

Issue 2  
June 2021  
[www.rgfindia.org](http://www.rgfindia.org)



# Sadbhavana

## DIGEST

### EMBRACING PLURALISM

**How do we deal  
with the Self?**

---

**How do we deal  
with Other  
Human Beings?**

---

**How do we deal  
with Nature?**

---



Sadbhavana Digest  
Issue # 2, June 2021

**Contents**

<b>Editorial.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Part I – How do we deal with the Self?.....</b>	<b>3</b>
सदभावना एवं विविधता जीवन के लिए आवश्यक हैं।.....	3
Embracing pluralism, as a personal goal.....	6
Active Listening.....	9
Ram Madhav Shares His Views about Nationalism, Religion and Secularism   India Today Conclave 2021.....	18
Cultural Diversity is not a Barrier for Social Unity.....	19
<b>Part II – How do we deal with Other Human Beings?.....</b>	<b>20</b>
The future of Indian secularism.....	20
On the Crisis of Secularism, Liberal Democracy, and the University: A Report from Gujarat*.....	25
India needs pluralism, not majoritarianism.....	40
Padam –Tavaro: Mallika Sarabhai performs on theme of Diversity.....	42
Keezhvenmani: Huts Ground to Dust and Ash.....	43
<b>Part III – How do we deal with Nature?.....</b>	<b>45</b>
How to Build Trust with a Cheetah?.....	45
Humanity and nature are not separate – we must see them as one to fix the climate crisis.....	46
TM Krishna – Sings a Song of Protest against the Destruction of Coastal Paramboke land near the Ennore Power Plant.....	50

## Editorial

---

On 28th March 2002, I was on my way to the railway station in Ahmedabad, preparing to board my train to Kerala. I decided to go ahead with the trip much against the advice of my friends and family. The city was bracing for a violent backlash after the barbaric killing of 52 passengers in a railway coach in Godhra. There were murmurs that a targeted hit against a certain community was imminent. My hopes of making a quiet exit from the city were dashed when a group of 4 or 5 young men stopped the vehicle at Swastik Char Rasta, a busy mind-boggling intersection. They demanded to know if I was a Muslim. Name, father's name, my profession....they quizzed me from all possible angles. And then a demand that I chant "Jai Shree Ram". They were quick to catch my hesitation. They asked me to step out of the vehicle, perhaps getting ready to use other methods to ascertain my religion. My friend who was driving me to the station was far smarter than I was. He sprang out of the vehicle ahead of me and pointed to the license plate of the vehicle where the name of an organization was written. "Yeh, sarkari gaadi hai". This is a government vehicle, implying that there will be trouble for them if they bother a government officer. I am not sure if that lie worked. They moved on to the next hapless victim.

Rattled to the core, I made it to the station without any further interruption. The ride was anything but usual. The vandalism had begun. Over the next 36 hours, my train co-passengers and I received updates about the riots. Subsequent days brought horrifying stories about killing and mayhem in the city and other parts of the state and the feeble voices of protest from the moderate leaders of the government. I was counting on some sane and soothing conversation with my extended family of uncles, aunts and cousins when I got home. Instead, I heard innuendo-laden comments like "they had it coming" or "well, it was time we taught them a lesson". The hostility towards another religion was not subtle anymore. None of us needed clarification of who "they" and "we" were. As the debate heated up, I discovered that the vitriol was not aimed solely at Muslims as a religion. It went from there to the resentment against the Christians and their legacy of conversion, the Sikh's attempt to secede, and to the Western world's attempt to undermine and "pollute" our Hindu culture. To be clear, I was not surprised that my relatives nursed such bigotry and parochial views. But the depth of their grief did. So did the shallowness of their argument.

Since the horrific pogrom following Godhra carnage, we have seen a steady rise in intolerance and xenophobia in India and across the planet. Is this a resurgence after the Hitler-Mussolini years of brazen fascism? If it is, will it reverse again before it exacts an unacceptable toll like the earlier phase? Did the civilized world actually modernize when more and more countries became democracies and when ideals like human rights and civil rights were not just an elite concept? If we did (most scholars believe we did), did we take our eyes off the ball while bigotry and intolerance festered? Are we, as a human race, losing one of our strongest and most beautiful human attributes – the ability to empathize and be compassionate? I framed these questions in an opinion piece to set the tone for this second issue of Sadbhavana Digest. The articles may appear varied in context. The idea of pluralism will be the thread that runs through all of them.

Vijay Mahajan traces the organic connection between the ethos of Sadbhavana and the diversity that our planet offers. His article (available in Hindi and English) points out that India is blessed, perhaps uniquely, with its spectacular diversity. Watch Mallika Sarabhai's dance recital to go right back to a fundamental question "can love be wrong?"

In my short opinion piece I argue that embracing pluralism may not be a matter of choice, but inevitable. This is followed by a seminal article written by Carl Rogers and Richard Farson on the concept of Active Listening, where the very act of listening to the "other" creates a rapport and establishes the first step for wider and deeper communication. Then we invite the reader to practice active listening right away by listening for seven minutes to Mr Ram Madhav speaking about secularism.

Against this backdrop, Rajiv Bhargava's essays look at the fate of secularism in India. Iftexhar Khan's article written in 2006, (turns out quite prescient!) further examines this relationship. DK Giri's article re-affirms the need for pluralism in the way India is governed.

Next we present a poem written to celebrate the life and work of Mythili Sivaraman a lifelong activist who died of COVID at 81. The poem is titled "Keezhvenmani: huts ground to dust and ash" that appears in the essay Gentlemen Killers of Kilvenmani. It reminds us of the consequence of letting a sense of false privilege and entitlement control and over-ride your innate desire to love. These and other articles also offer pointers to a way out of what I alluded to as the second wave of fascism and intolerance.

The final section on human-nature interaction also offers a mix of some heart warming videos, a poignant song that is a note of caution against unfettered exploitation of resources, particularly the commons. Heather Alberro reminds us that an adversarial nature of the relationship between human activity and climate change may be a flawed way of framing the problem.

This issue should evoke a sentiment that has overwhelmed much of humanity in the last 15 months – fear of the unknown and a cautious optimism that with patience, compassion and empathy, we can still tide over the crisis.

***Shashi Enarth***

***Senior Visiting Fellow, RGICS, New Delhi.***

***Adjunct Professor, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada***



## Part I- How do we deal with the Self?

### सदभावना एवं विविधता जीवन के लिए आवश्यक हैं

-विजय महाजन

<https://sadbhavana.net/content/watch-video/142>

यह जो सद्भावना शब्द है इस पर मैं थोड़ा बोलना चाहता हूं। सद्भावना भारत के लिए कोई नई चीज नहीं - भारत पूरी दुनिया में सद्भावना का केंद्र रहा है। तरह तरह के लोग सदियों से भारत में आए और यहाँ के वासियों ने "अतिथि देवो भवः" श्लोक की भावना से उन सबका स्वागत किया। कइओं को यहाँ रहने की जगह दी। जो लोग यहां बस गए उनको अपनाया और एक बिल्कुल मिश्रित संस्कृति बन गयी जो इतनी पुरानी है की इसमें तरह-तरह की भाषाएं, साहित्य, लोकगीत, नृत्यशैली, खाने, रहने एवं वेशभूषा की परंपराएं - सबमें बहुत सारी विविधता है।

विविध भारती केवल एक रेडियो प्रोग्राम नहीं है। विविध भारती भारत की गहरी सच्चाई है। यही विविधता हमारी प्रकृति में भी है। शायद ही कोई ऐसा देश होगा जहां पर गर्मी में कई जगह 50 डिग्री से ऊपर तापमान हो जाता है और कई जगह जैसे सियाचिन में - सर्दी में माइनस 50 डिग्री तापमान होता है। शायद ही कोई देश होगा जिसका 2000 किलोमीटर से भी लंबा समुद्री तट है और साथ ही साथ जिसका 2000 किलोमीटर का एक सुन्दर बर्फीला मुकुट है, हिंदुकुश से लेकर पूर्वी हिमालय तक। यही विविधता हमारे यहाँ वनस्पति में है, वन्य प्राणियों में है और जीवाणुओं में है जिन्हे हम आँख से देख भी नहीं सकते।

इस विविधता को प्रकृति ने क्यों बनाया? क्यों नहीं जिसने भी हमें बनाया उसने एक ही सांचा बनाया और उसी सांचे में सब को ढाल दिया? क्यों उसने इतने सारे सांचे बनाए? एक ही बार नहीं - हर पीढ़ी से अगली पीढ़ी जब बनती है, चाहे वह उसी जाति की हो लेकिन जो नई संतान होती है उस पीढ़ी में और उसके जो पूर्वज हैं, उनमें भी थोड़ी बहुत विविधता होती है। इसी के कारण बैक्टीरिया या जीवाणु से लेकर मनुष्य का एवोल्यूशन यानि उद्भव हुआ।

यह विविधता प्रकृति का बुनियादी नियम है। विविधता इसलिए बनाई हमारे विधाता ने कि जो पर्यावरण है उसमें तरह-तरह के परिवर्तन आते हैं। कुछ ऐसे परिवर्तन जिनसे कुछ प्राणी और पनप सकते और कुछ ऐसे परिवर्तन जिनसे कुछ प्राणियों का जीना तक भी दूभर हो जाता है। और यह परिवर्तन बिलकुल रैंडम यानि अनियमित होते हैं। इनको कोई कंट्रोल नहीं कर सकता और न ही इनको पूर्व अनुमानित कर सकता है। इसीलिए पृथ्वी पर विविधता बहुत आवश्यक है - अगर सभी प्राणी एक ही सांचे से बनते तो किसी प्रतिकूल पर्यावरण परिवर्तन के बाद शायद आज से लाखों वर्ष पहले हम भी मंगल ग्रह की तरह एक जीवित प्राणी रहित ग्रह बन जाते।

अतः विविधता प्रकृति का जीवन पालक नियम है और उस विविधता के कारण ही ज़रूरी है कि हम एक दूसरे के प्रति सद्भावना रखें। एक दूसरे के प्रति यानि सिर्फ भाई में भाई के प्रति सद्भावना, केवल अपने परिवार वालों के प्रति सद्भावना ही नहीं परन्तु मनुष्य और मनुष्य के प्रति सद्भावना रखें। जिन्हे हम नहीं जानते, जिनकी भाषा, जिनकी वेशभूषा, जिनकी खाने की शैली हम से विविध है उनके साथ भी हम परस्पर सद्भावना रखें। और यही नहीं प्रकृति में जितने भी प्राणी हैं, वो वनस्पति हों चाहे वह जीव जंतु हों चाहे वह कीटाणु हों चाहे वह निर्जीव चट्टान या मिट्टी हों यह सब हमारे जीवन के बचाव एवं बढ़ोतरी के लिए भागिदार हैं। इन सबके प्रति सद्भावना रखें।

इस लिए सद्भावना को हमें दोबारा अपने समाज की बुनियाद बनाना पड़ेगा। पिछले कुछ वर्ष में सद्भावना कम हो रही है। जो भी कारण है, राजनीति में मैं नहीं जाना चाहता लेकिन आप किसी भी संप्रदाय के हों , आपका कोई भी लिंग हो ,आप कोई भी भाषा बोलते हों तो केवल एक मिनट सोचेंगे तो आपको पता चलेगा कि विविधता जो है वह जीवन के लिए जरूरी है और विविधता के लिए सद्भावना। हम किसी भी प्राणी के प्रति दुर्भावना रखे तो एक दिन हमारे अपने सर्वाइवल, बचाव एवं जीवन यापन में अवश्य कुछ अड़चन आएगी। इसलिए आइये हम सब से सद्भावना पूर्व व्यवहार करने का प्रण लें।

I would like to speak a little on this word, Sadbhavana, which is often translated as goodwill, though I prefer 'sincere fellow feeling' or "empathy". Sadbhavana is not a new thing for India - India has been the center of goodwill all over the world. Different types of people came to India for centuries and the people here welcomed them all with the spirit of the sloka "Atithi Devo Bhava". Some were given a place to live here. The people who settled here were assimilated and it became a completely mixed culture which is so old that it has a variety of languages, literature, folk songs, dance styles, traditions of food, living and dress - there is a lot of diversity in all.

Vividh Bharati is not just a radio program, it is the deep reality of India. This diversity is also in our nature. There will be hardly any country where the temperature rises above 50 degrees in many places in summer and in many places like in Siachen - it is minus 50 degree in winter. There will hardly be any country which has a coastline of more than 2000 kms and at the same time which has a beautiful snowy crown of 2000 kms, from the Hindukush to the Eastern Himalayas. We have this diversity in vegetation, in wild animals and in bacteria, which we cannot even see with our eyes.

Why did nature create this diversity? Why not whoever made us made the same mold and molded everyone in the same mold? Why did he make so

many molds? Not at the same time - when the next generation is formed from each generation, even if it is of the same species, but the new child that is born in that generation and the ancestors there is also a little bit of diversity. Due to this, the evolution of human beings took place from bacteria.

This diversity is the basic law of nature. Diversity is created because our creator has made various changes in the environment which is there. Some such changes by which some living beings can flourish and some such changes, due to which the life of some creatures becomes difficult. And these changes are absolutely random. No one can control these nor can predict these. If all beings were formed from the same mold, then after some adverse environmental change, perhaps millions of years ago, we too would have become a planet without living beings like Mars. That's why diversity is so important on Earth.

Therefore, diversity is the life-sustaining law of nature and because of that it is necessary that we should have Sadbhavana towards each other. Keep goodwill towards each other i.e. not only for your brother, not only goodwill towards your family members but goodwill towards human and human. We should have mutual goodwill even with those whom we do not know, whose language, whose dress, whose eating style is different from ours. And not only this, all the elements in nature, whether it is vegetation, whether it is an animal, whether it is a germ, whether it is a non-living rock or soil, all these are partners for the protection and growth of our life. Be kind to all of them.

Therefore, we have to make Sadbhavana the foundation of our society again. Sadbhavana is decreasing in the last few years. Whatever the reason, I don't want to go into politics, but whatever sect you belong to, whatever gender you may be, whatever language you speak, just think for a minute, then you will know that diversity is essential for life, and Sadbhavana for diversity. If we hold a grudge towards any creature, or do it any harm, one day there will definitely be some obstacle in our own survival and living. Therefore, let us take a pledge to deal with all with Sadbhavana.



# Embracing pluralism, as a personal goal

*by Shashi Enarth*

The British historian Lord John Acton had predicted almost 150 years ago that the pursuit of the nation-state based on ethnicity, culture and language would make life very difficult for people who did not fit the national profile. In some cases, he prophesied with chilling accuracy, that they could be enslaved or even exterminated. Very few macabre predictions have proven to be so true, for so long. The list of documented fascism-driven pogroms and genocides appears endless. Just in the modern age, the Young Turks did exactly that to the Armenians in 1915-17, the Nazis did to the Jews in the 1940s, the Hindu and Muslims did it to each other in the Indian sub-continent in 1947, the Serbian Christians did to Bosnian Muslims in 1992-95, the Hutus did to the Tutsis in Rwanda in 1994, and the Arabs did to black Africans in Sudan in 2003. Even as we barely come to terms with this gruesome past, China's Communist Party is currently accused of ethnic cleansing of Uyghur Muslims in the Xinjiang region and Myanmar's Buddhist military is persecuting the Muslim Rohingyas. That it happens at such consistent intervals is evidence that the scourge of xenophobia and bigotry runs deeper than we acknowledge.

To this list we can add another list: the merciless attempts by the European colonizers to civilize the "savage" indigenous people largely through evangelization. Last month, Canada made a grim discovery – the First Nation (indigenous people of Canada) from Kamloops, British Columbia, unearthed remains of 215 children from a state-funded Christian residential school who were victims of systemic racism and child abuse by the clergy. There are survivors dealing with the trauma to this day. While the genocidal dictators carried out their plan to stay in power, a slow-moving and seemingly benign homogenization process was playing out in the colonies of the global south. European settlers used Church as the vehicle to wipe out anything indigenous. Like Mussolini's brazen propagation of fascism, the church openly denigrated local languages, faith, culture, livelihoods and indeed the very way of life of the indigenous people. Apartheid and near-apartheid-like institutions were the natural outcomes of this colonial practice.



We know, with reasonable certainty, what and how these crimes against humanity happened. We are less certain about why. Fascist ideology is arguably a dominant driver of many. Dictators of the early twentieth century did not require elaborate scheming to push their ideology. They found it handy to use the brute muscle of the military to carry out these pogroms. The decades after World War II, saw waves of modernization, growing popularity of liberal/progressive values towards egalitarianism and an unprecedented rate of north-south migration. Dictators and totalitarian governments gave way to electoral democracies. One would not be faulted for assuming that the appetite for fascist ideas will diminish under these conditions. It did not.

As it turns out, the fascist dogmas became a tested strategy to garner votes. Under the garb of nationalism, fascist behavior regained some respectability and even legitimacy. If Mussolini had no qualms about founding the National Fascist Party and propagating the ideology in an unvarnished form, it speaks to the popularity he and the ideology had at that time. It was fair game to sell totalitarianism as an election manifesto. What Mussolini started, Hitler perfected. Whether we have had closet admirers of Mussolini and Hitler since then is a moot point. We, however, have recently seen an unmistakable resurgence of a kind of nationalism that leaves little to the imagination. The most flagrant expression of nationalism came in the form of xenophobic anti-immigrant sentiments in Europe and North America. Multiculturalism is an assault on the culture of the majority by people from foreign shores, they cried. The new millennia saw the beginning of the mainstreaming of far-right neo-Nazi politics. Often it provided the very foundation of a political party that was no longer considered fringe. The divisive tactics employed by Trump in the US are nothing but a page out of the right-wing Hindutva playbook deployed in India two decades ago. It worked for both, setting the course for many more 21st century emulators – Erdogan in Turkey, Bolsenaro in Brazil, Modi in India, and Duterte in the Philippines. This is besides the long-standing legacy of autocratic rulers in China, Russia and many countries in the African continent.

With a very insignificant immigrant population in countries like India, the majority had to find a bogeyman to rally the majority. Muslims and Christians, with their history of invasions and proselytization, became an easy target. Mainstream parties did not shy away from characterizing secularism and multi-culturalism as corrupting influences. Majoritarianism was not a bad word anymore. It became acceptable for leaders in countries with Muslims, Christian or Hindu majority to be chauvinistic about the primacy of their religion, openly suggesting that those who are different must learn to be subservient to the majority.

So we can see that the ideology of fascism manifests itself through a variety of pathways. It can also come from a variety of motives. It can be a genuine, even if misguided, devotion to ethnic purity or delusions of superiority. It can also be an opportunistic and dangerous vote-catching strategy. Its appeal lingers among the ill-informed. Its use as a potent political strategy continues because it works. And it will continue to work as long as it is possible to foment fear and suspicion of the "other" among individuals and communities. The scourge will continue to fester as long as there are people who are in denial about the inevitability and pervasiveness of pluralism.

Pluralism is as ubiquitous on this planet as oceans and mountains. It can be awe-inspiring to some and intimidating to others. We can seek it and savour its beauty or stay away from it. However, we can neither deny its existence nor try to get rid of it. As immoral and inhuman as it is, we might have to continue to deal with the prospect of divisive leaders using the spectre of diversity in a menacing way. They will thrive only when there are enough people with delusions of superiority or irrational fear of the "others". The universal truth is that there will always be the "others". The sooner we learn this truth, the faster we will mature -- socially, culturally and politically. A mature citizenry is a nightmare for political aspirants who are either fascists or would not hesitate to use xenophobia as a tool to come to power.



# Active Listening

*Carl R. Rogers and Richard E. Farson<sup>1</sup>*

Active listening does not necessarily mean long sessions spent listening to grievances, personal or otherwise. It is simply a way of approaching those problems which arise out of the usual day-to-day events of any job.

To be effective, active listening must be firmly grounded in the basic attitudes of the user. We cannot employ it as a technique if our fundamental attitudes are in conflict with its basic concepts. If we try, our behavior will be empty and sterile, and our associates will be quick to recognize this. Until we can demonstrate a spirit which genuinely respects the potential worth of the individual, which considers his sights and trusts his capacity for self-direction, we cannot begin to be effective listeners.

## What We Achieve by Listening

Active listening is an important way to bring about changes in people. Despite the popular notion that listening is a passive approach, clinical and research evidence clearly shows that sensitive listening is a most effective agent for individual personality change and group development. Listening brings about changes in people's attitudes toward themselves and others; it also brings about changes in their basic values and personal philosophy. People who have been listened to in this new and special way become more emotionally mature, more open to their experiences, less defensive, more democratic, and less authoritarian.

When people are listened to sensitively, they tend to listen to themselves with more care and to make clear exactly what they are feeling and thinking. Group members tend to listen more to each other, to become less argumentative, more ready to incorporate other points of view. Because listening reduces the threat of having one's ideas criticized, the person is better able to see them for what they are and is more likely to feel that his contributions are worthwhile.

Not the least important result of listening is the change that takes place within the listener himself. Besides providing more information than any other activity, listening builds deep, positive relationships and tends to alter constructively the attitudes of the listener. Listening is a growth experience. These, then, are some of the worthwhile results we can expect from active listening. But how do we go about this kind of listening? How do we become active listeners?

## **How to Listen**

Active listening aims to bring about changes in people. To achieve this end, it relies upon definite techniques—things to do and things to avoid doing. Before discussing these techniques, however, we should first understand why they are effective. To do so, we must understand how the individual personality develops.

## **The Growth of the Individual**

---

<sup>1</sup> Excerpt from *Communicating in Business Today*, R.G. Newman, M.A. Danzinger, M. Cohen (eds) D.C. Heath & Company, 1987

Through all of our lives, from early childhood on, we have learned to think of ourselves in certain very definite ways. We have built up pictures of ourselves. Sometimes these self-pictures are pretty realistic, but at other times they are not. For example, an overage, overweight lady may fancy herself a youthful, ravishing siren, or an awkward teen-ager regard himself as a star athlete. All of us have experiences which fit the way we need to think about ourselves. These we accept. But it is much harder to accept experiences which don't fit. And sometimes if it is very important for us to hang on to this self-picture, we don't accept or admit these experiences at all.

These self-pictures are not necessarily attractive. A man, for example, may regard himself as incompetent and worthless. He may feel that he is doing his job poorly in spite of favorable appraisals by the company. As long as he has these feelings about himself, he must deny any experiences which

would seem not to fit this self-picture—in this case any that might indicate to him that he is competent. It is so necessary for him to maintain this self-picture that he is threatened by anything which would tend to change it. Thus, when the company raises his salary, it may seem to him only additional proof that he is a fraud. He must hold onto this self-picture, because, bad or good, it's the only thing he has by which he can identify himself.

This is why direct attempts to change this individual or change his self-picture are particularly threatening. He is forced to defend himself or to completely deny the experience. This denial of experience and defence of the self-picture tend to bring on rigidity of behavior and create difficulties in personal adjustment.

The active-listening approach, on the other hand, does not present a threat to the individual's self-picture. He does not have to defend it. He is able to explore it, see it for what it is, and make his own decision about how realistic it is. And he is then in a position to change.

If I want to help a man reduce his defensiveness and become more adaptive, I must try to remove the threat of myself as his potential changer. As long as the atmosphere is threatening, there can be no effective communication. So I must create a climate which is neither critical, evaluative, nor moralizing. It must be an atmosphere of equality and freedom, permissiveness and understanding, acceptance and warmth. It is in this climate and this climate only that the individual feels safe enough to incorporate new experiences and new values into his concept of himself. Let's see how active listening helps to create this climate.

### **What to Avoid**

When we encounter a person with a problem our usual response is to try to change his way of looking at things—to get him to see his situation the way we see it or would like him to see it. We plead, reason, scold, encourage, insult, and prod— anything to bring about a change in the desired direction,



that is, in the direction we want him to travel. What we seldom realize, however, is that, under these circumstances, we are usually responding to our own needs to see the world in certain ways. It is always difficult for us to tolerate and understand actions which are different from the ways in which we believe we should act.

If, however, we can free ourselves from the need to influence and direct others in our own paths, we enable ourselves to listen with understanding and thereby employ the most potent available agent of change. One problem the listener faces is that of responding to demands for decisions, judgments, and evaluations. He is constantly called upon to agree or disagree with someone or something. Yet, as he well knows, the question or challenge frequently is a masked expression of feelings or needs which the speaker is far more anxious to communicate than he is to have the surface questions answered. Because he cannot speak these feelings openly, the speaker must disguise them to himself and to others in an acceptable form.

Passing judgment, whether critical or favorable, makes free expression difficult. Similarly, advice and information are almost always seen as efforts to change a person and thus serve as barriers to his self-expression and the development of a creative relationship. Moreover, advice is seldom taken, and information hardly ever utilized. The eager young trainee probably will not become patient just because he is advised that "the road to success in business is a long, difficult one, and you must be patient."

And it is no more helpful for him to learn that "only one out of a hundred trainees reaches a top management position." Interestingly, it is a difficult lesson to learn that positive evaluations are sometimes as blocking as negative ones. It is almost as destructive to the freedom of a relationship to tell a person that he is good or capable or right, as to tell him otherwise. To evaluate him positively may make it more difficult for him to tell of the faults that distress him or the ways in which he believes he is not competent. Encouragement also may be seen as an attempt to motivate the speaker in certain directions or hold him off, rather than as support. "I'm sure everything will work out O.K." is not a helpful response to the person who is

deeply discouraged about a problem. In other words, most of the techniques and devices common to human relationships are found to be of little use in establishing the type of relationship we are seeking here.

## **What to Do**

Just what does active listening entail, then? Basically, it requires that we get inside the speaker, that we grasp, from his point of view, just what it is he is communicating to us. More than that, we must convey to the speaker that we are seeing things from his point of view. To listen actively, then, means that there are several things we must do.

## **Listen for Total Meaning**

Any message a person tries to get across usually has two components: the content of the message and the feeling or attitude underlying this content. Both are important; both give the message meaning. It is this total meaning of the message that we try to understand. For example, a machinist comes to his foreman and says, "I've finished that lathe setup." This message has obvious content and perhaps calls upon the foreman for another work assignment. Suppose, on the other hand, that he says, "Well, I'm finally finished with that damned lathe setup." The content is the same, but the total meaning of the message has changed—and changed in an important way for both the foreman and the worker. Here sensitive listening can facilitate the relationship. Suppose the foreman were to respond by simply giving another work assignment. Would the employee feel that he had gotten his total message across? Would he feel free to talk to his foreman? Will he feel better about his job, more anxious to do good work on the next assignment?

Now, on the other hand, suppose the foreman were to respond with, "Glad to have it over with, huh?" or "Had a pretty rough time of it?" or "I guess you don't feel like doing anything like that again," or anything else that tells the worker that he heard and understands. It doesn't necessarily mean that the next work assignment need be changed or that he must spend an hour

listening to the worker complain about the setup problems he encountered. He may do a number of things differently in the light of the new information he has from the worker—but not necessarily. It's just that extra sensitivity on the part of the foreman which can transform an average working climate into a good one.

### **Respond to Feelings**

In some instances, the content is far less important than the feeling which underlies it. To catch the full flavor or meaning of the message, one must respond particularly to the feeling component. If, for instance, our machinist had said, "I'd like to melt this lathe down and make paper clips out of it," responding to content would be obviously absurd. But to respond to his disgust or anger in trying to work with his lathe recognizes the meaning of this message. There are various shadings of these components in the meaning of any message. Each time, the listener must try to remain sensitive to the total meaning the message has to the speaker. What is he trying to tell me? What does this mean to him? How does he see this situation?

Note All Cues. Not all communication is verbal. The speaker's words alone don't tell us everything he is communicating. And hence, truly sensitive listening requires that we become aware of several kinds of communication besides verbal. The way in which a speaker hesitates in his speech can tell us much about his feelings. So, too, can the inflection of his voice. He may stress certain points loudly and clearly and may mumble others. We should also note such things as the person's facial expressions, body posture, hand movements, eye movements, and breathing. All of these help to convey his total message.

### **What We Communicate by Listening**

The first reaction of most people when they consider listening as a possible method for dealing with human beings is that listening cannot be sufficient in itself. Because it is passive, they feel, listening does not communicate anything to the speaker. Actually, nothing could be farther from the truth.

By consistently listening to a speaker, you are conveying the idea that: "I'm interested in you as a person, and I think that what you feel is important. I respect your thoughts, and even if I don't agree with them, I know that they are valid for you. I feel sure that you have a contribution to make. I'm not trying to change you or evaluate you. I just want to understand you. I think you're worth listening to, and I want you to know that I'm the kind of a person you can talk to."

The subtle but more important aspect of this is that it is the demonstration of the message that works. While it is most difficult to convince someone that you respect him by telling him so, you are much more likely to get this message across by really behaving that way—by actually having and demonstrating respect for this person. Listening does this most effectively.

Like other behavior, listening behavior is contagious. This has implications for all communication problems, whether between two people or within a large organization. To ensure good communication between associates up and down the line, one must first take the responsibility for setting a pattern of listening. Just as one learns that anger is usually met with anger, argument with argument, and deception with deception, one can learn that listening can be met with listening. Every person who feels responsibility in a situation can set the tone of the interaction, and the important lesson in this is that any behavior exhibited by one person will eventually be responded to with similar behavior in the other person.

It is far more difficult to stimulate constructive behavior in another person but far more profitable. Listening is one of these constructive behaviors, but if one's attitude is to "wait out" the speaker rather than really listen to him, it will fail. The one who consistently listens with understanding, however, is the one who eventually is most likely to be listened to. If you really want to be heard and understood by another, you can develop him as a potential listener, ready for new ideas, provided you can first develop yourself in these ways and sincerely listen with understanding and respect.

Because understanding another person is actually far more difficult than it at first seems, it is important to test constantly your ability to see the world

in the way the speaker sees it. You can do this by reflecting in your own words what the speaker seems to mean by his words and actions. His response to this will tell you whether or not he feels understood. A good rule of thumb is to assume that you never really understand until you can communicate this understanding to the others satisfaction.

Here is an experiment to test your skill in listening. The next time you become involved in a lively or controversial discussion with another person, stop for a moment and suggest that you adopt this ground rule for continued discussion:

Before either participant in the discussion can make a point or express an opinion of his own, he must first restate aloud the previous point or position of the other person. This restatement must be in his own words (merely parroting the words of another does not prove that one has understood but only that he has heard the words). The restatement must be accurate enough to satisfy the speaker before the listener can be allowed to speak for himself.

This is something you could try in your own discussion group. Have someone express himself on some topic of emotional concern to the group. Then, before another member expresses his own feelings and thought, he must rephrase the meaning expressed by the previous speaker to that individual's satisfaction. Note the changes in the emotional climate and in the quality of the discussion when you try this.

### **Problems in Active Listening**

Active listening is not an easy skill to acquire. It demands practice. Perhaps more important, it may require changes in our own basic attitudes. These changes come slowly and sometimes with considerable difficulty. Let us look at some of the major problems in active listening and what can be done to overcome them.

To be effective at all in active listening, one must have a sincere interest in the speaker. We all live in glass houses as far as our attitudes are concerned.



They always show through. And if we are only making a pretence of interest in the speaker. He will quickly pick this up, either consciously or unconsciously. And once he does, he will no longer express himself freely.

Active listening carries a strong element of personal risk. If we manage to accomplish what we are describing here—to sense deeply the feeling of another person, to understand the meaning his experiences have for him, to see the world as he sees it—we risk being changed ourselves... To get the meaning which life has for him—we risk coming to see the world as he sees it. It is threatening to give up, even momentarily, what we believe and start thinking in someone else's terms. It takes a great deal of inner security and courage to be able to risk one's self in understanding another.

We are so accustomed to viewing ourselves in certain ways—to seeing and hearing only what we want to see and hear—that it is extremely difficult for a person to free himself from his needs to see things these ways. To do this may sometimes be unpleasant, but it is far more difficult than unpleasant. Developing an attitude of sincere interest in the speaker is thus no easy task. It can be developed only by being willing to risk seeing the world from the speaker's point of view. If we have a number of such experiences, however, they will shape an attitude which will allow us to be truly genuine in our interest in the speaker.



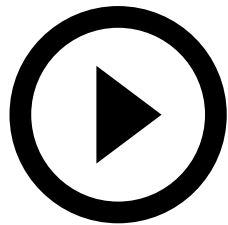
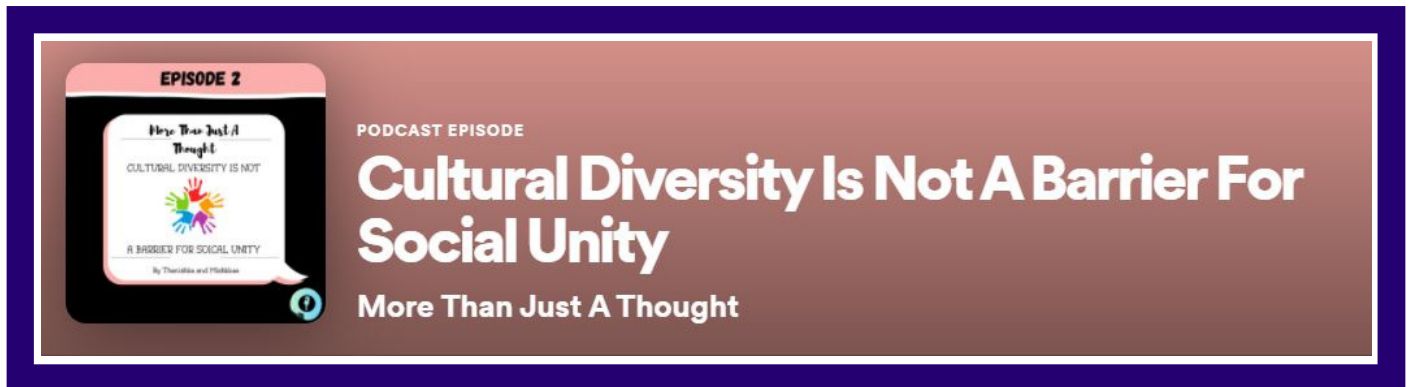
## Ram Madhav Shares His Views about Nationalism, Religion and Secularism | India Today Conclave 2021



[https://youtu.be/3mGj\\_y6Nza8](https://youtu.be/3mGj_y6Nza8)

# Cultural Diversity is not a Barrier for Social Unity

*Thanishka and Mishkkaa*



**PLAY PODCAST**



## Part II– How do we deal with Other Human Beings?

---

### **The future of Indian secularism**

*Rajeev Bhargava<sup>2</sup>*

Our public discourse is resounding with triumphalism on the one hand, and lament on the other over the death or defeat of secularism. It seems as if the bhoomi puja has burnt its bodily remains, and if anyone cares to claim it, the ashes of secularism will be buried near a dargah or immersed in the Saryu. As a child of the republic founded in 1950, one part of me wishes to join the lament. But the other part, nudging me to contemplate this moment, asks: does anything in India ever die? Silenced, yes; forced temporarily to go underground, maybe; transmigrate to another bodily form under a different name, possibly. But death? Gone forever? No!

Three years ago, on August 6, 2017, I had written, in this very paper — in the article, Constitutional or party-political secularism? — That secularism has paid a heavy price in our country for being at the centre of public and political discourse. It has been persistently misused and abused. Distinguishing it from constitutional political secularism, I called this abused entity, ‘party-political secularism’.

### **Respect and critique**

Constitutional secularism is marked by at least two features. First, critical respect for all religions. Unlike some secularisms, ours is not blindly anti-religious but respects religion. Unlike the secularisms of pre-dominantly single religious societies, it respects not one but all religions. However, given the virtual impossibility of distinguishing the religious from the social, as B.R. Ambedkar famously observed, every aspect of religious doctrine or practice cannot be respected.

---

<sup>2</sup> Appeared as Opinion piece, The Hindu, August 12, 2020. Rajeev Bhargava is Professor, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), Delhi

## **Respect for religion must be accompanied by critique**

It follows that our state must respectfully leave religion alone but also intervene whenever religious groups promote communal disharmony and discrimination on grounds of religion (an inter-religious matter) or are unable to protect their own members from the oppressions they perpetuate (an intra-religious issue). Therefore, and this is its second feature, the Indian state abandons strict separation but keeps a principled distance from all religions. For instance, it cannot tolerate untouchability or leave all personal laws as they are. Equally, it may non-preferentially subsidise schools run by religious communities. Thus, it has to constantly decide when to engage or disengage, help or hinder religion depending entirely on which of these enhances our constitutional commitment to freedom, equality and fraternity.

This constitutional secularism cannot be sustained by governments alone but requires collective commitment from an impartial judiciary, a scrupulous media, civil society activists, and an alert citizenry.

## **Advent of opportunism**

Party-political secularism, born around 40 years ago, is a nefarious doctrine practised by all political parties, including by so-called 'secular forces'. This secularism has dispelled all values from the core idea and replaced them with opportunism. Opportunistic distance (engagement or disengagement), but mainly opportunistic alliance with religious communities, particularly for the sake of immediate electoral benefit, is its unspoken slogan. Indifferent to freedom and equality-based religious reform, it has removed critical from the term 'critical respect' and bizarrely interpreted 'respect' to mean cutting deals with aggressive or orthodox sections of religious groups — unlocking the Babri Masjid/Ram temple for puja, and forsaking women's rights in the Shah Bano case. It has even been complicit in igniting communal violence.

This party-political 'secular' state, cozying up alternately to the fanatical fringe of the minority and the majority, was readymade for takeover by a majoritarian party. This was accomplished by removing the word 'all' and



replacing it by 'majority': respect only the majority religion; never criticise it, but recklessly demonise others; and ridding the state of the corrupt practice of opportunistic distance not by restoring principled distance but magically abolishing distance altogether. This is untrammelled majoritarianism masquerading as secularism, one that opposes 'pseudo-secularism' without examining its own equally unethical practices.

Today, Indian constitutional secularism is swallowed up by this party-political secularism, with not a little help from the Opposition, media and judiciary. Yet, I hesitate to pronounce the death of constitutional secularism. Grounded in millennia-old pluralist traditions, it cannot easily be brushed aside. Instead, I prefer the word 'setback'. Brakes have been suddenly applied to this largely state-driven political project of dealing with inter-religious issues such as communal harmony. It has come to a screeching halt, broken down. Does secularism then have a future?

Two crucial moves

I suggest two crucial moves to kick-start the discourse and practice of secularism. First, a shift of focus from a politically-led project to a socially-driven movement for justice. Second, a shift of emphasis from inter-religious to intra-religious issues. I invoke the name of two great leaders, B.R. Ambedkar and Jawaharlal Nehru, to make my point. B.R. Ambedkar dispassionately observed that when two roughly equal communities view each other as enemies, they get trapped in a majority-minority syndrome, a vicious cycle of spiralling political conflict and social alienation. This was true in the 1930s and the 1940s. Today, feeling extremely vulnerable, Indian Muslims appear to have opted out of this syndrome. When this happens, the syndrome implodes. The result is neither open conflict nor harmony, simply an exiled existence for Muslims in their own homeland.

B.R. Ambedkar also claimed that when communities view each other as a menace, they tend to close ranks. This has another debilitating impact: all dissent within the community is muzzled and much needed internal reforms are stalled. If so, the collapse of the syndrome unintentionally throws up an opportunity. As the focus shifts from the other to oneself, it may allow deeper introspection within, multiple dissenting voices to resurface, create

conditions to root out intra-religious injustices, and make its members free and equal. After all, the Indian project of secularism has been thwarted as much by party-politics as by religious orthodoxy and dogma.

### **Europe's example**

Here, Europe's example helps. The fight against the oppression of the church was as much a popular struggle as it was driven by the state. Europe's secularism provided a principle to fight intra-religious oppressions. Nehru understood this. For him, secularism was not only a project of civic friendship among religious communities but also of opposition to religion-based caste and gender oppressions — an endeavour at the heart of our own socially-driven freedom and equality-oriented reform movements in the 19th century. For the moment, the state-driven political project of secularism and its legal constitutional form appear to have taken a hit. But precisely this 'setback' can be turned into an opportunity to revitalise the social project of secularism.

Since the Indian state has failed to support victims of oppressions sanctioned by religion, a peaceful and democratic secularism from below provides a vantage point from which to carry out a much-needed internal critique and reform of our own respective religions, to enable their compatibility with constitutional values of equality, liberty and justice. A collective push from young men and women untainted by the politics and ideological straitjacketing of the recent past may help strengthen the social struggle of emancipation from intra-religious injustices. Those who most benefit from upholding these constitutional values, the oppressed minorities, Dalits, women, citizens sick to death with zealotry or crass commercialisation of their faiths must together renew this project.

### **Inter-community relations**

I am not suggesting that we must hereby ignore inter-religious issues. But having itself produced disharmony, it is surely beyond the capacity of the current state to restore communal harmony. But distance, freedom from mutual obsession, give communities breathing space. Each can now explore

resources within to construct new ways of living together. The issue here is not simple retrieval of older, failed modes of religious toleration. The political project of secularism arose precisely because religious toleration no longer worked. Needed today are new forms of socio-religious reciprocity, crucial for the business of everyday life and novel ways of reducing the political alienation of citizens, a democratic deficit whose ramifications go beyond the ambit of secularism.

If a critique of religion is to come at least partly from within, then its idiom must also draw from local religiosities and the multiple languages in which they find expression. A critique purely from outside, one which is not partly immanent, will not work. Nor can popular-democratic struggles be taken over by middle-class vanguardism. However, such struggles too need support from intellectuals. But to be effective, these intellectuals should already have learnt from a wide variety of cultural traditions, both natal and those outside their immediate ambit. Only then will their voice carry weight, and be heard.



# On the Crisis of Secularism, Liberal Democracy, and the University: A Report from Gujarat\*

*Dr. Iftikhar A. Khan*<sup>3</sup>

There are two issues I'd like to deal with here: First, the uses and relevance of 'secularism' and 'communalism' as dominant socio-political categories; categories with which we make sense of the bases and politics of religious-inspired hate; and concomitantly offer it resistance. And two, the bearings they have on the situation in Gujarat, particularly as one experiences it in the Universities.

I have been in Gujarat for over two decades and I have been teaching at the M.S. University of Baroda - reputedly the most prestigious institution of higher education in western India. I was there at the time of the carnage, and had an opportunity to witness it at close quarters, and to participate in the protests and resistance against it.

## I

As someone coming from Gujarat, my sense is that 'Secularism' and 'Communalism' are parts of a tired vocabulary. While 'communalism' has become common sense among large sections of at least middle class/upper caste Hindus in Gujarat, 'secularism' is met with a mixture of contempt and incomprehension. In making these observations my intention is neither to belittle these vital categories that embody and seek to advance modern principles of ethical social behaviour, through an extirpation of what detracts from them; nor to deny their continuing relevance in offering us terms of reference, a "narrative grid" for locating and describing aspects of politicized religious intolerance and its consequences for precious lives. My intention, rather, is to question the limits the terms impose, in their existent form, on the cultures of thought, inquiry, and social action, at a time

---

<sup>3</sup>Reader, Dept of History, The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, Vadodara (Gujarat) – 390002  
Email: iftikhar781@gmail.com

when the institutions of liberal democracy are not just acutely threatened, but have been dangerously suborned in significant parts of the country by rightwing, religious totalitarianism. Gujarat is an advanced outpost of that development - a sinister and successful example of how this force lodges itself within the institutional frameworks of liberal democracy and a federalist polity.

Much as 'secularism' and 'communalism', in their day to day to uses, indicate this phenomenon and attempt to grapple with it, they remain woefully short of being able to map it - i.e. measure its magnitude and depth, or grasp the underlying processes, or cogently account for the different "agencies" involved in its making. A prime reason for this, I would like to contend, is that the terms, carrying a baggage from the past, constitute a notion of righteous political behaviour wherein explanation and denunciation (qua critique) are so interlinked as to be mutually debilitating - in the sense of both losing their cutting edge, and thereby failing to realize their role as vital elements of a critique that becomes transformative by supplying the pre-conditions of a new social and political imaginary. In the strange traffic between these two terms, 'denunciation' tends to overdetermine the limits of 'explanation' by confining it to narrow areas of description and analysis (in addition to castigating and forestalling deviation from sanctified notions of political correctness). As a result, much of what now desperately awaits scrutiny, in a climate of heightened politico-religious assertions and mobilizations, finds at best only a muted explanation in established discourses. There is, in other words, a sterile circularity in the manner in which 'secularism' and 'communalism' are habitually invoked, which prevents secularist politics from an expansive and rigorous engagement with Indian social reality and ensures its confinement within traditional limits. One might, for instance, ask what conceptual resilience have these terms imbibed to capture the "void" surrounding the lives of Adivasis, which Harsh Mander refers to as an enabling condition in their disturbing incorporation into the project of Hindutva? Is it enough to simply affirm and reaffirm that they have been "communalized", as most of us tend to do ad nauseam on the presumption that it explains all that is worth knowing about the phenomenon? What analytical propositions have the two terms generated to explicate the 'crisis of identity' among rural migrants to cities,



marked by social disjunctions and anomie, and the possible role these have in predisposing such groups to rightwing propaganda and mobilization? What insights have the two categories reached out to in understanding the participation of women in the spate of organized violence that one observes in Gujarat? For all these reasons, and several more, there's an urgent need for secularist praxes to break out of the paralyzing circularity in which the current usage of the two terms seems to be trapped so often.

'Minority communalism' is another major area where the practice and discourse of secularism in India remain exceptionally opaque. In the dominant culture of secularism, represented largely by 'Hindus', there is a pronounced tendency to either look away from minority communalisms or to accord them less salience than I presume is due to them. And I say this in full awareness of the terrifying proportions that Hindutva, the organized communalism of the majority, has acquired today, and the immensely greater threat that it poses to the institutions of liberal democracy in India. Notwithstanding their differential capacities for damage within the context of India, the truth is that majority and minority communalisms are inter-dependent constructs: they are organically linked by similar premises and unfailingly draw sustenance from each other's stock of ideas, propagandas, and socio-political programmes, as enemies in close embrace. Together, they are deeply complicit in the general stymieing of 'individuated citizenship', the cornerstone of secular democracy. As a direct fallout of this, over two decades of competitive politico-religious assertions and mobilization have not just diminished the significance once accorded publicly to citizenship, but effectively aborted its consolidation as a core moral and political force across the face of religious communities as a whole.

In its general stance of accommodation and concern for religious minorities secularist politics has tended to grossly overlook the inter-relatedness of these critical developments.

Nor has 'citizenship', as political ideal, received a charge from the left of the centre discourses. This is not entirely unexpected. Deemed to be a figure of 'bourgeois democracy' it has only had a shadowy presence on the

peripheries of the organized left. So, in fact, as an emergent entity, this vital notion has met with reverses from different ends of the political spectrum. And if it nevertheless appears to survive it is more as an artifact – something that is embedded in the formal structure of state institutions, rather than as an energizing life-force at once cognitive and moral, with a capacity to determine biographies on both the grand and the small scales. The effects of this are catastrophic and are writ large on our political landscape. One can see this in the escalating levels of collective violence that we are witness to in Gujarat and other parts of the country and equally so in the public apathy that attends it not to speak of the enormous difficulties one is faced with in mounting and sustaining worthwhile opposition to a state of affairs involving brutal destruction of innocent human lives, time and again, in the name of some version or the other of justiciable retribution. If secularism has any hope of reversing this trend it will need to reorder its discourse and its political practice around citizenship as the core value and category and engage with the dynamics of the Indian socio-political order with its full conceptual force and its inherently radical potential to spell out another order of greater dignity and well-being. And this categorically entails, not shying away from, but bringing all forms of communalism within a single field of analysis and ideological censure – cognizant of, but not deterred by, their varied capacities for damage.

In this context, it may not be out of place to consider broadening the notion of communalism so as to bring within its purview even those supposedly 'communitarian' stances that inculcate an unproblematic and aggressive insularity among their adherents. Although these may well remain short of overt incitements of hostility, their appeal rests in fostering a sense of difference with the 'Other' as the prime determinant of the 'Self'. This appears to be a powerful axis around which the potentialities of citizenship have either remained unrealized or have been crumbling over the decades, alongside the withering away of a modern community called the public consummate with it. While both these constructs have perceptibly lost ground to religious and caste allegiances, the latter have undergone a cumulative transformation into conflicting political publics that have now acquired the networks and the muscles to subvert and rewrite the constitutional order itself. If secularism (and secular concerns) is to survive

and determine the direction of change we can no longer afford to confine it merely to the interfaces between communities but rather to develop the ability to interpose it with 'citizenship' as the third inalienable and substantive referent. A clear-sighted realignment of secular thought and politics with the inherently radical potential that unfulfilled citizenship holds in a country like India, and its consistent deployment to interrogate competing religion based ideologies and visions of collective life, so as to privilege the citizen vis-à-vis the religious community, is the only path available for overcoming the sectarian fragmentation of the public realm. Without this the credo of secularism would continue to be hopelessly ungrounded, and, to the same extent, the depth and interdependence of varied forms of the 'communal' would remain intractable and elusive.

Does this not expose one to the charge of being a secular fundamentalist? That danger is certainly present, but it needs to be faced for what it is. Let us have no illusions that the conflict between Secularism and the massive presence that politics centred on collective religiosity has acquired in India (and elsewhere, one must add) would be settled in a peaceable and equitable manner, i.e., to the equal satisfaction of all parties and communities. This will not be. The question as to which of these will become hegemonic definitely needs to be faced, and, antiquated as it may sound in the light of certain current and fashionable discourses, the two world-views still need to cross swords as it were. However, in averting the dangers of becoming a secular fundamentalist one might heed the words of Chantal Mouffe and the distinction between 'enemy' and 'adversary' which he argues for:

Once we accept the necessity of the political and the impossibility of a world without antagonism, what needs to be envisaged is how it is possible under these conditions to create and maintain pluralistic democratic order. Such an order is based on a distinction between 'enemy' and 'adversary'. It requires that, within the context of the political community, the opponent should be considered not as an enemy to be destroyed, but an adversary whose existence is legitimate and must be tolerated. We will fight against his ideas but will not question his right to defend them...This 'agonistic pluralism' is constitutive of modern democracy, and, rather than seeing it as a threat, we should realize that it represents the condition of existence of such democracy.

## II

And with these, somewhat extended, observations I would like to return to Gujarat. Despite the disgust and anguish that the Gujarat carnage has evoked nationally and internationally, I have reason to doubt if the extent and depth of what the place has witnessed, and continues to do so, and its grim portents, have been understood by the world outside. And an important reason (perhaps, manifestation of) why this should have been so seems to me to lie in the very conceptual flaccidity that has gathered around the two terms I have been dealing with and which are meant to capture the essentials of that malaise - in its complexities and its contradictions. The routine, and often obsessive, invocation of the two terms makes one wonder, at times, if they form parts of a critical political vocabulary or of a catechism that secularist priesthood takes recourse to in its desperation to exorcize the demon of hate, even as it falters in submitting it to an examination that is both incisive and self-reflexive.

Collective violence in Gujarat, and its well-coordinated political technology, has crossed new thresholds. And it is no longer merely about fomenting strife between Hindus and Muslims and Christians, but about completing the project of recasting the state on that fundamental premise. It is well on its way to becoming totalitarian in its grasp of the leading institutions. What we are faced with, in other words, in Gujarat is a full-fledged 'conservative revolution' successfully working its way through the maze of liberal democracy, of a federalist polity, and the institutions that translate them into flesh and blood. It is these that are being systematically bled, the University being a prime example of that.

As far as the saffron project on higher education is concerned, and which is what I am here to talk about in particular, I may inform you that in Gujarat the universities have already been taken over. Phase I of the project is complete. The BJP and its affiliates are now deeply entrenched in the governing bodies of all the Universities of the state - through placement of political apparatchik as Vice-Chancellors, Registrars, and government nominees on the Syndicates. Many if not all of these appointees/nominees come from backgrounds and professions that are ill suited for discharging

functions on the supreme executive body of any University: They are bank clerks, LIC agents, proprietors of show rooms, lecturers on probation, school teachers and government prosecutors. These by no means exhaust the list. Predictably enough the touchstone for selecting them has been, stringently, two-fold: either the membership of one of the para-government bodies or the nominees' proven allegiance/willingness to conform to their diktat. And, if there is one thing that stands out clear through all these outlandish innovations in 'university governance' it is this: the objective in making these placements is not to inject academic vitality into Universities, something that is badly needed, but rather to seize them from within and denature them. (It is no secret that the idea of liberal education – pure sciences, social sciences, humanities – sits uneasy with 'cultural nationalism', as indeed it does with other such movements veering towards state-power.)

Attrition has been a key feature of this phase, i.e. the slow, relentless penetration of one organ after another of the University, wearing down the normative resistance it is invested with by deployment of realpolitik: exploiting frictions, aspirations, and fears within the faculty; cynically brushing aside or circumventing academic conventions or statutory provisions through devious manoeuvres, in order to 'open up' and bend the institutions to the designs of the powers that be. The devil, of course, lies in the details, which are tedious to recall and for which we do not have the time. While the institutions – departments, faculties, the academic council, etc. - during this phase have remained seemingly intact, their autonomy has been brought under pressure or counterweighed by a system of supervening controls created through committees presided over by one or the other government representative on the Syndicate. At the level of Heads and Deans, appointments against vacant positions have been kept on hold for extended and varying periods – with an eye on political prospecting and blunting the edge of autonomous decision-making in these critical areas of University functioning. Even now more than 50% of the 84 Departments in the University are without regular Heads of Departments. [There is much more that needs to be described, but we do not have the time for it.]

By September 2004, the state government was poised to undertake the next major step – Phase II of the take over. This envisaged drastic changes in the

very structure of the Universities, so as to overcome what has been a major road block in the rightwing scheme of higher education: the inherent difficulty of wrenching these prime institutions from their old 'liberal' moorings and recasting them after its own ideological image in terms of the existing academic personnel, courses and syllabi, and, most importantly, the inbuilt statutory safeguards for the autonomous functioning of the University and its sub-units. These are the prime targets of cultural nationalism': If it is to triumph, become truly hegemonic, it must find the means to reproduce itself by capturing existing institutions and turning them round to its own purposes. That, of course, is a ploy of what in terms of political sociology is called a 'conservative revolution' - its tell tale sign.

However, in making a push towards this deeper end of the project (Phase II) and the brand of millenarianism it is meant to advance, the BJP but most notably, the RSS, the ideological fountainhead of the rightwing, faces a peculiar paradox – a power standoff, in which the political imperatives of overtaking the higher reaches of education run up against the reality of a generic failure of the Right to produce genuine scholarship. Unlike the left, the right wing, with its underbelly often in a culture of jingoistic nationalism and hate mongering, has no where in the world succeeded in throwing up critical scholarship. In fact, quite the opposite. While there is plenty to critique, and feel dissatisfied about, in the scholarship of the 'left', or even 'liberal' scholarship in the country, the Hindu Right's association with scholarship per se (and of course its capacity to produce it) has been perfunctory, tendentious, and inimical to the point of being virtually non-existent. This is perfectly explicable in terms of the worldviews it harbours, its background assumptions and the givens of its social map – all of which are patently impervious to critical social discourses and the creativity or insights born of them. In the circumstance, it typically lacks the minimal intellectual resources for putting its own personnel in positions of academic leadership in the University - through the normal course of selections and appointments. This is precisely what lies at the source of its desperation to subvert the evolved structure of the University and supplant it anyhow, and come what may, with surrogates through authoritarian means. The end result of these coordinated efforts, shot through by a labour of the negative, is nothing less than the final and definitive pulverization of the University system.



Phase II of the saffron project came to a head in the form of an Ordinance (September 2004) that sought to introduce fundamental changes in the structure of the Universities of the state, bringing them all under the umbrella of a single instrument. The Ordinance, which was being surreptitiously rushed through the corridors of power and decision making, did away with time-honoured procedures of extensive academic and public deliberations, through educational commissions, etc. as the primary requirement before attempting far-reaching institutional changes. It touted the need for 'standardization' and 'uniformity' in University governance, without spelling out the rationale or content of these catch-phrases. A closer look at the text of the Ordinance, which fortunately leaked out, revealed that it was distinguished by nothing more than the overriding urge to render the state government supreme in the management of the Universities; to install it as the "CEO of a business corporation," as noted by one important observer. Towards this end the provisions of the Ordinance struck a series of blows at the very basis of the administrative and academic autonomy of state Universities. A quick glance at just two distinct areas - the provisions relating to the appointment of Vice-Chancellors and faculty recruitment - will reveal how this is achieved:

1. As in the past, the state government would continue to appoint Vice-Chancellors from a panel of names submitted by 'Search Committees' consisting of three members each. But, who nominates the members of such Committee? The government itself! It is here that the Ordinance made the crucial departure from the current practice in which at least two of the three members on a Search Committee are nominated independently of the government. Not content with government monopoly in the constitution of Search Committees, the Ordinance contains additional provisions empowering the state government to reconstitute the Search Committees in case it is not pleased with the panel of names they have recommended. A Vice-Chancellor appointed thus cannot but be the handmaiden of the government. But even so, what is the guarantee that he will not develop a mind of his own, notwithstanding specific provisions in the Ordinance that oblige him to ensure that government orders are complied with, both by him and his subordinates? To rule out this eventuality, remote as it might be, the Ordinance reserved the right of the government to remove the

Vice-Chancellor in the middle of his term. In a memorandum submitted to the Governor of Gujarat, the Baroda Teachers' Association stated that, in a scheme such as this, the Vice-Chancellor becomes "the bridgehead through which the government will be able to make deeper inroads into the University system and entrench itself to the point of acquiring almost total control over its affairs." It concluded: "This would spell the final subversion of the autonomy of the University, converting it into a government department."

2. The fate of faculty recruitment – the life-line of the University system – was even more frightening within the terms laid down by the Ordinance. While retaining the idea of selection committees comprising ex-officio members of the University and external subject-experts, the Ordinance promulgated the inclusion of two government representatives on all such selection committees. And if this was not enough, the recommendations of these committees were shorn of any finality: to come into force they stood in need of government approval and ratification. These are only two examples, strategic ones to be sure, from a document that is replete with the intent of the government to establish its sway.

For the rest, the Ordinance was singularly bereft of any critical or creative inputs for salvaging the universities from their decrepit state. Expressing his deep anguish at the condition of universities in Gujarat, and the country in general, Prof. Bhiku Parekh underlined what the Ordinance presaged when he asked and answered the following questions, pithily, at a panel discussion on the proposed Ordinance:

- *What provisions of the Ordinance are designed to improve the libraries and the infrastructure? None!*
- *What provisions of the Ordinance are designed to improve the academic climate in which students and teachers can think, read and write? None!*
- *What provisions of the Ordinance are designed to impose a kind of quality control, on the kind of students we admit, because the University cannot allow itself to become a factory, it has to choose quality students? What powers have you given us to determine the quality of students? None!*

In other words, the Ordinance has absolutely nothing to say about matters that go to the very heart of the University.

Given the nature of the current dispensation in Gujarat, it is not difficult to foresee the devastating purposes to which the Ordinance would have been put – to bind the University even further not just to the government and its bureaucracy, but also to its supporting, revanchist and millenarian, organs that are now deeply embedded in civil society, in Gujarat and neighbouring regions. One has reason to speculate the slow but steady emanation and buildup of a saffron version of cæsaro-papaism in the realm of politics and public culture as a likely outcome of this state of affairs.

The situation, however, was averted for the moment. Under the pressure of a determined opposition that crystallized on some campuses, notably The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, the Ordinance was withdrawn. This occurred after some three weeks of growing protests, supported by the media and sections of the public. On behalf of the government, the Chief Secretary of the state, Sri P.N.Lahiri, gave the assurance that the Bill for a Common University Act would be introduced after due consultation and dialogue. The government has reneged on this: The Bill is now once again on the anvil – but without any dialogue or consultation worthy of being considered as remotely democratic or public. Furthermore, there is little indication that the contents of the Ordinance have undergone any substantive revision, apart from certain concessions to the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda by way of allowing it to retain its existing status, i.e. of being the only unitary/non-affiliating University in the state, with English as its medium of instruction. This was one of the key areas where the Ordinance had run into serious trouble with the University and the citizenry of Baroda. Although important in themselves, these concessions do not alter the basis of the schema the Ordinance advanced. Rather, they are a tactical ploy that serves the purpose of camouflaging the core issues and deflecting the most resolute source of opposition.

The touchstone for judging the motives and implications of the impending Act, now slated for July 2006, remains the crucial provisions relating to the autonomy of the University - both internally in relation to its parts and externally with the government. It is precisely these that were brought under severe attack in the Ordinance. Although aborted, the latter still remains the only document, available to the Universities and the public, on

the government's blueprint for the intended University legislation. On these grounds, it looks almost certain that the government will not relent on the question of University autonomy. For it is this essential, inalienable core of the University that has been a stumbling block in the politics of "cultural nationalism," in some Universities at least. The legislation will provide the means for clearing this bottleneck in Hindutva's final bid for hegemony in Gujarat.

Will there be resistance this time too on the same scale? And will the government be amenable to changing its stance? I have reason to doubt both. If anything, the government has dug its roots deeper, silencing even its own, in-house dissent. On the other hand, the public and the academia's perception of issues of such monumental gravity, and their preparedness to fight for them, are even more desultory than they were just a little more than a year back. So it is anybody's guess what the outcome is going to be.

It would be a mistake, however, to see the crisis of the University only in the short-term. That would be myopic. One must reckon the workings of a long haul in what has come to prevail. And the 'blame' for this clearly does not rest with the saffron fraternity. In fact, even in the bastions of the organized left the situation is far from satisfactory. The Universities have been in decay for a long time. Research and scholarship have languished to the point of being all but extinct, and teaching itself has been reduced over the years to little more than class room instruction – increasingly of the most inept, pedestrian variety. It provides nothing or very little towards nurturing young minds, engaging their imaginations, or sharpening their intellects. The so called 'peer culture', which one might have expected would provide the seeds for revival, has not had a chance to germinate, or has hopelessly withered, for a variety of reasons. Altogether, Indian Universities are not too far away from the Universities in Pakistan which have been appropriately described, recently, as "intellectual rubble" by Pervez Hoodbhoy, the country's leading nuclear physicist. This is a frightening prospect - a Republican India marked by an absence of a 'Republic of Letters'! Can a republican polity outlast this contradiction? And, supposing it does, would it not be to the same extent visionless, and without the elements of steel in its soul? Where will the modernizing elites come from – business schools, bureaucracy, the technical institutes?

### III

It is this extended process of involution that is the breeding ground for the rightwing, fascist putsch that we are witnessing in Gujarat and other parts of the country as well. Rather than being taken as a given, it is time to see Fascism as an evolving force that takes roots in a climate of growing intellectual and public apathy, settling in the cracks and fissures of civil society institutions, and turning them to its own advantage. It is a homing-in of rightwing and extreme rightwing political agencies in the local environs, under the cover of broader and concerted efforts to plant phobias, sectarian rituals, and millenarian preoccupations in the mind of the people. These are all parts of a worldview which the Hindu Right seeks to operationalize by softening up the public domain and preparing it for totalitarian incorporation, without breaking the formal shell of democracy. The Universities are yet another signpost, and a cardinaly important one, of the kind of laboratory Gujarat has successfully become.

The saffron fraternity is nominally, and organizationally, divided into separate groups, active in different sectors of public and social life. Its deliberately hydra-headed form is often mistaken for the supposed 'pluralism' of Indian society. Consequently, the lines of communication, and the considerable division of labour, between segments of the larger fraternity elude ordinary perception. The fraternity's essential political realism has grown around the oddities of the functioning of liberal democracy in India. And its political wile is focused, principally, on the project of using, but gradually and eventually undoing the system of checks and balances through which power is constitutionally mediated and enforced. It is therefore gradualist in its design, and attrition is its chief weapon. What we have here is not just any fascism but its consummately successful Fabian form, and it is time to capture this slowly advancing, menacing entity in its grains. In Gujarat where it has had the longest stint, the project has attained maturity. The Montesquieun plank of the three-fold division of power – the legislature, executive, and judiciary – may not have yet collapsed completely but has very substantially given way in several areas, most notably in the crucial area of protecting the rights of citizens to life and property and enforcing guarantees against religious or caste discrimination. The state is either abysmally attenuated in these respects, or

worse in cahoots with not just discrimination, but violent and heinous discrimination. Witness the Best Bakery case and the Supreme Court's compulsions to transfer it out of the state. Under the canopy of liberal democracy you already have a quasi-sectarian and increasingly inscrutable state apparatus that is testing the ingenuity of the highest court of law in the country.

This too is the result of a long haul. Over a period of some two-and-a-half decades, the liberal-democratic structure of the federalist state has been penetrated by a political agency that has, gradually and by way of a conscious and determined statecraft, planted its ideological personnel along and across the lines of the constitutional division of powers – so as to erode and nullify their efficacy during moments of decisive action. Predictably, the maximum advance in this direction occurred during periods when both the central and state governments belonged to the Hindu Right. This process unfolded alongside the intervention of saffron elements in the growing rifts around caste and religion in the 1970s and 80s, ingeniously and persistently linking them up into the local and regional articulations of Hindutva. It is in these circumstances and contexts that Fascism in India would need to be conceptualized. And Gandhi's Gujarat is today, ironically, the preferred terrain for understanding how it comes into play. A detailed, granular understanding of this furnishes us insights, and even a model, of how the project advances and realizes itself.

If we are to grapple with this phenomenon, the traditional usage of terms like secularism and communalism will need to be critiqued, sharpened and extended. In particular 'secularism' as a category needs to be restored to its original and historically cogent matrix, not as the do-good doctrine of 'religious tolerance' and accommodations, as it so often tends to be in India, but as an epistemic position from where one can conjure other social worlds through searching critiques of organized religions, including their propensity to harbour mutually aggressive collectivities. Religious tolerance per se is a wonderful thing to pursue, but as a concern it can at best have a tangential relationship with the philosophical and political ideals of secularism. Bandyng them together has neither made for clarity in public discourses nor proved to be particularly efficacious in generating harmonious co-existence between communities. Over the long-term, too, it seems that the '



syncretism' of Indian culture and acrimonious religious contestations, including pre-colonial instances of 'communal' violence, were not worlds completely set apart. Tolerance has perhaps a greater chance of success in a secularized world, where the hold of organized religion on human psyche has been displaced, or at least perceptibly relativised, by other concerns enlivened by the quest of the human mind and its capacity to fathom yet unimagined realms of thought, feeling, and existence.

We need to garner these possibilities without blinking too much. And the time is ***now***.



# India needs pluralism, not majoritarianism

*DK Giri*<sup>4</sup>

Religious and linguistic diversity are integral to the growth and development of our society. We must preserve them

“A lie does not become the truth, wrong does not become right, and evil does not become good, just because it is accepted by the majority”; a profound statement made by American pastor and author, Richard Warner. This should make us rethink the principle of majoritarianism in our political and social lives.

Majoritarianism is one of several mechanisms of decision-making in a democracy. It does not legitimise or sanctify every action and reaction. If we are not cognisant of this basic premise, our notion of majoritarianism will lead to denial of the genuine rights of many — those smaller in number, leading to further injustice in society.

Let us examine the hypothesis that the indiscriminate use of the majoritarian principle leads to domination and prejudice. Before that, let us also disabuse ourselves of the concept and construction of a majority, which is purely contextual, issue and space-specific. In India, everyone is a minority depending upon the context. Hindus are the minority in Kashmir, Brahmins in Tamil Nadu, non-Christians in Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya and of course, Muslims, Christians and Parsis in the whole of India. If we look beyond India, in South Asia, Muslims are a minority in India, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bhutan, but they are majority in Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Maldives. Likewise, Buddhists are minority in all South Asian countries but are a majority in Sri Lanka. If we take other signifiers such as language and ethnicity, there will be a different majority-minority dichotomy.

---

<sup>4</sup>DK Giri, Secretary General of Association for Democratic Socialism, New Delhi. First published in The Hindustan Times on Oct 27, 2019

From time to time, depending on the issue, the political majority is constructed as well as deconstructed. For instance, a new majority was constructed against the Emergency in 1975-77. Again, during the Bofors scandal, VP Singh built up a majority. Since 2014, a new majority has sprung up on “daring and decisive governance” and nationalism. This majority may disappear and new ones may emerge.

To test the hypothesis, we take up two issues: Language and religion. Recently, a controversy erupted when it was thought that the home minister suggested that Hindi be made the single national language to unite the country. Though he categorically clarified he was not suggesting the imposition of one language and had encouraged all languages, the debate continued for a while.

The majority principle, were it to be applied, in the Hindi case, militates against federalism and the denial of rights to several states and their people. The Constitution says, that India is a Union of states, and many states have been constituted on the basis of language. To deny states their own language is tantamount to erasing their cultural identity. Second, it is impractical and needless to translate English into Hindi until we generate our knowledge structures and enough material in indigenous languages or even Hindi. So, the majority principle here is untenable.

Religion is another area where the majority principle has often been misunderstood. Articles 25 to 28 of the Constitution state that every citizen has the right to practice and promote their religions peacefully. And yet, we have witnessed religious riots in the country on several occasions.

Hence, majoritarianism should be replaced by pluralism which promotes peaceful coexistence of diversities through the spirit of accommodation as well as solidarity. India has served as an exemplar of multicultural democracy. Let us not deny ourselves that uniqueness with a narrow and limited mechanism of majoritarianism.



## Padam –Tavaro: Mallika Sarabhai performs on theme of Diversity

Diverse voices come together to reflect on our present moment — the threats to our plural and diverse cultures, resistance burgeoning undefeated in radiant forms to stand firm against those attacks, and the directions we must turn to for carrying forward our struggles.



[Watch this Bharatnatyam](#) piece challenging caste and gender status quo with dancer Mallika Sarabhai.



# Keezhvenmani: Huts Ground to Dust and Ash

*Sayani Rakshit*<sup>5</sup>

A poem written to celebrate the life and work of Mythili Sivaraman a lifelong activist who died of COVID at 81.

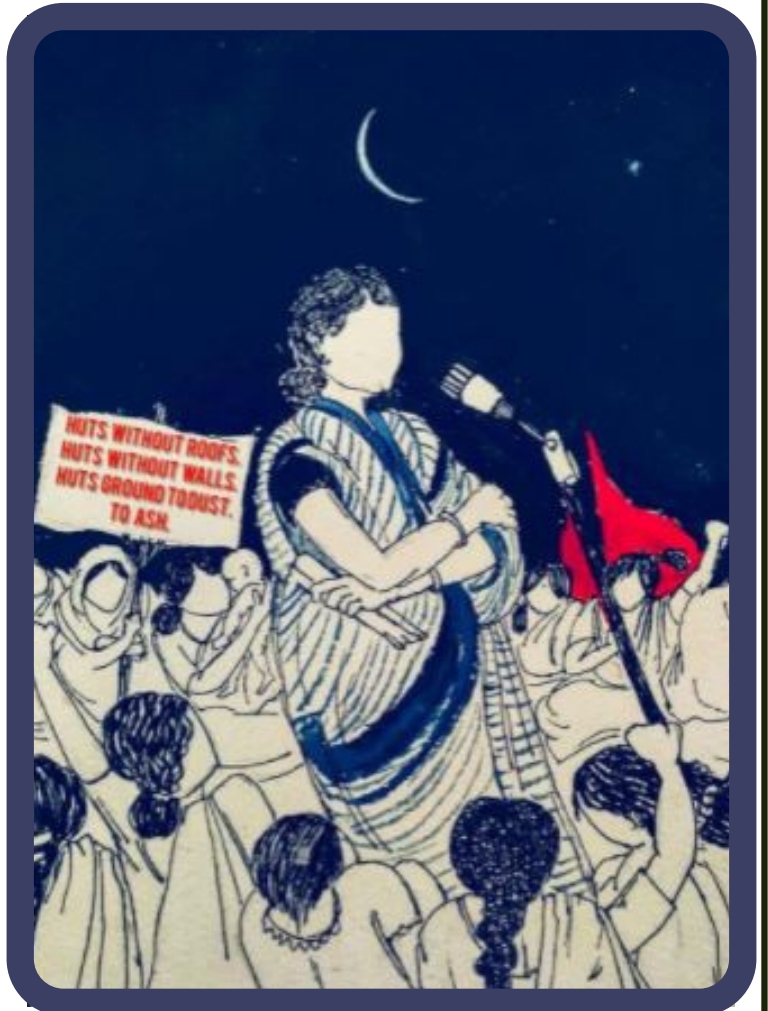
## Forty-four stone fists

*Huts without roofs.  
Huts without walls.  
Huts ground to dust.  
To ash.*

44 stone fists  
line the Cheri,  
like an angry memory,  
like a war cry from history,  
like tears gone cold and fiery,  
witnesses to the wretched night of  
December 25, 1968  
when Christmas was certainly not merry.  
Listen to the story of the 44;  
hear one, hear all.

*Huts without roofs.  
Huts without walls.  
Huts ground to dust.  
To ash.*

Flashback to four measures of paddy.  
Four is not enough, not enough they said,  
not enough to feed the landless and hungry.  
Hungry for food, hungry for land.  
Hungry for seeds, hungry for roots,  
Hungry to claim their broken backs,  
their toil, their sweat, their labour's fruit.  
Hungry for their upper caste neighbours,  
the landlords, to see the truth.



To listen to a recital of the poem by  
Sudhanva Deshpande.

Click on

[https://w.soundcloud.com/player/?  
url=https%3A//api.soundcloud.com/tracks/  
1060336879](https://w.soundcloud.com/player/?url=https%3A//api.soundcloud.com/tracks/1060336879)

<sup>5</sup> <https://indianculturalforum.in/2021/06/08/keezhvenmani-huts-ground-to-dust-and-ash/>

*Huts without roofs.*  
*Huts without walls.*  
*Huts ground to dust.*  
*To ash.*

Some of them were clad in red  
with a sickle and a hammer  
and ideas in their head.  
All were poor and all were mad  
Dalit men and women,  
defiant children of labourers they were.  
We unionise, all of us, they said,  
let us not harvest the master's fields.  
Little they knew as they sang their blues  
whose was the harvest, who was to reap.

*Huts without roofs.*  
*Huts without walls.*  
*Huts ground to dust.*  
*To ash.*

The masters were always sharper,  
calculating and merciless.  
They hired help from neighbouring villages  
"Beg forgiveness," they said.  
"For what?" retorted the labourers?  
So the landlords locked them –  
scared men, women, children,  
44 in all, huddled in a hut.  
Shot them, torched them.  
Trapped inside,  
they burst into flames  
in the middle of the night.  
22 children, 18 women, and 4 men  
made the tally  
of those slain brutally  
in the massacre of Keezhvenmani.  
They live in newspaper clippings,  
in novels and research journals

*Huts without roofs.*  
*Huts without walls.*  
*Huts ground to dust.*  
*To ash.*

\* *cheri*: Traditionally, villages in Tamil Nadu are segregated into *oors*, where the dominant castes live, and *cheris*, where Dalits reside

\* These lines are also in Mythily Sivaraman's book *Haunted by Fire: Essays on Caste, Class, Exploitation and Emancipation*, LeftWord Books, 2016.

*Audio: Sudhanva Deshpande is an actor and director with Jana Natya Manch, and an editor with LeftWord Books.*





## Part III– How do we deal with Nature?

---

### How to Build Trust with a Cheetah?

Wildlife cameraman Kim Wolhuter wanted to get closer than anyone to Cheetah, the fastest mammal on earth.



# **Humanity and Nature are Not Separate – We Must See Them as One to Fix the Climate Crisis**

*Heather Alberro*

*Associate Lecturer/PhD Candidate in Political Ecology, Nottingham Trent University*

From transport and housing to food production and fashion, our civilisation is driving climate and ecological breakdown.

It's no coincidence that almost every single sector of industry is contributing to the planet's downfall, either. A deeper issue underlies each one's part in the malaise enveloping the planet's ecosystems – and its origins date back to long before the industrial revolution. To truly bring ourselves into harmony with the natural world, we must return to seeing humanity as part of it.

Though a varied and complex story, the widespread separation of humans from nature in Western culture can be traced to a few key historical developments, starting with the rise of Judeo-Christian values 2000 years ago. Prior to this point, belief systems with multiple gods and earth spirits, such as paganism, dominated. They generally considered the sacred to be found throughout nature, and humanity as thoroughly enmeshed within it.

When Judaism and Christianity rose to become the dominant religious force in Western society, their sole god – as well as sacredness and salvation – were re-positioned outside of nature. The Old Testament taught that God made humans in his own image and gave them dominion over the Earth.

As historian Lynn White famously argued, such values laid the foundations of modern anthropocentrism, a system of beliefs that frames humans as separate from and superior to the nonhuman world. Indeed, those who hold literal beliefs in the Bible tend to express significantly more concerns over how environmental degradation affects humans than animals.

René Descartes considered it an 'absurd human failure' to compare the souls of humans and those of non-human 'brutes'. W Holl/Giorgos Kollidas/Shutterstock.

In the early 17th century, French father of modern philosophy René Descartes framed the world as essentially split between the realm of mind and that of inert matter. As the only rational beings, Descartes saw humans as wholly separate from and superior to nature and nonhuman animals, who were considered mere mindless machines to be mastered and exploited at will. Descartes' work was hugely influential in shaping modern conceptions of science and human and animal identities in Western society.

White and philosopher Val Plumwood were among the first to suggest that it is these attitudes themselves that cause the world's environmental crises. For example, when we talk of "natural resources" and fish stocks", we are suggesting that the Earth's fabric holds no value apart from what it provides us. That leads us to exploit it recklessly.

According to Plumwood, the opposition between reason and nature also legitimised the subjugation of social groups who came to be closely associated with nature – women, the working class, the colonised, and the indigenous among them.

### **Life as entanglement**

Scholars such as Timothy Morton and Bruno Latour remind us that viewing the natural world as separated from humans is not only ethically problematic but empirically false. Microorganisms in our gut aid digestion, while others compose part of our skin. Pollinators such as bees and wasps help produce the food we eat, while photosynthetic organisms such as trees and phytoplankton provide the oxygen that we need in order to live, in turn taking up the carbon dioxide we expel.

In the Anthropocene, we are seeing more and more how the fates of humanity and nature are intertwined. Governments and corporations have developed such control over the natural systems they exploit that they are

destabilising the fundamental chemistry of the global climate system. As a result, inhospitable heat, rising seas, and increasingly frequent and extreme weather events will render millions of humans and animals refugees.

### **Reconnecting the dots**

The good news is that the perceived separation from nature is not universal among the planet's human inhabitants. Australian, Amerindian, and countless other indigenous belief systems often portray nonhumans as kin with intrinsic value to be respected, rather than external objects to be dominated or exploited.

Eastern philosophies and religions such as Zen Buddhism also entangle humanity and nature, emphasising that there is no such thing as an independent self and that all things depend on others for their existence and well-being. For example, strongly influenced by Mahayana Buddhism, Bhutan has enshrined ecological resilience into its constitution. Mandating that at least 60% of the nation remain forested, the country is one of just two in the world to absorb more carbon than it emits. It measures progress not by GDP but against a “gross national happiness” index, which prioritises human and ecological well-being over boundless economic growth.

Of course, entanglement with nature exists in the Western world too. But the global socioeconomic systems birthed by this region were founded on the exploitation of the natural world for profit. Transforming these entrenched ways of working is no easy feat.

It will take time, and education is key. Higher education textbooks and courses across disciplines consistently perpetuate destructive relationships with nature. These must be redesigned to steer those about to enter the world of work towards care for the environment.

However, to bring about widespread fundamental change in worldviews, we need to start young. Practices such as nature journaling in early primary school – in which children record their experiences of the natural world in written and art form – can cultivate wonder at and connection to the natural world.

Schools should use every opportunity in the curriculum and playtime to tell children a new story of our place within the natural world. Economist and philosopher Charles Eisenstein calls for an overarching “Living Earth” narrative that views the earth not as a dead rock with resources to exploit, but as a living system whose health depends on the health of its organs and tissues – its wetlands, forests, seagrass, mangroves, fish, corals, and more. According to this story, the decision of whether to fell a forest for cattle grazing is not merely weighed against carbon accounting – which allows us to offset the cost by installing solar panels – but against respect for the forest and its inhabitants.

Such a world might seem unthinkable. But if we use our imagination now, in a few decades we might find our grandchildren creating the story we want them to believe in.

*Disclosure statement*

*Heather Alberro does not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organisation that would benefit from this article, and has disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond their academic appointment.*



# TM Krishna – Sings a Song of Protest against the Destruction of Coastal Paramboke land near the Ennore Power Plant

<https://youtu.be/82jFyeV5AHM>



Follow us:

Website: <https://rgfindia.org/>

FB: [@rgf](#)

YouTube: [@RGE](#)