

Martyr or Organizer?

Mudrarakshas

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During this nation's Fight for Freedom a number of eccentric people became martyrs, for example, Bhagat Singh, Bismil, Azad, Sukhdev, Khudiram Bose and many more. Mathuradas believes that was a mistake. If they hadn't given up their lives, they would have become Ministers. Since they never knew the joy of Life, they opted for the joy of Eternal Truth in the form of martyrdom. Which is better, the joy of Eternal Truth or the joy of Life? To Mathuradas the latter seems just fine. What do you get out of being a martyr?

Someone might reply that every year festivals are held for martyrs. If you asked a politician or a Minister if he would be willing to die for the sake of having an annual festival in his honour, he'd hit you. The other work, though, the organizing of the festival, he'd be happy to do. What else could be more fun than to have someone else become a martyr and you become the festival organizer. In such a festival, martyrdom itself becomes joyful.

Once Mathuradas went to see a martyr's memorial. A festival was in fact going on there because that day happened to be the martyr's birthday. A Minister came for the celebrations. Next to him on the dais sat Seth Milawat Ram and the big landholder Raja Kafan Khasot Singh. Seth ji had made a contribution of Rs. 100,000 for the making of the martyr's statue. Then, since for the past year he had successfully adulterated his spices with horse manure, he was about to begin having Mobil Oil filtered into his mustard oil for an entire year. Raja Saheb, for his part, had set up a Trust in the martyr's name, the office for which, had in fact become a warehouse for stolen idols and statues. With serious passion the Minister gave a speech in which he said, "The children of this land should all become Bhagat Singh and Candrashekhar Azad."

Mathuradas thought, What's this idiot saying? The English Government hanged Bhagat Singh, and they killed Candrashekhar Azad in a fight. Now, if all the children in the land want to become Bhagat Singh, where are we going to get all the nooses? Is the Minister himself going to accept the responsibility of hanging every child who wants to become Bhagat Singh? What'll we do if someone wanting to be Candrashekhar Azad goes to London's Hyde Park instead of Allahabad's Alfred Park? And if he can't go to Hyde Park, will the Minister have him compassionately gunned down in Delhi's Lodi Gardens?

This country has 180–200 million young people. All of them are going to become martyrs? None of the Minister's sons are martyrs, though. One became an IAS Officer, one a contractor. The third son is a master in the art of highway robbery. The fourth, however, is the smartest of them all. He organizes annual martyrs' festivals. He's the Director of the Martyr Festival Committee.

Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose used to use the slogan, "Give me your blood, and I'll give you freedom!"

The slogan of the Minister's son is: "Become a martyr, and I'll give you a festival!"

But this is good. Otherwise, Nero played his flute while Rome was burning, but the Minister's son can say, "You die, I'll give you a festival."

When there's a festival at a martyr's memorial, busses are brought in from far and wide brimming with passengers. If the usual fare is a hundred, this time it's three hundred, and even if only fifty busses come, the profit is what one would normally get from five hundred. A Memorial Programme of the Festival is brought out in which not the martyr's, but the Minister's picture and Message are printed. Stores are set up in the festival, for which rent is paid. Bamboo poles are dug in for fencing. It's not a festival, it's a whole industry!

Mathuradas thinks, There's a festival everywhere, a Black Market Festival, a Profiteering Festival, a Festival for the Profession of Being Wealthy, a Festival for the Speeches of Ministers, a Festival for Robbers' Loot, and here a massive funeral pyre burns to which martyrs are brought one after another, unemployed martyrs, starving martyrs, naked martyrs, harijan martyrs, martyrs living below the poverty line ...

Gradually our emphasis shifts from the martyr to the memorials and the festivals. What difference does it make if the memorial is for Bismil or Azad, the festival should be first-class and firmly under the control of the

Festival Committee. That's it.

Recently, the ruling party inaugurated a wonderful practice. Before giving someone permission to run for a seat on their ticket, the aspiring politician has to take a test. Mathuradas happened to be in a bookstore when he suddenly learned what type of test it was. A bunch of anxious politician types came in and said, "If you have one, please give us a book on the Freedom Movement."

The bookseller brought out more than one for them. Looking at the books, they became even more upset, and rightfully so. Ever since they had become politicians, they left merciless books far behind them. The only things they read now were speeches or party announcements. Not only that, even when they were University students they didn't have to read, being leaders of the Student Union. Depressed by the fat books lying in front of them, they said, "Where will we get the time to read such big books? Don't you have some little pamphlet or other?"

Meanwhile, another politician, who was perhaps in more of a hurry, said, "You must have read these. Give us the most important facts, like, what was the full name of Mahatma Gandhi? Was he Indira ji's brother or son? What was the Salt Satyagrah? That is, in that satyagrah did people stop eating salt or did they eat more? When did India gain her Independence, in 1857? Before that? Or after? In the incident at Chauri-Chaura how many men did Phoolan Devi kill? Who did Lala Lajpatray play his first match against, Lala Amarnath or Paraudi? When did Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale carry out the massacre at Jalianwala Bagh?"

The politician had come prepared, with pen and paper. He assumed that he had probably forgotten a few details here and there, but he knew most of it. The bookseller turned out to be a comedian. Using the name of an important leader, he said he had opened up a Coaching College, and if they'd go there, they'd soon know the answers to all their questions.

Mathuradas felt this was not a matter for light-heartedness, this was a serious affair. Since it was necessary to pass a test to get your name on the ballot, smart people should certainly get some work out of it. Regular coaching colleges should be set up, with advertisements like these:

GUARANTEED TO GET YOUR NAME ON THE BALLOT
COMPLETE INSTRUCTION IN THE ESSENCE OF LEADERSHIP IN ONLY
ONE MONTH
ONE-WEEK PROGRAMME FOR YOUTH LEADER INSTRUCTION, TWO

WEEKS FOR ADULT
SIMPLE METHOD FOR GETTING A CARBINE AND GOVERNMENT LAND

As long as one has to pass such a test, it should also be possible to have cheat sheets printed up. And with a little effort and some bargaining it should be possible to get "parcha out." For such a parcha one could demand quite a high price.

If nothing else, we could do a complete rehearsal of the test of political leadership. Right where the test will take place we could post a handful of huge men with microphones who would call out the answers to the questions. Of course, entry will be strictly controlled. No one will be allowed in who does not pay the required fee. Well, that's in the works.

Many aspects of both the educational system and politics have now become quite similar. For admittance into many Medical Colleges one has to put up a huge sum of money, which they call a Capitation Fee. The advantage of this is that lowcaste and backward people are unable to become doctors. The same thing happens in politics. In order to get on the ticket you've got to put up a lot of money, making it impossible, of course, for any of the riffraff to get into politics.

Education and politics have each taken on the form of an industry. The amazing thing is that each industry is at one and the same time a cottage industry, a large private concern and a public enterprise. In every fourth building on every lane of every neighbourhood of every town you'll find an Elementary Convent School, like paan shops. You'll find as many Coaching Colleges that guarantee a Pass as Impotency Clinics that guarantee virility. As in every Public-Sector Factory, so in every Governmental School, there are more jobs than work. Politics is in the exact same situation. Its cottage industry is what goes on at the neighbourhood level. There the politician paces up and down in the Party's Office ready to draw his gun. Later, that same industry takes on the form of a conglomerate. The politician wanders around wearing a garland, his assistant carries the gun. When this becomes a Public-Sector Industry, one sees only a loss. Having become the owner of land worth 100 million rupees, factories worth 500 million rupees and hotels worth one billion rupees, the politician wears only pure khadi and tells people that he will not accept the pay for his position as Cabinet Minister because he has taken a vow of poverty.

Like the stories in the *Pañcatantra*, this story, too, has a moral. The

country today needs two kinds of people—martyrs, whose funeral pyres will always stay lit, and those who will organize the festivals of martyrs. Mathuradas wants to say clearly that you should avoid trying to become a festival organizer. All the rights to that have already been protected. Yes, you can become a martyr, you've already become a martyr and you'll continue being a martyr. But don't worry, excellent arrangements will be made for your memorial.