

RELIGIOUS CO-EXISTENCE

The religious co-existence is the basic philosophy of the Indian way of life and it is found in all walks of our life. Equal respect for all faiths and beliefs is the cardinal principles of Indian thought process. There is religious freedom, and freedom of faith and belief in our country. India is secular from the very beginning dating back to four thousand years and it is a fact that word secular and secularism, are the later incorporations to the constitution of India. Indian political thinkers recognized the fact that the Hindu way of life was more secular than the modern secular state. In Hindu state the co-existence was the corner stone of its being and the very Hindu symbolises the co-existence, freedom of religion and belief. The two fundamentals and pronouncements of Sarva Dharma Sambhava and Vasudev Kutumbakam, mean equal respect for all faiths and whole world is one family are fundamental to the Hindu thought and way of life. Because of this religious co-existence the Indian thinkers did not felt the need of incorporating the word secular to the constitution. Because of the Hindu thought and belief and the religious traditions the word secular was incorporated in the preamble of the constitution lately as the Hindu way of thought and belief where brimming with religious freedom and co-existence and thus there was no need for the incorporation of the word secular to the constitution. It implies that the India was secular from the very beginning. India was and is secular like a modern secular state from the last five thousand years and this is the greatest contribution of the Hindu way of life, culture and civilization. Any way Indian coexistence is the cardinal principle of its beliefs, traditions and the practices. But one thing is certain that the co-existence is found in the Hindu society and it is the guiding force of our life and belief and as such is followed in the letter and spirit. In spite of the fact that the religious freedom has now got constitutional backing we Indians were secular even before and this hardly, matters for our society which was more secular even millennium years before. In Indian context two things should be understood that one there is no equivalent in Indian culture to secularism and second dharma is not religion. The term Hindu cannot be conflated with the western concept of religion which is fairly of very recent origin. The fact is that the term Hindu in the Indian context is several millennia old. Hindu essentially meant the society with its beliefs and traditions and way of life and its cultural and civilizational moorings and also includes its practices and prejudices. Unlike the institutionalised parameters of Semitic religions for the basic human rights of freedom of belief the Indian thought process kept the faith, belief and the method of worship outside the purview the state and uncontaminated by outside influence. In spite of this capacity to adjust and assimilate made Hindutva flexible, responsive to modernity and dynamic but yet rooted in tradition. Hindu society is full of religious freedom and belief and co-existence is the guiding force of the society and it finds strength in the Hindu thought and culture and way of living. The first Prime Minister J L Nehru rejected the inclusion of secularism in the constitution but two decades later his daughter Indira Gandhi effected drastic changes to all most all parts of the constitution including the preamble converting the sovereign, democratic republic into sovereign, socialist, secular and democratic republic. Here, the question arises, was India less secular from 1947 to 1976 or are we really more secular now since the constitution says so. The answer to this question is big no. The fact is that Indian secularism has been an integral part of polity through the ages.

Omkar Dattatray

OFF 'D' CUFF

How to create your own Mental Sunshine

Fear something that characterises us, as we are children of a sceptical age. We are afraid of the future, afraid of poverty, afraid of unemployment, afraid of dishonour and disgrace, afraid of disease and death - it seems to me that sometimes, we are afraid of life itself!

We live in fear; we work in fear; we walk in fear; we talk in fear. We move through life from one fear to another, crushed beneath the weight of a fearful existence!

Fear casts its dark shadow over our lives at one time or another. We are prone to fear almost instinctively. Neither the highest nor the lowest of us is exempt from fear. The most powerful nations fear their rivals and neighbours. Politicians are afraid of losing elections. People fear for their future. Students are afraid of failing in examinations. Mothers are afraid about their children's safety... the list is endless.

Fear is at the root of all our problems. Fear gives rise to all our misfortunes. Living in constant fear saps our vital energies, leaving us too drained and exhausted to savour the joy of life. Fear paralyses the mind, even as a stroke paralyses the body. It strikes at the nervous system; it causes stress and tension. It undermines our well-being. Worst of all, it robs us of happiness and destroys our peace of mind.

"The mind is its own place," wrote Milton, "and in itself, can create a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven." The mind can create fears and phobias; it can also create security and self-confidence. If we are to live life to the fullest, we must be fearless.

There are two options open to you. One is to sub-

mit to your fears, allow yourself to be overwhelmed by them, making your life miserable in the process. The other option - is the wiser alternative - is to overcome your fears, with God's help. When you do this, you achieve remarkable success that can change your life. All of us have the potential to achieve it.

To become free of fear, the first step is to become aware that fear, like all other human weaknesses, is removable. It was not put into you by God. You acquired it somewhere along the way: you took it on yourself, or it was put into you by the environment in which you live. Whatever it was, fear is removable.

You are not condemned to live with fear all your life. The Bhagwad Gita tells us: Be free from fear. Be fearless and have faith in the divine.

The uncertainties of life have to be taken on, in the spirit of acceptance. Escape and running away are no solutions. Life demands of us that we live with courage. Without the courage to act, justice would be impossible. Without the courage to love, compassion and understanding would not exist. Without the courage to endure, faith and hope would not flourish!

We must never underestimate mind-power, the power of will. Freedom from fear - as well as our own health, happiness and harmony - depends on thought-habits. Even happiness is the product of habitual right-thinking. Mental sunshine will cause the flowers of peace, joy and serenity to bloom wherever you go! Therefore, cultivate the will to be unafraid - create your own mental sunshine!

Dada Vaswani

India must come out of UN: It's a compromised body

PROF HARI OM



On May 27, United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) President, Volkan Bozkir, crossed the red line and openly, in a most brazen manner sided with the aggressor Pakistan. That day, he addressed press conference, along with Pakistan Foreign Minister, Shah Mahmood Qureshi at Islamabad and made a number of utterly unacceptable and provocative statements indicating his support for Pakistan and bias against India. He virtually equated Palestine with J&K and asked Pakistan to raise so-called Kashmir issue more vigorously at United Nations (UN).

"I think it is the duty, especially Pakistan's, to bring this (Kashmir issue) to the UN platform more strongly," said compromised Bozkir, adding, "He agreed that Palestinian issue and Kashmir issue were of the same age" and that "the status of J&K should not be changed". Obviously, he referred to the abrogation of pernicious Articles 35A and 370, bifurcation of J&K and creation of Union Territories of J&K and Ladakh.

What compromised UNGA President said was against both what the August 13,

1948 UN Security Council Resolution provided and what UN Secretary General Kofi Annan said on March 17, 2001. What did the UN Security Council Resolution say? It, inter-alia, said: "The Governments of India and Pakistan agree that their respective High Commands will issue separately and simultaneously a cease-fire order to apply to all forces under their control in the State of J&K as of the earliest practicable date or dates to be mutually agreed upon within four days after these proposals have been accepted by both Governments. As the presence of troops of Pakistan in the territory of the State of J&K constitutes a material change in the situation since it was represented by the Government of Pakistan before the Security Council, the Government of Pakistan agrees to withdraw its troops from that State. The Government of Pakistan will use its best endeavor to secure the withdrawal from the State of J&K of tribesmen and Pakistan nationals not normally resident therein who have entered the State for the purpose of fighting. Pending a final solution the territory evacuated by the Pakistan troops will be administered by the local authorities under the surveillance of the Commission. Pending the acceptance of the conditions for a final settlement of the situation in the State of J&K, the Indian Government will maintain within the lines existing at the moment of cease-fire the minimum strength of its

forces which in agreement with the Commission are considered necessary to assist local authorities in the observance of law and order. The Commission will have observers stationed where it deems necessary. The Government of India will undertake to ensure that the Government of the State of J&K will take all measures within their power to make it publicly known that peace, law and order will be safeguarded and that all human and political rights will be guaranteed".

This Resolution clearly asked Pakistan to withdraw its troops before plebiscite could organized in the State of J&K as it existed on August 15, 1947. It also recognized the Indian sovereignty over the whole of J&K by allowing it to station troops in the areas to be vacated by Pakistan to maintain law and order there. But Pakistan didn't vacate the aggression. Instead, it changed the political status of what we call PoJK by merging Gilgit-Baltistan with Pakistan and handing over a huge chunk of its land to China

And what did UN Secretary General Kofi Annan do and say between March 11 and 17, 2001? He rejected outright Pakistan's persistent demand for implementation of the UN resolutions on J&K and said these were not self-enforcing and the only way out was negotiations between the two parties.

"There are Security Council resolutions which are important, but they are not self-enforcing," Annan told reporters, on the last

leg of his four-nation tour of South Asia. He also rejected the Pakistani demand seeking establishment of separate UN Human Rights Commission for J&K He made these important statements after wide-ranging one-to-one talks with External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh, which were followed by delegation-level parleys.

It needs to be underlined that Kofi Annan had explained as to why the UN resolutions on J&K could not be implemented on the lines of the resolutions on East Timor. He had said, "There were two types of UN Resolutions: those falling under chapter seven and others under chapter six of the UN Charter. Resolutions on J&K, which fall under chapter six, are essentially about peace-making and wherein both the parties to the dispute agree to UN intervention. A resolution under chapter six can also be rejected by either party without involving any sort of punitive action."

Indeed, what Kofi Annan said was what was described as a 'rude shock for Pakistan', which had been projecting the 'Kashmir issue' as the 'core problem of South Asia'.

It is heartening that India lashed out at UNGA President Bozkir on May 29 over his what New Delhi called 'misleading' remarks on 'Kashmir issue'. However, it was not enough given the nature of the nasty stand that he took. India must exercise the option of coming out of the UN, which is a compromised and biased body.

Impacts of COVID-19 on biodiversity

HAMNA TARAQ BUTT

Globally, the COVID-19 pandemic affected the environment, placing a strain on economy and all parts of human society. The effects of COVID-19 are inevitable. COVID-19 pandemic affected virtually all sectors and the biodiversity conservation sector at local, regional and global levels. Its effects on biodiversity conservation are many and either negative or positive in form, but the negative impact outweighed the positive one. In the same vein as the previous disease outbreaks, COVID-19 led to the inability to manage the protected areas and carry out conservation programs because of the total lockdown. The effects include:

- Loss of Skilled Personnel and Funds: Economically, pandemics imposes high financial costs on both government and conservation organization. The highly trained staff lost to a pandemic is devastating in developing countries where conservation capacity is limited. For instance, 40 Rangers experienced job losses in the Mara Nabiseo Conservancy in Kenya because of the pandemic on tourism revenues used to pay their salaries. In the same vein, Waithaka (2020) confirmed the loss of employment and livelihood among the protected area staff in most African countries because of 60-100 per cent tourism revenue loss. Therefore, the training cost for the newly employed will be high.
- Ineffective and Lukewarm Staff: Absenteeism will be on the rise among the personnel. Psychologically, staff members will choose to care for their sick relatives than going to work. For instance, many protected areas in Nepal, Africa, Latin America and other parts of Asia experienced poor attendance by workers because of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. This personnel attitude led to an increased number of poaching incidents, deforestation, bushmeat consumption and wildlife loss in Uganda and Cambodia during the lockdown period in the year 2020.
- Weakened Performance in the Protected Area: Practically, there will be little or no management/supervision of patrols for the superior officers to mandate patrol are all home with their family because of the lockdown. Therefore, the rangers will not be effective in patrols around the park and making it possible for poachers neighboring the PAs to gain easy access and poach the wildlife resources. In Africa, 57 per cent of the countries reported the pandemic affected conducting regular field patrols in the protected areas during the lockdown period in the year 2020. Contrarily, the number of Rangers' patrols increased in 14 popular European National and Nature Parks during and after the first and second local restrictions because of the provision of personal protective equipment and installing plexiglass barriers in tourism hotspots. Also, an increase in the rate of illnesses and deaths among the protected area rangers, senior officials, game

guards, and other conservation bodies' personnel will weaken their performance in the protected areas. This situation occurs when the wildlife staff finds it difficult to execute their duties and enforce the law when sick. Even the most committed worker will become less or unproductive because of successive bereavement that will undermine their morale and enthusiasm. Poachers will take advantage to hunt wildlife illegally while wildlife staff members are sick, looking after their sick relatives, or attending funerals.

Reduced Revenue and Staff Strength: Tourism revenue is the source of funding for protected area agencies. It provides the means for livelihood improvement of local communities and national development through foreign exchange. Loss of tourism revenues in protected areas leads to joblessness through staff dismissal and non-organized monitoring programs. Presently, there is insufficient data on the impact of the COVID-19 on tourism revenues in various countries. The fluctuation of the tourist number in the world can better explain the dynamics of tourism revenue. According to UNWTO (2020), 100 per cent of countries with tourism destinations introduced travel restrictions because of COVID-19, and the pandemic caused a drastic decrease in tourist numbers (290-440 million) at a rate of 20-30 per cent during 2020 globally.

Human/Resource Conflict: The effect of lockdown and other pandemic associated factors can cause conflicts and destruction of natural resources. For instance, conflicts will arise when the behavior of local people changes because of difficult livelihood. The inability of rural households to farm and food insecurity leads to increased poverty among the local communities. According to the World Bank (2020), the COVID-19 pandemic will exacerbate the poverty of 176 million people worldwide. The high poverty rate will increase the dependence of vulnerable communities and households on natural resources (FAO, 2020). In Thailand, reversed migration to rural areas occurred among those who lost their jobs in the urban area. This migration led to undue pressure on natural resources in protected areas. Also, households that have lost their breadwinners to the course of the pandemic will be alone without an option for meeting their subsistence and income needs. World Bank (2020) stated that pandemic incapacitated productive adults in the household. Therefore, they divert to other available strategies which are unsustainable and ecologically destructive such as the killing of wildlife species and destruction of habitats so as for them to cope.

Increase in Local Exploitation: The physical environment is also affected as many plants and animals exploited. During this present pandemic (COVID-19), many wild animals species killed by the locals for consumption. The pandemics

have also aroused the beliefs of susceptible households in countries with biodiversity-rich ecosystem resulting in land clearing, illegal logging and mining. This belief change contributed to the overexploitation of biodiversity resources for their survival. For instance, the forest clearing in the Brazilian Amazon increased by 34 per cent during the pandemic in 2020. Besides, natural resources extracted for traditional medicines. On a quest to find treatments for the pandemic and related chronic diseases by traditional healers, concoctions made from parts of wild animals and some forest trees. This method of treating pandemic can cause harm to the environment. According to Somerville (2020), the illegal harvest of Rhinoceros (Dicerobicornis and Ceratotheriumsimum) increased in Botswana because of the high demand for its horn to treat the COVID-19 virus in traditional Chinese medicine.

Lack of Research, Assessment, and Monitoring on Biodiversity: The inability to conduct research and or identify the changes (lost and or movement of new species into an ecosystem) in the elements of biological diversity through monitoring programmes in a protected landscape speed up the rates of loss. Lockdown and social distancing because of the pandemic will inhibit rangers and other conservation scientists to provide information on the trends in primary species and other aspects of PAs. Many research, internship/industrial training in wildlife/biodiversity conservation disrupted. Researchers can no longer conduct field-based social research that requires interviews or focus groups because of the possibility of disease transmission. The continuing shortage of funds can be the fundamental barrier to biodiversity assessment and more effective monitoring programmes in Africa. This fund shortage exacerbates the unprecedented global recession driven by the COVID-19 pandemic. In the absence of such informative data, the missed research means missed opportunities to identify conservation priorities, monitor the health of endangered species and ecosystems, and provide practical solutions for the protection and sustainable use of resources on which human well-being depends.

COVID-19 pandemic remains a threat to biodiversity conservation through tourism revenue loss in PAs. The financial loss affects the budget, population monitoring/assessment programmes, and job loss to negative human behavior that drives human-wildlife conflicts and natural resources destruction. Pollution and poaching activities may increase or decrease depending on accessibility to locals and vehicular restriction to long-distant poachers. In conclusion, there is a need to end illegal wildlife trade globally to prevent future pandemic and biodiversity loss.

Mata Roopa Bhawani



DR DALEEP PANDITA

Sadhvi Swarupa of Mata Sharika of Hari Parbat in Kashmir is commonly referred as Mata Roopa Bhawani according to Kashmiri Hindu ethos. Roopa Bhawani literally means form of the Primordial Mother Bhawani. Roopa means 'Form' and Bhawani means 'Mother Creatrix'.

It is believed that pleased with his great devotion, Mata Sharika in form of a little girl appeared before her staunch Kashmiri Pandit devotee Madhav Joo during auspicious occasion of Brahma Muhurta and asked him, "Speak out your wish." Prostrated at Mata's feet, he submitted, "I wish you are born as my daughter." Mata Sharika granted the boon and a girl child was born to his wife in early morning of Maag Jyaistha Purnamasi 1621 AD at Safakadal locality in Srinagar city of Kashmir, which chronicled as the birth of Mata Roopa Bhawani.

Mata Roopa Bhawani, the renowned Yogini and a reputed spiritual poetess, occupies an iconic grandstanding in religio-spiritual tradition of Kashmir. Mata is one of the most revered scholar and saint, who is known for her masterful spiritual wisdom of the mystic occurrences, transcendental perceptions and social assertions. Her soul stirring sayings and sermons in Kashmiri most commonly known as Vakhhs, enormously popular among her devotees, are full of metaphysical truths, incorporeal perfections, Yogic realizations and true to mundane life discernments.

At that time, the birth of a girl child in a Kashmiri Pandit family was believed to be the form of Mata Raganya or Mata Durga or Mata Lakshmi, hence she was named as 'Alakshyeshwari', meaning one who is unnoticeable. It is also referred to Goddess in unnoticeable forms of life. It is said that since her birth, the baby girl had spiritual powers and filled in with divine touch. Maintaining his family traditions, her father, as her Guru, continued to preach teachings of Vedas and Upanishads at a tender age. Mata grew up in the profound religiously righteous and spiritual ambience of her home under guidance of her father. He was her first Shiksha and Deeksha guru in time-honoured Guru-Shishya tradition as per our Vedic culture.

From her early childhood days, Mata started to reshape prevailing Kashmiri household culture into divine sanity and encouraged spiritual devotion that helped in reduction of difference of opinion and resolution of various socio religious conflicts. Delicately Mata also started cultivating tolerance that generated love for each other and started becoming a social-reformer.

For want of a solitary location for continuing her spiritual Sadhana, Mata went to Manigam, then to Vaskura followed by Cheshma-Sahib, all serene village hamlets in central Kashmir, away from the materialistic world. She preferred to remain in company of saints, learned people and devotees all over to follow the path of spirituality. The great old Chinar tree on the banks of river Sindh in Manigam, culmination of a half-burnt branch planted by Mata, is still standing there as a mute but living witness to her spirituality. A blind man who sincerely served Mata with his full devotion, got back his vision and to address water woes of locals, Mata dug a well at Vaskura, whose water is considered to be pure and pious still, are some of the miracles Mata did for her devotees. Mata's brother, also her devotee, requested her to bless his illiterate son. Mata gave him a pen and paper and asked him to write and he got transformed into an educated person. Mata preached much needed awareness among innocent women for development of their divine feeling of self respect and nurtured their sentiments for the eternal peace for the peace of the society, which under present times is seen as 'women empowerment'. Mata was a Goddess born on earth with a religio-spiritual purpose and her legendary life and Vakhhs shall continue to enrich us to move forward on the right path of life.

Ruhani Gupta, New Plots, Jammu.

YOUR COLUMN Women deserve respect & love

Dear Editor,

The role played by women of managing household well, nurturing children and doing infinite services to their family is of great importance. The working women strive to maintain a balance between office and household chores. Women's contribution to the world can be considered more positive than men's. Their worth can be best recognized by imagining their absence from the world. Imagine how chaotic and problematic it could become!

The erased idea of love and lack of romantic songs will surely make the world a dull place of scary and solitary men. New-generations would never be born and thereby the end of human civilization.

Moreover, when it comes to respect, every creation deserves respect and admiration. Women have stronger emotional endurance and are in no way less than men. In recent times, education has empowered them and given wings to move ahead to desired locations. But, they face every day a series of challenges and constant struggle to survive.

The worsening social atmosphere of molestation and violence has made the whole world unsafe for them. The brutalities suffered by them create a big question mark on humanity.