

Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsava: The Moment of Moral Renaissance

By Udaya Kumar Varma

Author is a former IAS Officer of 1976 batch of Madhya Pradesh Cadre. He retired in 2013 from the post of Secretary, Information and Broadcasting, GOI.

The nation, we the people of India, are celebrating the 75th year of our independence. There is energy, enthusiasm, involvement all around. Never before the festivities were so elaborate, the diversity and the innovation to appropriately mark the occasion never so brilliantly devised. We are determined to make our country the strongest, the greatest country in the world.

It behoves all of us, and most of all, the ones who habitually suspect everything and who are so concerned about the democracy, rights, entitlements, poverty and inequalities, minorities and many such complex issues in India, to participate whole heartedly and for once, shed their inhibitions aside, for, in the heart, the most passionate liberal is also an ardent nationalist. The two are not antagonistic, they are mostly similar and supplementary.

More than a Celebration

And yet, for India to emerge as the greatest country what is required is far more than a passionate display of enthusiasm and energy. It requires a resolution and determination much deeper in content and much stronger and durable than the festivities and celebrations, howsoever, grandiose and gratifying.

To become a great country, we need to think about the quality of our national character and the value system that we practice in our dealings with ourselves and each other. It is this ethical and moral dimension of our growth that demands urgent attention and consideration. Alas! We seem to be far poorer and impoverished compared to material poverty in this respect. These are the intangible dimensions of growth, progress and strength.

A Case for Moral Renaissance

Is it the right time and occasion to talk about a moral or ethical renaissance of India? Will it dampen our enthusiasm if for a moment, we also review the prevailing standards of our conduct in personal and public life and ask ourselves whether the way we deal with our problems meet the basic test of morality or propriety? If we do not hesitate to offer a bribe to expedite things out of turn, if we find honor in flouting laws and processes merely to establish our superior station in life, if it is fashionable to get a driving license without undergoing the mandatory driving test and announce it as a symbol of one's clout and not feel guilty about it even for a moment, if we want privileges we are not entitled to and which are due to others, if we usurp somebody else's share without the least compunction, shall physical prosperity alone make our country great? Are huge GDP and high growth rates, a world class infrastructure and amenities enough and adequate to make our country the strongest or the greatest?

If such thoughts cross our minds and trouble us, even momentarily, I think we are seriously in the business of making our country great. The festivities, the gaiety, the élan and the excitement is indeed laudable. Desirable it is in any case, but the occasion calls for something far more substantial than spectacular celebrations and impressive display of our pride and pleasure of 75 years of a remarkable journey.

Can we visualize an India where respect to women is an instinct and protection of our children an article of faith? where it is honorable to wait for one's turn than to pay speed- money? where it is honorable to fail than to cheat? where one thinks of duties first and then of rights? and where the standing in the society is not so much on account of your wealth or authority but because of your contribution and sacrifices for the society? That will make India a great country.

It will take a generation, possibly two, to shape such an India because the moral and ethical resurgence will begin from the infants and children. It will be they who, when they grow- up, will transform India from an affluent nation to a great nation.

It may appear to some as perhaps a sobering thought, particularly around this time. Is it naïve, even foolish to think about this, let alone talk about it? Does the prevailing political discourse so corrosive, so divisive, so bitter and so self-centered subdues us into cynicism and pessimism?

A Future of Hope and Confidence

Perhaps not! The address today of the Prime Minister from the ramparts of Lal Qila, while full of hope, optimism, faith, vision and confidence, offers a road map for the next 25 years of our journey. He seeks and beseeches people's cooperation, help and blessings in his endeavors. We must respond with our whole-hearted and unreserved endorsement and support.

True patriotism and nationalism involve looking with objectivity at ourselves and being honest in admitting what plagues our national character. To overlook this basic challenge and to deny it Ostrich-like, may not be the appropriate redemption of a debt that we owe to the country that we claim to love.

Gunboat Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics

By Srikanth Kondapalli

Author is Professor in Chinese Studies and Dean of School of International Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University.

Despite serious reservations expressed by both Sri Lanka and India, and after a clearance delay of five days, China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) Strategic Support Force vessel Yuan Wang 5 finally docked at Chinese-leased Hambantota port on 16 August 2022. Of course, the Sri Lankan government later clarified that the docking was for supplies and maintenance, and that the vessel wouldn't undertake any "research" activities in its waters. While this point was reiterated by the ship's captain, Zhang Hongwang, observers are taking it with a pinch of salt.

The resulting shadow-boxing between India and China, in the backdrop of an already strained relationship following the land skirmish in mid-2020 in Galwan, has consequences for the neighbourhood as well. The Yuan Wang 5 incident will strengthen China's drive to acquire hegemony in South Asia and the Indian Ocean, in four areas.

Disrupt South Asia to divide and rule

In its quest to impose hegemony in different parts of Asia, China has been displacing dominant powers in several regions. In South Asia, following the ancient stratagem of hexiao kongda ('cooperate with the small to counter the big'), China has made disruptive inroads into Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and the Maldives,

while retaining influence over Pakistan. The aim here is not only to dislodge India, but to also create disequilibrium domestically in South Asian countries. This will lead to China effectively implementing its divide and rule policy and acquiring structural power in the region.

Coercion through gunboat diplomacy

Yuan Wang 5's berthing at Hambantota revives historical images of China's maritime invasions. During the third expedition to the Indian Ocean, Admiral Zheng He's sailors kidnapped a recalcitrant Vira Alakeshvara of Kotte kingdom (not far from the Chinese-leased Hambantota) in 1410-1411, and presented him to Ming emperor Yongle. China undertook regime change by installing Parakramabahu at Kotte. Now with the Rajapaksas on the run and Ranil Wickremesinghe under siege, Beijing finds an opportune moment to make inroads into Sri Lanka and attempt another regime change in its favour.

China's historical narrative is that the Europeans forced open the decaying Qing China through 'gunboat diplomacy'—mainly naval vessels and coercive diplomacy. More than a century later, with China having ascended to being the second largest economy in the world, Beijing is attempting similar antics across the globe. Much as the European powers had imposed treaty ports in coastal China—some like Hong Kong on 99-year lease—Beijing grabbed Hambantota also on a 99-year lease. It is no surprise then that the head of the China Merchant Port Holdings that owns Hambantota received the Yuan Wang 5, instead of the vessel docking at the much larger Colombo Port.

Coercion through economic arm-twisting

China's economic might allows it to arm-twist the Sri Lankan government, which is already under financial siege and debilitating social unrest. Sri Lanka owes over US\$ 51 billion in debt to several lenders, with China's share amounting between 10 to 20 per cent. Beijing refused to defer loan repayment and threatened Sri Lanka to comply with its diktats. Chinese Foreign minister Wang Yi visited Colombo in January 2022 with no offer of major relief to Sri Lanka, but with his sights set on a forum of Indian Ocean states. Beijing's stranglehold on Colombo provides it a good start to compete with India in the region. Sri Lanka's loan payment default on the Chinese-constructed Hambantota Port came in handy to arm-twist Colombo into accommodating the PLA vessel this week.

Aggravate space and maritime competition

Competition in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR)—and in space—is also further triggered by the Yuan Wang 5 visit. Like China's post-2008 naval missions to the IOR on the pretext of checking piracy, Yuan Wang 5's deployment in the region is probably permanent. It is shortly expected to be deployed again to monitor the Mengtian space module. In the past decade, China has launched over 30 satellites for different countries and made ground preparations for permanent missions.

In May 2007, Beijing launched a communication satellite at a cost of US\$ 311 million—NIGCOMSAT-1—for Nigeria, with ground station support from the capital, Abuja, and Xinjiang's Kashgar. In 2001, China set up a tracking, telemetry, and command station at Swakopmund in Namibia. It launched a communications satellite for Sri Lanka in November 2012, in which former President Rajapaksa's son played a crucial role. Yuan Wang was earlier involved in 80 missions related to Zhongxing 2D satellites, Moon and Mars missions, space stations, and for long periods of sailing—more than half a million nautical miles.

Since 2005, China has been crafting the Asia-Pacific Space Cooperation Organisation to counter US influence in space. Yuan Wang 5 is expected to support forthcoming 'fourth dimensional warfare' in space, with implications for the Quad members. While China highlights Yuan Wang 5's civilian achievements, no data on its military role, specifically on missile tracking missions, has been made available.

[Read complete article on website ipcs.org](http://www.ipcs.org)

The Company Gate

By Sanjay Sahay

Author is former Police Officer of Karnataka. Now he is Founder & Director of TechConPro Pvt Ltd., Bengaluru

From Watergate to Coalgate, gate by its very perception has become synonymous with scams in public perception. If you add gate to any word, it becomes self-explanatory. It is because this public connect with gate that every big scandal generally gets gate suffixed to it. While scandals have with own life cycle and one gives way to the other, most of times, some or other keeps playing in the public space. But when it companies; creation, management, operations, links, murky dealings by a large number, shares, stock market positioning and the like, there is feeling that the company gate is always on.

The business companies which form the bulwark of any economy and also the harbingers for technological change and wealth creation in every field, have their own dirty underbelly, which keeps showing up in the public domain quite a few times. Nearly every single scandal finally comes to the doorsteps of one company or the other. Companies are even created for scandals. The political scandals too finally end up with politicians who business enterprises, in way they should not, and /or supporting companies which are both against the rules and detrimental to governance. While religion and politics cocktail can have its own limitations, political and business has turned out to be a deadlier cocktail of nemesis.

Clean promoters are a rarity is what the Indian businesses have conclusively proved. If the cross connections of the directors of companies are unravelled, the business history and geography will be totally different. Skeletons will start tumbling out of the cupboard. With that if we get into the shareholding pattern, the picture would get much clearer. Every single company is dealt with as a single entity, providing them the comfort of law, while they work in unison favouring and indulging in all sorts of business practices which are unhealthy and at times blatantly illegal. The Indian business fraternity has developed its own ways to simultaneously and comply.

There is no beginning or an end to this underbelly, it keeps working as efficiently as it can, ceaselessly and relentlessly. It shows up even in international journalistic / whistle-blowers' / hacking revelations. The Pandora and Paradise Papers have thrown off the lid of the dirtiest it all – the dark web of the shell companies. One is ready to do anything to supposedly save tax. The funder / investor game has been companies undoing over and over again. The start-up ecosystem has now been at the same receiving end. Effortless financial euphoria is our curse, we have seen it over and over again. Over to the stock market and we the have the co-location criminal game and the generic problem of all time, NPA, the bottomless banking due diligence, the less said the better. A large-scale financial cleansing is a must for this country.

COMPANYGATE IS AN ETERNAL SCANDAL.

Traces Of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI's) In Ancient Indian Polity

By Alok Virendra Tiwari

Author is pursuing Masters in Political Science. He has carried out research works in Tribal districts of Jharkhand and Tripura.

The Constitution of India was adopted on 26th January 1950 and right from the adoption of Indian Constitution, one of the most important steps in order to assure political participation in

country was by passing the 73rd and 74th Amendment of the Indian Constitution in the year 1992 and 1993 which assured 'Democratic Decentralisation' and reaching the 'Democracy at the very grassroot level'. We can find traces of how inspite of presence of 'Monarchy', India was able to carryout the process of 'Decentralisation' in the ancient period and this in a way reflects how developed and how mature was the administrative and political system of India since Ancient period and this is also a representative of how 'Democracy' is actually present or is the very essence of India.

The traces of Panchayati Raj Institutions in India can be found since the early Rig-vedic period. In both the books Rig Veda and Atharva Veda we find mention of 'Sabha' which was present during the Early as well as Later Vedic Age. The Sabha in the vedic age performed both Judicial and Administrative functions and it also functioned like a judicial Authority. One of the important features of this Assembly was presence of Women on a large scale and they were called 'Sabhavati'. Information regarding the presence of 'Sabha', 'Samiti' and 'Sabhavati' is present in both Rig Veda and Atharva Veda. Democratic Decentralisation is a process by which aspirations of people along with implementation of policies becomes very smooth and easy. In a Monarchical System the power is concentrated in the hands of King who many a times doesn't carry out the work in the way citizens aspire, however in a democracy which is decentralised we can find traces of how this institutions carryout work in a way which is very helpful and which is able to fulfil the aspirations of citizens. The present day Three tier- system which we have in India can be compared with them because compulsory provisions has been made in the Constitution wherein 1/3rd seats are reserved for females in order to have their active participation. Around 20 states like Maharashtra, Orissa, Kerala, Karnataka, Tamilnadu, etc have even reserved 50% of their seats for female candidates. Along with this during the time of Gautam Buddha when there was presence of 16 Mahajanpadas like Magadha, Kosala, Anga , Avanti , Malla , Gandhara , etc we find that the rural administration was in the hands of village headmen and he was called 'Gramini' i.e. leader of the 'Grama' or a tribal military unit and even today the title of 'Gramini' is prevalent in Srilanka . Other titles like 'Gramabhojaka' and 'Gramika' was also prevalent and king of Magadha, Bimbisara of the Haryanka Dynasty is said to have summoned 86,000 Gramikas. These Gramikas are said to be playing very important role in the political sphere during the ancient period and they had direct links with the kings. When compared with the present day institutions at the local level we have Gram Panchayat at the Village level , Panchayat Samiti at the Block level and Zilla Parishad at the District level and heads of all the three institutions have big roles to play for the development of infrastructure facilities and for providing amenities like Education at Zilla Parishad Schools , organising and maintaining of primary healthcare centres , sanitation facilities , managing of village markets , etc so we find a similar kind of functions to some extent performed by Gramikas at that time at that time and by the 'Sarpanch' , 'Block Pramukh' , 'Zilla Panchayat Pramukh' in the present day.

In the Mauryan Empire during the time of Chandragupta Maurya, we find an elaborate system of administration which are mentioned in the books 'Indika' by the Megasthenes and 'Arthashastra' by Chanakya. In the Arthashastra by Chanakya we find mention of Village Panchayats. During the time of Maurayan Empire the town was called 'Pur' and its affairs were managed by a headman called 'Nagarik'. The Greek ambassador Megasthenes in 'Indika' states that the city during was administered by six committees which consisted of 5 members each. The 11th Schedule of the Indian Constitution and specifically Article 243-G contains 29 functions that are to be performed by the PRI's. It includes functions like providing Irrigation facilities , Agricultural extension , providing Drinking water , Development of Khadi and Village Industries , Providing Vocational training , Women and Child development , etc and in order to carry out all these functions small committees are made for implementation of the policies in the present day and in the Maurayan Empire the six committees of 5 members were made and their functions were to control and regulate Agriculture , Trade and Commerce , Weights and Measures ,crafts which included weaving , spinning and mining .

Here also a similarity can be seen in the functions which are performed. Eg: In the Maurayan Empire weaving and spinning was important was important function and even today organisation of cottage Industries with special emphasis on development of 'Khadi' shows a considerable significance regarding the duties which were performed then and even today.

During the Gupta Dynasty we find that a system of provincial and local administration was very significant and it is known to us through various inscriptions of the Gupta Empire wherein we find that the Empire was divided into divisions called 'Bhuktis' and Bhukti was placed under the control of 'Uparika'. The functions Bhuktis and even 'Vishyas' which were organised at the district level are to some extent similar to Zilla Parishad and they also played a significant role in the local administration during the reign of Gupta rulers.

So right from the Rigvedic period around 1500 BC to the year 1992 when the 73rd Amendment was passed the main reason for the establishment of all these institutions was to take steps for the welfare of citizens and thus it can be said that even though the 73rd and 74th Amendment were passed in the year 1992 and 1993 , the democratic essence through active participation is part of Ancient India's Polity and traces of democracy along with its decentralisation is present in India since more than 3000 years .

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors. They do not purport to reflect the opinions or views of the FINS or its members.

Nation is Indebted to:

Kanchan Sendre, 'Vaccine didi'

How a trans woman fought fear, rumours to ensure her community got Covid-19 vaccine



When the COVID-19 pandemic struck, the transgender community found itself at a triple disadvantage. Their main sources of livelihood, such as singing at functions, begging etc, were disrupted. Living in groups, they were at increased risk of infection. On top of this, there was a high rate of vaccine hesitancy in the community due to fear of humiliation at the vaccination centres.

In Chhattisgarh's Durg, Kanchan Sendre, a trans woman, has taken it upon herself to dispel fears about the Covid-19 vaccine in her community. Thanks to Sendre's efforts many transgendered people in Durg district have taken the shot, earning her the epithet of 'Vaccine Didi'.

"I too had hesitations about the COVID-19 vaccine. I had fallen sick after first dose. But once I understood the importance of taking the shot, I wanted everyone in my community to get it," Sendre says.

Sendre was convinced about the safety of the vaccine through the multiple engagements that she had with the MOMENTUM Routine Immunization Transformation and Equity Project team, a USAID-funded initiative that helps the Central and state governments accelerate COVID-19 vaccine coverage.

Dr Sanjay Kapur, Managing Director, John Snow India, said: “Trust building is an essential step when working with vulnerable communities. Thus, the project team knew that to reach out to transgender people, they would need someone from within the community. Vaccine hesitancy was high in this community. Most transgender people live in deras (clusters) where entry for an outsider is very difficult. We needed someone they would trust. Since Kanchan had already been working for transgender rights, we reached out to her”.

According to Sendre, many factors were responsible for the vaccine hesitancy.

“Apart from the usual rumours on social media etc., the transgender community had some specific concerns. Many of them take sex change hormones, some are HIV positive. They did not know how their bodies would react to the vaccine. Also, many no longer identify with the gender mentioned on their official ID cards. They feared ridicule at vaccination centres. Since I understood their problems, I could convince them. I was determined I would not give up,” Sendre says.

Sendre has been working for the welfare of her community since 2008. She is a member of the Third Gender Welfare Board of the Chhattisgarh government, and runs an organisation called Sangharsh Samiti, which helps transgender people get jobs, government benefits, and social and economic acceptance.

“When I left home, I had lived in a dera for some years. I moved out to pursue college education, but I was familiar with the structure and workings of a dera and had friends living there. Also, during the lockdown, my organisation had provided ration to members of the community, so people had a level of trust in me,” Sendre says.

The process of convincing meant multiple visits to the deras, hearing out people’s problems, and explaining the need for and importance of the vaccine in a manner they would understand. Thanks to Sendre’s efforts, in December 2021, vaccination camp for transgender people was held in Durg, in collaboration with the project and the state government. The benefits went beyond just COVID-19 vaccination.

At the camp, some people were found to be suffering from diabetes. They were put on medication for that. Also, the MOMENTUM Project team requested the state to send mobile medical units during the COVID-19 camps as an incentive to the community, as many don’t go for regular health check up’s fearing ridicule.

Sendre is hopeful her efforts for the vaccination will also benefit her community in other ways. “My life’s mission is to pull my community from the margins. I hope this experience of getting vaccinated will embolden trans people to come forward and claim more government benefits, as equal members of the society,” she adds.

A real humane approach by Kanchan Sendre to serve the transgender community during Pandemic crisis.

Write to us at:

bulletin@finsindia.org

**OFFICE :4, Belle View, Lakhamsi Nappu
Road, Dadar (East), MUMBAI – 400014
Phone 022 24127274**

EDITORIAL BOARD

Mr Gopal Dhok

Col Ravindra Tripathi