

# SACH

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## Kartarpur Corridor : Road to Peace

The historic Kartarpur corridor between arch-rivals India and Pakistan was thrown open ahead of the 550th birth anniversary of Sikhism founder Guru Nanak Dev on 9 November 2019. Kartarpur corridor, a secure, visa-free passage is a landmark peace move on the part of leaders in South Asia on ways to promote and respect religious diversity. It symbolizes respect for the minority Sikh religion in both India and Pakistan where inter-religious respect has been the most problematic issue. The corridor links Gurudwara Darbar Sahib in Pakistan's Kartarpur, the final resting place of Sikh faith's founder Guru Nanak Dev, to Dera Baba Nanak shrine in India's Gurdaspur district. The peace corridor would allow Sikh pilgrims from India to travel to Gurudwara Kartarpur Sahib – one of Sikhism's holiest pilgrimage sites. Kartarpur marks the most significant and constructive phase in the life of Guru Nanak Dev. He made Kartarpur Sahib, (Land of Kartar, God the Creator ) on the banks of the river Ravi his abode towards the later part of his life and it was here he laid the foundations of a new faith in a commune he set up. For more than seven decades and indeed, even before the events leading up to Partition, Sikhs have traditionally pleaded for access to their gurudwaras in Pakistan Punjab and Darbar Sahib topped that list. Kartarpur Gurudwara is not just a sacred place for Sikhs but for people from other communities as well. It is said that when Guru Nanak left for his heavenly abode, his followers, Hindus and Muslims who initially fought claiming the body for final rites, finally decided to place flowers on his body overnight and whose flowers would wither would lose the claim. Next morning when the sheet was removed, the followers were amazed to find that the body of the Guru was missing and all flowers were fresh. The two communities divided the sheet and flowers and completed the final rites as per their faith. Presently both a grave and a Samad coexist at Kartarpur Sahib.

While bilateral ties between India and Pakistan dipped to an extreme low in the last few years, the two sides continued talks on the corridor and did not let the construction of the Kartarpur passage become a hostage to relations between the two countries. The move represents a rare instance of co-operation between the two countries, which have fought three wars against each other since independence. The coming together of so many political personalities from both Indian and Pakistan across the political divide during the inaugural ceremony suggests the significance of this holy corridor. So far the visits by pilgrims of both sides, made possible by a protocol signed by the two countries in 1974, are among the few people-to-people contacts that have survived the tensions and have characterised bilateral relations in recent years. Visa free travel will not only lay the foundation for shared inter-Punjab contacts but also significantly contribute in strengthening people-to-people relations between Pakistanis and Indians and in the long run, it will bring the two neighbours together. Corridor opening is a development of huge importance towards peace building process between the two South Asian neighbours. It is also considered important from a "conflict resolution" perspective which would contribute in establishing peace and stability in South Asia region.

# 'I Can't Wait'

By: **B.BOB**, USA

*In present times when power and greed have become an uttermost priority of politicians and democracy is dying in their hands. When we have no sane leadership and citizenship is in crisis. We the people are waiting for someone who will care about society and social values with honesty, who will restore democracy and will put the nation above his/her personal attributes.*

I can't wait till once again  
We have a president who's sane;  
Whose meaningless words "No collusion!"  
Don't become a daily refrain;

Who cares about people and country  
More than profits and dividends;  
Who places trust in allies and doesn't  
Treat our adversaries as friends;

Whose charitable foundation isn't  
Merely a personal slush fund or scam;  
Whose kids aren't part of shady deals;  
Whose spouse really gives a \*\*\*\*;

Who has integrity and doesn't  
Give hateful fringe groups praise;  
Whose job applicants don't need  
The word "crook" on their résumés;

Who wins elections honestly  
And doesn't rely on outside assistance;  
For whom the use of lies and deceit  
Is NOT the path of least resistance;

Who wants border security but doesn't  
Constantly harp on a senseless wall;  
Whose behavior is much, much more  
Refined and LESS Neanderthal;

Who truly believes in democracy  
And fully supports the rule of law;  
Who doesn't expose ignorant views  
In daily tweets of blah, blah, blah;  
Who, when putting words together,  
Could prove to be more prolific;  
Whose daily repertoire has more  
Adjectives than "great" and "terrific";

Whose team is not constantly  
Involved in ethics violations;  
Who in his first years of office isn't  
In seventeen investigations.

Sooner or later, things will change.  
But judging from every indicator,  
It's suddenly starting to look as though  
Relief might come sooner than later.

*Courtesy : Hello Poetry*

# Phool Walon Ki Sair : A Festival of Communal Harmony Among Hindus and Muslims

By ABHISHEK KUMAR and HARSHVARDHAN INDIA

**PHOOL** walon ki sair (Procession of the Florists) is one of the oldest public festivals held annually in Delhi. The origin of this festival goes back to the early decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century during the rule of the penultimate Mughal Emperor, Akbar Shah II (1806-1837). The festival is held in Mehrauli, one of the seven ancient cities that make up Delhi, after the monsoon season. In contemporary times, the festival is organised by the civil society organisation *Anjuman Sair-e-Gul-Faroshan*. Conducted over the course of seven days, the festival aims to promote communal harmony among Hindus and Muslims.

The contemporary border of Delhi encloses within itself seven historical cities. Together, they have seen the rise and fall of multiple empires and dynasties. Apart from being the capital, Delhi is also a city of stories and one such story is about the last days of the Mughal Empire and the beginning of Colonial rule. The story of Phool walon ki sair binds multiple histories of Delhi across



different timelines. It connects Shajahanabad — the Mughal seat of power — to the legends of the Mahabharata. It connects the old city of Mehrauli — the seat of power of the last Tomar kings and the first dynasty of the Delhi Sultanate — to today's New Delhi at Raisina Hill. It also connects spiritual power with temporal power.

At the centre of the story are two places of worship belonging to different communities: the dargah of Bakhtiar Kaki and the temple of Yogmaya. The Yogmaya temple finds its roots in the events of Mahabharata. Yogmaya is the elder sister of Krishna, who fled from the grip of her maternal uncle. It is believed that after the end of the Great War, Krishna brought the victorious pandavas to the Yogmaya temple to seek her blessings. Qutbuddin Bakhtiar Kaki was a great Sufi mystic, a disciple and spiritual successor of Moinuddin Chisti — the Persian Sufi mystic who settled in India. According to the Sufi tradition of India,

Bakhtiar Kaki is considered the highest-ranking Sufi saint of Delhi. He was held in high esteem by the then ruler of Delhi, Illtutmish, and later by the Lodhi Dynasty.

### THE STORY OF THE FESTIVAL

As per the website and booklet of the Anjuman, the widely accepted story consists of historically accurate events. According to it, the origin of the festival is this:

The origin of "Phool Waalon Ki Sair" goes to history during the reign of the Mughal King Akbar Shah II (1808 to 1837). Akbar Shah-II wanted to nominate his younger son Mirza Jahangir as the Heir Apparent (Wali-Ahad) in preference to his elder son Sirajuddin 'Zafar'. This move was not liked by the then British Resident in the Red Fort, Sir Archibald Seton. Once Mirza Jahangir who was a reckless youth of 19 insulted Seton in open court and called him "Looloo". The British Resident did not react to this insult as probably he did not understand the meaning of "Looloo". After a few days, when Mirza Jahangir was merry making on the roof of Naubat Khana in Red Fort, Archibald Seton was coming from the darbar after an audience with the King. Mirza Jahangir fired a shot at the Resident from the roof of Naubat Khana. Seton escaped but his orderly was killed. For this act of his, Mirza Jahangir was exiled to Allahabad under orders of the British Resident.

The mother of Mirza Jahangir, Queen Mumtaz Mahal Begum, was distraught and took a vow that if her son was released from Allahabad and allowed to return to Delhi, she would offer a chaadar of flowers at the Dargah of Khwaja Bakhtiar "Kaaki" at Mehrauli. After a couple of years Mirza Jahangir was released and Mumtaz Mahal Begum went to Mehrauli to redeem her vow. With her the Imperial Court also shifted to Mehrauli and so did the entire population of Delhi. For seven days all sorts of merry making continued at Mehrauli with Jhoolas (swings) in the mango groves, cock fighting and bull baiting, kite-flying, wrestling and swimming bouts. Amidst all this merry making with great

pomp and show, a chaadar made of flowers was offered at the Dargah of Khwaja Bakhtiar "Kaaki". The Mughal King was secular minded and under his orders floral offering in the shape of a floral pankha was offered at the famous Temple of Yogmayaji which is also in Mehrauli, and it became a festival named by the King as "Phool Waalon Ki Sair".

Seeing the response of the people and sensing the enthusiasm generated, it was decided that the Festival will be held annually after the rains and people of all communities will offer pankha and chaadar at the Dargah of Khwaja Bakhtiar "Kaaki" and pankha and floral offering at Yogmayaji temple. The Darbar was also shifted to Mehrauli for the seven days of the Festival. The Festival reached its pinnacle during the reign of Sirajuddin "Zafar", the last Mughal emperor also known as Bahadur Shah "Zafar". Bahadur Shah "Zafar" went to celebrate "Phool Waalon Ki Sair" even in 1857 when Delhi was under siege of the British. This was the last "Phool Waalon Ki Sair" under the Mughals.

This "official" story was confirmed by the local pandit at the Yogmaya temple, by the caretakers of the darghas and by the local participants. We can also say that the story of Phool walon ki sair, apart from being a historical bridge, is the story of a mother's love for her son, of deep religious piety and also of — as has been suggested lately — proto anticolonial mobilisation by the last scion of the Mughal Dynasty.

The festival, since its inception, is linked with state and political power. Even after the end of Mughal Empire and with the establishment of British sovereignty, the festival continued to be organised except for a brief interregnum following the rebellion of 1857. In later years, the festival was organised under the patronage of the British Imperial government, but was again stopped during the Quit India Movement in 1942. The festival was restarted in 1961, due to the combined efforts of Jawaharlal Nehru, Yogeshwar Dayal and Noorudin Ahmed with an aim to promote the Ganga-Jamuni Tehzeeb. The scope of the



festival was further expanded by Indira Gandhi when she asked other Indian states to participate in the festival. Today, the festival is organised under the active patronage of the AAP-led Delhi government.

#### PHOOL WALON KI SAIR 2019

This year the festival was held over seven days with numerous public activities and cultural events along with the participation of political and administrative leaders. These activities included a painting competition for students on the theme of communal harmony; a procession of *pankhaas* from Chandni Chowk to India Gate, led by traditional musicians; presentation of *pankhaas* to the Chief Minister, Lieutenant Governor, and other prominent members of the Delhi state administration; and performances by cultural troops.

The location of the activities brought out their syncretic character. On the fifth day, the centre of the festival was the dargah of Qutbuddin Bakhtiar Kaki, where the

Lt Governor offer floral *chaddar* and *pankhaas* which was followed by qawwali performances. The next day, the activities shifted to the Yogmaya temple, where the Revenue Minister of Delhi offered floral *Chhattara* (Umbrella) and *pankhaas* to the deity, followed by a programme of Radha-Krishna songs.

The final day of the festival saw performances by cultural troops from Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Gujarat. The celebrations were held at the Jahaz Mahal in Mehrauli. The office of the President of India also sent two *pankhaas* as offering. After the performances, a *shobhayatra* was conducted from the Jahaz Mahal which moved slowly through the congested lanes of Mehrauli Market and later split into two groups. One group proceeded towards the dargah and the other group towards the Yogmaya temple. The *pankhaas* gifted by the participating states and the President were presented at both places of worship.

The above account of this year's Phool walon ki sair, is repeated every year with very minor differences in terms of participating states, performances and state officials who visit the dargah and temple. In sociology, one of the ways in which "ritualism" has been understood is as "the re-enactment of past events to keep the memory alive". If seen from this perspective, Phool walon ki sair is an annual civil ritual embedded with religious motifs, which has kept alive the events of the last years of the Mughal Empire. The people who conduct this "public ritual" are constant. The same set of people have been making and carrying the floral *pankhaas* over the years. The same groups of musicians have been playing the shehnai over the years. The head shehnai player has an important role in this festival. He is the one who ties a turban on the head of government officials in attendance. The head player told us that his father had been performing this duty before him.

As noted above, the festival has always been linked with power and politics. In the postcolonial context, successive governments promoted the festival as a symbol of communal harmony. Ever since its revival in 1961, the festival has only become deeply linked with political power to such a degree, that the festival today has become just another government event in the eyes of the participants. But this link with the state is also perceived as a way of continuing tradition. When asked about why the Lt Governor was coming to the dargah, one respondent answered that "Bakhtiar Kaki is the oldest patron saint of Delhi and whosoever rules Delhi must come to pay homage to the saint. From Illtutmish, to the Mughals, to the Britishers and finally to Lt Governor of Delhi, everyone comes here to pay their homage".

In the public imagination, the celebrations are linked with secularism. When asked why this festival is celebrated, one respondent at the dargah said, "Hindus and Muslims should live like brothers, all this communal hatred is not because common

Hindus and Muslims hate each other, but it is because of the politicians of both religions". While the hearings on the Ayodhya-Babri Masjid case was going on during the festival, another respondent at the Dargah said, "Look, in the event of violence, the Hindu pandit will go to Haridwar, while the maulana will fly to Saudi, but us common people have to live here. Instead of demanding for construction of masjid at Ayodhya, Muslims should focus on protecting their local mosques, which are in ruins, and Hindus should care for their local temples, which are also in ruins. They shouldn't focus on a faraway temple because a majority of people from both communities visit their local temples and mosque". Similarly, the priest at the temple also said that, "The purpose of this festival is to create communal harmony as we all are children of one god".

But despite a longstanding socio-cultural history and enthusiastic state patronage, the festival is losing its sheen. This might be because of the same state patrons who have revived it. Over the last few years, the Delhi government has so actively involved itself, that people have started to think that it is merely a "government event". We were not able to see much enthusiasm or excitement or even a festive mood. People did participate, but it appeared to be more in order to see the cultural performances and the political and administrative leaders in person than to do with the festival itself.

In contemporary times, when communal hatred is only growing with each passing day, the significance of a festival which has its origin in ideas of communal harmony becomes very important, and it becomes a site for the much needed inter-faith dialogue. Also, a festival like phool walon ki sair is important in itself for its historical significance. Therefore, the organisers, along with the state government and concerned citizens should focus more on making this extremely important public festival more participatory.

*Courtesy : Indian Cultural Forum*

# Preserving Purity of Festivals

By BABU RAM NEUPANE, NEPAL

**MAJOR** festivals across cultures have their roots in rural life. They also share similar rationale for celebration. The reunion of family members, sharing of good time, food, blessings, and worship of gods/goddesses are their universal themes. Unsurprisingly, they are embraced, modified, and commoditized by the urbanites, exurbanites and suburbanites in no time.

The indigenous (farmer) Newari communities around the Kathmandu Valley celebrate Gathamuga, which involves burning of putla (effigies) of the spirits (invoked to aid in bringing a good monsoon and crops) upon placating them with the offerings of money, flower and food.

And Gaijatra (festival of cow) is celebrated 'to commemorate the death of loved ones with dancing, singing, mirth and laughter'. The residents/onlookers line up at front yards and feed the passing revelers dressed in costumes impersonating cows during the celebrations.

Halloween (celebrated on October 31) and Thanksgiving Day (celebrated on the last Thursday of November) seem to share various aspects of Gaijatra, Deepawali (festival of lights) and Gathamuga. The Halloween is marked by decorated windows with spooky spiders, mummified doors, porches, lawns, and pumpkins carved into black cats. The objective is to ward off the evil spirits.

There are striking similarities between Gathamuga and Halloween. Halloween tradition has its roots in leaving sweets/chocolates at the door as offerings to goblins, ghosts, imps, gnomes, and changelings to

placate them so as to avoid incurring their mischief and wrath.

Children get dressed in fear-inducing and weird-looking costumes and knock the doors in the neighborhood saying 'trick-or-treat' (teat mostly comprises crafty chocolates). This tradition is identical to the donations sought during Deepawali's deusi/bhailo (group singing and dancing for fun) through invocation of Baliraja (demon King Mahabali).

The children allude to trickery/misfortune if they are not offered good treats during Halloween. Similarly, the deusi/bhailo groups chant damning curses if they are not offered any donations: *anna chhunda mato bhajawos* (transliteration: May the crops turn into earth upon contact) or blessings could be encouraging: *mato chhunda suna bhajawos* (transliteration: May the earth turn into gold upon contact). A curse incurred during a cultural festival can have a devastating effect on a family's psyche and is thus avoidable. Dhan Nach (paddy rice dance) festival is celebrated by the indigenous Kirata tribe of the eastern hills of Nepal upon successful completion of harvesting season. It's a celebration of nature's bountiful generosity, and embodiment of Annapurna, the Hindu goddess of food.

## DRAWING PARALLELS

Thanksgiving Day in America echoes Dhan Nach values albeit in a slightly different context. The European settlers had arrived in the New World (America) in winter and they had no food to eat and no resources to trade. Still, the Native Americans shared food with the starving settlers. Henceforth, the settlers

expressed their gratitude to the Native Americans and celebrated the former's generosity by naming it Thanksgiving Day.

Indigenous traditions and festivals keep us tied to our roots and nature. Our very existence and identity get threatened when long held traditions/festivals are circumvented and obscured. A lack of cultural purity further intensifies strife between man and nature.

We are already on a collision course with the Mother Nature due to our insatiable greed for material possession and unjustifiable craving for unnatural (processed) food, which, in turn, have sent the natural order off-balance and triggered unprecedented natural calamities such as floods, landslips, hurricanes and typhoons.

Thanksgiving Day and Black Friday (observed the day after Thanksgiving Day) have now been publicly mischaracterized as the heydays of capitalism/materialism since many inessential and soon-to-be-dumped non-food consumer products are sold in heavy discounts to the consumers (particularly in America).

Deusi and bhailo traditions have also been used as pretexts to extracting money/donation (from businesses, families, and individuals) which is spent mostly on outings and cocktail parties. It provides venues for romantic encounters among the young participants resulting into more businesses for abortion clinics.

Lust has always proved to be beneficial to shady abortion businesses even as organic love and romance traditions fade under any political systems, most of which are flawed, and some are more flawed than others, to borrow the Orwellian parlance.

On a positive note, Thanksgiving Day and Black Friday offer golden opportunities to the people left behind in the economy to make purchase of some products stacked on their wish list as the prices are heavily marked down. Likewise, many local mothers' groups and community organizations in Nepal are reported to organize deusi/bhailo program to raise resources to put to good causes.

Light is God. Darkness is Devil. Light is Life and Truth. Darkness is Death. Communities across cultures celebrate festivals of light in one way or the other because they loathe darkness. Light is central to celebration of Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, Dashain, Deepawali and Chhath Pooja. Illumination of houses, streets, riverbanks, ponds and public places brings about true joy among the revelers.

The hanging of festoons woven with multiple flowers, leaves of bar/pipal and mango (considered auspicious to be used during ritual Hindu worship) across the trails, over the roofs of houses, and animal shades is a unique tradition. The worship of the rising and setting sun (read the Sun God) along the ponds and riverbanks during the Chhath Pooja is a spectacle toward achieving rationality, peace and prosperity.

The illumination of the entire house, dhiki/janto (domestic tools made of wood, stone and mud for separating chaff/husk from paddy rice, quinoa, millet, barley, wheat, maize etc and grinding them to flour) and the whole surroundings with makeshift oil lamps made of chopped banana supla (stems). The earthen prayer lamps during Deepawali are as magical as the embellished and illuminated Christmas trees during Christmas.

Deepawali is one of the most organic and musical festivals. It is synonymous with lights, flowers, fruits and festoons. It helps develop young people's leadership capabilities as they wrestle to lead the chorus, sing, and dance. The most reticent boys become the most effective chorus leaders and the shyest girls become the coveted dancers in front of the enraptured audience. Yours truly always underwent overpowering nervousness while participating in deusi chorus. A self destructive consciousness prevented me from immersing in the group-activities.

My tragic illusion of being watched by the whole world betrayed me although few

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# Smokers' Corner : The 'Religious Card'

By NADEEM.F.PARACHA, PAKISTAN

IN 1981, the University Grants Commission of Pakistan issued a directive for authors and publishers of school and college textbooks, which stated, "The depiction of Jinnah should be that of a man of orthodox religious views who sought the creation of an Islamic state. The Ulema should be promoted as genuine heroes of the Pakistan Movement. There should be an emphasis on ritualistic Islam, together with a rejection of liberal interpretations of the religion. The books should guide students towards the ultimate goal of Pakistan, i.e., the creation of a completely Islamised State." The complete text of the directive can be found in *Mutala-i-Pakistan*, published in 1983 by Allama Iqbal Open University.

According to independent researcher Dr Rubina Saigol, in *Enemies Within and Enemies Without* (Futures, vol. 37, 2005), and anthropologist Aminah Mohammad-Arif, in *Manufacturing Citizenship* (ed. V. Benei), the immediate roots of such directives lay in the trauma of the 1971 East Pakistan debacle. The shock of losing East Pakistan was followed by the concern that Muhammad Ali Jinnah's two-nation theory had come into question with the departure of the equally Muslim East Pakistan on the basis of Bengali nationalism.

Saigol writes that, instead of acknowledging the shoddy manner in which West Pakistan's ruling and economic elites had treated East Pakistanis, the state and government of Pakistan began to explain East Pakistan's antagonistic departure as a diabolical conspiracy hatched by the 'enemies of Islam.'

The state and a new government formed

by Z.A. Bhutto's PPP feared that the same 'enemies' would now fan the fires of ethnic nationalism in other provinces. In 1972, a conference was organised by the new regime in which various intellectuals and historians were invited. Shumaila Hemani, in *Representing Pakistan through Folk Music* (University of Alberta, 2011), writes that the session bifurcated into two opposing groups. One group urged that the 'new Pakistan' should be described as a historical sum of various ethnic nationalities and faiths (Islam being one such faith). The other group disagreed, suggesting that a more robust and monolithic form of nationalism be promoted. This proposal was adopted.

This decision gradually evolved into becoming a narrative that explained Pakistani nationhood in an extremely narrow manner. In his 2011 essay for the Mauritian free-expression magazine *Lalit de Klas* (class struggle), sociologist Iqbal Ahmad Khan writes that this narrative eschewed the ideas of pluralism, diversity and moderation, which were inherent in the nationalist rendering of the founders of Pakistan.

In fact, Iqbal held the view that the process of narrowing the idea of Pakistani nationalism actually began in the 1950s, especially after Jinnah's demise. Drawing from the thesis developed in this context by the prominent Pakistani sociologist the late Hamza Alvi, Iqbal writes that the idea of having a separate Muslim country was largely fashioned by middle-class Muslims of India who were struggling to compete against the Hindu middle

classes who were in the majority.

Even though this segment of Muslims demanded a separate Muslim state, they were not envisioning an Islamic state, writes Iqbal. They were visualising a country where Muslims would be in a majority and thus be able to enhance their economic condition more fluently.

According to Iqbal, this is why the 'modernist' aspect of Muslim nationalism formulated by the likes of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, Muhammad Iqbal and Jinnah, appealed to this segment of Muslims. It rationalised the existence of a state in which the Muslim majority did not have to enact a theocracy and was able to pragmatically adopt economic and social modernity, but without compromising its overarching Muslim identity.

Iqbal is of the view that this was clear in the minds of the founders, but things became complicated soon after the creation of Pakistan, when the nascent state was almost immediately confronted by a plethora of economic and political problems. The more the government struggled to address these issues, the more it began to use the so-called 'religious card' to mask its failures.

One often comes across the term 'the religious card'. Keeping in mind Saigol, Arif and Iqbal's thesis, it can be concluded that this 'card' was invented by politicians, then adopted by the state, before becoming a weapon of sorts in the hands of various members of the society, especially after it began to influence the contents of the constitution. Ali Usman Qasmi, in his book *The Ahmadiyya and the Politics of Religious Exclusion in Pakistan*, writes that in 1953 Punjab CM Mumtaz Daultana, in an attempt to distract the media's attention away from an economic crisis in Punjab, did not hesitate to allow religious parties to instigate a violent movement against the Ahmadiyya community.

Iqbal is of the view that the state, governments and religious groups are not the only ones who began to use the religious card. He writes that the "urban bourgeois" constituencies that had originally responded positively to the modernist notions of Islam during the Pakistan Movement, too began to

endorse it by supporting movements against those they feared were threatening their economic well-being.

For example, in 1965, the 'modernist' regime of Ayub Khan questioned the religious beliefs of his opponent Fatima Jinnah. Certainly, a trend had begun to take shape since 1953. In his 2018 essay *The Clarion Call*, Z.Ahmad writes that when the situation in 1969 had greatly deteriorated in East Pakistan, a leader of the Jamiat Ulema-i-Pakistan, Shah Ahmad Noorani, told Gen Yahya (who had replaced Ayub) that the commotion in East Pakistan "was being created by the Ahmadiyya community."

In 1970, the Jamaat-i-Islami chief, Abul Ala Maududi, penned a fatwa against socialism and land reforms, mainly to target Bhutto's PPP. Despite the fact that the Bhutto regime allowed the inclusion of certain 'Islamic clauses' in the 1973 constitution, its attitude towards Islam was attacked when it refused to constitutionally oust the Ahmadiyya from the fold of Islam. By 1974, however, the government capitulated and enacted the Second Amendment, doing just that.

Three years later, the religious card once again came into play against the Bhutto regime by an alliance of religious and other anti-Bhutto parties, some of them secular. In July 1977, the regime was toppled through a coup by Gen Zia whose 11-year dictatorship would go on to actually institutionalise the religious card through draconian ordinances, additional clauses in the constitution and an assortment of directives.

It is through this institution-alisation, fortified by the constitution and textbooks, that the idea of using the religious card became a disconcerting norm. It is frequently used by politicians against each other; by the state to undermine so-called 'anti-state elements,' and even by various segments of society to settle scores and grudges. In a way, it rationalises the act of initiating mob violence against 'enemies' and the demonisation of opponents, on the basis of faith, to achieve entirely cynical goals.

*Courtesy : Dawn*

# Memoirs of the Kabuliwaala : A Testimony to Indo-Afghan Relations

By PITAMBER KAUSHIK, INDIA

**MY** family members fondly recall the charming, genial, irradiant persona of the Kabulliwallah, hearty, humorous simpletons who narrated dramatic anecdotes and elaborate descriptions of distant lands. Unlike the manipulative, adulterating, exploitative native banias of the village, they sold goods from original sources, unaltered in form, pure, uncontaminated and intense, at candid, modest prices. They thus built repute for their honesty and immaculate moral integrity, in spite of the

prevalent suspicion and prejudices of the era - both generic (against any outsider even hailing from a different village in the same state) to ones specific towards frontier-dwellers, typecasting them as uncouth, unrefined, brutish and boorish. The latter archetype was partly owing to a wave of homologous assailants and conquistadors who invaded medieval India throughout the course of the millennium with the mountain passes in the Hindu Kush being the natural entry passage,



leading to a misattribution of even the Turkic and Mongoloid invaders to the place.

Deriving sustenance and livelihood, and just that, was the sole purpose of their trade; monetary materialism never impelled these mercantile transhumans. They put impetus on seeing facets of life that prevail the aalam (world) of the parwardigaar (Nourisher, raiser and sustainer of the world: The Almighty), and amassing the treasure of exploration, experience, adventures and memories. They stressed living a simple, frugal but eventful, diverse life and emphasized the bond all humans share, notwithstanding individual differences, and disregarding petty sectarian bounds.

Akin to a mobile weekly Baazaar, the seasonally recurring transhuman traders, The Kabulliwallahs were traditionally the most eagerly-awaited guests in India. Irrespective of the region, terrain or habitat, Indian households urban and rural alike, counted on annual, biannual or even more frequent visits from these farfetched yet close-to-heart highlanders. Unlike traditional immigrants, vagabonds, tramps or drifters, who were met with skepticism or condescension, Afghan traders, came to be warmly welcomed.

Semiprecious gemstones, predominantly the endemic lapis lazuli, (long the exclusive source of the coveted imperial hue of ultramarine, used for regalia), Chickpeas (Kaabuli Chanaa i.e. Gram of Kabul), Rock Salt, Black Salt, traditional herbs and remedies brewed thereof, especially vitality-boosting folk medicines, and motley spices were the frequent subject of sale, besides occasional artefacts. Peddling these articles and items was a vulnerable job and traders were prone to loot - exposed to wandering bandits, thugees, pindaris, etc whilst trudging in the wilderness. Undertaking a perilous journey winding and traversing through tricky mountain passes, arid stretches, badlands vast expanses of hillocks and ravines, and vast thickly forested tracts. Being straightforward, candid, generous and credulous people, they were also soft targets to rumourmongers, manipulation and underhanded scapegoating, such as being framed for child abduction and thievery, often

at hands of the very perpetrators themselves. The native conmen would instigate the village folk against them, and subsequently loot them. However, overtime their integrity of character, consistent conscientious sanction and solid conduct established a credential of uncompromising virtue, and undented hard-earned repute. They transitioned from the susceptible to the dependable, being augmented into vernacular colloquialisms and local parlance as cultural exemplaries. It won't be an overstatement to proclaim that they became the analogical motifs for virtues of courage, vigour, gallantry, and sincerity. They were popular with children, whom they brought fascinating tales of distant lands, and showered with affection and petty novelties, often freebies. The Kabulliwallahs thus played a pivotal role in cultural exchange; in the mercantile process, transmitting tales everywhere and inadvertently accomplishing an information dissemination between various otherwise geographically isolated provinces. Indeed, they were a testimony to human zeal, and defied the doctrine that geographical isolation implied cultural alienation.

Kabulliwallahs were sparingly, if ever treated as other tramps, and ordinary vagabonds: being coveted visitors, engaging conversators, and capturing folk imagination, trickling into various mainstream literary narratives and dins of the rural folk. Although eking out a humble living, a popular saying in India labels them as having hearts of gold, and as vast as the fields. Though they dwelt arid lands, their hearts were teeming meads, pastures and gardens, where unbridled tales grazed. Fascinating tales of Indian lands were also frequently the subjects of minstrelling and qissagoi of wandering bards, back in the frontiers.

Memoirs of Kabulliwallahs rescuing and salvaging children and men in need or critical situations, at times, sacrificing own selves have been popular narratives in stories regarding them. Eastern India and Afghanistan shared a relation, notwithstanding and circumventing intermittent regions as Pakistan and West India, making it sad that modern cultural ties bear privy and dependence to mediators and

liaisons. Afghanis and Indians as far east as Bangladesh shared a direct heart-to heart bond, with a chunk of Afghanistan to be found in every Indian kitchen (where spices are vital and venerated) and every storyteller's captivating repertoire of of enrapturing tales of distant lands. Despite being susceptible to the myriad dangers venturing through wilderness, the traders loved the land, its diversity, eclectic tehzeeb, and looked forward to each visit. The eager await to visit India at times negated if not outweighed the temporary parting from their families. Despite, and perhaps because of, their cultural dissimilarities, Indians and Afghans were mutually charmed by respective, vivid cultural descriptions and resonated with the idea of Universal Brotherhood and Vasudhaev Kutumbakam. The shared heritage of mutual reverence for guests and fondness of narration,

human interaction and novelty strung the subcontinent together. The interfaith candour bypassed distinctions of nationality, regionalism and religion, whatsoever, hence forging the purest and most-selfless of friendships. It's thus aching to see that Indo-Afghan relations today don't often bypass the geopolitical intermediary Pakistan, and are reliant on the occasional shared animosity towards Pakistan, and the mutual sympathy of predicament of Pakistan-grown terror. This inherent underlying unity of humanity is immortalized in Tagore's short story Kabuliwala, a touching tale of generosity, integrity, transcendental friendship, and pluralism; subsequently adapted into an eponymous 1961 film, widely considered to be an unprecedented cinematic milestone.

*Courtesy : Outlook Afghanistan*

## Preserving Purity of Festivals

*Continued from page 8*

may have noticed me. Self and cosmic awareness are constructive forces while self-consciousness is oftentimes a recipe for failure as it saps one's energy from outside and within. The rainbow colored tika on the forehead of sisters and brothers, dhaka topi (traditional Nepali headgear made of fine cotton) and gunyu choli (lower and upper part of traditional women's dress) and the garlands of sayapatri (marigold), amaranth (makhamali), and gurdauli (chrysanthemum) flowers all add to the splendor of Deepawali/Tihar.

### **SAVE THE EARTH**

A submission to nature facilitates telepathy between mankind and the cosmic force. The spirituality practiced in tandem with nature brings about solace in life. Thus, an indiscreet exploitation of nature is a step toward annihilation. However, we can make course correction to absolve ourselves of all

the sins we have committed so far by singing and praying toward the wellbeing of the earth that we share with the rest of creatures that inhabit it.

Apes live in groups in forests and protect each other, their territory, and their packs from any external enemies and attacks but 'apes in us' live amongst each other and always conspire against each other to stand out from the packs. Our festivals encourage us to adopt the 'good apes' values and spirits to protect our dear territory (the earth).

It's high time we gave up insanity and arrogance to preserve the irreplaceable earth to ensuring peaceful coexistence. Otherwise, the grown-ups in the room will have no better choice than remain speechless and nonplussed while Greta Thunberg (Swedish climate activist) thunders representing millions of earth loving teens' voice at the United Nations Climate Summit: 'How dare you?'

*Courtesy : My Republica*

# Afghanistan Peace Process : Prospects and Roadblocks

By **SUNIL KUKSAL**, INDIA

**THE** war-torn country, Afghanistan held its presidential election on 28 September 2019 at a time when the country was passing through a period of deep political uncertainty. This election was held for the fourth time since the ouster of the Taliban in 2001. Eighteen years after U.S. forces entered Afghanistan, the country is still at war and its political future is uncertain. On the one hand the fate of a fledgling peace and reconciliation process driven by direct U.S.-Taliban talks, remains unclear after the U.S. President Donald Trump called off talks with the Taliban on September 2019. A peace agreement between the US and the Taliban, which had been “agreed in principle” was due to be signed in Doha. On the other hand despite opposition from prominent Afghan leaders the presidential elections were held but not without a controversy. Former Afghan president Hamid Karzai described the logic of having an election in Afghanistan at this time as “asking a heart patient to run a marathon”. Karzai has been arguing against the rationality of conducting elections this year. The Taliban called for a boycott of the country’s 28 September presidential election, and threatened to attack election rallies. The collapse of “peace talks” and the absence of a truly legitimate government have added to political uncertainty in Afghanistan peace process.

## **UNDERSTANDING POLITICAL COMPLEXITIE - PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION**

An abrupt cancellation of the peace

process has not only left a question mark over the future of peace talks intended to bring American involvement in Afghanistan to an end but it also cast a dark shadow of doubt over the outcome of the Presidential election process in Afghanistan.

Afghan people have been waiting for peace to come to the country to put an end to the suffering of the people of Afghanistan. In its more than 270-year history as an empire and as a modern state, Afghanistan has witnessed few peaceful transfers of power. The desire to have a lasting peace and consolidate this important democratic tradition through elections led more than two million Afghans to exercise their right to vote in presidential elections even under a volatile security situation after the suspension of peace talks, incessant Taliban threats and widespread concerns of corruption. The Afghan Taliban had declared an all-out war against the vote, threatening civilians, electoral staff and government forces with attacks. Taliban declared Afghan presidential elections to be illegitimate and wanted the elections to be cancelled as a precondition to signing a peace accord with the Americans. A peace agreement leading to an interim government would mean that Ashraf Ghani government must be replaced. But Afghan President Ashraf Ghani had strong objection to that as he wanted to run again and remain in power for another five years. Ghani’s refusal to put the prospects of a much-needed peace above his desire to remain in power has caused

tension between him and Afghanistan's major international supporters and it has been at odds with the position of most of the Afghan public and political leaders. Earlier the critics argued that Ghani's decision to hold elections at this uncertain juncture in the conflict resolution process could seriously undermine long-term prospects for peace.

The September 28 presidential election was embroiled in controversy due to accusations and counter-accusations of misconduct and fraud. Claims of victory by rival candidates have already raised serious question marks over the transparency of the entire electoral process. A series of delays caused by technical difficulties with the biometric data systems used for the first time during these elections resulted in widespread concern among scholars and policymakers along with Afghan civil society, who saw this election as a litmus test of Afghanistan's democratic maturity and endurance. The September 28 vote gained importance since the collapse of the peace talks, as the negotiations could have led to the creation of an interim government, which now seems to be a more distant prospect. However, given the current political dynamics in Afghanistan it appears that the election seems unlikely to bring the peace sought by Afghans, tired of an increasingly brutal war, or an easy exit for the United States, seeking to end its longest military engagement.

#### **US-TALIBAN PEACE TALKS- THE UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES**

The prospect of a negotiated end to the war in Afghanistan involving talks with Taliban currently faces the challenges posed by competing agendas. Nearly a year of intensive peace building negotiations by the U.S. government led by Zalmay Khalilzad, the Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation (SRAR) had brought the draft of a negotiated settlement of the conflict between U.S.-Taliban to the verge of signature. Then, on 7 September 2019, Trump upended plans to seal the deal, tweeting that he had invited Taliban leaders

to the Camp David presidential retreat and abruptly called off the event. He followed this news by declaring that talks between the U.S. and the Taliban were "dead" in effect scuttling the more important negotiations among Afghans that were to follow. The peace agreement finalised "in principle" after nine rounds of US-Taliban negotiations in Doha, Qatar was expected to include an initial withdrawal of more than a third of the 14,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan in exchange for a Taliban promise to not let the country become a base for global terrorist attacks. The Taliban was also expected to make a commitment to open power-sharing talks with the US-backed Afghan government and agree to a cease-fire. It also included a tight timeline of two weeks to kick-start intra-Afghan talks before the Afghan presidential elections scheduled on September 28.

The withdrawal agreement has been criticised by Afghanistan's president, Ashraf Ghani, whose government was excluded from the talks as a condition of the Taliban sitting down at the table. He had opposed suggestions that an interim government be formed to implement a peace plan, and he expressed concern that a hasty U.S.-Taliban deal could come at the expense of Afghan democracy and freedoms. In Afghanistan, the agreement was widely perceived as a sell-out and a betrayal of Afghanistan to the Taliban and Pakistan. Activists had also said a US withdrawal would have dire implications for ordinary Afghans, as it is most likely to jeopardize hard-won gains such as constitutional rights, citizens' rights and democratic institutions. They expressed fear that if successful, it could pave the way for a dominant position for the Taliban in any future dispensation before they took over power altogether and pushed Afghanistan towards instability and even a civil war worse than the intra-Mujahideen fighting of the 1990s with unpredictable consequences.

*Continued to page 19*

# India: Babri Judgment and Portents for Future

By RAM PUNIYANI, INDIA

**THE** Supreme Court judgment on Babri Mosque-Ram Janmbhumi dispute gave the verdict that the whole land where the mosque stood from 1528 to 6<sup>th</sup> December 1992 be given to the 'Hindu Side', Ram Janmbhoomi Nyas, set up by VHP. Just to recall it was demolished in broad day light by the RSS combine led by Lal Krishna Advani, Murli Manohar Joshi and Uma Bharat on that day. As per verdict Government should make a trust which should supervise the temple construct on and Muslims, Sunni Waqf Board, should be given five acres of land in a prominent site in Ayodhya. The SC conceded that the Namaz was being conducted at the site right till 1949 when the Ram Lalla idols were installed in the mosque in the middle of the night in a criminal way. The logic of SC is that from 1856 the place was associated with birth of Lord Ram. The evidence for this is not cited, the only basis here is that Hindus regarded it as the birthplace of Lord Ram! The Court has held that the claim of Muslims on land of inner court yard is not amenable to adverse possession in favor of mosque. And that Muslims have not been able to present the evidence that they were in exclusive possession of inner Court yard, prior to 1857. As per the Court "Hindus have established a clear case of possessory title to the outside Courtyard, by virtue of long continuous and unimpeded worship

at Ramchabutara and other aspects of religious significance." And so the judgment!

## PRELUDE TO JUDGMENT

There was a great mobilization of armed forces, police in anticipation of violence, either celebratory or due to protests against the judgment. Fortunately there has been no violence. One recalls that after Babri demolition in 1992, the violence was triggered in Mumbai by the celebratory procession led by Shiv Sena. While from 'Hindu Side' the likes of Lal Krishna Advani, are feeling vindicated, the most Muslims have to reconcile to the Court verdict for more reasons than one. As far as the nature of judgment, the one former judge put it in a bet possible way.

Retired Justice Ganguly put it "As a student of Constitution, it is difficult from me to accept it." Legal luminary Faizan Mustafa, Vice Chancellor of NALSAR Law University, states that "Ayodhya Judgment is a setback to evidence law." Seen in the long well documented history of the Babri Mosque it becomes clear that the judgment does not match to the known history of the Mosque and the happenings around it. While one concedes that this judgment will bring to a closure one long and painful chapter of contemporary Indian history. The hope is that other such mosques, which have been on the demolition list of RSS combine, will not be taken up for such a treatment.



## BACKGROUND

A brief recap of the dispute is in order to understand the mechanism of how the Babri Mosque issue was made controversial, how a huge mobilization was made to demolish it and what had been the political fallout of this well planned demolition, undertaken as a part of Hindu nationalist agenda. This criminal act of demolition was a move which has been built around the faith that it was a birth place of Lord Ram.

As such, Babar's General Mir Baqi built Babri mosque in 1528. There was no dispute around it till 1855, when the clash took place between Bairagis and Muslims on the issue of Chabutara (raised platform) outside the Mosque. The British made a barricade between the inner Courtyard with three-domed mosque and the outside area where many Hindu deities were located. The matter never came up during freedom struggle when whole nation was coming together to fight against the colonial forces.

The issue in current times begins on the night of 22-23 December 1949, when some elements forcibly broke the locks of the mosque and installed Ram Lalla idols in the mosque. Till around this time Namaz was being offered there. After installation of the idols in an illegal manner, fearing future trouble, the then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru wrote to the UP Chief Minister G B Pant to get the idols vacated. The local District collector K K Nayyar did not comply and Pant did not take suitable action on this. Same Nayyar later went on to join the BJP's previous avatar, Bharatiya Jansangh.

## DECADE OF 1980s : ISSUE COMES TO FORE

In 1980s the RSS Combine became more active and Ram Temple issue was brought to forefront. Reversal of SC judgment on Shah Bano gave it a boost. The locks of the mosque, which were put when the idols were installed in surreptitious manner in 1949, were opened under different political pressures.

This was one of the biggest fallacies

of current time, which paved the way for further moves by RSS combine. VHP took up the campaign of construction of grand Ram Temple at the site, claiming that Lord Ram was precisely born at that spot. Through Ram Shila Pujan and other campaigns a faith was constructed all over. It was propagated that Lord Ram was born at that spot, there was a Ram Temple there, which was demolished by Babar to build the mosque. We can see right in current times as to how faith can be constructed for political for goals. This faith was constructed through political and social maneuvers.

Whether Ayodhya, where Lord is supposed to have been born is the same Ayodhya, where mosque is located is a matter of doubt. Topping it all even in current Ayodhya there are many a temples which put forward similar claims which have been built at the birth place of Lord Ram.

It was popularized that the Babri mosque is a symbol of the 'foreign rule' and of atrocities against Hindus by the Muslim rulers. This is further derivation of communal historiography which looks at the rule of Kings through the prism of religion. This historiography was introduced by British to pursue the policy of 'Divide and Rule'. The Will of Babar to Humayun clearly spells out Babar's policy towards Hindu temples. He advises to his son Humayun not to break Hindu temples as majority of the subjects are Hindus.

As pointed out, that there was a temple at the spot, as such was part of the British introduced communal historiography. Mrs. A F Beevridge a British officer, while translating Babar's memoirs had put a foot note that there may have been at least a part of temple on which the mosque was built. (From S. Gopal, Anatomy of Confrontation, Penguin) This is the core seed which later on was blown for making the full fledged claim of temple, temple of Lord Ram,

Temple of birth place of Lord Ram was there. In a way demolition of this mosque in 1992 was the culmination of British policy where by Muslim Kings were selectively presented as temple destroyers. Incidentally many Muslims Kings also gave lots of donations to Hindu temples which have been undermined and unstated in the prevalent notions of History.

#### **BJP TAKES OVER TEMPLE MOVEMENT: LAL KRISHNA ADVANI**

Duly, BJP took over the campaign from VHP and Advani started a Rath Yatra from Somnath to Ayodhya. The Rath Yatra was followed by communal violence en route. The polarization in the society started deepening the hatred against Muslims increased. One can say the polarization among the Hindus and Muslims was taken to higher level by the Ram Temple issue, the consequent Rath yatras, and other programs undertaken by RSS and its affiliates. During Rath Yatra; Advani was arrested in Bihar by Lalu Prasad Yadav. Still many volunteers reached the Mosque and to prevent the damage to mosque; Mulayam Singh Yadav, the then Chief minister had to get the firing done, leading to tragic death of many. Mulayam Singh Yadav was presented as Mulla Mulayam, after this episode which was triggered as a culmination of Rath yatra.

Huge propaganda followed against the atrocities of Muslim kings. In the aftermath of Mandal commission implementation by VP Singh in 1990, the response to Ram Temple campaign started going up. Advani himself stated that the temple campaign is a political one. The faith of birth place of Lord Ram at Ayodhya where Babri Mosque stood is of recent origin, only few decades old. The plan was made to do Kar Seva (i.e. demolition of Babri Mosque) on 6<sup>th</sup> December 1992, under the guise of Kar Seva. Interestingly 6th December, the anniversary of Bhimrao Ambedkar, was chosen for the demolition.

#### **DEMOLITION AND VIOLENCE**

The UP Chief Minister Kalyan Singh of BJP; had given the written undertaking to protect the mosque. Nearly three lakh Kar Sevaks assembled in Ayodhya to do Kar seva, at the same time nearly twenty thousand Kar Sevikas were also mobilized for cooking and cleaning. As Kar Seva began the police and other forces withdrew from the site and in a planned way the mosque was demolished in broad day light in five and a half hours. Congress has its own share of blame in this demolition as the then Prime Minister Narsimha Rao locked himself in Puja room as Mosque was being demolished. In a show of sorrow, shedding crocodile tears same Narsimha Rao, after the demolition woke up and stated that Mosque will be restored at the same place.

During demolition the cheering crowd led by Advani, Murli Manohar Joshi and Uma Bharati gave the slogans, Ye to Keval Jhanki hai Kashi Mathura Baki hai (This is just the beginning, Kashi, Mathura will follow) A makeshift Ram Temple was built there illegally.

The crime of Babri demolition was investigated by Liberhan Commission, which opined that it was a planned act led by Advani and company. The guilty of Babri demolition have not been punished so far. This demolition was followed by massive violence particularly in Mumbai and also in other cities like Surat and Bhopal. Over thousand innocent lives were lost, majority victims being Muslims. The BJP started becoming electorally stronger after this. It had two MPs in 1984 elections. As Yatras around the issue began, Babri demolished and violence started going up, BJP's electoral power started zooming up, leading it to the seat of power in 1995 and in due course it become the largest political party in the country. That Ram was born at that spot became such a part of people's faith that even the Allahabad High Court in its judgment in 2010, kept this in mind while dividing the land into three parts. Since

1992 demolition in every subsequent election, Ram Temple has been the part of BJP's electoral agenda. With BJP assuming power, its parent organization RSS also started expanding at double the speed. Ram Temple campaign changed the national priorities. The priorities of health, education, employment, dignity have been replaced by identity issues like Cow-Beef, Ghar Wapasi and love jihad.

### PORTENTS FOR FUTURE

Where do we go from here? Will Muslims accept the five acres of land as compensation? There are some voices in the community to reject this offer, while some others are arguing that the land should be accepted and a College or Hospital should be built at that site. While one of the leaders of demolition squad Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi is saying that Kashi and Mathura should not be taken up, there are others in the RSS combine like Vinay Katiyar, who are invoking that now Kashi and Mathura issues should be brought to the fore. Can one pray

and hope that such issues should not be raked up, as such history is mired in different confusions and there also incidents where Buddhist Viharas were demolished by Brahmnical reaction against Buddhism. Country can't afford such agenda as the children dying in hospitals for lack of oxygen, youth not getting suitable employment and farmers worsening plight urges us to focus on the issues of present and not to create issues which retard the social progress and divide the society. The Constitutional guarantees of equality and status quo in matters of places of worship need to be followed. The whole episode of idol installations to Babri demolition to the accompanying communal violence and polarization should never be repeated is the optimistic hope. The country will adopt the path of communal harmony as represented by likes of Mahatma Gandhi and Maulana Abul Kalam and focus on issues of average people will be taken up in the right earnest.

*Courtesy : Communal Watch*

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## Afghanistan Peace Process: Prospects and Roadblocks

*Continued from page 15*

### THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

The major flaw in the current peace process is that it should have been preceded by the domestic consensus between various stakeholders. Withdrawal strategy must be aligned with Afghanistan's development priorities in infrastructure, agriculture, extractive industries, private sector and human capital development, to help generate greater revenue, continue delivering services and create long-term jobs. Without guarantees to safeguard the achievements of the past 18 years, any peace agreement will only clear

the way for the Taliban to shape the political order. It will not only oppose the values of democracy cherished by Afghans but also undermine the struggle of Americans and their international partners for the protection and promotion of women's rights and freedoms fought for since 2001. Afghan society is a complex one with multiple ethnic and political groups. Therefore, any long-lasting peace agreement has to be comprehensive and one, which includes the participation of Afghans from all walks of life including political parties, civil society, the central government, and tribal chiefs.

# Criminalising Dissent : What About Muzzling Opinions?

By QADARUDDIN SHISHIR, BANGLADESH

**HOLDING** or expressing opinions that do not go along the lines of the State is criminalised by law in many countries including ours. In addition, the State often translates here as “people in power”. So, having differences of opinion with “people in power” can land anyone in serious trouble. Not surprisingly, this has been happening for years and under different governments in Bangladesh.

Numerous dissenting voices had to pay—of course with the help of laws that have earned the labels “draconian” and “repressive” from rights activists.

When the State promotes suppression of dissenting voices in such a systematic way, what would be its implication in the greater society? Obviously, this sentiment trickles down to the public. People, especially those who feel connected with power circles, can take this as an opportunity to assert themselves and score some extra points for further political gain. This also serves the cause of the State to muzzle dissent. In this game of



gains Abrar Fahad, a young Buet student, had to sacrifice his precious life on October 7. He had committed a “crime”, at least in the eyes of the killers, by posting his personal opinion on Facebook that was deemed not in line with the ruling party narrative. Certainly, Abrar is not the only one in the list of victims of this kind, but the latest and one of the most unfortunate.

In the aftermath of Abrar’s gruesome killing by members of the ruling party’s student wing, top government minister and Awami League general secretary Obaidul Quader said, “You can’t just beat someone to death for having a different opinion.” He did not say, “You can’t deem someone to be criminal for having a different opinion.” The minister’s statement was rightly and cautiously worded. The laws of the land do not permit anyone to “just beat someone to death for having a different opinion”. But it permits incriminating anyone “for having a different opinion”.

In 2018, Amnesty International made a statement regarding the Digital Security Act (DSA)—a draconian law massively criticised by international bodies,—“The new Act is deeply problematic for three major reasons: ambiguous formulation of multiple sections that are vague that they may lead to criminalising of legitimate expression of opinions or thoughts; broad powers granted to authorities, which are not clearly defined and provisions which allow for removal or blocking of content and the seizure/ search of devices without sufficient safeguards.”

So, possible criminalising of legitimate expression of opinions or thoughts is at the core of a law and it wasn't changed despite waves of criticism by rights activists and journalists in the country and abroad. Rather, DSA was used indiscriminately to stifle critical voices.

During last year's road safety movement by the school students, Amnesty International observed about the draconian Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Act, which has been replaced by DSA, “Section 57 has long been used as an instrument to criminalise people for freely expressing their views and opinions.”

At that time prominent photographer, Shahidul Alam also became a victim of this law. PEN International then wrote, “Shahidul was taken away because in a few posts on social media, he has been vocal and critical of the government's human rights record. For exercising those legitimate rights, he is being punished.”

There were recurrent reports of arresting people for their Facebook posts. University teachers, government employees, among others, have been punished for expressing personal opinion on social media that hurt the feelings of ruling party men. In recent years, a number of cases were filed centring social media posts critical of the government. Mostly filed by government loyalists against dissenters, currently there are hundreds of cases to deal with in the Cyber Tribunal. After three persons getting arrested in such cases in

May this year, Human Rights Watch said, “The Bangladesh government should stop locking up its critics and review the law to ensure it upholds international standards on the right to peaceful expression.”

Suing against dissenting voices, including journalists, has become a subject of competition among the government devotees; 84 cases were filed against the editor of the leading English daily of the country.

Another dimension has been added to stifling dissent in Bangladesh in the last few years as the country saw a wave of killing of bloggers for writings that were deemed inappropriate by the conservative section of the society. However, those incidents were claimed by religious extremists.

Taking all this into consideration along with the existing culture of impunity enjoyed by criminals connected to the ruling party, and the government's hunting of dissenters, there may be a growing sense in pro-government party cadres that targeting people with opposing ideologies or opinions can be a good way for showing off loyalty. To them, being in the opposite side of a debate is a “crime”, writing one's views on Facebook is an “offence”, and that's why they called Abrar Fahad into the “torture cell” to interrogate him and find out who else shared his thoughts and opinions.

Most importantly, this was not an isolated incident in Buet; as media reports revealed the practice was going on for some time and the victims were not served justice after they reported these incidents to the university authorities. Why were they silent? Why were the university authorities afraid to act against Chhatra League's activities that went on for years?

So, who is to blame for Abrar's killing? Those who killed him? Or those who did not take any action to save him despite knowing what was going on? Or is it the state to blame that formulated laws criminalising dissent and encouraging the muzzling of critical voices?

*Courtesy : Daily Star*

## Poetry's Dream Work

By **CHRISTOPHER CAUDWELL**

*Continued from previous issue*



**IN** an earlier chapter we stated that modern poetry was composed of words, was non-symbolical, irrational, concrete, characterised by condensed affect, and rhythmical. Investigating dream we found that as

compared with other forms of phantasy it also was non-symbolical, and irrational. Poetry is composed of words; dream is composed of memory-images. Dream-images do not follow rational laws drawn from external reality, but, as psycho-analysis shows, the flow of images is explained by affective laws.

Dream is neither directed thinking nor directed feeling, but free – that is non-social – association. Hence the associations of dream are personal and can only be understood by reference to the dreamer's personal life. The secret law of dream's structure is the "dream-work."

Poetic irrationality bears this resemblance to dream, that its flow of images is explained by affective laws; but it is not "free" association as in dream. Poetic feeling is directed feeling – feeling controlled by the social ego. Poetic associations are social.

As the dreamer lives entirely in the

images of his dream, without reference to another reality, so the reader of poetry lives in the words of the poetry, without reference to the external world. The poet's world is his world. As he reads the poem he feels the emotions of the poet. Just as the pythoness or bacchante speaks for the god in the first person, so the reader under the influence of poetic illusion feels for the poet in the first person.

The images of dream, like the ideas of poetry, are concrete. In each dream, and in each poem, the memory-image and the word play a different part, and therefore have different meanings. Dreams and poems are inconsistent among themselves. Each dream and each poem is a world of its own.

Poetry is rhythmical. Rhythm secures the heightening of physiological consciousness so as to shut out sensory perception of the environment. In the rhythm of dance, music or song we become self-conscious instead of conscious. The rhythm of heart-beat and breathing and physiological periodicity negates the physical rhythm of the environment. In this sense sleep too is rhythmical. The dreamer retires into the citadel of the body and closes the doors.

Why is "physiological" introversion more necessary in poetry than in story, so that the poet accepts the difficulties of metre and rhyme? The answer is that introversion must be stronger in poetry. By introversion

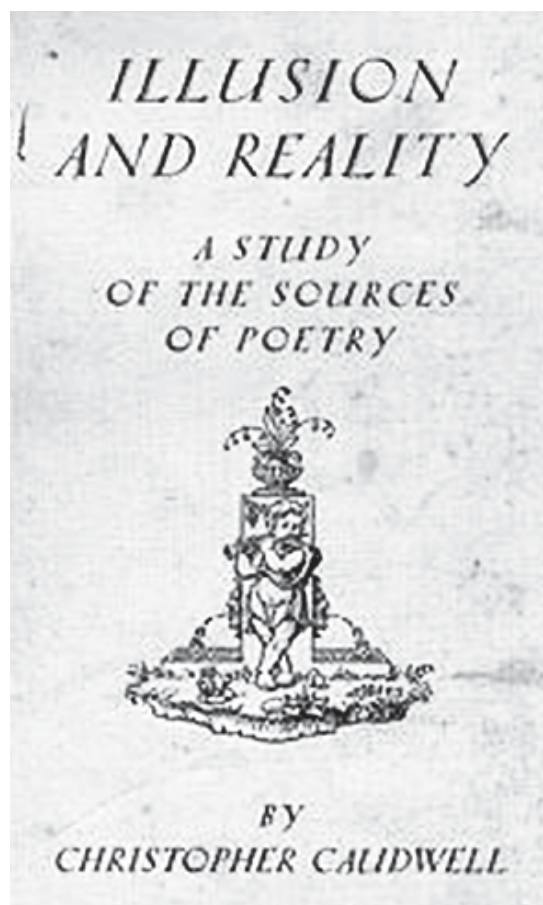
is not meant merely a turning-away from immediate environment – that could be secured by sitting in a quiet study, without disturbance. Such introversion is equally desirable for all kinds of thought, for scientific thinking and novel-reading as well as poetry, and it is not secured by the order of the words but by an effort of concentration. Some people can “concentrate” on a difficult scientific book or a book of poetry in conditions where others cannot. This kind of introversion does not therefore depend upon the order of the words. No one has suggested facilitating scientific writing by making it metrical.

But there is another aspect of introversion. In introversion for scientific phantasy it is true that we turn away from immediate environment, yet none the less we turn towards those parts of external reality of which the words are symbols. Ordinarily we see, hovering behind language, the world of external reality it describes. But in poetry the thoughts are to be directed on to the feeling-tone of the words themselves. Attention must sink below the pieces of external reality symbolised by the poetry, down into the emotional underworld adhering to those pieces. In poetry we must penetrate behind the dome of many-coloured glass into the white radiance of the self. Hence the need for a physiological introversion, which is a

turning-away not from the immediate environment of the reader but from the environment (or external reality) depicted in the poem. Hence poetry in its use of language continually distorts and denies the structure of reality to exalt the structure of the self. By means of rhyme, assonance or alliteration it couples together words which have no rational connection, that is, no nexus through the world of external reality. It breaks the words up into lines of arbitrary length, cutting across their logical construction. It breaks down their associations, derived from the world of external reality, by means of inversion and every variety of artificial stressing and counterpoint.

Thus the world of external reality recedes, and the world of instinct, the affective emotional linkage behind the words,

rises to the view and becomes the world of reality. The subject emerges from the object: the social ego from the social world. Wordsworth said correctly: “The tendency of metre is to divest language, in a certain degree, of its reality, and thus to throw a sort of half-consciousness of unsubstantial existence over the whole composition.” In the same way Coleridge reached out after a like conception to ours: “Metre is simply a stimulant of attention” – not of any attention but a special kind of attention – attention to



the affective associations of the words themselves.

We have here a distinction between poetry and the novel which it is vital to grasp. In the novel too the subjective elements are valued for themselves and rise to view, but in a different way. The novel blots out external reality by substituting a more or less consistent mock reality which has sufficient "stuff" to stand between reader and reality. This means that in the novel the emotional associations attach not to the words but to the moving current of mock reality symbolised by the words. That is why rhythm, "preciousness," and style are alien to the novel; why the novel translates so well; why novels are not composed of words. They are composed of scenes, actions, stuff, people, just as plays are. A "jewelled" style is a disadvantage to the novel because it distracts the eye from the things and people to the words – not as words, as black outlines, but as symbols to which a variety of feeling-tone is directly attached. For example when someone exclaims "Brute!" we do not think of animals and then of brutish qualities, but have a powerful subjective reaction suggesting cruelty and clumsiness. This is a poetic reaction to a word; the other is a story reaction.

Because words are few they are what Freud called "over-determined." One word has many affective associations because it has many "meanings" (e.g. the word "brute" can mean a foolish person, a cruel person,

the order of animals, etc). In novel-writing the words are arranged so that all other pieces of reality are excluded except the piece required, and the emotional association is to the resulting structure. Poetic writing is concerned with making the emotional associations either exclude or reinforce each other, without a prior reference to a coherent piece of reality, e.g. in novel-writing, in the phrase "the Indian Ocean" the word "ocean" has been restricted to specific geographical ocean, which then has emotional associations for the reader. In poetry "the Indian sea" has a different meaning, for the emotional associations are, not to a particular sea but to the word "Indian" and the word "sea," which affect each other and blend to produce a glowing cloudy "feeling" quite different from the novel-writer's phrase.

Of course there may be stretches of poetic writing in a novel (for example in Proust, Malraux, Lawrence and Melville) or of novel-writing in poetry (the purely explanatory patches in Shakespeare's plays), but this does not affect the general characteristics. The difference is so marked that it explains the strange insensitivity to poetry displayed by so many great novelists, and a similar fondness for bad novels on the part of so many great poets. This difference between the technique of poetry and the novel determines the difference between the spheres of the two arts.

*to be continued...*

*Courtesy : Illusion and Reality*

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