting anyone and everyone to do the jig by playing on anybody’s emotions, the Church per se will have well played the Jesus card to the hilt, conscious that Jesus did not come to spoon-feed anyone with fish but to teach how to catch fish and thus make an honourable living as is evident from so many instances of compassion in the gospels. **Ready for the challenge all you good Samaritans?**

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ronaldpereira1210@gmail.com

**7207. CHANDIGARH :** Anglo Indian Catholic Divorcee, (Born in April 1972), Ht. 6' 1", Wt. 80 kgs, Very Fair Complexion, Edn. B.Com., MFC, MA English, Teacher by profession. Contact email : vishalsud81@gmail.com

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# She gave her life to save her unborn babe

## (St. Gianna Beretta Molla)

By Fr. F. M. Britto

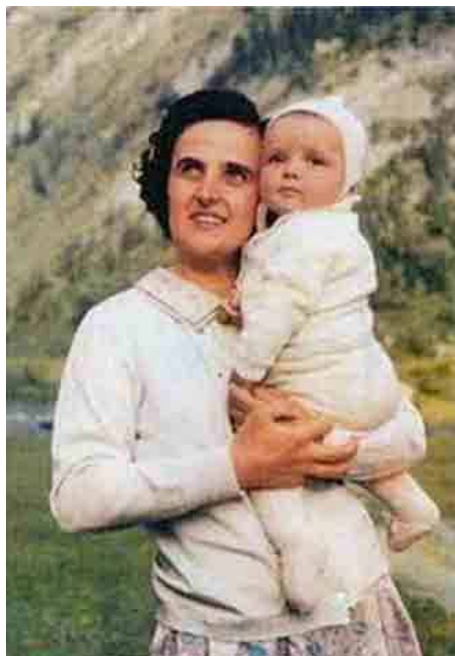
**T**his lady doctor preferred to die to save her fetus. And that child today has become a doctor like her mother and continues her clinic.

Gianna Beretta Molla was born in Magenta, Italy, Oct 4, 1922, as the tenth of thirteen children to Alberto Beretta and Maria de Micheli. Their family had many priests and nuns and since they belonged to the Third Order of St. Francis, they gave strong Christian formation to their children. Gianna grew up viewing life as a beautiful gift of God.

Imitating her loving parents, Gianna too became an active parishioner. She began her medical studies in Milan and got specialized in pediatrics. Though she wished to join her missionary brother-priest in Brazil and offer free gynecological services to poor women, her chronic ill health made it impossible. Practicing medicine as a mission, she opened a clinic in Mesero and gave special attention to mothers and babies. As an active member of the St. Vince de Paul Society and Catholic Action, the young Gianna cared the elderly and poor. Yet, she also enjoyed with her young friends, skiing, and mountaineering.

Meeting engineer Pietro Molla, the 33 years old Gianna got married to him on Sept 24, 1955. Taking her marriage as a vocation, she took it to forming a truly Christian family. Blessed with three kids, she harmonized her demands of wife, mother, doctor and church.

During the second month of her fourth pregnancy in 1961, the doctors diagnosed that Gianna had a fibroid tumour in her uterus. Its size threatened the fetus' life. The doctors gave her three options: an abortion which would take the babe's life, but save her life and allow her to conceive; or a complete hysterectomy, due to which



the fetus would die and she would not further conceive; or the removal of the fibroid, which might harm the fetus or her and might cause complications in her life.

### What will be your choice?

As a good Catholic, Gianna believed in the Church's teaching that an unborn babe too has a fundamental right to life from the moment of conception. So she preferred the third option, well aware of the risks as a doctor. Before the surgery, she instructed the doctors that her child's life is more important than hers. She informed her husband too, "If you have to decide between me and the child, do not hesitate to choose the child. I insist: save it." She entrusted the babe and herself to God in prayer. "I trust in God, yes," she said. "But now it is up to me to fulfill my duty as a mother. I renew to the Lord the offer of my life. I am ready for everything to save my baby."

Providentially both the mother and the baby survived the surgery. But problems continued throughout the remainder of her pregnancy. The child was delivered by a Caesarian surgery

on Holy Saturday, April 21. Gianna continued to suffer severe pain. After a week the 39 years old Gianna died of septic peritonitis on April 28, 1962. Thus she sacrificed her life to save her daughter.

Gianna's example was hailed courageous and her tale spread. Pope Paul VI, the former archbishop of Milan, hailed her in his Angelus address on Sept 23, 1973, "A young mother from the diocese of Milan, who to give life to her daughter, sacrificed her own."

During the International Year of the Family, Pope John Paul II beatified Gianna on April 24, 1994. Canonizing her in St. Peter's square on May 16, 2004, in the very presence of her husband and children, Pope John Paul II described her as "a simple, but more than ever, significant messenger of divine love." For her canonization, the husband and her children were also present. It was the first time ever a husband had witnessed one's wife's canonization.

She has today become the patron of unborn children, mothers and doctors. Her husband wrote a biography on Gianna, where he says that she followed her conscience as a mother, a doctor and as a Catholic.

This daughter, Gianna Emanuela, has become a doctor of geriatrics like her mom and continues her clinic. During the 2015 World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia, in the presence of Pope Francis, she read a letter written by her late mother to her father before their marriage. Highlighting the Christian virtues of marriage, that letter called him and her as a couple to serve God in a "saintly way" through "the Sacrament of love."

Inspired by her example, the first pro-life Catholic health-care centre, "The Gianna Centre," in New York with specialized gynecological care for women, has been built. ●

# Are Ghosts real?

Story telling can never go out of fashion. It dates back to pre-historic period where man in the absence of full fledged language used sounds to narrate his experiences. Centuries have passed and still man enjoys telling stories. Being a history teacher for more than a decade now I ought to be an exceptionally good story teller. And I owe my story telling skill to the place where I was born and brought up, that's in Western Ghats. Being a Malnad girl who have had early education in Canara often remember with nostalgia the days I spent in my village which was surrounded by coffee and tea plantation.



was so weird that the estate owner decided to install a statue of mother Mary to comfort people mentally. Even I have often seen people quickening steps before the dusk to escape horrible experience.

Growing up listening to all such stories, I was made to believe that ghosts do exist but, now looking back I sense things differently. Western ghats as we know is rich in coffee and tea plantation. Crops brought huge wealth, it was a obligatory to protected and stored them in a godown till it gets a fair price in

While spending all my vacations in ghats I came across people from all age groups who narrated me excellent ghost stories which they presumed were true, gradually I too started believing in them. I still remember the times when I often kept my hostel mates entertained by narrating ghost stories which scared them and as they had acknowledged that my stories created chills in their spine as they walked on the empty corridors of the hostels at night. 'Ghost' or 'haunted stories' were quite popular in ghats. And one has to have extra skill to narrate them which I did effortlessly.

from a get together in his motor bike, his way was blocked by a strange women. On enquiring, she said that she was a victim of a sad love affair and had thus killed herself a couple of year back. She had a strange voice, a haunted cry and a scary look. With two extra pegs of scotch that night at the party, my dad had clearly understood who she was, and it was not for the first time that he had come across

the market. It was a tough work for the owners to save their crops from any kind of thefts happening at night. And in order to escape this fate many such ghost stories were created which seldom allowed people to trespass the boundaries.



**Dr. Mona Mendonca**

such an experiences. He was no doubt a brave man but, also an expert in dealing with them. In his opinion, there were 3 methods to get rid of these souls, one, display of a cross two, abuse them three, sprinkle urine. I am told that my dad

Now going back to both by stories, one thing what I found in common was, the location where my dad encountered the strange lady was just close to the estate Bungalow, where the important documents and huge amount of cash was kept. Mean while,

As many catholic planters from Canara owned huge estates in ghats, I have often seen them building a grotto(Its a Catholic outdoor shrine where a statue of mother Mary is placed) in the estates as a manifestation of their love for mother Mary. At the same time, I have heard people saying that the 'grottos' were build exclusively in the haunted places where people otherwise were reluctant to move especially during night. How accurate were these assumptions I am not sure.

used all the three methods to chase this ghost and reached home safely and that night he a valid excuse to convince my mom as to why was he late.



The second haunted story was nothing to do with the evil spirit as such but, it was all about a tree that almost scared people. I came across a huge tree in one of the estates which was believed to be trouble maker. It seems few year back a young boy had hanged himself to that tree and ever since then one could listen to the strange sounds as they pass by. Coincidentally, that tree never bore any flower or fruit. The whole structure

the huge haunted tree was located close to the entry gate of the estate. So in both the cases its quite evident that it was necessary to safe guard k the estate and to serve this purpose ghost stories were created. This has been my observation. Henceforth, if you come across any such stories take a minute to think the mystery hidden behind the narratives.

\*\*\*\*\*



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