

| Chapter 10

EPILOGUE

In June 1994, three months short of my 65th birthday, I left the portals of King Saud University, where I had been teaching since August 1984. Earlier, in 1989, the very year I turned 60, I had seriously mulled over the prospect of retirement, but was persuaded against it as, out of the blue, I was granted a sizable hike in my earnings that I could hardly have turned up my nose at. In 1994, however, when the academic year ended, I decided it was time to ‘hang up my cap and gown’ and put my feet up. We bid farewell to Riyadh with mixed feelings about our sojourn there; ‘it was the best of times and it was the worst of times’, to sum it all up. We left for London in June to visit our son Bobby. Three months later we returned home. To Kerala, that is.

By that time, a container-load of our personal effects had arrived by sea at the Kochi Port waiting for customs clearance before we could take delivery of the stuff. As soon as we heard from our clearing agents about it, we drove to the Kochi Port. We were met by the agents’ representative and led to the Customs House, where we found that our belongings, which had been dispatched securely crated from Riyadh, had already been unloaded and queued up to be opened and scrutinized by the officers of the Customs Authority. They had been waiting us for to turn up. On our arrival, they promptly unpacked the crates for inspection. And just as quickly left leaving the crates open.

Later, much later, their work of ferreting about the opened crates commenced. When they had almost got done with it, three young men, who didn’t look remotely like customs officers, sauntered in and proceeded to give the crates a look-over without as much as a by-your-leave. Such brazenness was annoying. For a reason I could not put my finger on, they were all dressed in over-starched white, half-sleeved shirts and no less starched dhotis *a la* the local politicians, whether of the Left or of the Right. Could they be party functionaries? What excuse could they have for being at the customs house? Could they be in league with the Customs men to do whatever they were there for?

Moving from crate to crate, giving each the once-over, they came to where my books had been unpacked. They had just gone past that pile, when one of them doubled back and began running his eyes over the books. One caught his attention and he pulled it out. It happened to be Inder Malhotra’s biography of Indira Gandhi, a former Prime Minister of India. He began leafing through it, by which time the other two who had breezed past returned to rejoin their comrade.

Abruptly, as if by premonition, the one who was skimming through the book looked up and shot a glance over his shoulder. Our eyes locked. I could see indecision creeping over his face. His friends noticed it too, whereupon they too turned and eyed me. They, who had until then deigned to give me no more than a cursory glance, began looking me up and down as though to size me up. I was dressed in a home-spun white, collar-less Kurta

and dhoti in the manner of Congress politicians of an earlier vintage. The next thing I knew, the three of them had just as swiftly turned away from me to beat a slow retreat, all brashness gone, with whatever plans they might have hatched apparently blighted. I was to learn later, that the local Congress party free-wheelers would often drop in unannounced to scrounge around and swipe whatever handy things they could stealthily help themselves to. And the customs men, hand in glove with them, would turn a blind eye even as such interlopers made off with the loot they could lay their hands on.

We came to learn soon enough, but too late to have forestalled it, that some of our stuff had been purloined. How or when that was executed is to this day a matter of conjecture for us. You see, after our belongings had been checked and cleared by the customs, they were being loaded on to a truck, which we had hired for the purpose, when, to our surprise, the siren went off for the lunch-break. The loading-up, which had not got very far, was discontinued forthwith as was the usual custom. We had to walk out of the yard, leaving the partly-loaded truck behind and the rest of our things all strewn around, apparently with no one to keep an eye on the stuff. Could the sleight-of-hand have been performed during that break? Anyhow, like everyone one of the visitors, it was only after the lunch-break that we could return for the loading up to be resumed.

When it was eventually completed, the load was securely fastened for the journey back and the truck was soon on its way. We followed closely behind. Our loss was not spotted until we had reached home and had the truck unloaded. On tallying the stuff against the check list, we found that they did not agree. The loss, however, did not amount to much except for one particular item for its value as an irreplaceable keepsake. That was a beautiful Persian carpet, no bigger than the size of a prayer mat, that the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Nawaz Sharif no less, had gifted it to our daughter Miriam after she had interviewed him for the a BBC TV documentary. It happened to be the four-part series 'The Dynasty' featuring the Nehru-Gandhi family's enduring hold on the Indian psyche.

Clearly, the initial omens on our return to our country did not seem quite auspicious. Until that point, we had been birds of passage, drifting from country to country over a period of well-nigh forty years. A six-year spell in between this period was, more or less, a cloistered life on the campus of the Lawrence School in Ooty. This experience gave us our first real taste of the shenanigans and scams obtaining in *hamaara Bhaarat mahaan*. The changes that time had wrought on the country were hard to reconcile to.

I remember my early years in Travancore, a simple, care-free period of my life, moving from place to place wherever my father's work took him, from Pallam to Perumbavoor, and then on to Quilon. Often, we siblings, George, Alice and I, accompanying our mother, would return to our ancestral home at Kumbanad. It was in those days an obscure village, miles from nowhere, just a collection of modest houses with thatched roofs, except for a house or two, brick-built and tiled, a thatched church and a scattering of shops. The arrival once in a while of an itinerant butcher was a rare event. He would put up a palm-fronded shanty, slaughter a bull, and sometimes a goat as well, to sell its meat to the villagers for their not so frequent meaty repast, longingly looked forward to.

Apart from these slaughter-house bloodlettings, nothing that smacks of gore had ever made the news in Kumbanad. When a few years earlier a man in the neighbouring village of Koipuram had savagely hacked his wife to death in a fit of rage, for no better reason than that she had not scrambled his favourite meal on that fateful day, it caused a great sensation that was discussed in hushed tones by the villagers for a long time afterwards. The ‘villain’ of the piece was until then known to be an amiable family man well-liked by all who knew him. He went by the name of Mathai. What flipped his lid on that day was the fatal flaw in his belly, namely his weakness for sautéed Jackfruit seeds, (*chakka kuru mezhukku varattieth*), the relish that he had an irresistible fondness for. As the court had found that his crime was not pre-meditated, he was spared the noose. He was, nevertheless, sentenced to ‘life imprisonment’. In those days, life imprisonment was not for the rest of one’s earthly life, but was for a flexible term. In the Princely State of Travancore of yesteryears, it was for a term not exceeding twelve years, often with up to one third of the jail term remitted for good behaviour. Mathai was out in nine.

For a long time afterwards, he was referred to in these parts as *Chakka kuru Mathai* viz Jackfruit seed Mathai. His very name conjured up visions of a monster in children’s minds. And, whenever a child in the family threw a temper tantrum, the mere mention of Mathai’s name would be enough to stop him in his tracks. Such was Mathai’s fearful hold on their artless imagination. There were other ghoulish stories too that the women in the family had up their sleeve to deal with obstreperous little brats. But, of course, such childish bugaboos remained lingering memories only until the children outgrew such unreal fears.

Life in the village had an even flow. There was a certain honest simplicity, and freedom from artifice, in the day-to-day dealings between the ordinary villagers, not to mention their readiness to help one another in times of need, like for instance a marriage in the village or bereavement, regardless of the squabbles they might have had before. But that was a long time ago. Today, what exists in Kumbanad is a far cry from what was obtaining in those far-off days.

For one thing, the dwellers of Kumbanad then were mostly the members of the *Kumbanaattu Kudumbom* –descendants of our progenitor Kocheasow Panicker that is, and their farm hands and servants. Farming was their main sustenance. More often than not, it was an unenviable task, especially for the larger families, to make ends meet. With the advent of education, however, from the fifth generation onwards the younger ones in the family looked for and found work, sometimes far away from home to supplement the family income. Erstwhile Malaya, Ceylon and Burma were the most sought after destinations in those early days. One or two went as far as Iraq. My father was one. From the 1940’s onwards the sons and daughters of the family ventured further afield, in droves. This outward flow still goes on, looking for fresh fields and new pastures.

Along with this efflux, there has been a gradual influx into Kumbanad of new arrivals, who bought land and settled here. There were also the retail-traders –the bakers, takeaways, grocers, green-grocers, stationers, ironmongers, moneylenders and what have you- who set up shop, cheek by jowl, to cash in on the new-found prosperity built on the

sweat and toil of the ‘sons of the soil’, daughters not excepted, scattered the world over by now; Africa, the Americas, Australia, Great Britain, mainland Europe, the Gulf countries, New Zealand, you name it. No wonder, the High Street of Kumbanad, all of a kilometre long, can now boast of the branches of some dozen or more commercial banks, their vaults bursting at the seams with cash and gold. And, there are no fewer than ten ATM’s at our beck and call. Strangely, we have yet to have a Jewellery shop that buys and sells jewels and ornaments. Nor do we have a bar to slake our thirst. We do not have a cinema either. Saudi Arabia would have approved our abstinence. Kumbanad, however, is no longer the abstemious, spartan village it once was. That old village is long gone. It’s begun aping a town now with all its comforts, its hustle and bustle.

I remember the pleasant, jasmine-scented Kumbanad nights of yesteryears, its silence broken only by the high-pitched chirping of insects, especially the Cicadas in summer, its shrillness sharpening one’s sense of the darkness outside. The barking of dogs too, keen and loud, would sometimes carry over the gentle slopes of Kumbanad, only to accentuate the silence that followed. Sometimes, bullock-carts would noisily trundle by, their carters singing raucously to keep themselves awake. It was Hobson’s choice to forgive them their ‘trespasses’. Bullock-carts were the common mode of transporting goods, day in and day out. Lorries were hardly ever used for carrying merchandise to Kumbanad from distant places. Instead, river barges used to bring stuff to Arattupuzha river-crossing, three miles down the road; and then, by flat-bedded bullock carts to Kumbanad, not lorries. Motor buses too were a rarity on the roads, and in any case nary a one after dark. During the daylight hours, an eight-seater bus plying between Tiruvalla and Kozhencherry would pass by Kumbanad once every two hours or so honking loudly for likely fare. If perchance a car hove into sight, it was a nine days’ wonder for the children.

When once they had grown out of this stage, filled with wonderment and excitement, and entered the realm of the real, their childlike perceptions too saw a change. They realised that their hankering after the simpler life of that idyllic past now long gone was wishful thinking, a mere passing fancy. They learnt that there was more in life than met the child’s eye. As the prison house of experience descended apace and enveloped him, he got wised up to the changing ways of the world. My experience was no different.

That to me was well-nigh four score or so years ago. Over those years, there has been a creeping change, in particular a gradual lowering in human values in our country. The relationships between people have taken a plunge for the worse. It is in an entirely different social environment that we live now, especially in this part of the world. Old kinships have changed; a change that may not augur well for future generations in how they cope with challenges be it social, cultural, economic, political or otherwise. We live in parlous times.

Not long after our return to India in 1994, I was inducted into the Y’s Men’s Club of Kumbanad. Structurally, the club is the local unit of the Geneva-based Y’s Men International, a community service organisation that works as ‘partners in service’ with the YMCA. Earlier, in the late 1980’s as an expatriate, I had contributed my mite to the club’s acquiring a plot of land and building a clubhouse on it, so it was taken as read that

I would join the club on my return to the country, which I did with great gusto. I involved myself enthusiastically in all its activities. Ammu was also right behind me in support of what we had believed the club stood for. .But, that did not last very long.

Nearly two years after our joining the movement, on 30th June 1996 to be precise, I was installed as the President of the Kumbanad club for the Y'sdom year 1996-1997. Although in hindsight my tenure was nothing spectacular, I believe I was able to carry through the club's plans for a community project or two with more than a modicum of success. I also managed to raise funds from my overseas contacts to add to the club's kitty. But, the maverick bend in me -call it outspokenness if you like- had not exactly helped to endear me to some of the founder members of the club. That was how towards the end of 1998 I found myself isolated in a case involving one of the founder members who had made a nuisance of himself during a club meeting. And, thereby hangs a tale.

On October 25, 1998 the club was holding its General Body Meeting. The chief guest of the day was the then Lieutenant Regional Director of the movement, Y's Man P.M. Mathew. During the meeting, the member in question, who was sitting at the back of the hall, decided to be a nuisance, making some facetious remarks thus overstepping the bounds of ordinary decencies. The members present, one could see, did not take kindly to this disruption, but generally managed to keep a tight rein on their understandable indignation lest they made matters worse. When our man realised that his attention-seeking stratagem did not elicit the kind of response he might have wanted to provoke them into, he subsided. But not for long, as it transpired.

A little later, even as my wife, Ammu, was at the podium felicitating the chief guest, there was a power failure and the hall was momentarily immersed in darkness, at which point our hero started erupting again. Ammu stopped in her tracks and after a brief pause, by which time power was back on, intoned in Malayalam as though to no one in particular, '*Poocha paalu kattu kudickumboll kannadeche Iruttakkunnathu poleya ithu*'. I.e. this is like the cat that thinks it can drink milk stealthily in the darkness it has conjured up by closing its eyes. This dig at him was not lost on the audience and they erupted laughing. Not one to give up easily, our man raised his voice a few decibels and kicked up a shindy. At that point George Joseph Padickal, who was chairing the meeting, sprang up from his chair, walked up to him and admonished him quietly, which however was not lost on the audience. Not wanting to be one-upped, the fellow nearly rounded on him, but thankfully stopped short of laying his hands on him. He then left the hall in an almighty huff, muttering under his breath. Even as he was on his way out, someone in the audience made another crack: *Ariyum thinne, aashaarichiyem kadiche, pinneyum pattikkaa murumuruppe*. i.e. not content with having already bitten the hand that fed it, the dog bares its fangs and growls some more.

In the next Board Meeting that fell on the 6th of November, as soon as this matter was taken up to decide whether he should be disciplined for his unbecoming behaviour, the villain of the piece declared that he was resigning from the club forthwith, so without further ado he was struck off the club roster. We thought that we had heard the last of the matter. But that was not to be. It later turns out that the resignation drama was a just a

subterfuge, for in the meeting that followed what should emerge but a letter he sent through a collaborator of his, lo and behold none other than the president-elect of the club himself. The letter sought permission for him to be a 'member-at-large', a provision for leave of absence if one were laid low by illness or one planned to be out of station indefinitely. Strangely, another letter materialized thereafter this time asking that his membership be restored. That this new concoction would fly in the face of the letter that had earlier been submitted, the collaborator seemed to have conveniently overlooked.

It soon became clear that this was all a ruse invented in cahoots with his collaborator, who had by then become the president of the club. That our mischief-maker had neither intended to leave the confines of Kumbanad nor was he ever bed-ridden even for a day was as plain as day. Feigning ignorance of the man's earlier rustication from the club, the new president declared the afore-mentioned offender to be a member in good standing, as proof whereof he presented a backdated cheque to make it look as though the club dues had been paid in good time. Disgusted with this charade, stage-managed by these latter-day 'thespians', we felt that we had had enough of the club and walked out.

We had our membership transferred to the Maramon Y's Men's Club, a sister club, not far from our place. Most of the members there are senior citizens, mostly of modest means, and are shorn of pretensions to high office in the movement and therefore not in thrall to the machinations of mischief makers. It is only when members have an eye to the main chance that they are more prone to indulge in hanky-panky. The schemer in the aforementioned episode was one such chronic troublemaker.

Sometime after we had left the Kumbanad Club, we were to witness the same shyster president, a lawyer no less, being up to his old tricks again stirring up trouble. This time it was over his woman. It was at one of the Y's Men's District cultural meets at which friendly competitions are customarily held between the sister clubs. One such was the 'Sari Queen', a dress competition for women. He claimed that his wife was denied a prize he thought she so richly deserved. Our man kicked up a stink by blowing what was so trivial out of all proportion and lodged a complaint with the International HQ in Geneva no less. It was ignored. Later, at another cultural meet, another Y's man, an up-and-coming leader in the movement, perhaps taking his cue from the afore-mentioned 'role model' and equally besotted with love for his wife, raised Cain over her having been denied a prize for her 'prize worthy' effort in singing a solo. Egged on by his 'woman scorned', he wrote to the higher-ups to haul the 'offending' organizers over the coals. *Cherchez la femme*, there is a woman at the bottom of it, as the French would have it. A Malayalam maxim would have a different take on him, '*shoved into a pipe and kept there for as long as you want, the curled up tail of a dog would still refuse to straighten*'.

The unabashed tussle for leadership positions at any level in the Y's Men movement in India is a blot on a voluntary service organisation such as ours, which ought to be upholding the principle of 'Service before self'. The movement, especially in our part of India, the South West India Region, had largely fallen into the hands of interlopers, carpetbaggers and disingenuous office seekers. Shameless self-promotion is the order of

the day. Muck-raking and one-upmanship go hand in hand. In their pursuit of leadership positions, they even create paper clubs, or inflate existing club membership with phantom members and pay the dues on their behalf in order to manipulate the voters' list and bump up their vote count just so they get elected come election time. They thus create their own pocket boroughs. And as soon as they have 'won' the elections, it is *status quo ante* again. They are unmindful of the means they have used to come by these, as they seek self-aggrandizement. No wonder, funds go unaccounted for, year after year. Rules are broken with impunity. They do all this without the faintest feelings of guilt.

And they say one thing and mean another with such disarming ease that whatever they say tends to be swallowed hook, line and sinker. In particular, when these pack of lies come from what appears to be a friendly, open face, it causes a degree of trust far in excess of what is owed. Our senses are so easily manipulated by their concoctions that we are no longer in control of ourselves to draw our own inferences. And these leaders, each one of them, like Squealer in Orwell's 'Animal Farm', reels off 'facts and figures' to support their claims. And, indeed as they do so, the very concept of truth is being willingly reshaped especially in the minds of those among the 'foot soldiers', waiting in the wings, pushing and shoving, with an eye to future leadership positions. They would do so with more than a little bit of help from their none-too-upright promoters at the top levels of the leadership. Such shameful opportunism does not raise eyebrows anymore here in Indian Y'sdom. The international leaders based in Geneva have for sometime been looking askance at the questionable goings-on in India with increasing impatience. It was no wonder then that not long ago three such crafty contenders for top positions in the South West India Region were debarred from holding office or running for office at any level, from the club to the International, for five years!

The kind of leadership we are heir to is only a reflection of the values and standards of the society we belong to. In a caste-based, class-based hierarchical society such as is ours, servitude is but its natural concomitant with all its crassness. A community only gets the kind of leadership it deserves. In spite of the self-proclaimed equality between members, Y'sdom in India has over the years sadly succumbed to the malady of a subservient, sycophantic culture. The sight of ordinary members' kow-towing to its leaders, apparently in order to gain some advantage from them, is a sign of how contagious the disease of obsequiousness is in India. They are willingly led, as they bow and scrape to their leaders, always hoping they could curry their favour. These time-servers, having attained some office, more often than not by questionable means, in their turn get so full of themselves that they come to believe that it is their due to patronize the foot soldiers of the movement. They also believe that they enjoy immunity from being quizzed about how common funds are disbursed. Accountability in their financial dealings for and on behalf of the movement is the least of their concerns.

One would have thought that old fogeys, while waiting for the call to meet their maker, so to say, would have forsworn their time-worn urge to continue to force obedience from others. *Au contraire*, old age would seem to have given a leg up to their "vaulting ambition that is apt to overreach itself" as the Bard would put it. Of such are some 'venerable' leaders who run the parent body of the Senior Citizens Associations

hereabouts; i.e. the Federation of the Senior Citizens' Associations of Kerala. I might add that since India's has been a subservient culture down the ages, those senior citizens that we have thought fit to elevate as our leaders think that therefore they can make demands on us at will. Not long ago, they sent out a directive to the local associations to collect a rather large sum of money ostensibly for rendering service to the community at large, on the face of it a laudable objective. The catch in it was that this sum collected was to be forwarded to the mother body, whose pleasure it would then be to dole out, one would suspect, no more than a niggardly fraction of it, if that, for local charity work and would brook no questions. Thankfully, the Kumbanad Chapter of the Association, of which I am a member, decided not to deliver.

And what can one say of the state of play in the field of national politics in India as a whole and of the players who have sneaked into it by hook or by crook? The less said about them the better. There is a multiplicity of national as also regional leaders, each with his special bailiwick, whether it is based on faith, language or ethnicity.

National debate in India has of late been dominated mainly by the issue of corruption. In the wake of the recent scams and scandals that the country was dragged through, the Supreme Court is on record as having averred that among the leaders there are not many upright statesmen who can be counted on to put the country's interest first, rising above narrow parochial and more often self-seeking considerations. Such leaders as these are venal, to put it mildly.

The last two decades have seen our country tossed about from one crisis to the next, without being able to sail on an even keel. At best, we have barely managed to cope with each crisis as it came, but have been pitifully inept at seeing them coming, having lacked the prescience to do so, or, what is more likely, having surrendered our altruism at the feet of grasping cupidity. You may recall what Jesus said to the leaders of his day who had asked him for a sign to prove his credentials. "You may predict the weather by looking at the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times". Today, two thousand years on, this answer still rings true of our lack of discernment, but more to the point, the perennial pre-occupation of our leaders with acquiring pelf and power has made them turn a blind eye to the travails of the nation.

And, as if this were not enough, now we see the spectacle of communal interest groups pulling in different directions aggressively. What is communal can be based on religious, ethnic or linguistic considerations. Though there is communalism rampant in India in each of these different ways, communalism in the sphere of religion appears to be the most aggressive, especially as marketed and manipulated by the RSS, the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* popularly known as the *Sangh Parivar*. What we are witnessing now goes counter to what we were taught at school that Hindus held all life as sacred to be loved and revered and that therefore they should practice Ahimsa in thought, word and deed. *Vasudaiva kutumbakam!* i.e. that all humanity is one family. What do these RSS Swayamsevaks (self-servers?) know of Hinduism who only divisive Hindutwa know?

And, the political wing of the RSS is the Bharatiya Janata Party, BJP for short. The party is largely led by high-caste Hindus. Their writ runs in the BJP. Their ideology, entirely at odds with the benign public persona that they had tried so smoothly to project before and during the recent parliamentary elections, has indeed been evolved from their long-held faith in ancient fables of a mythological past. This ideology that thrives on antipathy towards anything that dares question Manuvadi Hindutwa can only be drilled into the uneducated; the unemployed fringe that these Manuvadis believe could be press ganged for attacking the dalits and the minorities. Incidentally, petty criminals have also wormed their way into their ranks for they see filthy lucre in the venture. Kill their prey or drive them out, and their cattle, their money, their property you name it, all is theirs for the taking. Sadly, this is completely at variance with the stir of change in the country, which one fervently hopes would lead to a future of deliverance from the existential fear that the oppressed masses of India desperately pray for. It is this kind of antipathy that is taking India to an uncertain destiny for the silent majority.

To be an Indian, the RSS would aver, one needs must agree to be *Bhaarat Mata ki Santaan* (children of Mother India) and, therefore be, by implication, a Hindu. The catch in it is, like it or not, he would carry, albatross like, the encumbering baggage of *Manu Smriti* (the Code of Manu). It is the *Chatur Varna* doctrine (the Caste System) and its concomitant, the laws of *Karma* that the already disenfranchised must continue to bear the burden of. The system postulates that the caste one is born into is the result of one's past life. One will be reborn in the future as the sequel to the summary of one's behaviour in this life. This record of behaviour through one's former lives is a man's *Karma*. A man rises in caste through life after life if his Karma shows a history of increasing 'virtue'.

Manu Smriti, they claim, provides a scientific basis for the *Chatur Varna* or the Caste System by categorizing human beings, each according to his 'potential' past and present. A form of arbitrary Artificial Selection! And even more arbitrarily, human beings would remain shackled by these so-called potentials without any chance of their being able to break free from them and reach for 'higher' potentials except through a penitential cycle of births and rebirths. As for the casteless, the irredeemable, it is a chimera. That is the irony of being a *Harijan*, a Child of God as Gandhiji liked to see him! The prospect of deliverance for a Dalit, in the here and now, is thus precluded by Manu's writ. He and his progeny shall for ever remain dispossessed and succourless, as bonded slaves at the beck and call of their masters. The Harijan must be made to keep his appointed place in their scheme of things, way down in the 'food chain'.

This hierarchy moves down from the high-born *Brahmins* or priests, as 'Removers of Ignorance', at the apex of the pyramid, through *Kshatriyas*, the warriors' or 'Removers of Injustice' and *Vysyas*, the traders' or 'Removers of Scarcity' to *Sudras* or 'Removers of Inconveniences', at the bottom, the last named being partly a euphemism for 'night soil'! The Sudras are only one remove from being classified as casteless i.e. social outcasts, some ways not unlike the aforesaid Dalits, the *Chandaalas* or 'untouchables' who are beyond the pale of acceptable society. To a Dalit, the lack of caste determines the course of his life with all its concomitant millstones. Biological determinism, if you like, to

buttress a shadowy ideology for the high-born to monopolize social and economic opportunities!

Incidentally, it is tempting to postulate that the European rulers of South Africa, the Boers, had modelled their political system of racial *apartheid* or apartness along the lines of Manu's writ, to keep the Africans and the mixed races corralled in their compounds, only to come out to work for their European masters as bonded labourers. This racial separation has now been dismantled, thanks to Nelson Mandela and the African National Congress. Manu's dispensation in our country, which can be defined as caste apartheid, may one day be similarly dismantled, one hopes. Sadly though, *Manu Smriti* is the prism through which many a caste Hindu's political consciousness continues to be filtered. The newly won defenders of this doctrine have come to believe that to be a patriotic Indian is to be a Hindu. M.S. Golwalker, one of the founding fathers of the RSS, had this to say, **“Hindus alone are the legal citizens of Bharat....and the non-Hindus.....may stay in this country, wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment - not even citizen's rights...”**

He thus conveniently relegates the minorities, especially the Muslims and the Christians, to the lower orders; and they had better know their place in India; that they do not have what it takes to be regarded as Indian. This overweening bigotry is astounding. Golwalker was not alone within the RSS in voicing such a notion. In 2001, the former RSS chief Sudarshan said that the Muslims and Christians should reinterpret their scriptures to prove their 'Indianness' to be accepted in India. These unctuous arbiters of Indianness wield the weapons of Hindu nationalism or *Hindutwa*, a supercilious exclusivist ideology, with which to stipulate conditions for the religious minorities to be accepted. It is a convenient tool of these self-appointed representatives of the majority to dismiss an entire category of people for their 'otherness' and look upon them with what amounts to disdain. It is noteworthy that among the minorities in India, the Muslims form the second largest group of Muslims worldwide, second only to Indonesia.

This bigotry is only the lesser evil, but is fraught with consequences that question the very idea of an inclusive, secular society that independent India's founding fathers had hoped to build. The aim of the BJP is to polarise society and rule the country, like their white colonial masters before them. Only, the new brown Sahibs will step into the shoes of the old British Sahibs. And the inviolable law of *Varna* will serve these highborn brown Sahibs as their 'Brown man's burden', an authoritarian brand of politics to subjugate the masses. If one were to draw a net deeply enough through their 'dark, unfathomed caves' of their minds one could well trawl the unseen guilt they bear for the fell deeds they have perpetrated and have continued to do using their stooges in the name of '*Ghar wapasi*' and 'cow guardianship' against the dalits and the minorities. To them, killing a cow is sacrilege, but not a human being; they are given carte blanche to kill their fellowmen with impunity. To paraphrase Shakespeare, 'as flies to wanton boys are they to these yobs; they kill them for their sport!

The acts of having condoned the murder of those *Mlechas* like, for instance, the missionary Graham Staines and his two sons, who were reduced to cinder, would be seen

as a mark of patriotism by those benighted boneheads of the country. And what was the crime of those *Mlechas* to suffer such a fate? They had selflessly worked among the wretched of the earth to heal their wounds both of body and of mind, to give them a leg up as it were, like their great exemplar Jesus Christ who had dedicated his life for the succour of the heavy-laden and the downtrodden. Christian forbearance, prompting them to turn the other cheek as it were, has not altogether restrained the promoters of *Hindutwa* from adding Christians as well to their list of whipping boys. From time to time churches have been desecrated, Christian women violently raped and defenceless tribal Christians done in for good measure.

On the other hand, not being given to showing such forbearance, the hard-core Muslims would seem to be driven by their version of faith to fight for what Islam means to them and in the process to kill or be killed and die as martyrs. They believe that it is the duty of every Muslim to fight to the death if necessary against what they regard as apostasy that does not accord with God's laws. They are exhorted to use any means to realise a society that is based on God's revelation. With regard to their political praxis, Muslims so oriented are generally referred to as Salafi Jihadists. The Arabic aphorism says it all: *In tuqtaloo falqatlu akramumaiattatin*; that is 'If you are killed, your being killed is the noblest mode of death' to reach heaven. And as an added impetus, it is put about by wags that the youthful among the martyrs-in-waiting fall for the fable that there are untold allurements promised to them in the future, not the least tempting of which is the prospect of being able to dally with fetching maidens in *Jannum*, the hereafter. No matter how heavy the odds are against them, such indoctrinated youths go out of gear, and keep suffering far blacker cruelties in the bargain at the hands of these saffron-tinted slayers.

It is interesting that these pliant lackeys of the RSS are mobilized primarily from the Dalit ranks, mostly poor and poorly educated owing largely to Manu's centrifugal prescriptions that had spun them outside the scope of decent employability. Their deep-seated inferiority, rooted in a past of caste subjugation, makes them yield to the tempting blandishments of their masters to make them do in the minorities on their behalf. In one of his plays, wasn't it Oscar Wilde who tells us of a squire who for some minor misdeed berates and belabours his wretched man-servant? Seething with impotent rage, the man could only take it out on his master's hapless dog on his way out!

Rather than challenging the hegemony of the upper castes that kept them in thrall, such Dalits are prone to taking the line of least resistance hoping to seek acceptance in *Hindutwa* society that is now being cleverly touted as a society open to all. They may in this manner be hoping to skirt round their social backwardness without realising that they are in fact being actively inveigled by the BJP and RSS upper caste leaders into thinking that a new, inclusive post-Manu imprimatur of deliverance for them is in the offing.

These 'converts', taken in so easily, are nurtured by their patrons and, in soliciting their support, given the opportunity to kick someone's head in with impunity. It is like 'mother's milk' to them. Think of Meerut, Mumbai, Khandamaal and Muzzaffarnagar, to name but a few instances of the pogroms they carried out. And remember the horror of what happened in Gujarat in 2002 after the Godhra incident? The trident-bearing Saffron

Brigade, driven by their atavistic compulsions, like Attila's hordes on the rampage, fanned out looking for Muslims to burn, rape, eviscerate and slaughter. The appetite to kill is nourished by the morsel of deliverance that they are constantly fed on.

The carnage in Gujarat claimed the lives of well over two thousand Muslims. And while this was being played out, Narendra Modi was by some accounts looking the other way. If that were true, could he have also been playing a notional fiddle like that infamous Roman emperor before him? We know on good authority that he had instructed the state police to show no haste to step in even as the rabble was in a murderous frenzy. Judging by the turn of events, one could not be faulted for assuming that he stood by and turned a blind eye to the scene of carnage. Modi it is claimed hails from a backward caste, whose kind had down the ages been beneath contempt for the highborn, but by cleverly manipulating him and investing on him the mantle of a *Manuvadi*, a votary of Manu's stratification by status, his RSS handlers had inducted him into their organisation.

Also, his well-groomed beard, his broad chest, his sartorial elegance, his propensity for hamming it up while declaiming in public and, above all, his combative capacity to counter criticism with his demagogic ripostes, measure for measure, spiced with his abrasive rhetorical flourishes bordering on the bombast, have also enhanced his popularity among the great unwashed. Apart from this, his relatively pale complexion as an additional factor for gaining acceptance among the rank and file has further persuaded the *Hindutwa*-stumping, Brahmin-led RSS with an eye to the main chance to raise him to the status of an honorary Brahmin. *Manu's* cycles of births and deaths having thus been conveniently obviated, he was sublimated and elevated to be their blue-eyed boy and prime ministerial candidate to barnstorm the country, carrying all before him.

The declared intention of the purveyors of *Hindutwa* is to refute mainstream history, which tells us that Aryans were migrants who kept coming to India between 2000 BC and 1000 BC. These new 'historiographers', however, would claim that Aryans were indigenous to the sub-continent of India, which was the centre of mother earth. The last word in is that the Indus Valley Civilization has been renamed as *Sindhu Saraswati Sabhyata*, implying that it was part of the mythical Vedic Civilisation of old. Thus nurtured by the Hindu faith, it was the mother of all civilizations as far apart as the Chinese, the Nile Valley, the Mesopotamian, the Greco-Roman civilizations, you name it. In keeping with this claim of their faith being the *Vishwa Guru*, the mentor for all, they declare that the *Ka'aba* in Mecca was at one time in the hoary past a *Vishnu* temple! Jerusalem was their *Yadushaalayam*. St. Paul's in London was *Gopal Mandir*. And Paris was *Parameshwareeyam*. At one stroke, Vishnu, Krishna and Siva have all been propitiated!

There is more. Homer is a plagiarist who merely copied *Vaalmeeki*. Pythagoras is none other than *Pathanjali Maharshi*. Again, Aryans are supposed to have taught the Egyptians the science of pyramid making. The one that takes the cake, however, is their claim that the progenitor of Homeopathy was none other than *Hanuman*, the Lord Rama's sidekick, and not Heinemann. The foregoing is but a representative selection from the *Vishwa Hindu Parishad's* publication *Vishwa Hindu* (World Hindu). Bumping

up such history using their new-found hagiographers goes on unabated. The idea is to create the impression that between the time of Vedic India of yore, flying chariots and all, and its present reinvention under Modi there is nothing of any historical consequence.

The latest nugget came in October 2016 from Ajay Bhatt the Uttarakhand BJP President. In the wake of the terrorist attack launched on the Uri Indian army camp by Islamist terrorists and the commando surgical strike in retaliation on their hide-outs in Pakistan-occupied-Kashmir, it now emerges that it was the same Hanuman the fabled Homeopathic healer, he of many parts no less, who had led the first surgical strike in history as a commando at Lord Rama's bidding against his *bête noire*, the intractable Ravan of Sri Lanka. Following this trend, one wonders if the latter day Greeks might be tempted to rationalise *'Homer's Iliad'* as a historical narrative, Trojan War and all, or Hercules cleaning the Aegean stables or, the present-day Scandinavians be tempted to do likewise with Thor, the god of thunder, or for that matter, the modern Arabs *'The Arabian Nights'*, Magic Carpet and all.

Interestingly, as part of their version of revised history, an attempt was also being made to beguile the aboriginal tribes of India, the Adivaasis, into believing that they were indeed the 'Vanavaasis' or the forest dwellers, the lost tribes of the original Aryans, pining to be reunited with their 'long-lost kindred'. The new historians hope that their claims will, by unrelenting repetition, fabricate a political reality out of a concoction. This lesson in 'history' is part of the 'national education' that the *Vidya Bharti* (the education wing of the RSS) imparts in their schools. This staggered indoctrination indirectly aims at giving notice that anyone living within India, Muslim, Christian or whoever must re-interpret his faith and witness to his Hindu identity or forever remain outside their charmed circle. Here is a quote from a workbook that has been devised for their schools, which says it all. *'In the Faizabad district of Uttar Pradesh, where present day Ayodhya stands, there on the banks of the Sarayu River was ancient Ayodhya, capital of Suryavanshi Kshatriya kings. Manu and Maharani Shatroopa were reborn in Ayodhya as Raja Dasharatha and Kaushalya, and in their home Saakshaat Narayana took incarnation as Lord Ram. According to astrologers and the Puranas the time of Shri Ram is believed to be around 886,000 years ago!'* The romance of it all cannot but appeal to the impressionable minds of children.

"In the process, any sense of teaching objective history is abandoned" says Sumit Sarkar, a leading Indian historian. Sunit K. Sen, a fellow of the Indian Council of Historical Research, in his article "**Masters of Manipulation**" that appeared in the **Frontline** magazine of 13 December, 2013, had this to say: *'...it has been around since time immemorial both as a territorial entity and, more importantly, as an essence.....that binds the territory.....and the populations that people it. It follows that all "Indians" – Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, tribal people, pastoral animists, everyone must recognize that they are inescapably, ineluctably and irreducibly Hindu.Out, in the final analysis, goes the pursuit of historical verities because the available evidence cannot sustain the arbitrary claims of those who seek merely one end in whatever way possible: **the imposition of the will of a vocal and organized minority within the majority** (the emphasis is added) with access to resources and muscle power over a vast population, which all the available*

evidence repeatedly urges is not overly supportive of, or perhaps even interested in, the nefarious designs of the Hindutwa peddlers. Myth-making is usually intrinsic in the process of nation-making...one only has to think of little England, the United States in the era of slavery, Nazi Germany; the list, is pretty long”.

The case of Germany would be especially instructive. History tells us that, on 1st July 1935, Heinrich Himmler had founded an organisation called **Deutsches Ahnerbe** or “**German Ancestral Heritage**”. It was a group of highly qualified academics that attempted to forge the ideology of a racist warrior religion. By so doing, they had intended to uncover the past of an imaginary Aryan race that they along with Himmler and his Fuehrer, Adolf Hitler, liked to project for posterity as the noblest prototype in human development. They even believed that Aryans had been unleashed on the world after divine thunderbolts had shattered primordial ice in which they had been preserved! And Hitler was *Lichtgestalt*, one of the great ‘figures of light’ that re-incarnated itself in the Fuehrer (a ruler with unlimited power). It seems uncanny that Himmler had especially drawn attention to the Code of Manu, which he interpreted as a guidebook on how to keep the Aryan race pure. With this in mind, the Nazis under Hitler and Himmler had committed unspeakable atrocities to exterminate the Jews.

We have also read of the Nazi policy of ‘**Lebensraum**’ (German for ‘**habitat**’), a plan of action for territorial expansion to gain ‘**living space**’ for the ever-increasing number of ‘**superior**’ Aryans by displacing people of the ‘inferior’ races, like the Slavonic people. This policy of annexation was what led to the 2nd World War. We know what the sequel to it was. Germany was defeated; Himmler was tried as a war criminal and hanged, as were many others. Hitler himself is said to have committed suicide. Likewise, one could prognosticate that sooner or later the doctrine that Manu ‘unleashed’ on the wretched ‘under classes’ of this country could well boomerang on the latterly cloned ‘indigenous Indian’ Aryan. History has an uncanny knack of repeating itself.

What is arbitrary is fascist. Fascism is the very antithesis of democracy. To the purveyors of *Hindutwa*, democracy is a foreign imposition, a cancer, which India must excise. They claim that the individual does not always know what is best for him and that therefore he needs to be guided, if necessary against his will, as if he were in a garrison state. Democracy to them is no more than the Hobbesian concept of unquestioning acceptance of the divine right of the ruler to enlist his patronage and patriarchal eye. As Shiv Viswanathan put it in one of his syndicated columns, “...democracy, like the market, becomes a competitive game, where right loses to might and democracy becomes a fragile Hobbesian Word”. An intellectual engagement with people of other persuasions, religious or otherwise, is anathema to our ‘home-grown’ fascist ‘kings’. Instead, they would silence those who ‘reason why’. They would tell you what faith to follow, what food to eat and what social mores to abide by.

They are hoping to clone a whole new generation of compliant Indians fed chiefly on *Sanskriti Gyan* or Hindu Cultural Knowledge, Sanskrit language, Astral Sciences and Vedic Mathematics as the be-all and end-all of education. They believe that all that is to be known is hidden in the Hindu scripture. They do not seem to concede that knowledge

is not static, but dynamic and expands and broadens our horizons through disputation of ideas, old and new. In fact, during the BJP's first term in power, they had tried to re-write the school-curriculum with this ideological frame of reference in mind. No people in world history have left a lasting legacy, using the faith, language and culture of an elite minority. History teaches us that European Renaissance did not develop its potential to the full until the Europeans threw off Latin, the liturgical language of mediaeval Rome, and along with it Rome's hegemony.

Then there are the communal groups that push the notion of linguistic and ethnic identities. They are determined on serving their own ends by creating their own little fiefdoms, careless of the problems it poses to the unity of the country. The Ghurkhas, the Nagas, the Bodos and what have you. They all have their clandestine guerrilla groups fighting from across the border for independence from India. We have had the latest agitation for carving out the state of Telengana by splitting present-day Andhra Pradesh, which itself had earlier been a part of the State of Madras. That the Tamils had later re-named Madras as Tamil Nadu to re-affirm their Dravidian identity is another story, but happily of no consequence to the oneness of India.

We know how Potti Sreeramalu had immolated himself, and how the agitation that had ensued, eventually led to the creation of the State of Andhra Pradesh exclusively for Telugu speakers. In the present instance, the Indian parliament having long dithered between 'no' and 'maybe', finally buckled under political pressure on the eve of the 2014 elections to sub-divide the Telegu speakers. A new state, Telengana, has been carved out of what was until then the state of Andhra Pradesh. And that may well put wind in the sails of those who may want to steer their boats to islands of their own in the country. For instance, it is not inconceivable that any one of the present-day districts of Kerala might want to secede from the state of Kerala as we know it now. Just the kind of balkanization our predatory neighbour Pakistan, not to mention expansionist China, is counting on.

All this has produced a situation that threatens the very survival of India as a political entity. The danger it poses demands political solutions, hence upright politicians are necessary for the very survival of the country as one entity. And yet, paradoxically, we continue to cull the same crop of tainted politicians from among us, some of them yahoo to the nth degree. This could only mean that we ourselves are treading a perilous path, on an unthinking pursuit of our own selfish objectives, having on purpose muted our conscience that should help us discern between the lurking dangers to the country and its larger good. If we have thus freed ourselves from the compulsions of loyalty to the country, can we then expect those that we ourselves have elected to govern us to be altruistic in their thought and deed? Only an enlightened citizenry will choose an enlightened leader; by the same token, benighted minds, only one of their kind.

Of late, we have seen the emergence of a new crop of committed leaders who had initiated a drive to fight corruption and thus ensure accountability on the part of politicians. With that in view, they formed a new party and named it the Aam Aadmi Party i.e. the Common Man's Party with Arvind Kejriwal as its leader. Symbolically, the party had chosen a broom as its symbol. It created something of a sensation by fighting

2014 Delhi State Assembly elections and winning as many as 28 seats, which helped them form a coalition government with the help of the Indian National Congress party. One had hoped that the new broom would sweep clean, but sadly the Congress Party pulled the rug from under its feet when the new government wanted a bill to be passed to institute, an ombudsman, to fight corruption. In a huff, but in hindsight rather stupidly, Kejriwal resigned and his government came unstuck after just 49 days. And, Narendra Modi, who would hardly lose a chance to take a dig at his political opponents, gleefully lampooned Arvind Kejriwal's short-lived government as 'AK 49', not the tried and tested 'Anton Kalashnikov 49' but the unstuck 'Arvind Kejriwal 49' as the reader might well have guessed. Undaunted, Kejriwal took on Narendra Modi at the hustings leading to the 2014 Parliamentary elections for the Varanasi seat in Uttar Pradesh. It was an exercise in futility. On the plank of Hindutwa, Modi had carried all before him. The outcome was a foregone conclusion. What with the consolidation of Caste Hindu votes for him, Modi was a surefire winner against his rival in Varanasi, the temple town that is sacred to the Hindus.

When the election results were announced on 16th May 2014, it turned out to be a clean sweep for Narendra Modi and the BJP across the Hindi heartland in North India: Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Bihar, and what have you. West Bengal was the exception in the North. And in the South, apart from the States of Tamil Nadu and Kerala, they were able to make their presence felt significantly. The state of Kerala had the rare distinction of being the only state to keep the BJP at bay, but even there only by a whisker. Elsewhere, the grand old party, the Indian National Congress, bit the dust. After more than a quarter century of coalition governments, a political party had on its own won an absolute majority in the Lok Sabha, the lower house of parliament. Incidentally, it is noteworthy that it was the 'first past the post' system of balloting that handed them the victory, for they had won only a 31 percent share of the total votes cast. Had the system been proportional representation the story would have been different.

And Narendra Modi was sworn in as the Prime Minister. For his supporters, it was time to celebrate with joyous abandon in anticipation of a new majoritarian dispensation in the offing; a mythical Ram Raj recreated. The minorities, on the other hand, viewed with foreboding the prospect of an uncertain future in India. They dread the prospect of being compelled to recant their faiths or be reduced to the status of menials not unlike the serfs of old in Eastern Europe, or nearer home, the Chandalas. We have to wait and see whether their fears would turn out to be real or unfounded. Hardly two months into the new governance, there are already disquieting signs of the shape of things to come.

Police officers who had been suspended awaiting trial pending investigations into their alleged complicity in the 2002 Gujarat pogrom of hundreds of hapless Muslims, let alone their devious role in the stage-managed murders of political opponents, euphemistically called encounter deaths, with the gleeful contrivance of their political masters lurking in the shadows, are being re-instated or let off the hook. This was only the thin end of the wedge. A BJP leader, who had, in the run-up to the just-concluded election campaign, gone so far as to exhort his followers to do Muslims in with impunity. He had earlier been also under suspicion for contriving political assassinations and duly charge-sheeted

by the CBI, but has been let off for ‘lack of evidence’, a surefire ploy, and elevated to high office in the BJP by Modi, thus cocking a snook at moral scruples.

State governors who had been chosen by the previous government have been asked to vacate office with immediate effect without so much as a ‘by your leave’ from the President of India, the head of the nation. It was he who had in the first place given his seal of approval to their appointments. Most of the new appointees are men and women of little distinction, yes-men for the most part whose credentials have nothing to write home about. The party’s mindset is to subvert the constitution that had been framed by the secular founding fathers of the Republic of India. The Supreme Court is likely to be stripped of its exclusive right to recommend judges for elevation to the apex court. The nation’s Planning Commission has been disbanded. And, here is what takes the cake! Gajendra Chauhan a soft-porn artist and a BJP votary, whose only claim to fame, such as it was, was that he had acted as the mythical Pandava Yudhistir in the TV serial ‘Mahabharata’, has been named the chairman of the prestigious Film and Television Institute of India at Pune. The students as well as the faculty have protested and have launched a strike against it. The authorities have ignored it, hoping thereby to tire and weaken them by attrition.

Likewise, other top-level academic posts have also been filled by half-baked RSS ideologues such as Dinanath Batra, entrusting them with the task of re-designing the educational curricula across the board to perpetuate a Hindu national identity, and if it means having to concoct a new history for India based on the miraculous legends of its mythical past with its inter-galactic travellers, astronauts, plastic surgeons and what have you, so be it. A relatively unknown historian Y. Sudarshan Rao, who had earlier written in praise of the caste system, has been made the chairperson of the Indian Council for Historical Research.

Here is what Shiv Viswanathan, a professor at the Jindal School of Government and Public policy had to say, vide his article in *The Hindu* of October 30, 2014: “The BJP through its acts of appropriation and rewriting history is turning history into a fragile object. Every emerging party has a right to challenge history to redress old wrongs but rewriting can become sinister. One sees it in the sanitization of Mahatma Gandhi.....by reducing him to a fragment...Gandhi is reduced to text-book civics and social work, to civics without ethics or politics.....The BJP’s depoliticising of leadership and its gargantuanising Sardar Patel has to be seen as part of the false myths it is creating.” Deifying their Hindutwa icons like Savarkar and Golwalker who had kowtowed to their colonial masters at one time, but denigrating the true patriots of India, who had defied their rulers instead, is their latest predilection.

Thus, towards furthering their design to revise and re-write history, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the architect of modern India, has not been spared either. Efforts are on to relegate him to the footnotes of Indian history. In his place, they plan to project Sardar Vallabhai Patel as the true architect of modern India, and erect a statue of his, the largest in the world. There are already signs of the BJP arrogating to itself the power to downgrade the stellar role played by Gandhi and Nehru in the freedom struggle. In the fullness of time

hopefully we will come to learn that like Shelley's Ozymandias, the Patel statue too would become a symbol of the futility of BJP's scornful arrogance. To quote Shelley, '**And on the pedestal these words appear: / "My name is Ozymandias, king of kings: / Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!" / Nothing beside remains. Round the decay / Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare, / The lone and level sands stretch far away**'. Only, in the present case it is the sea that would stretch far away.

Their nefarious act of appropriation –that of claiming as their own someone who until then did not belong to their Manuvadi community- continues unabated. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's is another case in point. Dr. Ambedkar was the chief framer of the all-embracing, pluralistic Indian Constitution which is based on "the principle that people of different races, religions and political beliefs can live together peacefully in the same society" -an ideal that is anathema to the high-caste purveyors of Hindutwa. He belonged to the Mahar community, regarded as lower down in the 'food chain' by the Brahmin-led Manuvadis. But, wonder of wonders, he has recently been, with retrospective effect, posthumously transmogrified into a Hindu icon worthy of being venerated. These people who are claiming Ambedkar as one of their own are cleverly trying to wink at the fact that he was a radical sought solace in Buddhism, for he could not brook the inequities that *Manu Smriti* had institutionalised. He had become an eyesore to Manuvadis for his having advocated the emancipation of the oppressed masses of dalits from feudal bondage and for his having appealed to them to convert to Buddhism. The present ploy of the Manuvadis is to lure and assimilate the alienated dalits into the Saffron fold, but in all likelihood only to be deluded into serving their erstwhile High caste overlords as their convenient hatchet men for saffronising secular India by any means. The poaching goes on. They have now turned their attention to the very south of India sparing no effort to entice the secular-minded people of Kerala who have until now successfully resisted their blandishments.

Towards the end of 2015, Amit Shah, the BJP President, that Faustian factotum of the RSS-nurtured NaMo, was sent down south to look for proselytes to the RSS-spawned Hindu nationalist persuasion. He found a pliant listener in the person of Vellapally Natesan, the present General Secretary of the **Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam**, the long-established movement that had striven for the emancipation of the backward Hindu caste of Ezhavas from servitude.

The SNDP, for short, was founded in the latter half the 19th Century as a social reform movement to strive towards the enfranchisement of the numerically strong, but largely disenfranchised Ezhava community. The founder of that movement was none other than the much revered philosopher and social reformer, Sree Narayana Guru (1856-1928), an Ezhava himself. The uplift of the underprivileged masses was his life's mission. Inspired by the ideals of Vedanta, he said, '*Namukku jathiyilla*' (**We have no caste**) and gave the state the syncretistic slogan "**one race, one faith, one god for mankind**", to counter the Manuvadi, high-caste Hindus who had until then been socially, educationally and economically excluding the Ezhavas from playing any major role in the affairs of Kerala.

Paradoxically, the very same Sree Narayana Guru, who had been anathema to the high-born Hindus, has now been conjured up, with a wink and a nod from Natesan, to the pantheon of Hindu deities. Amit Shah stooped to spread the canard that the Guru was a Hindu sage or *Sanyasi*. The Prime Minister himself found time not only to unveil a statue of this reformist leader but also to make a show of paying obeisance to his statue. And Vellapally Natesan and his son Tushar Vellapally, having decided to toady up to them, have accordingly formed a new political party to play second fiddle to the BJP. As a prelude to it, the father had been using public platforms to demonise the local political leaders with his diatribes about their so-called partiality for the minorities, especially the Muslims, a sound that is sweet to the ears of his RSS promoters.

On the 5th of December of 2015, he announced the formation of his political party, the **Bharat Dharma Jana Sena** (BDJS for short) in the presence of a large crowd at the Trivandrum Shanmugham Beach. It is ironical that, of all people, a professed disciple of the revered Guru should surrender the universal ideals of the SNDP at the feet of the likes of the Manuvadi Mohan Bhagwat the RSS chief. The broad-based, all-inclusive, non-discriminatory **Sree Narayana Dharma** has at one fell stroke been reduced to the narrow, exclusivist Hindutwa ideology of the so-called **Bharat Dharma** as though it is one of a kind. Incidentally, they fought the Kerala state elections held in May 2016, but drew a blank, which is likely to lead to their having second thoughts about this alliance.

There are indications that overtures are being made to rope in others into the BJP fold by this clever ruse of idolization. Bhagat Singh, the atheist freedom fighter whom the British sent to the gallows, has also been appropriated as a Hindu icon. It is being bandied about that their next catch would be that of another misnamed 'low-born' Sree Ayyan Kaali, the social reformer and activist who had at one time made it his life's mission to ameliorate the sufferings of his Pulaya brethren, formerly the bonded slaves of Kerala, the tillers of the soil for their masters, or, like the sons of Ham, their 'hewers of wood and drawers of water'. That the enlightened Maharaja, Sree Moolam Thirunal, of the erstwhile State of Travancore had found it fit to nominate him to his legislative council is but a footnote now in history books. It seems Ayyan Kaali is going to be 'refurbished' now with the assistance of the RSS.

Next in line for such duplicity are likely to be the followers of Kumara Guru Dev. Having first gone by the name of Poikayil Yohannan Upadesi, a Christian convert lay preacher of the Mar Thoma Syrian Christian Church, he broke with that church and assumed a new name to form his own assembly and install himself as the spiritual leader of his own community of disenfranchised Parayas. The organization he founded is to this day known as the 'Prathyaksha Raksha Deiva Sabha'. Freely translated, it means something like, '**the assembly of the revealed salvation of God**'. It now seems more than likely that the BJP president Amit Shah, he of the bald pate, the scraggly beard on a jowly face that sits almost neckless on an amorphous torso, - a perfect foil to his comrade-in-arms, the good-looking, well-groomed, fit-as-a-fiddle NaMo- may for all we know meet the leaders of this organisation any time soon and make overtures to entice them into the saffron brigade.

During the 2016 Caucus of the RSS held at Kozhikode, which more or less coincided with the nearly week-long Onam festival of Kerala, Amit Shah was once again up to his favourite pastime of polarising communities. According to local folklore, the said festival has been carried over from olden times to celebrate the yearly 'parole' that was granted to Mahabali the Asura (read Dalit) king to return from Paathaalam (the netherworld), where he had been tricked into expulsion by the scheming Vamana the fifth incarnation of Lord Vishnu, to his erstwhile subjects in his fabled kingdom of Maavelinaadu. The largely secular Keralites, cutting across all creeds and faiths, joyously celebrate Onam -and in particular the Syrian Christians evermore joyously- as a syncretised festival that go hand in hand with the festive harvest season. Amit Shah, the Manuvadi, too clever by half, exhorted the Keralites, with a disingenuous expression on his face, to celebrate the occasion not as Onam but as *Vamana Jayanti*, Vamana the Brahmin's birthday. At a stroke, both the Manuvadi RSS and likewise the BJP have been suitably propitiated!

Incidentally, one must mention in passing that many a Syrian Christian of Kerala, not unlike many a Manuvadi, looks down on Dalit Christian converts who he disdainfully refers to as '*Maargavaasis*' that is, those who have been converted to Christianity from the backward communities. Poikayil Yohannan Upadesi's estrangement and subsequent alienation from the Mar Thoma Church could well have been the result of the superciliousness of such Syrian Christians, who often insist on tracing their ancestry back to the high-caste Hindus who were purportedly converted to Christianity by Apostle Thomas in or after A.D 52. This sniffiness is not unlike that of the caste-hubris of many a high-caste Hindu that brings disrepute upon him in the eyes of those who put faith in the oneness of man. The RSS may now be set to try their old tack of winning new support.

The largely Brahmin-led RSS hope that by appearing to make amends for the ruthless humiliation heaped down the ages on those who had been relegated by Manu diktat to the state of outcastes or Chandalas, they can now manipulate their descendants into believing that a new dawn is awaiting them. The RSS thus hope that the Dalits could be deluded into blotting out from their collective memory their past history of abject slavery and dispossession they had endured for ages and still do in more ways than one in a purportedly democratic India. It was the credulity with which a significant number of Dalits had allowed themselves to be taken in by these 'Pied Pipers of Hamelin' that had led to the BJP's unprecedented success in the 2014 parliamentary elections.

From the stirrings that have been happening since then, one is heartened at the thought that the nefarious plans envisaged by the BJP at the behest of their RSS patrons to replace the secular democratic republic of India, characterised by its syncretic culture, with a monolithic Hindu Rashtra, may one hopes come unstuck. The RSS are hoping to create a society where people will not be free to examine the actions of the powers-that-be with critical enquiry. And in particular, the minorities and dalits would be assigned a Regimented Subservient Status (RSS for short?) living out their lives by the diktats of Manusmriti, theirs 'not to reason why' theirs 'but to do and die'. Will the common people wise up to this diabolical scheme?

After the 2015 hustings for the Delhi State Assembly elections, Arvind Kejriwal, who else but the butt of Narendra Modi's AK 49 gibe, the leader of the Aam Aadmi Party, carried all before him and came back to beat the BJP hollow notwithstanding Narendra Modi's whirlwind campaign peppered with his rabble-rousing diatribes. Again, in the Bihar state elections that came later, Nitish Kumar and Lalu Prasad Yaadav between them cleverly turned Narendra Modi/Amit Shah duo's 'whistle-stop' tub-thumping, to muse a nixed metaphor, into a damp squib. Modi and Shah between them had tried to polarize society into two adversarial groups, the Hindus and the non-Hindus. They were given a good drubbing and were made to look foolish by the Biharis who had spurned their Hindutwa-peddling and their attempts to set communities at loggerheads with one another. Cut to the present, July 2017, and to every one's surprise, Nitish Kumar has come out of the closet at the prodding of the RSS, to play second fiddle to the BJP once again as he did before in 2013; proving that for him politics is the art of the possible. Can a leopard change its spots?

If the machinations of the RSS fail for any reason, to be deterred from their hopes of reviving a Manusmriti-based society with its top-down dispensation would be the last thing the RSS/BJP duo would do. They refuse to acknowledge that the commonality's mindset is not cast in stone. Journalist Swapan Dasgupta, who had once briefly flirted with the BJP, had second thoughts, and in a June 4, 2009 column "**A Change of priorities**" written for the *Times of India*, advised BJP to dump Hindutwa as Indians in general were repelled by bigotry: "The BJP must candidly recognise that assertive Hindutwa marked by hate speeches and moral policing is seen as ugly mirror images of the Taliban. The spectacle of old and middle-aged men oozing sanctimoniousness and droning on about India's ancient inheritance belongs to a bygone age..."

Cut to 2016, and we are taken aback at seeing Hindutwa outfits flourishing again and even out-Talibaning the Taliban in attacking their targeted opponents with the tacit approval of the neo-Nazis among the powers-that-be. The impunity with which these saffron hordes inflict mindless cruelty on the naysayers is blood-curdling. For instance, the dalits, the tribal people and the religious minorities of India are their customary quarries for hounding down for the heck of it. And then there were the rationalists like Narendra Dabholkar, Govind Pansare and Malleshappa Kalburgi who were murdered in cold blood because they were uncompromising critics of the very idea of a sectarian, theocratic Hindu Rashtra exclusively for Hindus as envisioned by the RSS.

In any civilised society, such storm troopers would not only be brought to book but also exposed to public shame. These killers, on the other hand, know only too well that they can get away with murder, without so much as a rap on their knuckles, in the knowledge that they enjoy political patronage and that their bosses would gloss over their fell deeds. And instead of at least pretending to be shocked at their cruelty, these Janus-faced rulers keep spouting 'terminological inexactitudes' in true Goebbelsian fashion to either disavow their role in having manipulated such violence, or at least euphemise the outrage. They find pliant partisans who can also be suborned, for instance, to prevaricate under oath after having murdered in the name of the sacred cow. They are the archetypes of moral turpitude ensuring that their victims' blood is not seen to stain their own hands.

They are pros at the art of sophistry. A BJP minister at the centre is reported to have called a case of such a murder ‘an accident’ if you please!

It brings to mind how after the Una incident in Gujarat, one too many to be swept under the carpet, our Prime Minister, who was used to keeping mum when Dalits and Muslims get done in by these footloose vigilante rag-tag, was constrained this time round to concede that it was a reprehensible crime, but still only to fudge his call of duty to punish the felons by artfully stressing the need for both sides to exercise restraint as if there was equal blame to be laid on both the killers and their quarry; a case of doubtful honesty that is unbecoming of a prime minister.

Is it possible that Modi, with his ongoing policy of communal polarisation in India, has turned out to be a role-model for that egregious, loud-mouthed President Trump who has trumped up reasons to apportion equal blame between the white supremacists of Charlottesville and the victims of their racial violence? You see, Trump and Modi have of late been seeing a lot of each other. I am not surprised that they have taken up with each other; they are birds of a feather.

Now we hear that in the village of Uri in U.P, the patrons of some jailed vigilantes have outsmarted themselves by dressing up a vigilante of their very own ilk, Ravin Sisodia by name, in the mantle of a national hero by draping the national flag over his remains after he had died of renal failure in prison. He was one those who had bludgeoned to death Mohammed Akhlaq a Muslim on 28th September 2015, based only on the spurious claim that he had stored beef in his fridge as if the life of an animal was more precious than that of a human.

To add insult to injury, the backers of those very murderers who had been indicted and remanded in custody, but only under pressure to allay popular anger at the murder of Akhlaq, having bided their time for nearly nine months for the nation-wide anger at this premeditated crime to die down and in collusion with the Hindu-dominated Panchayat (the local government council), have brazenly filed a case against the members of Akhlaq’s family for having stored beef in their fridge. Interestingly some of those prisoners have already been set free on bail on the doubtful score of their being juveniles. Is it possible that the judiciary is failing in their sacred duty to be fair and equal in meting out justice? Offence, these killers believe is the best form of defence. These panchayati ‘sympathisers’ may be hoping thereby to browbeat the family into withdrawing the FIR (First Instance Report) that the Police had been forced to register in the said case of murder. They were also aided and abetted by a veterinarian, who connived to overturn an earlier finding that the said meat was not beef, but mutton.

Writing in ‘The Week’ magazine of 25th September of 2016 (Page 36), Meenakshi Lekhi, a prominent BJP MP no less, and a lady to boot, harking back to the words of the erstwhile President of the Jan Sangh Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya, spoken back in 1967 at the Calicut Jan Sangh conclave, said, “In his presidential address, Panditji had also challenged the wrong portrayal of the Jan Sangh and RSS activists in **some of the killings** (emphasis added) that happened at that time. The speech reminds us of cow

vigilantes and church attackers, whose activities were wrongly attributed to the BJP. We are still fighting with the same type of branding and smear campaigns” Why does she say ‘some of the killings’? Pray, what about the rest? Being economical with truth is the stock in trade of the likes of her, to say nothing of outright lies. She is one of those assiduously propagating the whopper that it was Savarkar, none else but him of that time-serving lot that kowtowed to the British, who won independence for India.

That appearances can be deceptive was never more truly exemplified than in the way in which some of the top BJP leaders, outwardly seen as suave, debonair and well-spoken, but sadly often patronizingly so, have had their masks of high-mindedness stripped away to reveal how adept they really are at double-speak. We saw how Arun Jaitley, the number three in the BJP pecking order, recently came down in a huff to Kerala to raise a hue and cry about an RSS functionary getting killed by the Marxists. What about his silence at the Muslims having been killed in the Cow Belt or for that matter the Marxists who had earlier been killed in Kerala by the RSS henchmen? But the standard bearers of Hindutwa would in no way consider the likes of him as dishonest. Their critics would dare do so at their own peril, as the late lamented rationalist thinkers were too late to find out.

And now it is the turn of the progressive, ‘free-thinking’ student community of India to bear the brunt of the saffron brigade’s attacks. The RSS employs the members of its students’ wing, the Akhila Bharatiya Vidhyarthi Parishad, ABVP for short, to act as their foot soldiers and stir up trouble on campuses under false pretences by making spurious allegations against them and then let the police, hand-in-glove with these saffron hordes, wade in to arrest not the troublemakers but their victims, seen as anti-national and charged with sedition, a convenient tool to intimidate, kill and suppress dissent. Nationalism to them must have a homogenized saffron hue. Anything syncretic will be seditious in prospective Akhand Bharat.

My mind goes back to the fable of the wolf and the lamb. The wolf, a noxious beast of prey, inhabiting the upper reaches of a river flowing down, repeatedly rounds on a lamb that is grazing near its lower reaches for regularly muddying his waters, before pouncing on and making a meal of the poor creature, by then scared witless. Likewise, by relentless intimidation, these hatchet men plan to tire and weaken and thus swallow up higher institutions of learning that are trying, against heavy odds, to uphold democracy and free speech. Any stand on their part against the nefarious RSS tactics for establishing a theocratic Hindu republic would be regarded as seditious. And with Modi’s government conniving at it, the RSS is thus trying to wrest control of the premier institutions of learning to ingrain in the students a uniform set of obsequious observances that demands unquestioning obedience from the youth of the country. What better way of hoping to turn universities into *Guru Kulas* for churning out RSS acolytes!

We know how first it was the film and television institute at Pune that they targeted. Then it was the turn of the Hyderabad Central University to be castigated, followed close on its heels by the Jawaharlal Nehru University. Jadhavpur University was not far behind. There may be more as the days go by. At the Hyderabad Central University, they chose

Dalit scholars as their targets to vilify and victimise. And some of the academics who were sympathetic to the cause of the students were taken to task for their stand. The Vice chancellor himself turned out to be closely connected with the mandarins in Delhi led by the evermore combative, not to say truculent, Smriti Irani, the Union Human Resource Development Minister, in first denying the scholars their well-earned fellowships and then in rustivating them to boot. In hindsight, it was just deserts that she was later relieved of her charge of the HRD ministry, ironically by the very Narendra Modi who had inducted her into the cabinet, and was shifted, if one might say tongue firmly in cheek, from having spun yarns it would seem to jack up her academic credentials to overseeing the real stuff in the textile mills of the country.

One can hardly suppress a chuckle at Modi's oblique use of his much-hyped sense of humour. She has since been dropped from cabinet committees as well. In a word, she has been hoist with her own petard of blind bigotry, to say nothing of her middling academic credentials. She has well and truly had her comeuppance. One fervently hopes that the prime minister would in like fashion off-load the other small-minded ministers from his team. In a democracy, it is a given that the highest positions in the government are given to those with the most ability and not to obsequious cronies the need of the hour is meritocracy in place of mediocrity. But, that seems to be in short measure in the present dispensation. Let me now get back to my earlier narrative.

One of those that were victimised, Rohit Vemula a Dalit research scholar, who was pursuing a PhD programme committed suicide in sheer desperation, after he was rusticated from the Hyderabad Central University, denied a fellowship and expelled from the hostel. His crime was that he had freely expressed his opinion of how rotten the state of things was in *mera Bhaarat mahaan*. He protested against the attempts being made to regiment our country where each one would be ideologically cloned to march together to the drumbeats of the saffron brigade. In his suicide note he wrote, "Never was a man treated as a mind; as a glorious thing made up of star dust". That line typifies the bitterness of a young man who took his own life in protest against an authoritarian establishment complicit in the politics of identity founded on a socially divisive agenda that promotes the practice of thuggery with impunity to pressgang the unwilling.

Towards the end of the 19th Century and the first quarter of the 20th Century, there had sprung up in what is now Tamil Nadu a free-thinking, Dravidian self-respect movement, the non-Brahmin party *Dravida Kazhagam* (DK), under the leadership of the much-revered atheist Periyar E.V. Ramasamy. Its declared aim was to cock a snook at the superciliousness of the high-caste, exclusivist Hindu Mahasabha, the precursor of the latter-day RSS whose members hold secularism and free speech as apostasy to them. Taking their cue from Periyar, Tamil political leaders who came after him showed they were no less proud of their Tamil culture. They like Periyar have been reiterating their commitment to eradicating caste and give Tamil its due and religiously patterning themselves on his brand of Dravidian pride *vis-a-vis* the superciliousness of the so-called Aryan.

The uppity Aryan's curl of the lip so to say as he treats others with disdain is never more made evident in the way in which African students are often roughed up in the north. Not long ago, an African girl who was out shopping was even stripped to the buff before being manhandled. When African ambassadors and envoys remonstrated against these manifestly racist attacks, an RSS bigot from the north is said to have piously declared that this was no racism. As proof whereof, he claimed how the fair-skinned Aryans put up with the Dravidian 'darkies' to the south of the Vindhya! Periyar who stood for Tamil pride must have turned in his grave. And so too must have the Tamil icons of the past.

And yet, there have of late been disturbing signs, especially among certain sections of caste Tamils in Tamil Nadu, to act as 'sleeper units' of the Sangh Parivar. One such is the vigilante 'moral police' of the RSS in the South, the rabid, right-wing *Hindu Munnani*, ready and willing on their behalf to abuse, bully and hound down anyone who dares to write or say anything that may be unacceptable to the squeamish Hindutwamongers. A prominent academic and novelist, Professor Perumal Murugan was their latest quarry. In 2010, he had written a novel titled *Madhorubagan* about a childless couple falling back as a last resort on a socially sanctioned practice of free sexual mixing together of childless women with willing partners on the auspicious 14th day of the *Vaikasi Visakam* festival. One may recall in this context how in the Hindu epic *Mahabharata*, Satyawati, the matriarch of the *Kaurava* clan, asks her son *Vyasa* to impregnate his brothers' wives to keep alive the *Kaurava* line. The custom of *Niyoga* sanctioned such sexual unions (a brother sleeping with his sister-in-law).

To Professor Murugan's dismay, the so-called 'guardians of Indian morality', after biding their time for the appropriate political moment to strike, raised Cain. This allegedly 'immoral' portrayal of the 'virtuous womanhood of India', *Bhaarat Mata ki Naari*, as examples of women of easy virtue was enough of a provocation for these Tamilian hypocrites to get their hackles up. The author was ostracised, bullied and threatened. The much harried man, on realising that the state would not bail him out, withdrew his novel to the dismay of his well-wishers. He felt so threatened that he decided to stop his literary pursuits once and for all.

Happily, that was not to be the end of that episode. An assortment of malicious submissions had earlier been made against him in the Madras High Court alleging that his novel was blasphemous and morally reprehensible. On July 5th 2016, the First Division Bench of the High Court led by Chief Justice Sanjay Kishan Kaul threw out their petitions, concluding their verdict with the words, "Let the author be resurrected to what he is best at, write."

It is interesting that the same Justice Kaul had earlier in 2008 thrown out a case at the Delhi High Court against the world-renowned painter M.F. Husain. The petitioners had foisted a false charge on him for his having painted Hindu goddesses, according to them in the buff. That lie was articulated Goebbelsian fashion many times over until it began to sound as though there was some substance to the accusation. Relief came only when Justice Kaul, in concluding his judgement, had cogently observed, "There should be

freedom for the thought we hate. Freedom of speech has no meaning if there is no freedom after speech”.

Close behind such judicial encouragement in his case as well, although having earlier rather timidly bridled his intellectual urge and dismounted from the writer’s saddle, Perumal Murugan has shaken off his timorous doubts to reinvigorate himself and write again with renewed vigour putting behind him the trials and tribulations of that episode. Perhaps with the benefit of hindsight that it was out of fear that he had killed his creative self far too easily, he has now resurrected himself with the launch of his book ‘*Kozhayin Paadalkal*’ (Songs of a Coward’) a collection of 200 poems. In his words, “Poetry is the great potion the *Sanjeevi* herb that can bring the dead to life. It was indeed poetry that restored me to life”.

It is only sanctimonious minds that make a show of being shocked by anything that is of a sexual nature. Only prigs refuse to perceive what is artistically defensible from what they construe as unnatural and blameworthy. Would such ‘guardians of morality’ dare challenge ordinary Indians who in their hundreds of thousands visit Khajuraho? Khajuraho has nudity. Surely they would not ask for the amatory idols there to be removed from their niches, would they? Over the years, the open-minded visitors to the place have shown only a refreshing acceptance of what is so delightfully human.

.How such an ancient culture such as ours that gave the world that instructive manual on Sex, *Kama Sutra*, could yield to such Victorian prudery is not easy to fathom. One might hazard a guess and deduce that this is a more recent development that resulted from our longish association with the straitlaced Tartars and the Mughals or more likely with those of the more recent of our cynical British colonial masters who came here in their own selfish interest chiefly with their avarice for exploiting our wealth. But close behind them would come their puritanical missionaries, as if by prior plan, for ‘civilizing the heathen’ and Christianising them into the bargain.

Our home-grown moral policemen, with their misconceived Hindutwa religiosity, now seem to outrival the priggishness of those Christian missionaries who had come to India in the wake of those hard-nosed colonisers to Christianize Indians. Only, our latter-day moral policemen would rather Hinduise the country, especially the minorities like the Christians and Muslims of the country. Especially, those *Gau bakhshak*, beef-eating ‘blackamoors’ of the South and the North-eastern ‘Chinks’, so nicknamed by the babus of the North, had better be prepared to relinquish their time-honoured beliefs and practices, both socio-cultural and culinary, when these, to use a neologism, ‘bovolatrous’ *Gau rakshaks* ride roughshod over them to proselytise them with more than a little bit of help from their unseen masters.

The intention is to so brutalize the minorities by deliberately letting loose such savagery in the name of *Gau* protection that their sensitivities are deadened to make them yield to the so-called ‘Ghar wapasi’. That is how the present dispensation aims to control human affairs and create a Hindu Rashtra, a garrison state.

Kancha Ilaiah Shepherd, the Director of the Centre for the Study of Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policy, Maulana Azad National Urdu University, Hyderabad, has this to say and I quote: ‘The cow has become Bharat Mata. And all beef-eaters are anti-national. Under a gazette notification titled Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Regulation of Livestock Markets) Rules, 2017, all of them are projected so. The cow is not a nationalist symbol but has been made into one and Dalits and Muslims will continue to be lynched using this weapon’. He could well have added Christians to that list. The Hindutwa fundamentalists might have wondered why he did not.

In an interview given to the Frontline magazine (of June 23, 2017) the JNU sociologist Avijit Pathak had this to say on the rise in incidents of lynching and its social ramifications: These lynching incidents reveal three things: (a) when political power comes without liberating education, a deep philosophy of life and humanism, it degenerates into a cult of violence; (b) when this brute power is reconciled with a propaganda machinery that breeds stereotypes about the “stigmatised others”, individuals lose their autonomy and creative thinking, and what emerges is the mob psychology of fascism; and (c) the normalisation of violence that aims at generating fear and destroying the basic human dignity of the so-called “enemies”.....And the tragedy is that this sort of violence is legitimised in the name of hyper-masculine nationalism. In fact we are witnessing not merely the ideological apparatus but the repressive apparatus of the state.....the ugliness of the coercion of a mighty state; it diminishes the moral power of the community. And today the danger is rather severe because if, in a plural society, the onslaught of majoritarianism is not controlled, we may see the sanctification of VIOLENCE FOR THE GLORY OF “BHARAT MATA”.Indifference to human tragedy and political violence is the worst enemy of human civilisation”. Are we witnessing the transformation of Hindustan to a ‘Himsastan’? Ahimsa appears to be more honoured in the breach than in its observance of late in Mahatma Gandhi’s own Bharat. The RSS and their cohorts need to ponder over this, but sadly they have other ideas.

They demand that the minority communities with their non-indigenous faiths as also the scheduled tribes with their largely animistic rituals renounce their own religious beliefs, social customs and dietary habits in order to be homogenized and assimilated into the Hindutwa persuasion. They would insist that adherence to the polytheistic Hindutwa way of life is the one and only validation of Indian nationalism and the only guarantee for claiming permanent Indian citizenship. Those who fail to measure up to this yardstick, whether Muslims, Christians, Parsees, atheists or what have you might forever be excluded from first-class citizenship of India that is Bharat and relegated to the lowly status of what could be termed ‘non-permanent resident aliens’, to borrow a phrase from America’s statute book. They labour under delusions of moral superiority over Muslims and Christians, but these RSS ideologues have deigned to be patronizing towards the followers of faiths such as Jainism, Sikhism and Buddhism native to India, but only just.

To an octogenarian going on 88, puffing and blowing, the chances of being sent down by diktat to a lower social class in my country do not so much unnerve me as the thought that I might not be able to round off my memoirs while I am still *compos mentis* enough.

My strength both physical and mental is constantly getting weaker as the days go by. The ability, therefore, to be creative and ‘put pen to paper’ is also on the wane. Having experienced bouts of cardiac palpitation time and again, I have recently had an angiogram done on me to ascertain whether I need a remedial surgery. Thankfully, I was spared that disquiet for now, but I occasionally feel lightheaded and continue to experience spells of shortness of breath. The cardiologist tells me that it has something to do with the erratic electrical impulses that control the rate of my heartbeat (Sick Sinus Syndrome) and has put me on medication, but I manage to be mobile. I have to be thankful for small mercies.

Whereas until recently my reflections on what is obtaining in Indian politics and in our socio-cultural milieu welled up freely from my mind, they are now beginning to congeal and clog with irreducible age, but then what else is new? The incurable optimist that he was, Robert Browning the poet might well have asked his readers to ‘**grow old along with me/ the best is yet to be/ /the last of life/ for which the first was made** etc.’, but I doubt if the not so optimistic mortals would face the prospect of reaching ‘the last of life’ with the degree of assurance that Browning’s Rabbi Ben Ezra had. Perhaps the more insouciant among them might with Keats the poet make bold to say that they were ‘half in love with easeful death’! As a writer though I am on the whole still in possession of my faculty to retrieve past events but only increasingly hazily, I shall henceforward take the line of least resistance and move from assaying reflections the hard way to resuming personal narratives and begin with writing about my siblings.

Brothers and sisters, we were seven in all, four boys and three girls. I am the eldest. To my mother I was Yusuf, the Arabic rendering of Joseph, so locally I came to be so addressed. After me there is George, Mary, John, Susan, Thomas and Jessie. They were known informally by their pet names as Georgekutty (Georgie), Alice, Johnnykutty, Marykutty, Thomaskutty (to his friends, Tom) and Loolu in that order. In our neck of the woods, ‘kutty’, which means ‘little one’, is often placed after a name at one’s birth as a term of endearment, which suffix goes on being used no matter how old one gets. We thus hear names like Krishnankutty, Lakshmikutty, Moideenkutty, Ahmedukutty and so on cutting across faiths. In our family, it so happens that apart from me, only Alice and Loolu went without this suffix to their names, but that was not for parental lack of affection.

Sadly Alice is no longer with us; nor is Johnnykutty. Alice passed on in 2009 at the age of 73. In 1955, Alice married M.E.Abraham (aka Kunjachen) of the Mannoor family of Mylapra in the Pathanamthitta district of Kerala. He was working for the East African Railways at that time. Having volunteered for early retirement sometime in the early Seventies, he along with his wife Alice, daughters Premila and Peggy and son Prince, moved back to India. He settled down in Quilon where he worked for the firm Quilon Agencies of which at one time my father had been a sleeping partner. Ill health compelled Kunjachen to give up his job sometime in the late Eighties. He passed away on 9th April, 1990.

Premila, Peggy and Prince are married and have flown the coop. Having sadly been ditched by her husband, Premila lives in Kochi with her daughter. The daughter who is a

computer engineer works there. Her son works in Bangalore. Peggy is in Mumbai and Prince in Quilon with their families. Peggy's daughters, one of whom is married to a Goan, work in Bombay. Prince's wife Preethi is presently staying in Mangalore with their son Aby who is an undergraduate student there while Prince works in Abu Dhabi.

Johnnykutty left us on 28th June, 2016. He was 77. He had worked as an electrical engineer in Kuwait. At the start of the Gulf War, he and his wife were forced by the situation to return to India bag and baggage, back in 1991. They had been in Kuwait for more than thirty years. Their sons Biju and Binu and their daughter Bindu had already been sent back to India for schooling. In 1993 or so, he bought a plot of land contiguous to our Nadavallil homestead. Not long after that, staying with us at Nadavallil, he had his 'dream home' built on it over the following year and for old times' sake named it after the house we had all grown up in, 'Hopeville', and for good measure, tagged onto it 'Kuzhiyidathil' the old house name which our much revered grandfather Puthenpurackal Yonnachen of old had named it!

Johnnykutty was a good neighbour to us, one in a million. Many were the times when he would unstintingly come to our aid in handling troublesome situations. Ammu also remembers how back in 1955, waiting for her first confinement after I had left for East Africa ahead of her, he would always stand up for her if for any reason anyone in the family were tactless or insensitive in one's conduct towards her. The only weakness in his makeup was that he was irascible. At the slightest provocation he would fly into an almighty temper but would as soon calm down. We all sorely miss him, flaw and all. His wife Sunu has reconciled herself to her loss and is coping with her widowhood admirably. Their son Biju is in Australia with his wife Anita and son. Bindu, a peripatetic army wife -her husband Sherry is an army engineer whose work often keeps him on the move- is now in Hyderabad with her daughter. Their son is studying to be an engineer.

Binu, the youngest of Johnnykutty's children, chose by conviction to be an evangelist, pleasantly surprising all of his dear ones. In his growing up years, part of which he spent in Kumbanad with his grandparents, he had proved to be quite a handful as my wife Ammu would testify. Ammu was at that time in Kumbanad attending to the needs of my aged parents. Anyway, that is history now. Initially, our evangelist had spread the gospel in Kerala before shifting his area of missionary work to Hyderabad under the auspices of one of the better-known non-Episcopalian denominations- the Assemblies of God I believe it was. That he later changed his loyalties to another Christian sect, a so-called messianic group that has an improbable alliance with some obscure Jewish rabbis in, of all places, the Zionist state of Israel- has however raised our eyebrows, more than somewhat. His wife Suma and children, Abigail and Aaron, are also with him.

Georgie, having left Madras Christian College before completing his studies, left first for Bombay and then made his way to Singapore. He stayed for a long time with our paternal Uncle John's family while he was in Singapore. Initially, he was with the Royal Air Force as a technical trainee before he joined the BBC Far Eastern Services at Johor Bahru in Malaysia where in time, more than making up for his earlier academic lapse, he rose to be the resident engineer of the station after having had a training stint with the BBC in

London. He has settled down in Johor Bahru with his wife Alice. They spend long spells with their children in Sydney, Australia. They have been given leave to take up permanent residence in Australia, but they seem to be in two minds about taking it up. Their children Benjamin (Benny) and Enis (Mini) are both married with children. One of Mini's two daughters is doing medicine and the other, working in the media.

My sister Susan (Marykutty to us) is a trained teacher with a Master's degree in Education. She was married to M.C. Jacob (whose pet name is Mon) a mechanical engineer of the Manaloor family of Aluva. Having worked initially for the Indian Aluminium Company at Eloor close to their home in Aluva, she at their school and he at the factory, they moved first to Kenya and then in search of new pastures on to Dubai first, then Saudi Arabia and finally to Oman in the Middle East before they came back to India in 1997. They now live in retirement at Mather Nagar, Kalamesseri in Kochi. In 2017, she was diagnosed with cancer and had a mastectomy performed on her. To her credit, it has to be said that she has taken it in her stride and continues to be as chirpy as ever. Their first son Roshan is the Dean of a college at the University of Abu Dhabi. He is married and has a son who is at university in the USA as I write this. Roshan's wife I understand is doing research for her Ph.D. Their second son Reji is an Orthopaedic surgeon who like his wife works at the American Hospital in Manama, Bahrein. His wife Deepa is an ophthalmologist. They have two children, Rahul and Ria. Rahul is studying in India to be an engineer. Their daughter is still schooling.

Tom, my youngest brother, on completing his undergraduate studies at the Union Christian College in Aluva, had worked for some time as a medical representative with a Swiss pharmaceutical company before he emigrated to the United States of America in September, 1972. Subsequently, he did his Master's at the University of Denver in Colorado, majoring in film making. Sometime in the late eighties as I recall, with a little bit of help from some of his siblings and a cousin of his, he produced a feature film in Malayalam titled, *Eenam Maranna Kattu* (The Breeze that Missed its Melody). To the disappointment of his dear ones, thanks to the avaricious machinations of the local distributors, his efforts to get it exhibited in our cinemas did not bear fruit. Tom is still in Denver with his wife Vimala and daughters Deepa and Maya, although he often shuttles between the US and Kerala to tend to his property in Kumbanad. The elder daughter, Deepa, is married to Binu and they have two children, Serena and Isaac. They are also in Denver.

Loolu, my youngest sister, is married to George Fenn of the Chunangattu Thoppil family of Vazhoor. Georgie was a captain in the Indian Army and opted for early retirement to work as an executive in the Indian Aluminium Company (INDAL, for short) in Belgaum. They have two children, Joe Fenn aka Manoj and Miriam George Fenn aka Vavadi. Both studied Medicine and earned their bachelor's degrees from the Medical College at Belgaum. Instead of choosing a career in medicine, Manoj opted for a vocation as a businessman.

Based in the United States, he runs a business establishment that makes and distributes organic medicine and is by all accounts making money hand over fist. He is married to

Monica a Punjabi lass from Delhi and they have two girls, fraternal twins, Anita and Anvi. Vavadi who chose to study further and pursue a medical career is presently on the teaching faculty of the Kolencherry Medical College. So is her husband Jacob Eapen aka Prasad. They have a son and a daughter, Karun and Keertana. While Karun has done Higher Secondary School and is mulling over his next stage of studies, Keertana has just completed her M.B.B.S at the Kolencherry Medical College and is marking time to start her internship at the same college.

Mention of such academic highfliers brings to mind the question why some of the children have been under-achievers. Surely, for all we know, it was not as though such children did not have it in them to 'fly high'. So, if it is not their nature that is the cause, could it have something to do with their nurture? We often hear the argument that parents who are remiss in guiding their children in their academic progress and admonishing them whenever they are slacking could take the rap for the underachievement of their children.

And yet, we know that children who had been left to their own devices have risen to great heights by dint of hard work. This nature-nurture controversy has been raging for long without our educational psychologists being able to draw a conclusion with any degree of certainty. Suffice it to say, much might be said on both sides. Ammu and I were lucky to have had three children endowed with immense potential, which I confess as their parents we could not always personally help them develop. Since we were compelled to move from country to country for bread and butter reasons, there were periods when we had to leave Bobby, Bonny and Bina, pretty much to their own devices as residents in boarding schools and for the most part the Lawrence School, Lovedale.

At the Indian School Certificate exams Bobby did not exactly cover himself with glory, but managed to pass. He joined Christ College, Bangalore, for his pre-university studies, which opportunity one might have hoped he would utilize to make up for his rather pedestrian performance at school. But, that was not to be. We were crestfallen. He then joined us in Kitwe, Zambia in 1975 and for a year worked as a trainee accountant with Trevor Coppock and Company. In the following year he joined James Karen and Company as Accounts administrator. In the meanwhile, under our watchful eyes he managed to do his "A" Levels by private study with a modicum of success. On the strength of that and at the instance of my brother Tommy, we sent Bobby to the US to further his studies at the University of Denver, where again free from constraints he was determined to have his own way. Being a headstrong maverick can cut both ways. Whereas his peripatetic stint in the US made him street smart, he had failed to do his stuff as we had expected to prepare for his future. Sadly, we called him back.

By then we had moved to Lusaka. For the next three years, he worked as Financial Administrator For Roland Penza and Co. first in Lusaka and then Ndola. In 1981, his wanderlust took him to Harare in Zimbabwe to work for the Zimbabwe Fertilizer Corporation for the next two years. In 1983, he left for London to be with the Asian Action Group as a community worker and at the same time with the Greater London Council Ethnic Minorities Unit, co-ordinating the 'Anti-abolition of GLC campaign'. In

1984 he was back in Harare and managed to find a position with Save the Children Fund, Zimbabwe.

He was back in London after five years, footloose and fancy free. When wanderlust is strong, it is irresistible. For the next nine years, he dabbled in various campaigns by the Health Education Authority in the UK for the marginalised. In 1993, he managed, co-ordinated, edited and produced “*Time to be Free*” a children’s book on Nelson Mandela. From 1998 to 2004 he was the Director of the Selby Community Centre in North London. Since 2004, he has been into commodity broking in refined fuel as the head honcho of Directrium Ltd. In 2014, when filial duty called him, he shifted base to Kumbanad to be by our side in our twilight years. What the future holds in store for him when we are gone, only he, the non-conformist that he has chosen to be, can prognosticate.

As in the case of Bobby, after a short spell in the primary section of the Loyola School at Trivandrum as a boarder, Bonny too moved with us in September 1965 to Lovedale in Ooty and continued his schooling at the Lawrence School, the last five years of which were as a boarder as Ammu and I had left for Africa by the end of 1971. He secured a First Class in the Indian School Certificate examination. He then joined college. On completing his undergraduate studies at the University of Kerala and armed with a Bachelor of Commerce degree he joined us in Zambia in 1979. He promptly got to work first for the accounting firm of KPMG in their audit department for three years before doing a short stint with the UN in a project management capacity for the FAO. Like his brother before him, he then crossed the Pond and joined the University of Denver. That was in 1983. He obtained a Bachelor of Science and Business Administration degree from there, where he was also a Hornbeck Scholar in Development Economics.

Over the next twenty-five years, he has worked with the IT Sector with primary focus on E.R.P i.e. Enterprise Resource Planning. He was Vice-President, Strategic Initiatives, with RSA Companies at Englewood in Colorado for the first few years. He has more recently been engaged in Technology Consulting and Executive Recruiting for markets in North America, Europe, Asia and Africa. He has also been in partnership with his brother Bobby in Directrium Ltd. in commodity broking.

Being more even-tempered, unlike his siblings, he does not easily get hot under the collar. Again, he has a taste for music and had honed his skills in instrumental music, especially the trumpet, under the tutelage of Denzel Prince, his band master at Lovedale. He has got a good voice as well. He, like his brother and sister, is also a connoisseur of good food, hearty eaters all of them. They are lucky to have as their mother one who is a cook *par excellence*, given to making dishes by rule of thumb, scrambling it up in a jiffy.

In 1989, Bonny had married an American, a Fine Arts graduate, Genelle Chambers by name, the daughter of Bob and Joan Chambers formerly of Mountain Heights, Colorado, and presently living in Cedar Woods. Genelle teaches differently-abled children with great love and commitment. She is a lover of dogs too, as is evident from the many pets she keeps, and is a familiar presence at dog-shows around the country as a judge. She combines all this with being a wonderful homemaker. Multi-tasking for her seems to

come naturally. Bonny and Genelle have a daughter, her name Rachel, and she has recently completed her undergraduate studies. Armed with a degree in Film Production, she has joined a production company on probation.

Last but not least is our daughter Bina, many-splendoured and many-sided. Like her brothers before her, Bina also had her schooling at Lawrence School, Lovedale, but only up to Class X. She did her pre-university Course at St. Joseph's College for Women at Alleppey before moving to Jaipur, where she stayed for the next three years with her maternal uncle Kunjumon and his family, for her undergraduate studies in the humanities. Her stay in Jaipur, I might add, did help her improve her proficiency in Hindi, which in hindsight turned out to be an invaluable asset in the profession she later chose. She can speak Malayalam, Hindi and English with equal facility.

After graduation, she proceeded to the UK where she studied Filming at the University of London's Goldsmith's College at New Cross. On finishing Film School, she started her career as a broadcast journalist and documentary producer with the BBC. She spent the next thirteen years working for several TV channels in England helping make political and historical documentaries, the four-part BBC documentary, 'The Dynasty' on the Nehru-Gandhi era in Indian politics being one that stands out. She then moved back to India and joined Excel Entertainments, a feature-film production house in Mumbai, formerly Bombay, as executive producer and the CEO to lead multi-disciplinary teams making large-budget, star-driven Hindi feature films. She also made small-budget, independent films. In addition, To this day, she acts as a free-lance production consultant in a few mainstream houses in Mumbai.

She has since moved her base to Kochi to be closer to us her parents, in Kumbanad, to be of help to us in our twilight years, and comes down as often as she can to take care of us, as does her brother Bobby, for which we cannot thank her enough. She is a fiercely independent person and, like Bobby, is loathe to doing anything at the instance of others, let alone those who are near and dear to her, except on its merits. A character trait that she also shares with our son Bobby is that she is given to flying off the handle at the drop of a hat. Whereas in the case of Bobby it could be for what he perceives as an affront to his self-esteem, with Bina, more often than not, it is for what she construes as an act of omission or commission in word or deed on the part of her dear ones. It more often than not ends in a 'cloudburst', a catharsis of sorts red eyes and all, which drives her to being once again her self-possessed persona with a 'calm of mind, all passions spent'.

I have often wondered if there is a dichotomy here, for as far as I can surmise, she, being a companionable person, gets on famously with her colleagues in the film world, where she has made quite a name for herself. She has a wide circle of friends and associates. I believe she has taken after her mother, an outgoing person, an affable companion and a warm-hearted hostess, unlike her father who doesn't quite measure up to being such a sociable person, having increasingly become somewhat of a loner with advancing age.

In her line of work she often has to travel round the country as well as the world, practically living out of a suitcase. She is a visiting lecturer at the K.R. Narayanan

National Institute of Visual Sciences and Arts in Kerala. She does the same at the Film and Television Institute in Pune and the Satyajit Ray Film and Television Institute in Kolkata, where she is also a member of the Academic Council and was instrumental in instituting the country's only 3-year Production Course, designing the syllabus and the Curriculum herself. Besides she acts as a consultant to the National Film Development Corporation in India.

We love our children and are proud of them for what they are, flaws and all, and for their love and affection for us. We have often been despondent about Bobby and Bina choosing not to raise families of theirs to take care of. Ammu and I now often dearly miss the presence of spirited little ones, I mean grandchildren, gambolling about us; to be petted and pampered. Our one and only grandchild has had her growing years in faraway United States of America, sadly. Well, that's history now. You win some, you lose some. Looking back, we take comfort at the thought that the good Lord works in mysterious ways for if Bobby and Bina had had their own children to look after, they would have been hard put to be by our side quite as often as they do now.

The mention of the spirited little ones being joyfully active at home brings to mind the *Kudumba Yogams* at Pamala, the annual Pulimoottil family reunions that Ammu and I make it a point to attend, year after year without fail, for Ammu hails from that family. The 2017 Kudumba Yogam was held on Saturday the 12th of August at the residence of Kanakam (wife of the late Thampi Idiculla of Pulimoottil). After the customary opening hymn was sung and a lesson from the Bible read, a prayer was offered before the Yogam began. A short address by Anita a lady member of the family, and an educator to boot, came next. She aptly chose for her message the idea of a stream of water, as one nourishing its banks while flowing between them, meanwhile negotiating its bends and rapids. It was an apt metaphor for the highs and lows of family life. The exuberance of her off the cuff delivery had evoked everyone's admiration.

The best was yet come. I was pleasantly surprised to find Kanakam's granddaughters and grandnieces, all of them either in their pre-teens or in their early teens, still wet behind their ears to all appearances, emceeding the rest of the programme with great assurance and verve while the family elders sat back comfortably, looking noticeably proud of the performance of their progeny. It was heart-warming to see with what *joie de vivre* the teenagers as well as the pre-teens mostly girls sashayed their way through the dances, both cinematic and classical, to say nothing of the group songs and quizzes that they had also presented. The more prosaic matter of submitting the Yogam accounts and making plans for the future were over and done with expeditiously in order not to detract from the overall pleasure that the gathering had earlier enjoyed.

Comparisons are odious they say, but in this context I cannot help but think of the *Kumbanaattu Kudumba Yogams* that are held every year in May with monotonous regularity. A keynote address by a guest speaker, nearly always a clergyman, is invariably a homily, which goes on and on to test the attention span of even the most long-suffering in the gathering. It is best not to mention the longwinded monologues from the organisers that open and end the meeting with, which turn the day to be such a drag

that by the end of it all even the most patient in the audience, having all that while sat there in monastic silence, begin to squirm in their seats. At least I do. One feels inadequate that one's own family is loathe to being imaginative in organising what should in reality be mainly an informal, interactive session. Except for a song or two rendered, no doubt beautifully, by the choristers of the family there is hardly any role to play for the younger members of our family in a social gathering such as this. It is not as if the young ones, given half a chance, would lack the time and the talent to make a reunion such as this an interesting one.

Long speeches are a scourge of our society. Our leaders, whether political or otherwise, are in the habit of holding forth if they have a captive audience for their tub-thumping. It is anybody's guess that they are frightfully fond of listening to their own voices. Our political leaders, Narendra Modi for one, are the most vociferous of the lot. Of whatever hue, red or saffron or whatever, they always vie with one another, to try and outflank the other. And the veritable detainees that their audience have in fact been turned into have no choice but to be sitting their compelled to squirm in their seats willy-nilly.

This long-windedness is just as true of service organisations in this country such as the Rotary Club, Lions Club and the Y's Men International to name but a few. Ammu and I, as members of the Y's Men's Club of Maramon as also the Senior Citizens' Association of Kumbanad can vouch for this experience of ennui. It is a confounded bore having to go out usually on weekends or on a holiday -for retirees with time on their hands, the day matters little- with nothing to do but to listen to someone droning on and on, now and again diffusively, upon the selfsame topics, *ad infinitum*. Repetition may be the mother of learning for school children, but God grant that may not happen to a senior citizen who has heard it all before often enough! It is not as if the opportunity to have a good time, a time for enjoyment, should be denied to the old ones in their twilight years.

Let me hasten to add, in fairness to the organisers of such meetings, that every year on special occasions like Christmas or Easter or what have you, they relent and acquiesce to having some fun and games to make the get-togethers more interactive and interesting to the members by having them compete in musical chairs, lemon and spoon race, aiming at the target, as also in parlour games such as quizzes and guessing games or in singing songs, sung both solo and as a group.

Of them all, what has struck me the most, and I dare say others as well, is the joyful observance of Onam (the harvest festival of Malayalees that coincides with the syncretic celebration of the legendary return of the benevolent Asura King Mahabali of ancient lore, to his erstwhile kingdom of *Maavelinaadu* from *Paathaalam* the mythical netherworld, on parole as it were. According to that ancient legend, he had been sent down there by the jealous Aryan supreme god Vishnu by the subterfuge of his assuming the guise of Vamana, an innocent-looking, indigent Brahmin asking for alms. He begged for and was granted three strides of land for a roof over his head; with two, Vamana hived off Mahabali's kingdom in its entirety. For the third, running out of options, Mahabali had to offer his head to be measured off, and with what result we all know. He was unceremoniously dispossessed of his kingdom and 'booted' out!

This calls to mind what sounds suspiciously like the unabashed advocacy of Aryan hegemony that *Aryaputra* Amit Shah, the RSS bred BJP bigwig, has recently mooted while he was in Kerala. He had the cheek to suggest that the Dravidian Malayalees, of all people, celebrate *Vamana Jayanthi* in praise of the wily Aryan Brahmin Vamana who tricked Mahabali into relinquishing his kingdom rather than observe Onam that commemorates the benevolent Asura king Mahabali's yearly visit. Was it a slip of the tongue?

The present regime in Delhi with their authoritarian ways, which most Indians with their unreflecting psyche and deferential nature have continued to treat as of little account, are thus encouraged to put the screws on us incrementally *vis-a-vis* matters that are intrinsic to our lives, such as the faith we practise, the food we eat, the festivals we celebrate, the customs we follow. In planning to strip us of the right of choice in these primary aspects of everyday life, they are also plotting to deny us the right to privacy which our country's constitution guarantees us as a fundamental right. And if you dared to challenge their politics, it would be on pain of death as the rationalists Pansare, Dabholkar and Kalburgi were too late to find out. To that illustrious list of martyrs we may now add Gauri Lankesh, the lady journalist and activist who, in defying the odds, paid the ultimate price for unrelentingly censuring the obscurantist policies of the RSS-BJP combine. There are also the likes of A.G.Noorani, Romila Thapar, Arundhati Roy, Mani Shankar Iyer, Shiv Viswanathan, Pulapre Balakrishnan and Kancha Ilaiah among others, who are quite conscious of what they are bargaining for. Regardless all of them are trenchant critics of the perfidious polarisation that the present dispensation that rules from Delhi is trying to effect. Many a right-thinking Indian has misgivings that these our 'conscientious objectors' could well be done in by the deadly designs of these obscurantists?

Why do they want to polarize the people of India, who have until now been proud of their composite Indianness, a robust blending of different racial groups, different language speakers, different customs, different faiths and different political beliefs, to say nothing of their varied dietary choices? Do they thereby intend to keep them in submission to their designs? Are they hoping to homogenize them against their will to keep them in thralldom, language-wise, faith-wise, diet-wise and culture-wise to negate the principle that people the world over do indeed customarily live together peacefully in the same society regardless of their heterogeneity? It is their exclusivist ideology that is now being pitted against the inclusive ideals of tolerance and secularism that defines a pluralistic society. If the intention of the promoters of Hindutwa to assimilate people into one undifferentiated mass of subservient people were realized, that would sound the death knell of the secular India that was, and mark the beginning of a sectarian Hindu Rashtra with all its concomitants like *Manu Smriti* brought into play again, wouldn't it? God forbid!

There you go again, you might say! How can I desist from expressing my fears that our dear country is heading for an uncertain future in which the minorities would be corralled in a confining menagerie to be terrorized, as is happening to the Yezedis and Christians in contiguous areas of Iraq and Syria controlled by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria?

Yet, I have said enough. Though unworthy to claim equivalence, let me like old Simeon in the Good Book, make bold to say, 'Now, Lord lettest thou thy servant depart in peace'. I have had a well-spent life, its inevitable ups and downs notwithstanding. Adieu.