



ALL HUMAN BEINGS ARE

**BORN
FREE &
EQUAL**

IN DIGNITY AND RIGHTS

Righting the Wrongs in India Today!



BY CEDRIC PRAKASH

**The sacred document of 1948
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Universal Rights’, to which
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In the run-up to the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) on 30 November launched a new website www.standup4humanrights.org. This highly interactive website has on one of its key pages this quote “No democracy! No Human Rights! Male police beating up women in a peaceful protest in Lucknow UP 23 October 2017.” Certainly not a laudatory comment on the reality of the largest democracy in the world; indeed a big shame and a terrible blot on the country that this incident should figure on the page of the world’s premier human rights body. The plain truth however is that this is indicative of the ground reality in India today: human rights of the ordinary citizens are trampled upon as never before!



It is pathetic to witness the way the country is being dragged into unmitigated disaster by the Government of the day and its unholy nexus with small group of anti-national forces consisting of fundamentalists, fascists, fanatics and other fringe elements! The rights and freedoms which are guaranteed in the UDHR and in the Indian Constitution are totally disregarded by these autocrats and despots, who today attempt to control the lives and destinies of the people. They have abdicated their role and responsibility to defend the rights of every citizen: among them, the right to life and to livelihood; to freedom of speech and expression; to freedom to preach, practise and propagate one's religion; the right to eat, dress and see what one chooses...



As another 10th December draws near we need to remind ourselves that the sacred document of 1948 the 'Universal Declaration of Universal Rights', to which India is also a signatory, is systematically being torn to shreds in our country. Citizens from across the board need to awake now and rally together to prevent the human rights situation from deteriorating any further. Those responsible for governing this country must be made to realise that 'human rights are universal and inalienable; indivisible; interdependent and interrelated. They are universal because everyone is born with and possesses the same rights, regardless of where they live, their gender or race, or their religious, cultural or ethnic background'.



One does not have to be a 'rocket scientist' to know how bad the situation is today regarding the violation of human rights. The economy is on a downward spiral; demonetization has had an extremely negative impact particularly on the common person. The poor and the vulnerable find it impossible to make both ends meet due to the escalation of prices on essential commodities. Farmers are protesting all over; many have committed suicide and some have been killed in police firing. Dalits, adivasis, patidars and others are on the warpath; minorities are being victimized: Christians and their places of worship are regularly attacked. Beef-eating has become a major issue; cow vigilantes have no qualms in lynching people. The media is largely throttled. Those who dissent and take on



the Government are harassed no end and even killed. Powerful vested interests continue to destroy the environment and displace thousands all over. Women continue to be at the receiving end in societies, which do not treat them with the dignity, which they deserve. A sizeable section of children in India work for long hours in hazardous occupations to eke out a living. The list is endless!

Two of the world's leading human rights NGOs, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, have come down heavily on human rights violations in India in their recently released Annual Reports. Human Rights Watch says, "Limits on free speech and attacks on religious minorities, often led by vigilante groups that claim to be supporters of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), are an increasing concern in India. In 2016, students were accused of sedition for expressing their views; people who raised concerns over challenges to civil liberties were deemed anti-Indian; Dalits and Muslims were attacked on suspicion they had killed, stolen, or sold cows for beef; and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) came under pressure due to India's restrictive foreign funding regulations."

Amnesty International is more brazen stating that, "The authorities used repressive laws to curb freedom of expression and silence critics. Human rights defenders and organizations continued to face harassment and intimidation, and vigilante cow protection groups carried out several attacks. Thousands protested against discrimination and violence faced by Dalit communities. Millions of people opposed changes to labour laws. Marginalized communities continued to be frequently ignored in the government's push for faster economic growth. Tensions between India and Pakistan intensified following an attack by gunmen on an army base in Uri, Jammu and Kashmir. Jammu and Kashmir state witnessed months of curfew and a range of human rights violations by authorities. A ban on India's largest currency bills, intended as a crackdown on the country's black market, severely affected the livelihoods of millions".

The way the wheels of justice have been subverted in the recent past will make any

normal person squirm. A few weeks there has been an expose by the 'Caravan' magazine on the mysterious and untimely death of Judge Brijgopal Harkishan Loya, the Special CBI Judge presiding over the trial of BJP President Amit Shah and several Gujarat Police Officers in the Sohrabuddin fake encounter case. Judge Loya died on 1 December 2014. His family has today come out with startling revelations including that he was offered a 100-crore bribe to key Amit Shah a clean chit. Several eminent personalities are now demanding a 'high-level' judicial inquiry' into his death. These include Justice A.P. Shah former Chief Justice of Delhi High Court and Justice (Retd.) B.H. Marlapalle. In a letter addressed to the Chief Justice of India former Navy Chief Admiral L. Ramdas writes, "A judicial probe at this point, at least to respond to the queries raised by the family, and to uphold the image of the judiciary in the eyes of the people of India, is absolutely necessary. As a former Chief of the Indian Navy, I feel strongly that it is critically important to clear any doubts about this entire incident. Therefore in the larger interests of the nation and its people, and above all in upholding the Constitution of India and the image of our entire legal system, a high level judicial enquiry be initiated immediately" On 3 December thirty-two signatories including former Government secretaries, former Ambassadors also wrote to the Chief Justice of India in support of Admiral Ramdas' letter demanding an immediate high-level probe into the death of Judge Loya.

Whether this will happen is anyone's guess. The media in India as the fourth pillar of democracy should have taken up cudgels and highlighted the human rights violations in the country. They would have certainly done a great service to the freedom of speech and expression if they had joined the 'Caravan' magazine in the quest of justice for Judge Loya. Sadly, they are not doing so. A sizeable section of the media in India has been throttled and muzzled, becoming pawns in the hands of murderous groups and corrupt corporations. So practically, no one dares speak about the death of Judge Loya. There was also the story of the blatant corruption of Jay Shah (the son of Amit Shah); mainstream media, which will



shout hoarse on any trivial issue, is just too frightened to take up such issues. There are several other major human rights issues, which will never hog the headlines in our media today these include the suicides by farmers, of how Government policies like demonetization have impoverished millions of Indians, of protests all over the country, of the profiteering by business houses like the Ambanis and Adanis. Above all, despite ample factual data none of the 'big' media houses will dare expose the colossal failure of the so-called 'Gujarat Model'; of how it has benefited a few at the expense of the vast majority!

Lots more can be said of the 'right to freedom of opinion and expression' (#19). Several media persons and other intellectuals, who have stood up for justice and truth, like Gauri Lankesh, Kalburgi, Dabholkar, Pansare and others have been killed (just a few weeks ago on 21 November Sudip Dutta Bhaumik, a Bengali language scribe, was killed in Tripura); many more are intimidated and harassed and even have false cases foisted on them. Films like 'Padmavati' and 'Durga' were either banned or not allowed to be screened. Social media activists are closely monitored and some have even been arrested. Those who stand up for truth and speak out on critical issues and human rights violations are immediately dubbed as 'anti-nationals.'

Article 18 of the UDHR unequivocally states

that "everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance." The Government of the day seems determined that this right is not exercised by the many minorities and others who belong to sub-altern groups. The situation of India's minorities for one, is going from bad to worse daily; in the recent past a Christian Pastor was shot dead in Punjab, Muslim families were brutally attacked in UP, sacred Christian objects and cemeteries were vandalized in Goa, young Muslims were lynched for allegedly carrying or eating beef.

Volumes can be written about how the rights of children and women are violated. Millions of children still labour in hazardous occupations in several parts of the country besides being denied their right to education they are deprived of their childhood. Women despite the platitudes that are dished out, continue to be treated as second-class citizens. India is known to be a major hub for human trafficking – children and women are the victims. The Government of India's stand on the Rohingya Muslims fleeing persecution from Myanmar – besides violating the rights of refugees goes totally against the basic spirit of compassion and hospitality. The LGBT community is still looked down upon and treated very unjustly in India.

Eleanor Roosevelt who oversaw the drafting of the UDHR says it succinctly, "Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home – so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. ... Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerned citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world." Taking a cue from this visionary lady, concerned citizens of India need to renew their commitment to the rights of all and swing into concrete action now! The wrongs must be made right!

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