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OPINION

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As the old year came to its end, Mrs. Gandhi received a very special present which must have delighted her. The Supreme Court struck a most powerful blow in favour of authoritarianism. It stultified judicial independence, making the holder of high judicial office a creature subject to the Executive's will. The Law Minister, the instrument of the Prime Minister, would hereafter be the arbiter of the judge's fate. He was here to-day, but he might in a month's time be on the other side of the country, if the Law Minister thought he was too independent or found a decision or two of his awkward for the Government. The difference between him and any government servant carrying out orders would get less and less, until it finally disappeared. He might still on occasion roar like lion, but only as a "lion beneath the throne." Soon, to keep his place, he must be constantly looking over his shoulder to see whether the government approved. If it frowned, he must quickly amend his ways and win favour. The Supreme Court having in effect established the supremacy of the Executive over the Judiciary, the rest must follow. We congratulate Mrs. Gandhi on this signal success; we offer our condolences to all lovers of freedom and to the inoffensive people of the country on this great misfortune that has befallen them. "Ah freedom is a noble thing" sang old Dunbar, but here we have one of its strongest bulwarks being overturned by those whose foremost duty, one would have thought, was to defend and protect it. Tyranny shall flourish then, and you and I and all of us lie down and be unconscionably oppressed, without hope of redress? So it would seem, aye it may well be so. But the spirit of man is unconquerable; and we must cherish it and let its flame burn brighter, so that it may still overcome.

A TALE OF OUR TIMES

(A tale which will be told and retold by children in the years to come)

(Present narrator DHARAM YASH DEV)

ONCE upon a time, in the ancient land of Bharatvarsha, there lived a Maharani. Like all Maharanis, she was a beautiful Maharani. Her rule over her 60 crores of subjects was firm and ruthless and her empire was far flung.

According to reports which her darbaries, sepoys and sleuths brought her, there were peace and prosperity in the Land of Bharatvarsha; all dacoits, robbers, thugs, rapers, swindlers *et al*, had been

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smashed or rounded up. And so, they told her, all her subjects were happy and ate well and slept well. The land overran with milk and honey, so said her informers.

But in spite of all this, there were a few grumblers in her empire. The grumblers and fault finders were always mumbling something or other. But they felt helpless and frustrated as the Maharani had a sort of charismatic power and would sway and even mesmerise the subjects against all these frustrated grumblers.

So, having failed in their efforts to change her or move her or dethrone her, they resorted to prayers and poojas to various gods and goddesses to help them get rid of the Maharani. Even that did not succeed. So, one day, a group of more prominent grumblers held a big *yagna* in a *mandap* by the banks of a sacred river and started praying to BRAHAMAJI....the Supreme Lord of the Universe.

After days and days of TAPASYA the grumblers succeeded in getting BRAHAMAJI's ears. He appeared before them, prepared to listen to their prayers.

Brahamaji promised to look into their complaints against the Maharani, her ruthless rule, her favours to her sycophants, chamchas and corrupt darbaries, and do something about it.

Sri Brahamaji, on return to his heavenly abode, sent for one of his top trouble shooters—Ramachandra—who, like a few other trouble shooters, had the reputation of appearing in human form in troubled lands from time to time and thereby restoring peace, happiness and prosperity in these spots.

RAMA appeared before Brahamaji and bowed respectfully.

RAMA, said Brahamaji, I have a job for you. There is misery and unhappiness in parts of Bharatvarsha; people are complaining of zulums, of breakdown of law and order and much more. But on their own they are helpless against their ruthless rulers. You go, and, like you are supposed to have done it ages ago, restore a state of Ram-Rajya in the land of Bharatvarsha.

Rama again bowed respectfully. And said, Sire, I dare not refuse you but I am most reluctant to accept the commission you are giving me. I do not feel up to it. I do not consider myself competent to handle the problem you have placed before me.

What do you mean, asked Brahamaji. Explain your reluctance. Sire, again spoke Rama, the land of Bharatvarsha is ruled by a woman. In my last re-birth in that land my experiences were not too happy. So I dare not try another rebirth for the job you are asking me to do. There are good reasons :

In my last birth, though born in a noble family, my experiences at the hands of my women adversaries were anything but happy.

I was born in a royal family. Was married to a lovely girl from another royal and noble family. But then, see, what happened to me soon after my marriage?

When I was about to be crowned the king, one of my step-mothers

threw a spanner and got me sent out into exile.

That was my first sad experience at the hands of an unreasonable woman. But I was reconciled to the 14 years of VANVAS; I thought it would be an extended honey-moon in the silvan surroundings, with birds and peacocks dancing around us. But did this come to pass?

With these thoughts uppermost in my mind, and when I was about to leave my home, my second step-mother stepped in and threw another spanner. She wanted her son, Lakshman, to accompany us. And with my step-brother by our side day and night, what kind of a honey-moon could I think of?.... When we, me and my wife, were in our *kutiya*, he was there outside the door; when we went out for a walk, he followed us. And what a honey-moon, we said to ourselves.

But I was reconciled and decided to live through it for the 14 years of the exile.

But was that the end? No, Sire.

Before, long, another woman appeared and threw another spanner into the peaceful existence I had hoped for. This was SHAROOPNAKHA, another haughty, arrogant and self-opinionated woman. When she could not have her way, she incited her brother, the King of a neighbouring land, to do another dirty trick on me and my wife. Sita was abducted!

And to get her back I had to wage a long and bitter war.

I won the war and brought Sita back to my kingdom, hoping to live happily thereafter.

But could I? Did I?

There was no end to my troubles in spite of these sufferings. There was no living happily thereafter !!!

And then there appeared a wily DHOBAN on the scene... and you know the rest, Sire. I had to get rid of my beloved wife all because of a DHOBAN... the fourth woman who had done her best to ruin my life and bring unhappiness and misery to me....

Having said all this, Rama, with tearful eyes, bowed once again to Sri Brahamaji... Sire, you see, I have my limitations.

I am not capable of coping with women... and as you have told me BHARATVARSHA is now ruled by another tough and ruthless woman... how do you expect me to restore Ramrajya in that land?

Then both were silent for a while.

Rama bowed again and said: Sire, may I respectfully make a suggestion?

You may, said Sri Brahamaji.

Sire, you have, somewhere in your vast prolok, another trouble shooter, a genius, who is an expert in handling women of all sorts.

Why not send for him, the Bansiwalla, Krishna.... during his last AVATAR he was reputed to have tamed as many as 365 women... Why not send him to tackle the difficult situation in Bharatvarsha. May be, he could do something....

Rama bowed again and left a brooding Brahma to think over the suggestion made by Rama....

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PLATO AS CON MAN

BILL AITKEN

AVING been a victim of modern schooling I've never thought much of the vaunted English Christian Gentleman type of education (invented incidentally not by Dr. Arnold of Victorian Rugby but by William of Wykham in Medieval Winchester.) Whenever an Indian friend educated at Winchester drops in, I lock the telephone for he is quite capable of putting a call through to New York the moment my back is turned and then in the familiar charming manner offer to pay for it with cheques that bounce higher than a Manhattan penthouse.

However as far as I am concerned the system at University level did provide some glimpses of what education can be, an exciting awareness of the cosmic harmony held in the universal mind.

In India I grew to accept the mass copying and lack of independence of headmasters as ugly features that would disappear like Marx's State. Now with the converting of education by cynical professionals into a systematic fleecing of the poor I am not so sure.

The other day, to illustrate the situation, a young student who had the courage to leave a Mussoorie public school (because he felt it was pointless) to work in his father's shop, told me he wanted to study electronics by a correspondence course. He sent Rs. 75/- and received twenty pages of illegibly typed gibberish. He lost more than his money (which he could ill afford). He lost the will to educate himself and learnt that crooked methods are both easy and profitable.

In this case modern education has taught a man to write letters but has failed to teach him the need to dismantle carefully with the tool of the mind the claims made by any given advertisement. Gullibility, the willingness to believe, has a place in a universe of unexplained wonders but to knowingly make a man a sucker in my opinion is anti-social.

(To be continued)

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