



FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

THE MIGHTY STATE

It needs to hound and victimise a writer to feel strong and decisive

IT SHOULD BE deeply embarrassing to the Ministry of Home Affairs in India to be shown up as a petty-minded witch-hunter like this. (It should be deeply troubling to the rest of the country if the MHA isn't embarrassed). The ministry has put out, officially, that the Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI) card of British-born journalist and writer Aatish Taseer is being cancelled because he concealed the fact that his late father was of Pakistani origin, and because Taseer had failed to dispute the notice sent to him which asked him to explain this "lapse" in information. To counter the second claim, Taseer has tweeted out a picture of an email exchange between himself and the Consul General where he objected to the ministry's claim — the full 21 days to reply were not given to him, he pointed out, only 24 hours. And on the first charge, surely the mandarins of MHA need to read more, or at least, be better informed about what is being written and read. Aatish Taseer has written about his father, Salmaan Taseer, governor of Pakistan's Punjab who was assassinated in January 2011, extensively, including in his 2007 book, *Stranger to History: A Son's Journey through Islamic Lands*. As he wrote in a later essay: "The line that had gone through Punjab affected me directly. No nostalgia, no bittersweet ironies for me: I had a parent on one side and a parent on the other".

But then, the powers-that-be in the MHA do read. By all accounts, they have read Taseer's profile of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in *Time* magazine earlier this year, in May, during his re-election bid, titled "India's Divider in Chief". They have read it enough to be provoked by it to show Taseer the border. They are provoked by it enough to lose sight of how small and insecure they are making themselves look by drawing a line to keep out a writer who writes about his hybrid identity and about the idea of India in affectionate and generous ways. In doing so, they make India, the country he spent formative years in, look more like the Pakistan he travelled to, and discovered, only later in life — the home of the idea of a utopia "animated far more by the wish to purge than to build". Of course, Taseer also found it in himself, and in Pakistan, to revise that view. To widen his lens in order to see the country through its more complicated realities and its people, beyond the "endless contradictions" that are also "self-wounding" as they seek to kill off a shared past with India.

As it tries to cut Taseer off from a country he calls his own, a country that is therefore his, the Indian government only attracts unflattering attention to itself. The controversy about Taseer's citizenship is not about the obscure and antiquated law, the Citizenship Act of 1955. It is about the mighty Indian state that apparently needs to hound and victimise a writer to feel strong and decisive.

NOT CRICKET

Players involved in fixing are only most visible part of a malaise that spreads far beyond, must be urgently addressed

THE SKELETONS KEEP tumbling out of the Karnataka Premier League with players and coaches being regularly picked up by the police on charges of matchfixing. CM Gautam is the latest player caught in the police net and indications are that it may be just the tip of the iceberg. No one should be surprised, except, of course, the Indian cricket board which has been silent witness to corruption in officially sanctioned state leagues over the years. This is the board that puts several hurdles in the way of Indian cricketers taking part in county cricket for genuine skill-building experience and stops them from playing in overseas leagues, but has continued to be a silent watcher as its own state association sanctioned leagues are infested with corruption. The players and support staff that form the core of these leagues are the ones who end up in the IPL, from where paths lead to the Indian team — and yet, the Indian board continues to push things under the carpet.

Take the KPL, for instance. It was even stopped for three years when Anil Kumble was the president of Karnataka State Cricket Association. When he stopped it in 2009 because he wasn't happy with the private ownership of the franchise model, Kumble had said: "What is the KPL about? What is the point of it? In its current form, it would allow backdoor entry into KSCA for people not passionate about cricket." And here we are, the backdoor smashed by the gate crashers.

It's easy to criticise the players who have been involved in fixing, but the malaise spreads far beyond them. Karnataka cricket is full of stories about how the system is rigged from the top, a fact borne out by the police who have unearthed dubious owners and those who influence them. The situation has been dire for some time now. There have been cases of captains announcing final playing elevens after the team takes to the field, because they have been suspicious of their own team mates. Some have been spooked by the presence of travelling "fans" from across the country to remote places in the state where the games were held. Even as the police continue to investigate the KPL, the Tamil Nadu state association whose TNPL, too, was hit by the fixing controversy, has given a clean chit after an internal investigation. The pattern seems to be clear: Unless and until the police get into the act, the board or the associations won't do any serious spring cleaning on their own.

LET MONA LISA BE

She continues to trigger conversation, and disagreement, five centuries later

THIS TIME IT isn't the enigmatic smile that has got people talking about Mona Lisa, but a claim that the Musee du Louvre in Paris is worse off for being the home of Leonardo Da Vinci's masterpiece. Millions of visitors troop in to the Louvre, in itself an architectural marvel and heritage structure, just to view the oil-on-wood painting Da Vinci is believed to have completed in 1507. Since the French Revolution, this Renaissance masterpiece has been housed here except for a brief period when it was stolen.

It is being held against Mona Lisa that she overshadows all the other masterpieces in the Louvre, and the magnificent museum itself. True, the glory of Mona Lisa is such that visitors tend to ignore the many great specimens of Renaissance art, Egyptian antiquities and Greek sculptures. The Rembrandts and Raphaels, Rubens and Vermeer, Michelangelo and even the other Da Vinci works fade into the background as the gaze is focussed on Mona Lisa. Yet, many visitors, drawn in by the aura around the painting, leave unimpressed by this relatively small-sized oil-on-wood work. For the informed museum-goer, however, it signifies a moment in art history that can't be ignored. If the great Flemish art in the hall that houses Mona Lisa is largely ignored as a consequence, so be it.

If it is just hype that draws people to her, the crowd will disperse, later if not sooner. There is, however, no reason to force the crowd to exit. Or to take down Mona Lisa from that Louvre wall. Cut out the noise, and the smile will continue to reach out to you. Stay or leave, but let her be on the wall surrounded by many masters.



TAVLEEN SINGH

AS I SIT down to write this, I still find it hard to believe that a prime minister whom I have openly supported for more than five years has allowed his government to exile my son. When the notice arrived from the home ministry, three months ago, asking Aatish to explain why his status as an Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) should not be revoked on the grounds that he had not revealed that his father was Pakistani, my first reaction was to call the home minister.

I thought there was some misunderstanding and wanted to clear it up. I wanted to show him a document in my possession that shows that when I brought Aatish to live in India in 1982 as his sole legal guardian, he was given permission till the age of 18. His father's name is on the affidavit I signed. When he turned 18, I tried to apply for another indefinite visa and was advised by the officials to get a PIO card instead. This I did and nobody asked me if his father was Pakistani. In any case, this was irrelevant since neither Aatish nor I were in touch with his father. I thought if I explained all this to the home minister, he would be supportive.

My calls to the home minister were ignored. So I then tried to call Hiren Joshi who, as the prime minister's man in charge of the media, has an obligation to at least return the calls of a journalist. He refused to come on the phone. I wrote him several e-mails. They were also ignored. It was then that I realised that somebody very high up wanted revenge on Aatish. This had been a nagging fear at the back of my mind ever since he wrote that article in *Time* magazine that appeared on the cover with a distorted sketch of Narendra Modi and the words, "Divider in Chief".

I remember telling Aatish, then, that the

What has happened to Aatish, what the state is doing, is not just wrong but evil

I have to say that I am truly horrified that this was done without my even being given a hearing. Of course, as the BJP's Twitter trolls tell me gleefully, I could go to court. But, I am not sure that I can afford to spend the next ten years fighting a legal battle against the mighty Indian state. Even as I write these words, my heart goes out to those people whom the home minister calls "termites" who may actually be Indian "termites" but will probably spend the rest of their lives in detention centres because if I cannot afford a legal battle how can they.

article was inaccurate and ill-timed because this was in the last week of the Lok Sabha campaign and there were clear indications to me that Modi would be winning a second term. The title of the piece was offensive but the content should have offended Rahul Gandhi more than Modi because in it the then Congress President was described as "an unteachable mediocrity". In any case, it was only after this article appeared that the plot to exile my son began to unfold. Modi's troll army on Twitter went ballistic and it was not long before Aatish was being described not just as a Pakistani but as an ISI agent and a jihadist.

The inevitable happened yesterday when Twitter was used to inform Aatish that he was no longer entitled to an OCI card because he had "lied" about his father's nationality. The truth is that neither he nor I have ever lied about it. Salmaan Taseer's mother was English and as far as I know, Salmaan had a British passport since as a Pakistani he is allowed dual nationality. Aatish was born in London in 1980 and British law at the time allowed him to become a full British citizen. We got him a British passport because of the hope that it would make it easier for him to go between India and Pakistan. My relationship with Salmaan ended badly soon after and I brought Aatish back to India. He did not meet his father till he was an adult.

Bringing him home to India as a baby made my family less disapproving of my "mistake". Financially, the only support I had was the job that MJ Akbar gave me in *The Telegraph* as soon as I returned home and told him I needed work. What I earned was not enough to live on. My mother helped by

paying the rent of my *barsati* in Golf Links. And, my sister and my friend, Vasundhara Raje, helped financially whenever I was too broke to get through the month. Luckily, my sister's twins are only two years older than Aatish, so there was a regular supply of clothes. And, as I wrote in my book, *Durbar*, the only really nice clothes Aatish had as a child came from Sonia Gandhi. We were friends then and she helped, as did my other friends, in whatever way they could. But, grateful as I am to all those who helped me through those difficult years, I have to say that I would not advise any woman to become a single mother.

To return, though, to the exile that Aatish now faces, I have to say that I am truly horrified that this was done without my even being given a hearing. Of course, as the BJP's Twitter trolls tell me gleefully, I could go to court. But, I am not sure that I can afford to spend the next 10 years fighting a legal battle against the mighty Indian state. Even as I write these words, my heart goes out to those people whom the home minister calls "termites" who may actually be Indian "termites" but will probably spend the rest of their lives in detention centres because if I cannot afford a legal battle, how can they.

Let me say as clearly as possible that I believe what has happened to Aatish is not just wrong but evil, just as what is happening to the desperately poor people who are running around trying to prove their Indian citizenship is evil and wrong. The damage done to India's image as the world's largest democracy is incalculable.

The writer is contributing editor, The Indian Express

LONG MARCH THAT WASN'T

Fazlur Rehman's movement seems impressive, but only on the surface



KHALED AHMED

THE PLAN TO hold a "long march" to topple Prime Minister Imran Khan from power was called the "azadi march", a name Khan had chosen for his own agitation against then Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in 2014. But, in 2019, a long march has not been easy to organise.

The main opposition parties, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PMLN) and Pakistan People's Party (PPP), were doing badly after the 2018 election, won by Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI). PMLN leader Sharif had been convicted of corruption and money-laundering, or not being "sadiq" (truthful) and "ameen" (trustworthy), under the constitution, and sentenced to seven years in jail. The leader of the PPP, Asif Ali Zardari, was picked up for corruption by the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) once again and was facing trial. Both mainstream party leaders were severely, if not terminally, ill: Zardari has already spent 11 years in a NAB jail in the past. But it was neither the PMLN nor the PPP who thought of the "long march" against Khan, knowing that the army — called the "idara" or "institution" — stood squarely behind him.

PMLN was divided between the incarcerated Nawaz, who wanted anti-government agitation, and his younger brother — head of the party, Shehbaz Sharif — who preferred to wait for the right winds to blow from the GHQ. A letter from prison from Nawaz to the party, however, forced his hand. On the other hand, Zardari, pragmatic to a fault, thought he could marginally support the "long march" and see where it went in the long run.

But the long march was owned by neither party. It was organised and run by Maulana Fazlur Rehman of Jamiat Ulema-

e-Islam-Fazl (JUIF), a religious party no one thought could ever undertake a protest march with little following among the masses (Fazlur Rehman actually had lost his seat in parliament in the 2018 election). Additionally, the maulana was supposed to be a man of realism, ever staying on the right side of the army which he knew stood behind PM Khan. The kind of mobilisation he finally managed, though, on the outskirts of Islamabad on the first of November, surprised all observers.

The disciplined crowd from the party's religious seminaries or madrasas was estimated at a couple of hundred thousand. Still, even more astounding was the amount of money he could spend — estimated at a billion rupees — on the transport of his votaries. No one, not even expert observers, could have predicted the kind of show in Islamabad where the PMLN's Shehbaz Sharif and PPP's Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari looked like "marginal" politicians seeking the limelight.

Bilawal was upfront with his "selected" accusation — that the 2018 polls were rigged by the army to bring Khan to power, kicking polling agents out of the process while soldiers oversaw the vote-count. Fazlur Rehman was not less emphatic in sarcastically pointing to the support of the army behind Khan who, he said, was totally incompetent as prime minister. He was, no doubt, responding to Khan's own uncivilised language about him in the recent past. And, when he threw at Khan the deadline of "two days" — in which Khan was to bow out of power or face "arrest" at the hands of his madrasa followers — everyone knew that the maulana was taking on the "idara" in extremis, which neither of the two parties

would be able to do.

However, Shehbaz Sharif let off some accumulated steam accusing Khan of relying on magic rather than Islam: Tangentially referring to Khan's ascetically inclined wife, who is rumoured to be in possession of djinns, making Khan win through supernatural means. Predictably, the army spoke through its Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) warning all and sundry that the army would not tolerate the sort of disturbance the "long march" was threatening.

What Pakistan has achieved in its 72 years of existence is the culture of insult. It is a nuclear power where the leaders, and their followers, speak a language unheard of in past civilisations. Some fulmination comes from religion, but not all. And it comes equally from the mouths of men and women. For instance, the prime minister's adviser on information, Firdaus Ahiq Awan (the name means paradise) — a heavily powdered volcano emitting fire and brimstone on television. She easily eclipses the PTI rank-and-file vulgarising democracy in Pakistan daily through their harangues.

The Maulana says he can take on the government and the army across the country, and jam all business. However, the protest or "dharna" has gone on while the PPP and PMLN hesitated at the starting line saying they were a part of the protest against an "illegitimate" state; but that they won't go beyond sitting on the outer edge of Islamabad. Everyone knows the maulana can't take on the army, but no one minds enjoying the destabilising abuse-fest unleashed against the ruling party.

The writer is consulting editor, Newsweek Pakistan

NOVEMBER 9, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

IOC STRIKE OFF
INDIAN OIL WORKERS suspended their 14-day-old agitation which had seriously disrupted national economy and hampered drought relief and rabi sowing. The decision was taken by representatives of nine unions and leaders of the Petroleum Workers' Federation in response to the Petroleum and Chemical Minister's appeal. General secretary of the Petroleum Workers' Federation, Y D Sharma, announced that the nine concerned unions all over the country had been advised to suspend the protest action. Though workers are expected to resume work by tomorrow, it will take another week or 10 days before normalcy in the IOC operations is restored.

JANATA LOCAL TIES
JAGJIVAN RAM CONFIRMED that the Janata Party would have local adjustments in the four southern states and Maharashtra and West Bengal, and that it would put up "roughly 400" candidates in the coming elections. Talking to newsmen, he said, "I do not think we will contest all the 542 Lok Sabha seats." He did not think there would be any difficulty in selection of candidates even for the seats not held by the Janata Party in the distorted Lok Sabha. "We have learnt the art of selecting candidates. We have done this for years," he added. Replying to questions, Ram confirmed that the party president, Chandra Shekhar, had left the final selection of candidates for

the seats on which there were sharp differences to him.

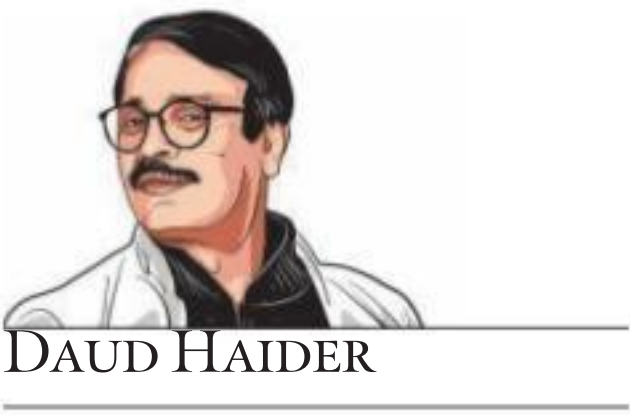
US HOSTAGE CRISIS
THE MUSLIM PROTESTERS holding some 60 American hostages in the US embassy in Teheran rejected a mediation offer from the Palestine Liberation Organisation, Teheran radio reported. The announcement appeared to dash one of the best hopes for a quick end to the embassy siege, AP reports. As if to underline their determination, an Iranian student set himself afire outside the embassy today, Iran's Pars news agency said. He was hospitalised with serious burns and was given little chance of survival.



THE IDEAS PAGE

Revisiting the Wall

Political and economic divisions continue to haunt Germany three decades after people pulled down the barrier that divided Berlin



DAUD HAIDER

THE BLOODLESS REVOLUTION came from East Germany, but it was West Berlin which demolished the wall. From November 9 to 11, West Berliners clambered on to the Wall, leapt down onto East German soil. East Berliners, men and women, meanwhile, formed orderly queues at the Bernholmer Strasse checkpoint at Prenzlauer Berg, clutching their passports issued by the East German government. The checkpoint was opened before midnight on November 9, 1989 by the East German police, following which passports were displayed, and entry gained into West Berlin. No hammers or crowbars in sight, at least in my sight. Forget about breaking down the Wall. Post-midnight, four more checkpoints opened their gates. East Berliners walked into West Berlin. West Berliners walked into East Berlin too. Without passports.

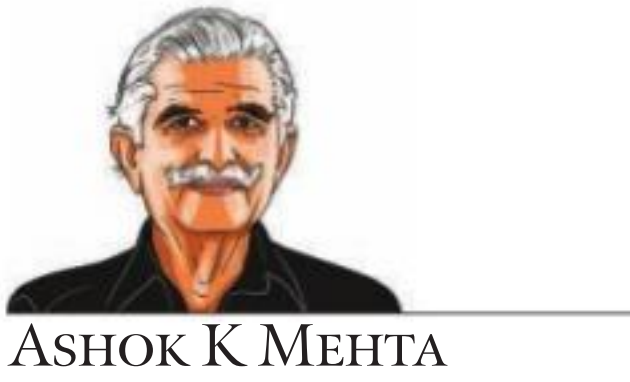
The Berlin Wall measured 161 km. Not that all of it was wall; rivers and forests were lined with barbed wire. The police presence was all pervasive, though. A watchtower every half a kilometre, no telling who was in it. Not a single East German or East Berlin artist contributed to the graffiti on the Berlin Wall. On the eastern face, that is. On the western side, there was graffiti by artists from West Berlin, West Germany, Western Europe, and elsewhere in the world. A sort of “draw as you like”. Politics, landscapes, faces, even male and female nudes; in every possible colour and size; all kinds of comments, writings, all anonymous. On one section of the Wall at Potsdamer Platz, a major tourist attraction today, I saw, in huge black Bengali letters, the word “sala”.

I found refuge in West Berlin a few years before the fall of the Wall. No one from West Berlin had any problems travelling to East Berlin. Anyone from East Germany aged 65 or more, and holding a passport, was entitled to a day’s visit to any city in the west. In some cases, a week’s visit was permitted.

For those of us who saw the fall of the Wall, the history of the fall is not yet in the past, the 30 years in between seem like yesterday because the Wall still exists. The fall isn’t complete. This wall is made of politics, economics, discrimination. For tourists to Berlin, there’s still a few metres of the “real” Wall standing at one designated spot. The area previously covered by the Wall is marked by signposts that read “Mauer (wall) 1961-89”. Bits of the Wall are still sold to visitors from abroad, complete with government authentication. But after 30 years, the “pieces of the Wall” business is floundering.

Those who are 35 have no memories of the Wall, those who are 30 don’t even know what it means. School textbooks devote plenty of space to it (particularly to the misrule of the East German government and East European Communists, not even Hitler and the Nazis, or World War II command as much attention). The current generation do not agonise over the Wall, or East-West Berlin. They are simply not interested. Their problems are rooted in today’s Germany. Unemployment is on the rise, living spaces increasingly scarce, the youth are headed abroad. The political establishment is seemingly indifferent, and the right-wing is exploiting the situation.

We are watching as the right-wing support-base increases at a dizzying rate. Who



ASHOK K MEHTA

WINNING A VICTORIA Cross — the highest gallantry award an Indian soldier could get before Independence, like the Param Vir Chakra today — is a rarest of rare events. It is born out of a conjugation of stars when audacity, temerity and daredevilry combine with luck to make ordinary mortals perform feats of battle-madness in the face of extreme risk, and the enemy. Gorkhas have a flair for risk taking as many are not familiar with danger. Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw once famously said: “Anyone who says he does not know fear is either lying or a Gorkha”.

However, the following stories about valour and courage are bewilderingly true. One battalion of the Indian Army — the Second Battalion, Fifth Gorkha Rifles, Frontier Force — achieved the unthinkable. It got three Victoria Crosses in the second Burma campaign during World War II, all within 14 months and two within the same action. The Second Battalion Fifth Gorkha Rifles (Second-Five) had got a drubbing from the Japanese on both sides of the Sittang River crossing in February 1942. It was reduced to half its strength of 880, mostly due to non-swimming Gorkhas being caught on the wrong side of the river when the bridge on it was

blown up. Many were taken as prisoners, or went missing. Another battalion — First Battalion, Third Gorkha Rifles — faced worst depletion. It was amalgamated with Second-Five to constitute the Fifth Battalion, Third Gorkha Rifles (Five-Three GR) with a commanding officer from Second-Five.

The three actions that got the Second-Five the VC took place along one axis — Tiddim to Imphal — to prevent the Japanese from taking Imphal. All three were classic infantry battles entailing the use of silencing machine guns, lobbing grenades into bunkers and assaulting gun emplacements, culminating in hand to hand combat using bayonets, khukuris and stones and the ultimate weapon of faith, the cry, “Aayo Gorkhali”. In defence or in attack, battles were fought to the last man, last round, the wounded refusing evacuation and the leaders at the front. Compare this with today’s stand-off combat with missiles and drones where the assault is mounted from another continent by remote control.

Second Fifth VC winning actions were of a different kind. The first action on May 26, 1943, was on Basha Hill to stem Japanese advance. Havaladar Gaje Ghale leading his platoon was asked to evict the Japanese. Ghale

and the raw recruits he led had not been baptised under fear. Even then, he shepherded them, while being under fire from a dozen machine guns, across the killing zone into the lion’s den. Ghale would take one lot and return to guide the second along the narrow ledge criss-crossed by all manner of small arms and indirect fire. On his third sortie, Ghale received multiple wounds but refused to be evacuated, fighting doggedly till the Japanese yielded.

The second VC battle on June 26 1944 was in Bishenpur when Subedar Netra Bahadur Thapa was ordered to take Mortar Bluff under Japanese assault. With a reinforced platoon, Thapa sneaked into Mortar Bluff and held it. The perimeter defence withstood several deadly Japanese assaults. Luck deserted the platoon as two machine guns became unusable and stock of ammunition sunk. With several wounded, Thapa rallied his men to hold fast. The ammunition re-supply team was wounded as Japanese entered the post. He called for artillery fire on his own post and fell, fighting a memorable action with khukuri in one hand and the head of a Japanese in the other.

The third VC action on June 26, followed immediately to recapture Mortar Bluff and

Water Picquet. Leading his section, Naik Agan Singh Rai’s heroic action not only regained Mortar Bluff but also led to the capture of Water Picquet. At both places, Rai single-handedly covered by his section and artillery, charged gun emplacement killing their crew. Rai’s battle heroics became stuff of legends. In his village in Nepal after his retirement, Rai re-enacted for me, both the battles in a spellbinding one-man sound and light show.

On November 9 in Dehradun, the next of kin of the three Victoria Cross winners will be honoured on the 133rd Raising Day of Second Five. Hundreds of veterans from Nepal and India will meet to remember not just the VC winners but other brave soldiers of the battalion who were recognised in battle, and many who went unsung. The whiff of Five-Three GR will return after 77 years as the present commanding officer is from One-Three GR which is co-located with Second Five in Dehradun. The toast to the President will be drunk with Old Monk rum, though some diehards will prefer Nepal’s traditional *jhol, kodo*.

The writer is a former Commanding Officer of the Second Battalion, Fifth Gorkha Rifles

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

“IN a society where everyone is not equal before the law, or equally significant in terms of political considerations, certain people get to exercise their right to protest... others are deprived of it.” — **DAWN**

With a twinkle and a smile

Nabaneeta Dev Sen’s versatility was mixed always with a penetrating but forgiving sense of humour



DIPESH CHAKRABARTY

NABANEETA DEV SEN, the popular, award-winning, and feminist Bengali author, poet, teacher, raconteur, and literary critic, passed away in Kolkata on November 7. She had been fighting cancer for a while. She was 81 at the time of her passing. Born to acclaimed writer-parents, Narendra Dev and Radharani Dev, she married, in 1959, Amartya Sen, the economist who would later go on to win the Nobel prize. Their marriage ended in 1976. Antara, a well-known editor in Delhi, and Nandana, a noted screen actress, are their two daughters.

It is difficult in the space of this brief notice to convey a sense of the versatility — mixed always with a distant, penetrating but, ultimately, forgiving sense of humour — that marked the writings of Dev Sen. She moved effortlessly between many different genres of writing, from poetry, short story, novels, novellas, travel writing, children’s literature, one-act plays, essays, belles-lettres to academic literary criticism. Her writings in English belong only to the last category, all of her other writings — adding up to some eighty volumes — being in Bengali. In one of her famous autobiographical essays, with signature humour, Dev Sen described her two eyes as being rather different in what they saw of the world. Her right eye, she said, was always full of mirth and laughter, and was naturally drawn to all that was pleasurable and fun in life. Her left eye, however, was forever turned inwards and nothing that was deeply ironical or sad about the human condition could escape its attention. This was her way of explaining why all her critical observations of the world were always tinged with a gentle sense of humour. But humour was also a genre she excelled at. Even a few weeks before she died, she wrote a funny newspaper piece on her illness that made the rounds on numerous WhatsApp groups in West Bengal and Bangladesh. She borrowed an immortal and funny line from a children’s poem written by Sukumar Ray, the father of the non-sense rhyme in Bengali, and of Satyajit Ray — “Alrite, kamen fite” (Alright, come’n fight!). This was the title she gave to her short essay, where she wondered if cancer,

at 81, was such a big deal after all. And, if her friends who seemed to her to be rather sad at her suffering, were not confusing her imminent passing with the mahaprayan of a child! It was, in any case, time to go. So why so much grieving, she asked of them.

Dev Sen’s accomplishments were many. A winner of many honours and prizes, including the Mahadevi Verma Prize in 1992, Sahitya Akademi award in 1999, and Padma Shri in 2000, she was a professor of comparative literature at Jadavpur University, Kolkata, until her retirement in 2002. She held many distinguished positions, either as a visiting professor or as a visiting creative writer, at many reputed academic institutions in the United States, the United Kingdom, Mexico, Germany, France, Japan, and Israel. She also served in leadership positions in many state-level, national and international literary institutions and acted as a member of the jury for many important literary prizes in the country. She was the founder of West Bengal Women’s Writing Forum. Her English translation of the 16th-century female Bengali poet Chandrabati’s version of the Ramayana — together with her comparative discussion of this text, the 16th-century Telugu poetess Molla’s Ramayana, some texts in Marathi and Maithili, as well as the more contemporary Telugu writer Ranganayakamma’s *Ramayana Vishavruksham* (1974-76), will remain an enduring contribution to feminist scholarship on the study of the epic.

It was through her creative writing that Dev Sen gave herself a sovereign presence in the Bengali literary sphere. I say “sovereign” because Dev Sen did not bow to any expectations that the Kolkata society might have had of a woman whose life had been the subject of gossip and speculation among the literati of the city. She was not afraid of baring her pain in the early poetry she wrote, nor did she ever compromise on questions of freedom. Finding herself a divorcee and a single mother when she was not even 40, she went to Indiana University in the United States for her doctoral degree and secured a teaching position in Jadavpur on return. She thus made a new life for herself, a life of which she was the sole author and became exemplary for many. Her writings won her a permanent place in the hearts of her readers.

Professor Dev Sen’s death will be deeply mourned in the literary and scholarly circles.

The writer is Lawrence A. Kimpton distinguished service professor of history, South Asian languages and civilizations, University of Chicago

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

SECURING VARSITY

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, ‘Threat perception’ (IE, November 8). The posting of CISF in Rabin dr Nath Tagore’s Visva-Bharati will be a great disservice to the author of the national anthem and his ideals. Threat perception has become a new reason to undermine rational and democratic arguments against the powers that be.

L R Murmu, Delhi

ISSUES AFTER RCEP

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, ‘Closing a door’ (IE, November 8). The gains made by the country if it had joined the RCEP would have been negated by the losses in several sectors of the economy. But if India does not carry out reforms it will continue to lag behind its competitors in Asia. India has a huge market of cheap labour and a spirited private sector which can be used to its advantage. The government should look into reducing energy costs and encourage other efficiency measures to increase the viability of the country’s industries.

Anmol Singh Gandhi, Ujjain

CREATE CHANCES

THIS IS WITH reference to the article, ‘Experts, dissent and the economy’ (IE, November 8). One of the main reasons for the poor state of the economy is the focus, by successive governments, on giving subsidies, freebies and doles. People should be empowered to buy goods and services and not handed them free of cost. This can be done by creating employment opportunities and developing infrastructure. By setting up educational Institutes on the lines of IIMs, AIIMs and IITs and by giving impetus to research, the country’s policymakers can check brain drain.

Veena Shenoy, Thane

ABOUT HARMONY

THIS REFERS TO the article, ‘On Ayodhya, listen carefully’ (IE, November 7). The author deserves to

LETTER OF THE WEEK

WRONG PRIORITIES

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, ‘Lost opportunity’ (IE, November 6). The decision to opt out of RCEP is not surprising. Export-led growth does not figure in our list of priorities. In contrast, Bangladesh has achieved an 8 per cent GDP growth on the back of rising exports. Asian tigers led by Indonesia and Vietnam have left us far behind in grabbing the opportunities provide by the US-China trade dispute. Now, with RCEP countries accounting for one third of foreign trade, an export revival is highly unlikely.

S Bhalariao, Mumbai

be congratulated for reformulating the slogan, “Garv se kaho hum Hindu hain” to “Prem se kaho hum Hindu hain”. She has expressed the sentiments of many who want to see a Ram temple and yet, respect the existence of mosques where our Muslim brethren can worship.

Vinod Dhall, Gurgaon

CORRIDOR OF HOPE

THIS REFERS TO the report, ‘Kartarpur opening tomorrow, Pak Army overrules Imran Khan: Passports needed’ (IE, November 8). Kartarpur corridor’s opening comes at a juncture when operations of the Samjhauta Express and Thar Express have been suspended and trade-ties cut. At a time when people to people relations is almost negligible, the opening of the Kartarpur comes as a breather.

Abhishek Saroha, Haryana





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If there are questions of current or contemporary relevance that you would like explained, please write to explained@indianexpress.com

TELLING NUMBERS

Maternal mortality rate in the states: Assam 229, Kerala 42

MATERNAL MORTALITY ratio, measured as the number of maternal deaths per lakh live births, varies among the Indian states from a high of 229 per lakh in Assam to a low of 42 in Kerala. This emerges out of the data in a Special Bulletin on Maternal Mortality in India 2015-2017 of the Sample Registration System, released on Wednesday.

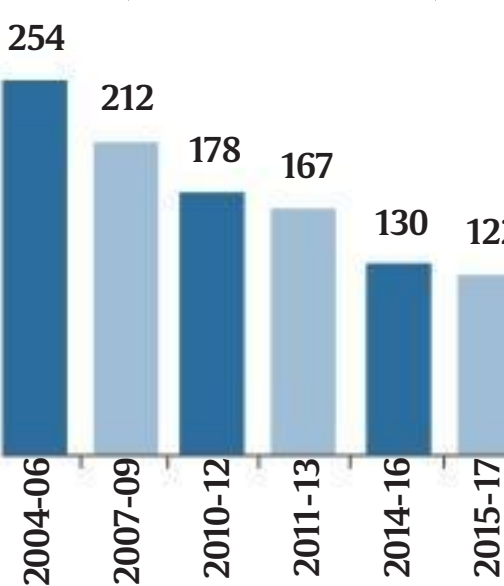
Across the country, the maternal mortality ratio has declined from 130 during 2014-2016 to 122 during 2015-17. While the bulletin has flagged a 26.9% decrease since 2013 (from 167 in 2011-13 to 122 in the latest bulletin), the decline has been by more than half since 2004-06, when the ratio was 254.

Since maternal maternity ratio, or MMR, is calculated by dividing the number of maternal deaths in a given population during a period of time by the number of live births occurring in that period, it reflects the risk of maternal death relative to the number of live births. There is another measure, maternal mortality rate, which is calculated by dividing the average annual number of maternal deaths in a population by the average number of women of reproductive age alive in the same period. This rate reflects the risk of maternal death per pregnancy or per birth and the level of fertility in a population. The bulletin provides details of both measures.

For Assam, which recorded the highest MMR, the 229 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births is still an improvement from the 2014-16 MMR of 237. Uttar Pradesh (216), Madhya Pradesh (188), Rajasthan (186), Odisha (168), Bihar (165) and Chhattisgarh (141) follow. Among these states, the maternal mortality rate is the highest in Uttar Pradesh, at 20.1. Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan and Assam follow with maternal mortality rates at 17.5, 16.9, 16.8 and 15.2 respectively.

Kerala has the lowest MMR, at 42. It is followed by Maharashtra (55), Tamil Nadu (63), Andhra Pradesh (74), Jharkhand (76) and Telangana (76). Kerala also has the lowest maternal mortality rate, at 1.9, followed by Maharashtra at 3.3.

MATERNAL MORTALITY RATIO (MMR) IN INDIA (PER LAKH LIVE BIRTHS)



STATES WITH HIGH MMR, 2015-2017

State	Maternal Mortality Ratio	Maternal Mortality Rate
Assam	229	15.2
Uttar Pradesh	216	20.1
Madhya Pradesh	188	17.5
Rajasthan	186	16.8
Odisha	168	11.1
Bihar	165	16.9
Chhattisgarh	141	11.0

STATES WITH LOW MMR, 2015-2017

State	Maternal Mortality Ratio	Maternal Mortality Rate
Kerala	42	1.9
Maharashtra	55	3.3
Tamil Nadu	63	4.8
Andhra Pradesh	74	3.6
Jharkhand/ Telangana	76	6.1 / 3.8

Maternal maternity ratio = maternal deaths/lakh live births

Maternal mortality rate = Average annual maternal deaths/average number (in lakh) of women of reproductive age alive

Source: SRS, Niti Aayog

According to the United Nations' (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the global target is to bring down the MMR to fewer than 70 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births by 2030.

THIS WORD MEANS

OVERSEAS CITIZEN OF INDIA

The status author Aatish Taseer enjoyed until Indian government revoked it. Who are eligible for it?

THE INDIAN government has revoked author Aatish Taseer's Overseas Citizen of India card (*The Indian Express*, November 7). An Overseas Citizen of India, or OCI, is a category introduced by the government in 2005. Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs) of certain categories as specified in the Citizenship Act, 1955 are eligible for being OCI cardholders. Some of the benefits for PIO and OCI cardholders were different until 2015, when the government merged these two categories.

The Ministry of Home Affairs defines an OCI as a person who was a citizen of India on or after January 26, 1950; or was eligible to become a citizen of India on that date; or who is a child or grandchild of such a person, among other eligibility criteria. According to Section 7A of the OCI card rules, an applicant is not eligible for the OCI card if he, his parents or grandparents have ever been a citizen of Pakistan or Bangladesh. This is the ground cited by the government in revoking the OCI card granted to Taseer, whose

father was a Pakistani national. Taseer grew up in India, and holds a British passport and a Green Card in the US.

OCI cardholders can enter India multiple times, get a multipurpose lifelong visa to visit India, and are exempt from registering with Foreigners Regional Registration Office (FRRO) no matter how long their stay.

If an individual is registered as an OCI for a period of five years, he/she are eligible to apply for Indian citizenship. At all Indian international airports, OCI cardholders are provided with special immigration counters. OCI cardholders can open special bank accounts in India, they can buy non-farm property and exercise ownership rights and can also apply for a driver's license and PAN card. However, OCI cardholders do not get voting rights, cannot hold a government job and purchase agricultural or farm land. They cannot run for public office either, nor can they travel to restricted areas without government permission.

SIMPLY PUT QUESTION & ANSWER

What to read in ozone hole size

The annual ozone hole over the Antarctic has been found to be at its smallest since the 1980s. What causes the hole, and what does the small area this year mean in the context of climate protection efforts?

AMITABH SINHA

PUNE. NOVEMBER 8

WHILE ONGOING and predicted impacts of climate change have been bringing an almost daily reminder of an impending catastrophe, there is some good news on another environmental danger. An "ozone hole", which builds up over the Antarctic region this time of the year, has been found to be the smallest since it was first discovered in the 1980s (briefly reported in *The Indian Express*, October 24). This comes just a month after the UN Environment Programme said that the ozone layer was on track to be completely restored within "our lifetime" itself.

Depletion of the ozone layer, which protects the planet from the harmful ultraviolet rays of the sun, was considered as grave a threat to the planet in the 1980s and 1990s as climate change is now. Over the years, however, that threat has largely dissipated, as the world has banned the production and consumption of most of the "ozone-depleting substances". However, it will take another 15-45 years for the ozone layer to be fully restored.

Why is ozone important?

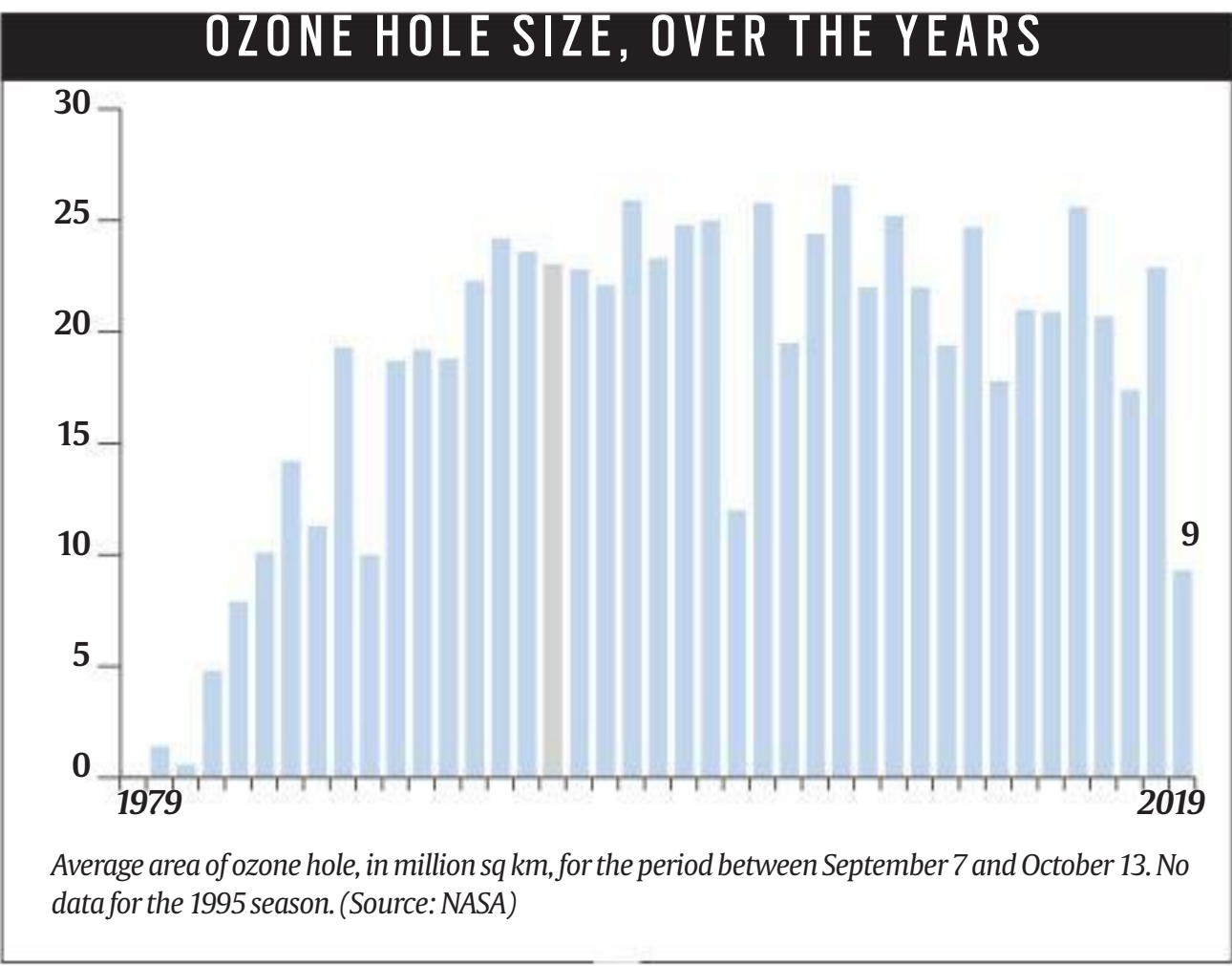
Ozone (chemically, a molecule of three oxygen atoms) is found mainly in the upper atmosphere, an area called stratosphere, between 10 and 50 km from the earth's surface. Though it is talked of as a layer, ozone is present in the atmosphere in rather low concentrations. Even at places where this layer is thickest, there are not more than a few molecules of ozone for every million air molecules.

But they perform a very important function. By absorbing the harmful ultraviolet radiations from the sun, the ozone molecules eliminate a big threat to life forms on earth. UV rays can cause skin cancer and other diseases and deformities, in plants and animals.

During experiments in Antarctica in the early 1980s, scientists noticed that during September-November, the concentration of ozone fell considerably lower to what was recorded in the 1950s. Studies and satellite measurements confirmed the depletion, and by mid-1980s scientists narrowed down on a class of industrial chemicals like chlorofluorocarbons, or CFCs, as the likely culprits.

What causes the ozone hole?

The 'ozone hole' is not really a hole. It is a



Average area of ozone hole, in million sq km, for the period between September 7 and October 13. No data for the 1995 season. (Source: NASA)



World Ozone Day in 2013. Express Archive

region in the stratosphere, directly above Antarctica, where the concentration of ozone has been measured to become extremely low in certain months. Depletion is not limited to that area and has happened in other regions of the stratosphere as well, but a set of special meteorological and chemical conditions that arise over the Antarctica in the months of

September, October and November make the problem much more acute there.

NASA recently reported that this ozone hole, which usually grows to about 20 million sq km in September, was less than half that size this year, the smallest it has ever been during this time after being discovered.

Is this a major gain?

NASA said that this could have happened because of an extraordinarily high temperatures in the stratosphere this year, rather than the ongoing human efforts to contain the ozone depletion. Scientists have reported that temperatures in some areas of the stratosphere — usually over 100 degrees below zero — were 30° to 40°C higher than normal in September this year. At least two such extraordinary warming of the stratosphere has been observed in the past, and on both those occasions the ozone hole was also measured to be smaller than usual. But scientists are not sure why this warming happens. This warming has no observed connection with the warming in lower atmosphere that leads to climate change.

But while this gain might be temporary, the depletion in the ozone layer is consistently being contained, thanks to global efforts to ban the use of harmful chemicals that destroy ozone. CFCs and similar chemicals

Fake 'horns' in the lab: will they save rhinos?

Study describes method to create fakes using horse hairs, rhino experts not convinced it can stop poaching

KABIR FIRAQUE

NEW DELHI, NOVEMBER 8

THE MAIN reason why rhinos of all species are poached, including the one-horned Indian rhinoceros found mostly in Assam, is that there is a market for its horn. In Chinese traditional medicine, the rhino horn is believed to have medicinal and other health benefits, including working as an aphrodisiac — an idea that remains a threat to rhino populations.

Now, researchers have proposed a solution — fake horns. They have described a method for creating fake "rhino horns" using horse hair, and suggested that if the market could be flooded with these, then the demand for real rhino horns would go down. The proposal has been met with incredulity by rhino conservation experts in India.

What the research claims

Scientists from the University of Oxford and Fudan University, Shanghai, have described their method in a paper published on Friday in the journal *Scientific Reports*. They

have suggested that the method will provide a blueprint to create "credible fakes" that could eventually flood the rhino horn market.

Unlike the horn of a cow, at the core of which is live bone, the rhino's horn is actually a tuft of hair that grows, tightly packed, and glued together on the nose by a mass of cells and fluid. The scientists relied on the horse, which is the rhino's near relative, bundled together its tail hairs and glued them together with a matrix of regenerated silk. These sample structures, they have reported, were similar to real rhino horn in look, feel and properties, as shown by analytical studies.

In order to confuse the market, the authors stressed, plausible copies should be simple to produce while being similar. The composite they created is easily moulded into a "rhino horn copy" with a microstructure that, when cut and polished, is remarkably similar to that of the real horn, they said.

The composition and the method of preparation should be the same for Indian and African rhinos, co-lead author Fritz Vollrath, professor of zoology at Oxford, told *The Indian Express* in reply to a question. In a statement on



Express Archive

the Oxford website, Vollrath said, "We leave it to others to develop this technology further with the aim to confuse the trade, depress prices and thus support rhino conservation."

Questions over effectiveness

If fakes do infiltrate the market, the question is whether buyers will eventually become conscious enough to avoid them. "It's a black market already and dodgy entrepreneurs will find ways... Exposing the rhino horn for what it is i.e. a tuft of hair, albeit a hugely expensive one that is easily replicated, should rattle the end customer and make him consider spending good money on it," Vollrath said, by email.

In India, rhino conservation experts were

unconvinced when the study was brought to their notice. "The fake rhino horn concept will not work," said Dr Bibhab K Talukdar, chair, Asian Rhino Specialist Group of International Union for Conservation of Nature/Species Survival Commission; Asia coordinator, International Rhino Foundation; and CEO and secretary general of the NGO Aaranyak. "... Whether fake or real horn trade, the intention is to make money. So this is not going to help rhinos in the wild, either way!" Talukdar said.

Amit Sharma, head of Rhino Conservation, World Wildlife Fund, noted he has not seen the study, "but my view is that people are always looking for genuine products as they value it. This is true for any commodity. There will always be check and balance especially for products of high value and demand."

At Kaziranga National Park, home to over 2,000 rhinos, the number of rhinos poached has decreased from 27 in 2014 to six in 2017. For these horns, too, the market is China. Talukdar said in the last few years horns from Assam, and North Bengal, are being transported to China via Myanmar.

Inputs from Tora Agarwala in Guwahati

Why Thiruvalluvar matters in Tamil Nadu, and the debate over his history

ARUN JANARDHANAN

CHENNAI, NOVEMBER 8

FOR A WEEK now, a controversy has been playing out in Tamil Nadu over the legacy of the ancient saint Thiruvalluvar. It began with the BJP state unit tweeting a picture of Thiruvalluvar, whose white robes had been replaced with saffron, which drew protests from Dravidian and Left parties. On Monday, a statue of the saint was vandalised in Thanjavur; on Wednesday, after the state BJP IT cell asked party members to pay floral tributes to Thiruvalluvar statues across the state, Arjun Sampath, leader of a fringe group called Hindu Munnani, tried to drape a saffron shawl on one statue, and was arrested. A look at the importance of Thiruvalluvar in Tamil Nadu:

Who was Thiruvalluvar?

He is regarded as a cultural and moral icon for Tamils across caste and religious lines. The period when he lived is debated,

as is his religious identity. Some place him in the third or fourth century; others put him in the eighth or ninth. Some call him a Hindu; some trace his past to Jainism; Dravidian groups count him as a saint with no religious identifiers except his Dravidian roots.

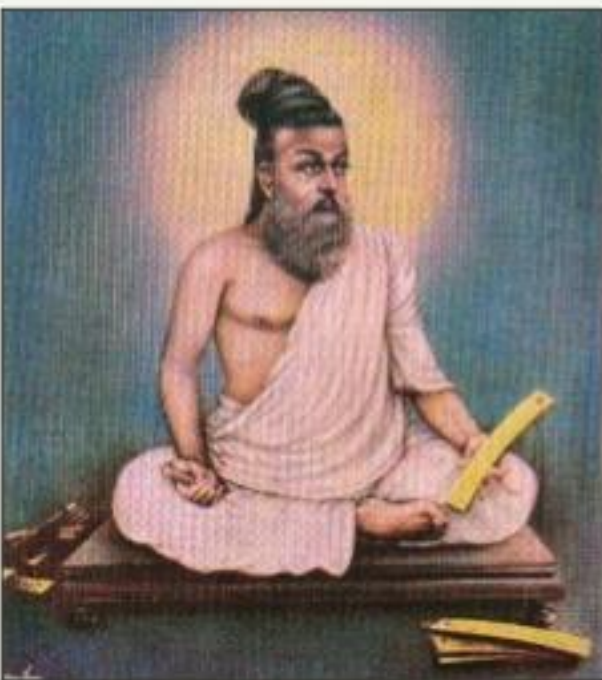
In his 1873 book *Tamil Wisdom; Traditions Concerning Hindu Sages and Selections from their Writings*, British scholar Edward Jewitt Robinson wrote about the saint, including the suggestion that "Valluvan, or priest of the Pariah tribe, found the deserted child [in a grove in Chennai], and reared him as his own." The book quotes several testimonies on Valluvar (Thiruvalluvar), including: "Of the six sects, one will condemn the system of the other but none of them will condemn the system propounded by Valluvar in his Cural: It has the merit of harmonising the opinions of them all, so that each sect would admit it to be its own." Another testimony says, "It is difficult to say whether the Sanskrit or the Tamil is the best: They are perhaps on a par, since the Sanskrit possesses the Veda, and the Tamil

the Cural, composed by the divine Valluvar."

What are the contemporary views?

BJP national secretary H Raja told *The Indian Express* that Dravidian parties who don't believe in gods had removed Hindu symbols from depictions of Thiruvalluvar. Raja said *Tirukkural*, the saint's collection of 1,330 couplets (or Kurals/Curals) is similar to Hindu Sastram. "The original Thiruvalluvar had *vibhuti* and all Hindu symbols. It was Dravida Kazhagam and DMK who changed his appearance to suit their political gains," he said, arguing that the saint's verses and life were similar to *Sanatan Dharma*.

S Swaminathan, a retired IIT professor who specialised in ancient Tamil history, said: "From whatever little evidence left on Thiruvalluvar's life, several scholars had concluded that most likely he was a Jain, neither a Hindu nor a Dravidian. All that we can ascertain is *Tirukkural*, his extraordinary piece of literature, has no comparison in Indian history or ancient literature."



A painting of Thiruvalluvar

Where does all this fit in alongside recent findings on Dravidian history?

While the ongoing controversy was trig-

gered by the BJP's efforts to attribute a Hindu religious link to Thiruvalluvar, Dravidian history has already been the subject of recent discourse. Findings from the Keeladi excavation site, published by the state archaeological department, had pushed back Tamil Dravidian history in South India by at least 300 years, from 300 BCE to 600 BCE. The exhaustive excavations did not find symbols associated with Hinduism, which strengthened the theory of ancient Dravidian history detached from Hinduism. The excavations are expected to throw light on a nearly 1,000-year gap between the Indus Valley civilisation (1500 BCE) and the Sangam Era (600 BCE).

Is this the first time that efforts are being made to claim the legacy of important Tamil personalities?

Swaminathan said that this has been happening all along, by Dravidian groups five decades ago, and by Hindutva groups now. "The so-called picture of Thiruvalluvar

in white robes itself was a recent imagination. No figure or picture of Thiruvalluvar existed [earlier]. We do not even know whether the ancient saint who penned *Tirukkural* was one person or a blend of many over the years. Like Jesus, we created the figure of Thiruvalluvar several hundred years after his death," Swaminathan said.

Two years ago, a similar controversy had been created when the BJP called the 19th-century social reformer Sree Narayana Guru a Hindu saint. Guru, who is credited with laying the foundations for Kerala's social and secular fabric, is known for opposing casteism and promoting spiritual freedom.

In 2017, the RSS national council in Coimbatore called for popularising Tamil saints and icons in the organisation's literature to help Hindutva ideology gain more visibility in the state. The RSS-BJP has sought to claim the legacy of freedom fighters and national leaders like Kappalottiya Tamizhan, with whom households in Tamil Nadu identify closely.

