



# PRISM

## A PPF Dispatch

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**The Policy Perspectives Foundation (PPF) is a non-profit, apolitical think tank on matters of national interest. PPF's activities focus on complex and inter-connected challenges to peace, stability and development in India in cognisance of the external dimension. PPF is committed to spreading awareness, building capacity and promoting resilience.**

In this issue of PPF's monthly newsletter 'PRISM – A PPF Dispatch' we bring you a wrap of important news from India's neighbourhood. In the India wrap section we cover significant developments on the domestic front.

This issue of PRISM includes commentaries on the elections in Afghanistan, the media debates on Muslim Personal Law & Triple Talaq and on the continuing relevance of the teachings of Mahatma Gandhiji on the occasion of his 150th birth anniversary.

### Neighbourhood wrap

The ten ASEAN nations and their six FTA (free trade agreement) partners India, China, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand addressed the urgency to conclude a mega free trade agreement, in Bangkok from September 8-10, 2019. The 16 partners negotiated on the proposed FTA being addressed under the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). With Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows from ASEAN accounting for nearly thirty-seven per cent of total FDI growth in bilateral trade the ASEAN block has emerged as the largest trading partner of India. In the midst of ongoing global uncertainties, countries in the Indian Ocean region are striving to sustain the long-term vision of deepening and expanding value chains.

Challenges of marine Ecology, navigational security and the rising specter of terrorism in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) were reflected upon at the fourth Indian Ocean Conference 2019

held in Male, Maldives from September 3-4, 2019. External Affairs Minister (EAM) Dr. S. Jaishankar addressed the conference and spoke about the need to work towards developing the *“regional cooperation structure in such a way that allows us to handle questions of maritime pollution, environmental degradation and sustainable exploitation of resources.”* The Conference was chaired by Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe.

The seventh annual bilateral maritime exercises between India and Sri Lanka 'SLINEX 2019' was held from September 7-14, 2019 at Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh. The bilateral maritime exercise enables the Indian and Sri Lankan navies to rehearse and improve own capabilities and enhance operational effectiveness required to maintain maritime security in Indian Ocean region (IOR).

A United Nations Human Right Council's fact-finding mission has detailed the role of the



Myanmar's military the 'Tatmadaw' for atrocities against and flight of some 730,000 Rohingya Muslims from western Rakhine state to Bangladesh. The UN panel has recommended that the state of Myanmar be brought before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and held responsible for "in its obligation to prevent genocide." With the report being critical of Aung San Suu Kyi for failing to take action there is appears to be questioning of the civilian government's accountability. Myanmar has always rejected any moves to bring the issue of ethnic Rohingya Muslims to the international legal forum.

On September 10, 2019 Prime Ministers Narendra Modi and K. P. Sharma Oli jointly inaugurated a 69-km petroleum products pipeline from Motihari in Bihar to Amlekhgunj in Nepal through video conference. This is South Asia's first cross-border petroleum products pipeline with a capacity of 2 million metric ton per annum and is expected to provide cleaner petroleum products at affordable cost to the people of Nepal.

Nepal celebrated the fourth anniversary of the promulgation of its constitution, amidst the ongoing Madhesi activism on September 20, 2019. The Madhesi based political parties are still agitating against the 2015 Constitution of Nepal, which many consider discriminatory with overzealous citizenship requirements. Those defending the constitution point to an open and highly porous border with India and the need to safeguard against a mass influx of Indian migrants. For a socially progressive and inclusive Nepal, there needs to be a deliberate effort to incorporate the Madhesi and other marginalised communities into envisaged national identity of Nepal.

India-Thailand Coordinated Patrol (Indo-Thai CORPAT) between Indian Navy (IN) and Royal Thai Navy (RTN) was conducted from September 5-15, 2019. Indian Navy's ships and aircraft of Andaman and Nicobar Command have been participating in the biannual CORPAT with the RTN since 2003, with the stated objective of ensuring effective implementation of United Nations Conventions on Laws of the Sea (UNCLOS) specifically to safeguarded maritime order in the Indian ocean region.

The Sri Lankan Election Commission has announced November 16, 2019 as the date for the presidential elections, with nominations called on October 7, 2019. Leader of Opposition and former President Mahinda Rajapaksa has named his brother Gotabaya Rajapaksa, former Defence Secretary accused of war-crimes, as the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna candidate. A 2015 legislation puts a two-term cap on presidency, preventing Mahinda Rajapaksa from contesting for the highest office, but the popular leader has spoken about possibly returning to power through Parliament, as Prime Minister when Sri Lanka holds general elections next year. The ruling coalition led by the United National Party (UNP) is yet to announce its candidate for the presidential race and has three leading candidates UNP leader and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, deputy leader and Minister Sajith Premadasa and Speaker Karu Jayasuriya. Gotabaya Rajapaksa's campaign would undoubtedly centre on the theme of national security, especially in the wake of the April Easter Sunday bombings; pitching himself as a "decisive leader" and recalling his role in leading the Sri Lankan armed forces to victory against the LTTE.

Scaling efforts to internationalise the Kashmir issue, Pakistan has been alluding to the specter of nuclear war for impact at diplomatic levels. Pakistan has downgraded diplomatic ties with India expelling the Indian High Commissioner, besides suspending its trade with India and stopping train and bus services.

## India wrap

The Automatic Exchange of Information (AEOI) Regime between Switzerland and India kicked off from September 1, 2019. Under the AEOI mechanism, India's Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) will start receiving information on all financial accounts held by Indian residents in Switzerland, for the year 2018. This will significantly reduce "Swiss bank secrecy" and tax evasion and also assist law enforcement in its fight against black money.

Jaish-e-Mohammed chief Masood Azhar, Lashkar-e-Taiba founder Hafiz Muhammad Saeed, Mumbai terror attack accused

Zaki-ur-Rehman-Lakhvi and fugitive mob boss Dawood Ibrahim have been declared individual terrorists by the Union Government under the recently amended Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Amendment (UAPA) Act, 1967. Previously under the UAPA, only a group could be declared as terrorist organisation. The new act passed in August this year allows the Centre under amended Section 35 Sub Section 2 to *“exercise its power under Clause (a) of Sub Section 1 in respect of an organisation or an individual only if it believes that such organisation and individual is involved in terrorism”*.

In succession to abrogation of special status given to Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) under Article 370 and bifurcation of state into two union territories (UTs), on August 5, 2019 the Union government has constituted a three-member advisory committee chaired by Sanjay Mitra, former defence secretary, to oversee the bifurcation and apportionment of assets and liabilities of J&K.

The 68<sup>th</sup> Plenary session of the North Eastern Council (NEC) inaugurated by Union Home Minister (HM) Amit Shah was held in Guwahati, Assam on September 8-9, 2019. The NEC was attended by the Governors and Chief Ministers of all the eight north eastern states. The HM asserted that Article 371, which provides special provisions for North Eastern states, will not be tampered with. NEC has been given its highest budgetary allotment of Rs.1476 crore for year 2019-20 for achieving the goal of development at par with the rest of India.

The hallmark of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's sixth visit to U.S. was the “Howdy, Modi!” event at Houston's (Texas) NRG stadium on September 22, 2019. U.S. President Donald Trump who attended the event addressed the Indian community and presented himself as a supporter of legal immigrants. PM Modi presented the ending of autonomy for Jammu and Kashmir to the cheering crowd as a significant achievement of this government. During his visit to the U.S., PM Modi delivered the keynote address at the third annual Bloomberg Global Business Forum (GBF), the leading public-private convention of CEOs and heads

of state and government and was felicitated by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation with the ‘2019 Global Goalkeeper Award’ for the Swachh Bharat Mission. On September 27, the PM addressed the 74<sup>th</sup> session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA).

A report titled *‘Keeladi – An Urban Settlement of Sangam Age on the Banks of River Vaigai’* released by the Tamil Nadu Archaeology Department asserts that carbon dating of deposits unearthed during excavations at Keeladi (erstwhile Keezhadi) in Tamil Nadu can be dated to a period between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE. An urban settlement as complex as those in the Indus Valley Civilisation (IVC) has been unearthed at Keeladi establishing a link between the IVC and Tamil history. Artefacts yielded from the site bear graffiti marks similar to those from the Indus script. These findings give credence to the theory that towards the period of its decline the people of the IVC moved east and southwards. The findings provide material evidence to the Sangam period of Tamil literature. It pushes the age of the Sangam period back to around 600 BCE previously considered to be between 200 BCE and 400 BCE. Interestingly of the nearly 15,000 artefacts found on the site, none is of a religious nature, indicating that the civilisation at Keeladi had no interaction with Vedic culture. While shedding light on our understanding of the history and evolution of ancient Tamil society, it provides clinching evidence that the IVC was Dravidian, and that Tamils have descended from the IVC, a theory long held among historians.

India's moon mission Chandrayaan-2's Vikram Lander scheduled to soft land on the Moon surface on September 7, 2019 lost contact with ground stations, just 2.1 km above the touchdown site. NASA has confirmed that Vikram had a “hard landing”, as it released high-resolution images captured by its reconnaissance orbiter. ISRO has said that all payload operations of Chandrayaan-2 orbiter have commenced. Chandrayaan-2 is a highly complex mission and despite the hard landing it represents a significant technological leap for ISRO.

Director Zoya Akhtar's *Gully Boy*, has been selected as India's official entry in the International Feature Film category at the Oscars. *Gully Boy* is about an upcoming rapper portrayed by Ranveer Singh, who sets out to achieve his dream by rapping about his life in the streets of Mumbai.

## COMMENTARIES

### Afghanistan Holds an Unstable election

On September 28, 2019 amidst the threats of terror attacks by the Taliban, Afghanistan held its fourth Presidential elections since 2001. Initial estimates indicated that the voter turnout was historically low. This happened because of the prominence accorded in the past couple of months to the US-Taliban direct talks, confusion over whether the already twice-delayed elections will at all be held, threat of attacks from the Taliban, voter dissatisfaction with candidates and vacillations on part of certain candidates over participation in the elections. Even after the US led peace talks were abandoned, the election process and campaigns itself had become jaded and passed over as irrelevant. To prevent a new government jeopardising the "peace process," some of the election candidates including Abdullah Abdullah had argued for a postponement of the elections. In fact, up until the talks were going on there was hardly any discussion on Afghan elections, with some of the candidates not even bothering to undertake public campaigning.

Election day witnessed scores of insurgent attacks across Afghanistan. The Taliban had issued a warning to civilians to stay away from the polling centres, *"The Mujahideen of Islamic Emirate - with the help of Allah and support of its nation - intend to disrupting this fake process of the American invaders and their few servile slaves by attacking all security personnel that guard this process and by targeting offices and centres that operate for this staged show."* True to its claim on polling, the first insurgent attack was reported from a mosque in Kandahar which was being used as a polling booth. Another blast in the Sorkh Rod district in eastern Nangarhar left

one person dead and three others wounded. A rocket attack in Kunduz province killed an election observer. Taliban insurgents also fired multiple times on the northern city of Kunduz causing civilian casualties in order to disrupt the election. In a country that is continually beset by insurgent attacks, election day itself proves to be a major security operation by national and international forces. The organisation and implementation of the elections, given the tight timeframes and the difficult operating environment can prove to be a daunting logistical and technical feat. A combination of international military forces as well as the Afghan National Army, the Afghan National Police and Afghanistan's intelligence agency, the National Security Directorate, provided election security.

Officials with Afghanistan's Independent Election Commission (IEC) issued a statement saying that they have had no contact with 901 of the 4,942 polling centres across the country. Hawa Alam Nuristani, the head of the IEC said, *"We sent materials to 4,942 centres, but we received some reports that only 4,041 centres are open."* It remains unclear whether voting took place in these 901 centres, or they were shut down by the Taliban. Apart from the violence the other issue that will mar the election process and its outcome are the reports that voters' lists were incomplete or missing and biometric identification machines intended to reduce fraud were not working properly or people were not adequately trained on how to use them.

In the meantime, the two leading candidates Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and his main rival Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah are both claiming victory in the presidential election, ahead of the release of any official results. Preliminary results of the Presidential elections are not expected before October 17, and the final results will be announced on November 7, 2019. A presidential candidate must secure 50 percent of the vote to win outright. If no candidate crosses the benchmark, a runoff will be held between the top two contenders, most likely on November 23, 2019. This is not the first time that the results will be contested. Past presidential elections have also been fraught with dissensions. The



previous presidential election in 2014 was inconclusive and was followed by a run-off. The results of that too were challenged by the losing candidate Abdullah Abdullah, who claimed the results were manipulated to ensure his opponent Ashraf Ghani was declared the winner. Finally, a National Unity Government (NUG) had to be installed, which failed to unite all power blocs in Afghanistan, stabilise the security situation in the country or start a peace process with the Taliban. The 2009 presidential election was characterised by lack of security, low voter turnout and widespread ballot stuffing, intimidation, and other electoral frauds. Only the 2005 presidential election exhibited a reasonably fair electoral process.

The political environment in Afghanistan itself requires a lot to be desired. Foremost being the nature of Afghan politics itself and the absence of strong and effective political parties. Even in the run up to the elections the political parties and their leaders were unable to speak in one voice about delegitimising the direct US-Taliban talks and about the necessity of holding elections. Former President Hamid Karzai stated that holding the vote now “is like asking a heart patient to run a marathon” and the polls could threaten the nation’s best chance of achieving peace with the Taliban. Political infighting and name-calling that has plagued previous administrations in Afghanistan. In fact, the one positive that emerged from the abandonment of direct talks between the US and the Taliban, was the recommenced centrality accorded to Afghan Presidential elections. The peace talks with the Taliban and any deal struck without the inclusion of the elected Afghan government in the negotiations was not a legitimate process. The sudden abandonment of the Khalilzad led talks were seen as a vindication of India’s consistent stance that elections must be held on the scheduled date as Afghanistan needed a political leadership that had received a renewed democratic mandate from its citizens.

Despite its many shortcomings the outcome of these elections will produce a constitutionally elected government. It is likely that the existing order will be replicated with minor variations and it unlikely that an entirely new

administration will take its place. There is a lot about the electoral process in Afghanistan, to be cynical about and the next government in Kabul faces a serious uphill challenge in taking charge of the war-torn nation. The fate of the peace talks will also be decided by the new constitutionally elected government.

The violence, the low voter turnout, allegations of fraud, fighting among candidates may leave one with a negative outlook but one should not forget that this was a democratic election especially in a war-torn country like Afghanistan, which is no mean achievement. It is hoped that lessons from the recent elections will be used to improve governance and future elections.

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## Making Sense of Popular Media Debates on Muslim Personal Law and Triple Talaq

An interesting trend emerges from a study of debates as reported in the mainstream media on instant triple talaq (ITT) (*talaq-e-biddah*) or in a broader sense the Muslim Personal Law (MPL). The Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act, 1937 that deals with marriage, succession, inheritance and charities among Muslims and the Dissolution of Muslim Marriage Act, 1939 that deals with the circumstances in which Muslim women can obtain divorce and their rights as a divorcee have been the main reference points in the discussions over the issue.

In Post-1947 period, the skilful management of Sharia Laws by Muslim elite and different political parties as *inevitable sociological foundation* of Muslim presence in India placed them in a binary opposition to the unclear idea of Uniform Civil Code. In fact, the Laws and the constitutional commitment for a common law were posed as a threat to each other. This kept the diversity and multiplicity of Family Laws followed by different religious, regional, ethnic and caste communities

completely out of national political discourse. This portrayal came to fore again during the discourse on Shah Bano verdict in 1985 and the recent Shayra Bano case proceedings. Such controversies restricted the possibilities of reform in the MPL and scope for constructive dialogue. Consequently, interests of Muslim women whose status and rights are at the epicentre of these family laws did not receive the attention it deserves. The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act 2019 known as triple talaq law and the role played by mainstream media should be understood in this context.

The criminalisation of ITT is undoubtedly a step forward against the unjust practices carried out in the name of Family Laws (FL) and 'undefined' religious sanctions. The Act has invalidated the practice of ITT in any form – spoken, written, or by electronic means such as email or SMS – as illegal and void, made it a punishable offence resulting in up to three years of jail and penalty for the husband and entitled wives to maintenance for dependent children.

The mainstream media debates failed to contribute towards a genuine socio-political reform while following claims and counterclaims producing certain stereotypical images and binaries. This shifted the focus away from real issues that need attention in relation to the Law and its implications on affected families and the society at large. In the media driven process, identity, rights, and liberties of women in general, and more specifically Muslim women became just an agenda item for patriarchal negotiations and scoring debating points politically. Quality and depth of understanding of the participants in these debates were questionable. Heated debates tended to communalise an issue that is essentially an issue of rights of women. The latter were relegated to being mere receivers of what is being considered and offered as an 'appropriate' and 'rightful' share of equality for them – whether a promise for model *nikahnama* or criminalisation of such practices. Voices of those who feel concerned over an apparent politicisation/communalisation of the issue and those who support the act but with some reservations and concerns over its implications on families did not

receive adequate attention. The media debates quite categorically divided the responses of political actors and religious organisations into those who support the criminalisation of instant triple talaq uncritically and the group of people who are opposing the law in its entirety.

Significantly, ITT is one of a form of Islamic ways of divorce and practiced by only a section of Sunni Muslim community who follow *Hanafi* schools of jurisprudence (*maslak*). This practice of Muslim men divorcing their wives by merely uttering the word 'talaq' three times has degenerated in recent years with increasingly men divorcing their wives in absentia in the written form or, even worse, electronically through WhatsApp messages or SMS despite criticism from a segment within the community. There was clearly a need to bring this practice within a legal framework.

Three types of claims were discussed over the years in the context of instant triple talaq. The first holds the arbitrary practice of ITT as the ONLY reason behind the marginalisation of Muslim women. Sweeping generalisations about the extent of the problem and projection of the practice as a defining characteristic of the community or the religious sanctions in media debates have led to communalisation of the discourse.

Projection of abolition of practice of ITT as a step forward to the abolition of MPL and formation of UCC pays scant attention to the rights of Muslim women. The discourse hardened the image of 'supporters' as an un-paralleled/un-critical 'guardian' of Muslim women. The environment created made it difficult to acknowledge the desirability of criminalisation of triple talaq without stating one's ideological credentials.

The second type of claim selectively pursued relates to views of the opponent groups, which included political parties and Muslim religious organisations. The latter saw the passage of the law as an agenda of the government and a conspiracy against Muslim community. Citing the presumed 'sacred' status of MPL, the opposition condemned the law as being anti-Muslim and unconstitutional.

These claims and counterclaims dealt with the issue of identity of Muslim women in a fashion that effectively reduced it to be a subject of patriarchal communal negotiations. Meanwhile, the mainstream media through these debates produced a “pseudo-secular/liberal” perspective which is against any kind of reform in arbitrary Muslim Personal Laws, politics of Muslim appeasement, anti-nationalist version of politics and a hurdle in the larger agenda of cultural integration of religious minorities.

Certain perceptions were lauded as defining characteristics of the Muslim community. These are: *Muslim community is highly religious and anti-reform hence attack on triple Talaq is an attack on Islam and their Islamic beliefs. The Muslim religious practices are completely anti-women and gives privileges to Muslim men on almost everything.* The vocabulary used and the tenor were gender-biased and highly non-sensitive towards Muslim women. This cacophony in the media drowned the voices of groups favouring a comprehensive, neutral perspective and a systems approach to eliminate derogative and oppressive practices from the society.

In this media driven discourse, however, the existence of Muslim women as an agency – a decisive and informed decision maker – is completely missing. Media debates have narrowed the space for discussing grey areas. The tenor of debates and its management by media has contributed to an extent to the larger stereotypical anti-Muslim discourse.

A brief look at the recommendations of the Law Commission of India would have been sobering for both sides. The Law Commission, in its report on Reform on Family law, 2018, had observed that social evils often take refuge as ‘religious customs’... such as sati, slavery, devdasi, dowry, triple talaq, child marriage. In its opinion, it would be a serious folly to seek their protection under law as ‘religion’. The report also highlighted the need to discuss implications of the Law on families particularly women and children and remedies, gradual structural changes in family laws in general and Muslim Personal laws, and most importantly the constitutional integrity of such

structural changes. These concerns were also disregarded in the media.

Muslim women today find themselves in a piquant dilemma. What should they do? The ongoing debate has been corrosive. Should the Muslim women accept the patriarchal argument and assert her Muslim identity or rejoice the empowerment through law while bearing the blame of the destruction of their families. Furthermore, communalisation of triple talaq, MPL and the UCC have diluted the spirit of the issue of gender justice and eventually led to the anxiety: *Whose women is more marginalised? And men of which community get what advantages in managing their women?*

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## ‘खुद वो बदलाव बनिए जो आप दुनिया में देखना चाहते हैं’। - महात्मा गाँधी

गाँधीजी के जन्मदिवस को संयुक्त राष्ट्र संघ प्रति वर्ष अहिंसा दिवस के रूप में मनाता है जिसका अर्थ हिंसा को नकारना है। इस साल भी 2 अक्टूबर को उनकी 150वीं सालगिरह पर सम्पूर्ण विश्व भारत के साथ उनको याद करेगा। पर एक प्रश्न उठता है की किस रूप में? जहां एक ओर भूख, गरीबी, बेरोजगारी जैसी समस्याएं समाप्त नहीं हुई हैं वहीं हिंसा का बढ़ता प्रयोग चिंता का विषय है।

गाँधीजी पिछड़ों के विकास के लिए काम करते थे और समाज में उनके साथ हो रहे भेदभाव को खत्म करने के लिए हमेशा अपनी मासिक पत्रिका में लिखते थे, लेकिन अफसोस आज भी गाँधीजी का वह वर्ग भेदभाव से परेशान है। स्वतंत्र भारत की कोशिश इसी भेदभाव को खत्म करने से शुरू हुई थी, लेकिन आज हम इससे एक अलग रास्ते पर भटक रहे हैं।

गाँधीजी महिलाओं के विकास और उनके सशक्तिकरण के लिए हमेशा बात करते थे, उन्होंने बाल विवाह पर शारदा अधिनियम से दी गई उम्र को बढ़ाने की बात की और कहा कि ‘यह सीमा 16 या 18 साल तक बढ़ा देनी चाहिए।’ इसके साथ ही कहा कि पति की मृत्यु के बाद पत्नी को

जला देना जागरुकता की निशानी नहीं बल्कि अज्ञानता की निशानी है। ऐसे ही दहेज प्रथा पर कहा कि 'जब तक शादी को जाति प्रथा से जोड़ते रहेंगे तब तक दहेज प्रथा हमारे समाज में बनी रहेगी।'

जब 1921 में महिलाओं के मताधिकार का मुद्दा उठा तो उन्होंने इसका पूरा समर्थन किया और ये तर्क दिया कि दांडी मार्च की सफलता में महिलाओं की उत्साहपूर्ण व सक्रिय भागीदारी ने निर्णायक भूमिका निभाई थी। गाँधीजी को यह भलीभाँति ज्ञात था कि अगर किसी देश की आधी जनता देश के बड़े आंदोलन से दूर रहेगी तो देश का आंदोलन कभी सफल नहीं हो सकता।

आज जहां बड़े से बड़ा अपराध करके भी लोग बचने के लिए हजारों उपाय करते हैं वहा गाँधीजी ने अपने चंपारण दौरे के दौरान वहां के जिला अधिकारी द्वारा भेजे नोटिस (जिसमें लिखा था आप से अशांति का खतरा है और आपको ये स्थान छोड़ कर जाना होगा) के जवाब में अदालत में कहा की वह अपने ही देश में कहीं आने-जाने और काम करने की बंदिश को नहीं मानेंगे लेकिन जिला अधिकारी के ऐसे आदेश को न मानने की गलती की है तो सजा की मांग जरूर करता हूँ, उनके इस जवाब पर न्यायालय भी सोच में पड़ गया की यह कैसा अपराधी है जो बचने की जगह खुद के लिए सजा की मांग कर रहा है।

2 अक्टूबर, 1944 को महात्मा गाँधी के 75वें जन्मदिवस पर आइंस्टीन ने अपने संदेश में लिखा था, 'आने वाली नरलें शायद मुश्किल से ही विश्वास करेंगी कि हाड़-मांस से बना हुआ कोई ऐसा व्यक्ति भी धरती पर चलता-फिरता था'। उनकी मृत्यु पर लिखे संदेश में आइंस्टीन ने कहा था, 'लोगों की निष्ठा राजनीतिक धोखेबाजी के धूर्ततापूर्ण खेल से नहीं जीती जा सकती, बल्कि वह नैतिक रूप से उत्कृष्ट जीवन का जीवंत उदाहरण बनकर भी हासिल की जा सकती है'।

भारत सरकार की मनरेगा और स्वच्छता अभियान गाँधीवादी विचारों के बेहतरीन उदाहरण हैं जहां उनकी झलक मिलती

है, मनरेगा के जरिए एक तरफ देश में गरीबी कम करने में मदद मिली है वहीं स्वच्छता अभियान ने लाखों लोगों के जीवन को गंदगी मुक्त किया है खास कर ग्रामिण क्षेत्रों को, हमें भविष्य में भी गाँधीजी के विचारों को जीवित रखने के लिए इसी तरह कि योजनाओं कि जरूरत है।

गाँधीजी के शब्दों में 'किसी देश की संस्कृति लोगों के दिलों में और आत्मा में निवास करती है'। यही हमारी असल पहचान भी है। क्या भारत की आने वाली पीढ़ियां गाँधीजी को केवल कागज़ के नोट पर देखेंगी और जानेंगी या उनके विचारों से भी परिचित होंगी ये पूरी तरह हम पर निर्भर करता है। अपने से विरोधी विचारधार का सम्मान करना उनके द्वारा बताए मूल्यों में से एक है जिसका हमें अपने जीवन में पालन करना चाहिए।

गाँधीजी के शब्दों में ही कहना उचित होगा कि 'हो सकता है हम ठोकर खाकर गिर पड़ें पर हम उठ सकते हैं; लड़ाई से भागने से तो इतना अच्छा ही है'। हमें दूसरों को उपदेश देने से पहले ये समझना होगा की गाँधीजी दूसरों को कोई भी उपदेश देने से पहले उसे स्वयं पर आजमाते थे।

आज का दिन इस देश के ऐसे प्रधानमंत्री के जन्मदिन के रूप में भी याद किया जाता है जो कोई भी सुझाव देने से पहले खुद से और अपने परिवार से उसकी शुरुआत करते थे, फिर वो सूखे और गरीबी की मार झेलते भारत में एक दिन के उपवास की बात क्यूँ न हो। लाल बहादुर शास्त्री जी के इसी आचरण ने उन्हें गाँधीजी के करीब ला खड़ा किया था।

गाँधीजी सभी को साथ लेकर चलने की बात करते थे वह एक ऐसे समाज की रचना के पक्षदार थे जहां धर्म, जाति वर्ण, भाषा आदि के नाम पर कोई भेदभाव न हो सबको आगे बढ़ने का समान अवसर मिले आज भारत को इसी दिशा में आगे बढ़ने की जरूरत है और यही सच्चे अर्थों में गाँधीजी के लिए हमारा सम्मान होगा।

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## Forthcoming events

A discussion on challenges and opportunities provided by the 'Drone Policy 2.0' of the Govt of India, IIC Main, 4<sup>th</sup> October 2019

Cyber security awareness workshop for PGCIL mid-level officers, Bengaluru, 19<sup>th</sup> October 2019

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