

A Record for Uttar Pradesh

Mudrarakshas

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Uttar Pradesh is a state in India known for its record-setting activities. The Guinness Book of Records will remain incomplete as long as it neglects the records of Uttar Pradesh. In fact, this state should be called the Treasury of Records. And now we have another one to add to our store. A passenger train was robbed, and among those passengers relieved of their money were a group of MLAs and a Minister.

This province once had a great man called Chavi Ram. Whenever he came to rob and plunder, the people would shout, “Long live the Leader! (*netaji zindabad!*)” He always wore clothes of white, homespun cotton, and he always wore a garland of flowers while he went on a walkabout and greeted the people. Then he would take out his beautiful carbines and rifles, fill the air with the overpowering sound of expensive bullets, rob the area to his heart’s content and return whence he came.

Uttar Pradesh is that wondrous state in the Indian Union where a Police Superintendent once wrote in his Daily Record the happy report that his area had experienced a sharp decline in cattle thefts because the clever cattle thief “*basilsile vajārat ājkal lakhnaū mē mukīm hai* (had become a Minister and was now resident in Lucknow).”

The cattle thief became a Minister, so the Police Superintendent could breathe a sigh of relief. Having become a Minister, the cattle thief would no longer reside in his electoral district, he would go and live in the capital. That’s always how it works. Once the elections are over, the candidate’s work in his electoral district is finished. Besides, how many cattle could there be there when he now has the entire state to plunder?

Once a big hullabaloo occurred over the fact that hundreds of Members of the Legislative Assembly were *histreesheters*. The police had a

physical description of him. Most of the MLAs requested bodyguards, which they finally got. Without a pistol-packing bodyguard the life of an MLA is not safe. Since he is a Representative of the People, he is entitled to such protection. Mathuradas kept wondering, though, why that should be. The people themselves choose their Representative, honour him with a garland and send him to the capital. Why, then, should there ever arise the problem of him being beaten up?

A drama recently took place in the Legislative Assembly of another state. There, crying, an MLA fell at the feet of his party's leader and pleaded for his life. The person from whom he wanted to be saved was also present and said, "He has no reason to fear me." Nevertheless, the MLA kept on crying and begging for his life.

What a simple-minded MLA he must have been. Otherwise, instead of crying and begging, he would have applied for a license to own a genuine carbine. Then he and his enemy could have gone about their business as they pleased. That's how it works in Uttar Pradesh. Here MLAs don't cry. The only ones who cry are the people who raise cattle.

But this is not about cattle, it's about the robbery of the MLAs and the Minister in the train. Mathuradas felt that something had to be wrong. A barber doesn't have himself shaved by another barber. Yet a dacoit robbed some MLAs and a Minister, and in a really crude fashion, threatening them with his pistol.

The Government purchased thousands of tons of grain, expending tens of millions of rupees on the purchase, but the godown never saw it. It remained as empty as ever. From an ethical point of view one would say that the godown had been robbed, but from a technical point of view it could not have been robbed. Since the grain never made it to the godown in the first place, how could the godown have been robbed? Nevertheless, a robbery had taken place. This is one of the more subtle aspects of the Art of Robbery.

If the robber is a bumpkin, then he has four lathi experts beat up the passengers before he snatches their *sattū* away from them. (*Sattū* is a fine powder of parched gram or barley that many country folk take with them when they travel.) That type of robbery is the straight-forward, prosaic kind. If we look at the subtle, poetic type of robbery, however, then we see a qualitative difference in the crime against travellers.

An Officer says to the Government, "The road from Lucknow to Varanasi is full of potholes for hundreds of kilometres. There is an in-

crease in traffic accidents, and we are no longer able to protect life and property there. The road has to be repaired.”

The Government replies, “A capital idea! See to it!”

All the same, accidents keep happening, the travellers still have to fight against the mud and dust, and life and property are at as much risk as always. In the meantime, however, the Minister, the Officer, the Engineer, and the Contractor each had themselves a beautiful home built. Once those four palaces were built, road repairs were no longer necessary. This is the subtle, poetic type of robbery.

It looks as though this Art Form has suffered a decline here. In this Age of Fine Robbery why else would this crude, unsophisticated robbery have taken place, in which four or five men climbed onto a train, displayed their pistols in a most uncouth fashion, and with a lot of screaming and yelling, pulled off their robbery.

Once in Uttar Pradesh a proposal was made for the building of a “Bharat Bhavan”. It had to be built quickly. With that new building the development and the evaluation of the arts could be easily carried out.

For the development of the arts maybe Uttar Pradesh has trouble finding an Ashok Bajpeyee. That will remain the case until the Bharat Bhavan is built. As soon as it is built, three of four nephews will emerge out of every Minister’s house to become Uttar Pradesh’s Ashok Bajpeyee. At the most, Madhya Pradsesh’s Ashok Bajpeyee reads and writes a little. Each of them can do that. Uttar Pradesh’s Ashok Bajpeyee, however, will start writing only on the condition that he become the Director of the Bharat Bhavan. And on top of the writing he’ll also give a speech on the 20–Point Programme, which Ashok Bajpeyee was never able to do.

When you look at Bharat Bhavan from the outside, it doesn’t even seem that there’s a building there. Looked at from the inside, however, it is an imposing and important edifice. In Uttar Pradesh this art can be developed even further, to the point that one cannot see the building either from the outside or the inside, but you do see the Director.

So Minister ji was robbed, robbed while travelling in a train. Just consider this incident, though, from an ethical point of view. At the time he was robbed neither was he drunk nor was he attempting to seduce his nurse. He was travelling, his mind pure and focussed.

The dacoits must have thought that since he’s a Minister, he’ll have lots of money on him. When they come into villages, shooting off their pistols, they go straight to Dhannu Sah, the money lender. They know

that he's the one who has the entire village's pawned gold and silver. So they stomp boldly into his house, take what they want and leave. Did they think that Minister ji, too, had pawned goods about his person?

Mathuradas claims that the root of the entire problem is the first-class bogey. The dacoits believe that very wealthy people travel first class. They need to realize, however, that most people travelling first class do not have the ability themselves to buy a first-class ticket. They are able to travel first class only because the Government or the Railway Board provides them the ticket.

Sometimes you'll find an intellectual travelling first class to a conference, whose organizers settled on giving him three first-class tickets as an incentive. You'll ask, "Why does he need three tickets?" Let me explain. One for going, one for returning, and one for selling for tea and for a saree to bring back to his wife.

But this was about the Minister who was robbed in the train. Why does that become a newsworthy item? Mathuradas read in a book on journalism that it is no news when a dog bites a man, but it is news when a man bites a dog. So then what are the reporters trying to say by making this a news story, that dacoits have robbed a Minister?