

NATIONAL SONG

Government of India making singing of original Vande Mataram, including six missing paragraphs – in all Legislative Assemblies before the national anthem has ruffled many feathers. Especially, the Muslims seem to be upset about it citing religious reasons. Some Muslim leaders and especially the All India Muslim Personal Law board has strongly objected to the move and threatened to approach the apex court against the order. Senior leaders of the AIMLB have expressed strong opposition to the government's decision, calling it unconstitutional, against religious freedom and secular values, contrary to the Supreme Court judgment, and directly conflicting with the religious beliefs of Muslims. To be fair to the BJP government, it had been passionately seeking to mainstream Bankim Chandra Chattopadyay's song. The song has a mass appeal and brings up the sense of rebellion in a nation ruled by foreign power. The Vande Mataram was initially curtailed to accommodate the Muslim point of view that it was reverential to mother earth, something, they believed was against the tenets of Islam. The point is even after it was modified for use, the song was not acceptable to Muslims. Probably, it would never be acceptable to many Muslims. So how does the curtailing of the original song help. Of course there is politics involved in it. The revival of the national song is part of BJP's policy of ending appeasement of any group and reviving the Indian traditions. There is a distinction between playing of the national at official gatherings and making its boycott an offence. The opposition from Muslims will probably take this issue to the Supreme Court and the decision will be interesting. Also over the Muslims' opposition to it, a question arises, are the sentiments of only Muslims important? Hindus, who form 85 percent population of India and revere the feminine divinity, must put their faith in the backdrop just to please others. It was done in good faith but even then it was not acceptable to them.

Nilantha ILangamuwa

It is ugly. It is disgusting. No one knows whether he died by suicide or by some other, more carefully arranged ending, designed to bury what he knew and whom it protected. But this is what the hypocritical West looks like when the curtain slips. You praise a person as long as you do not know what sits inside him; you despise him the moment the rot begins to breathe in public. Jeffrey Epstein tells a complete story of what America and the West have become, not because he was exceptional, but because he was ordinary in the ways that matter most. From Chomsky to Bill Gates, Elon Musk to Trump, from New York boardrooms to Westminster salons, and the long, awkward associations with figures such as Peter Mandelson, the same putrid pattern repeats. This is not about monsters hiding in basements. This is about appetite, denial, and the theatre of respectability.

Last week, as millions of pages from the so-called Epstein files began circulating again, another artefact surfaced alongside them: the last known interview Epstein ever gave, recorded with Steve Bannon. It is not a confession. It is not remorseful. It is something far colder. A man speaking as if the trial were civilisation itself, not him.

He speaks of finance as something closer to mysticism than economics. Leaders, he suggests, do not understand the systems they claim to govern. "You weigh and measure every day," Bannon tells him. "You weigh and measure people. You weigh and mea-

sure leaders. You weigh and measure economies." Epstein replies, calmly, "I don't even know what it means to be measured." Not as evasion, but as assertion. Measurement, in his account, is approximation, an abuse of language, a crude imposition on reality. Precision itself becomes a fiction.

He repeatedly returns to this refusal. Asked when human life begins, he says the question itself is malformed. "You're asking me to measure something again." Pressed further, he retreats into paradox, invoking Zeno, quantum behaviour, and the impossibility of exactitude. Hair, skull, height, decimals. The question dissolves into semantics. Nothing lands. Nothing sticks.

This is the rhythm of the interview. Whenever responsibility approaches, the language lifts off the ground.

Epstein frames history as a long record of misunderstanding. Newton, he says, could describe motion but not explain it. Quantum physics only widened the mystery. "We just cannot explain," he repeats. Electrons are not things but clouds. Solids are not solid. At small scales, reality collapses into probabilities. From this, he draws a broader claim: that science, mathematics, and formal systems are the wrong tools for understanding life. "No really new ideas have come out," he says of modern institutions, because they are trapped using the wrong instruments.

He applies this logic everywhere. Markets are not calculable; they are felt. Traders succeed through intuition, not models. Mathematics follows action,

never the reverse. Measurement arrives after the fact, to justify what instinct already decided. Crises are not moral failures; they are structural inevitabilities. Collapse is not crime. It is mechanics.

Rockefeller and JP Morgan appear in his telling as honest predators, men who never pretended capitalism was humane. Modern leaders, by contrast, are described as symbolic figures, trapped inside systems they cannot read, repeating language about growth and stability while liquidity moves independently of them. Whether this is true is almost irrelevant. What matters is that Epstein speaks as if proximity to power grants ontological superiority. Understanding, in his world, is not earned; it is inherited through access.

The files released alongside this interview make the same argument without words. Names recur. Flights recur. Dinners recur. Foundations recur. What disappears is responsibility. Everything is coincidence. Everyone was only passing through. The documents do not need to prove every allegation to expose the structure. Power does not operate through direct orders. It circulates. It accumulates. It protects itself through diffusion.

When Bannon asks whether institutions should take money from someone like him, Epstein does not deny the question's legitimacy. He reframes it. He speaks of polio vaccines in Pakistan and India. He asks whether mothers would refuse money if told it came from the devil himself. "I don't care, I want the money for my children," he imagines them say-

ing. Utility overrides origin. Outcome erases source. Pressed further, Bannon asks the question directly: is your money dirty money? Epstein answers simply: no. He earned it – advising terrible people, perhaps, but earning it nonetheless. Ethics, he suggests, are always complicated. This is not a defence. It is a declaration of how the world works.

At one point, Bannon asks whether Epstein thinks he is the devil. Epstein does not laugh. He deflects. The devil, he says, scares him. Satan, he notes, was brilliant, an archangel who rebelled because he could not be number one. The comparison lingers without resolution. The interview ends shortly after. No absolution. No reckoning.

What emerges from this last interview is not a man in denial, but a man entirely comfortable with abstraction. Shame is translated into systems. Harm dissolves into theory. Victims never appear as subjects, only as variables implied offstage. Consciousness, intuition, the soul all enter the conversation only to establish that nothing essential can be pinned down.

The files show how well this posture was accommodated. Universities accepted money while insisting they were neutral. Politicians appeared alongside them while assuring themselves they were merely polite. Media figures attended dinners while calling it observation. Everyone performed a role and trusted that performance itself was protection.

The West likes to describe itself as transparent, but it survives through selective blindness. Confession is demanded from the weak. Silence is granted to the

useful. When scandals erupt, they are framed as deviations rather than products. Epstein's story is intolerable precisely because it refuses that comfort. He does not apologise for understanding the rules as they are practised rather than preached.

There is an instinct to personalise the horror, to catalogue names and savour disgrace. That instinct misses the deeper point. Epstein's circle was not united by ideology or loyalty, but by convenience. People who would never share a moral code shared aircraft. People who condemned exploitation in public tolerated it in private. This is not casual hypocrisy. It is structural compartmentalisation.

The West has learned to split its self-image from its conduct, to celebrate progress while outsourcing its costs to the unseen. Epstein did not disrupt this order. He navigated it fluently. Financier, philanthropist, intellectual – he shifted registers with ease. The files show how often this worked.

His death resolved nothing. It converted a living problem into an archival one. Documents replaced testimony. Speculation replaced trial. The anger dispersed into procedural arguments. Meanwhile, the structures that enabled him remain untouched: reverence for wealth, fear of disruption, and the confusion of success with legitimacy.

What makes the interview disturbing is not bravado. It is tone. Epstein speaks without urgency, without fear, as if describing weather patterns. Consequences are acknowledged but not absorbed.

THE GROWING MENACE OF MILK ADULTERATION IN INDIA

Subhash Agrawal

It refers to a very important issue of adulterated and spurious milk and milk products raised in Rajya Sabha. Usual reports of unauthorised units found producing synthetic milk and spurious milk products like khoya & paneer require supply of pure milk & milk products at least in cities where branded milk and milk products are easily accessible. Government should take some concrete steps in the interest of public health, that too in a manner that consumers are not cheated by big corporations by supplying less quantity through gimmick packaging.

Sale of only branded milk

With government-owned Mother Dairy and co-operative giant Amul, apart from some other private companies, now dominating the National Capital Region of Delhi in the supply of milk and milk products, sale of only branded milk may be permitted in the capital city. There are other reputed co-operative giants like Vita, Verka, Sudha, Saras and Nandini dominating sale of branded milk and milk products in respective states. Therefore, sale of only branded milk may be permitted in cities with availability of plenty of branded milk.

Discourage khoya-based sweets Consumption of khoya during the festive season of Diwali in Delhi much exceeds all probable capacity through practical availability of milk to produce so much khoya. Demand for khoya in the festive season evidently can only be fulfilled through adulterated khoya available in the open market. Apart from launching a massive educative

campaign through electronic and print media against use and exchange of sweets during the festive season (sweets are otherwise harmful in consumption with ever-increasing diabetic patients in the country), every effort should be made to increase production of branded khoya by reputed manufacturers in the public, private and co-operative sectors. Regular checks with sweet dealers for checking adulterated khoya can discourage confectioners from making khoya-based sweets. Sale of unbranded paneer should also be discouraged through a massive educative campaign launched by central and state governments to use home-made paneer from branded milk.

Mother Dairy and Amul, having appreciable market share in Delhi, should also arrange door delivery of khoya for bulk purchasers on advance booking. Mother Dairy markets khoya, but because of extraordinary fat content, its product is not only costlier but is much harder to use. Mother Dairy should decrease fat content in khoya to make it softer, with its price comparable with that of khoya sold in the open market by the unorganised sector. Fat content of khoya can be used for production of ghee and butter to increase profitability.

Packaging of milk should be in true metric spirit

Namaste India branded milk marketed in Delhi by NIF Limited has adopted an anti-consumer practice through gimmick packing of its milk in packs of 950 ml and 1900 ml printed in tiny little alphabets to look like packs of one and two litres respectively to befool customers. Other milk products mar-

keted by milk companies, including Mother Dairy and Amul, are at times in odd packings like 400 ml or g, 250 ml or g, 450 ml or g etc.

Milk and all milk products, including ghee, must be compulsorily packed in true metric spirit in either packs of 1, 2, 5, 10, 20, 50, 100, 200, 500, 1000 and likewise g, ml, litres and kg only as the case may be. Bigger milk packs presently packed in six litres can be packed in five litres. Rule should cover ghee also, which should be packed in big packs of 10 or 20 kg or litres rather than 15 kg or litres as at present. Moreover, products like ghee should be uniformly packed in litres only and not in kg to avoid confusion. Consumers are confused in comparing prices of different brands where some marketers pack in litres while others pack in kg.

Co-operative giant Amul, ranking 15th in the top 100 most valuable food brands in the world, needs to be encouraged further in larger public interest of India.

It is a matter of pride for the co-operative sector in India when Amul ranked 15th in the top 100 most valuable food brands in the world according to the Brand Finance Food and Drink 2021 report, with private-sector Britannia being the only other Indian company to find 54th place. Co-operative giant Amul should be encouraged and entrusted in larger public interest for extending its marketing scope by implementing long-awaited implementation of tender results of handing over loss-generating Delhi Milk Scheme to Amul.

With too many complaints coming in the mid-day meal programme in schools and railway catering, Amul,

other co-operative giants and government-owned Mother Dairy can be entrusted to supply packaged food items for the mid-day meal programme and railway catering. Central and state governments should encourage Amul and other co-operative giants like Vita, Verka, Sudha, Saras and Nandini engaged in marketing milk and milk products through allotment of land at subsidised rates to set up new units. Such encouragement will not only be in public interest, but will also induce healthy competition amongst other Indian companies to find a place in the top 100 most valuable food brands in the world.

Panchamrit by Amul Co-operative milk giant Amul has introduced Panchamrit, a holy mix of milk, curd, honey, powdered sugar and ghee which is used to offer to deities in Hindu temples to be later consumed as prasad by devotees. Considering use of adulterated ghee in prasad of laddoos in Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam during an earlier regime funds for entrusting reputed co-operative giants like Amul, Vita, Verka, Sudha, Saras, Nandini etc and Mother Dairy to prepare prasad in famous Hindu temples of the country. Loss-making Delhi Milk Scheme (DMS) should be immediately transferred to Amul as per tender results for best utilisation of DMS resources including its milk booths. Co-operative giant Amul had won over Mother Dairy to take over Delhi Milk Scheme (DMS) running in heavy losses at an annual lease of rupees 42.30 crore against rupees 42.20 offered by Mother Dairy for 30 years with a 7 per cent annual increase in lease amount in the bid opened on 27.11.2018.

Congress dilemma: Why Rahul Gandhi must decide the Party's future

Anil Anand

Two decades in politics is not a small period. Though the learning curve never ceases to exist, the time comes in the life of a political leader to give a real account of himself or herself and accordingly take tough decisions. Such a situation cannot be allowed to linger on forever in view of the dynamically changing political landscape.

Ironically, after two decades of active politics and, in between, an unsuccessful bid for the presidency of India's oldest political party, the Indian National Congress, Mr Rahul Gandhi still finds himself at a crossroads. Which way to go and which road to take – he seems to be stuck in a dilemma.

He has allowed himself to become the de facto chief of the party, and at the same time his close aides take pains to deflect this perception by painstakingly reminding the country that Mr Mallikarjun Kharge is the fully elected president of the party. There is no denying this fact, but ground realities point in a different direction.

Mr Kharge has been Congress pres-

ident for over three years after defeating Mr Shashi Tharoor, with the full support of Mr Gandhi and his family. Everyone knows that Mr Kharge's candidature was openly backed by Mrs Sonia Gandhi, which set the course for the poll outcome. Ever since, Mr Tharoor, being suspect in the eyes of Gandhi-camp backers, has acquired the status of a rebel, while Mr Gandhi remains the de facto boss calling the shots.

Whatever Mr Gandhi did during the last three years (Mr Kharge's tenure) naturally has his stamp, and whatever he did not do also bears his stamp. The "not doing" part pertains to indecisiveness - be it taking over the mantle as Congress president, bringing far-reaching organisational changes, or implementing his own words expressed from time to time. He must take equal credit or blame for decisions taken or not taken.

Solo acts without the backing of a solid organisation will not take you very far, Mr Gandhi. Nor will closing your eyes to rejuvenating the Congress.

This prolonged paradox has now begun manifesting dangerously and is desperately awaiting a rescue act.

On the contrary, the situation has become more serious, with the positive impact generated by Mr Gandhi's strenuous Bharat Jodo Yatras (BJYs) almost on the verge of evaporation. In the absence of a follow-up plan, and with deeply divided party units from the AICC down to the states and Union Territories failing to effectively take Mr Gandhi's message to the grassroots level, the historic event is slipping into oblivion.

The BJP's sleeper cells are merrily running PCCs in many states and UTs. If this reflects Mr Gandhi's shortcomings, it is also an abject failure of his support team, who work in close proximity to him, either in sustaining on the ground the aftermath of such gigantic programmes or in tendering impactful advice to him. The oft-repeated complaint in AICC circles, and a question frequently asked in public, is: "Who are Mr Gandhi's advisers?" No one knows the answer.

Yet another common refrain is the inaccessibility of him and his AICC team, particularly the general secretary (organisation), Mr KC Venugopal, to party leaders and the rank and file – let alone the public at large. This is a jarring situation, which none

other than Mr Gandhi himself can tackle. He has to set a new model, through personal example, to be followed by others down below. He has a multifaceted personality with a strong knowledge base, but most of the time he misses the point that being a leading political light entails leading from the front through personal example.

His fight for the marginalised sections of society is commendable, and it has been his quest to bring the core support base back to the Congress. A missing balanced approach - caring for all and antagonising none - has led to this quest creating a buzz but not accruing any electoral benefits. This is something Mr Gandhi must sit and mull over.

The political situation in the country is dynamic and changing fast, with serious questions being raised about the thinking, policies, and planning of the Narendra Modi government - more importantly, about its handling of the social fabric of society.

The unfortunate episode involving Swami Avinuktashwarananda ji, Shankaracharya of Jyotish Peeth, at the Prayagraj Magh Mela - where he sat on dharna protesting against al-

leged insult by the administration, with no word of pacification coming either from Prime Minister Mr Modi or UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath - has added new grist to the political whirlwind. This is a serious development which Congress cannot ignore, particularly in the face of the aggressive Hindutva agenda of Mr Modi and the Shankaracharya questioning its veracity.

Unfortunately, the Congress does not seem prepared to act in consonance, or preferably remain a step ahead of the situation, amid these fast-paced developments. In contrast, the BJP and the Modi government's fire-fighting techniques are ever ready, rediscovering ways at a fast pace to repeatedly turn the tables.

The Congress and Mr Gandhi must shun lethargy if he is to remain in the game. There are misdemeanours of the ruling dispensation, such as the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of the electoral rolls and various other measures that tilt the balance in its favour, thereby preventing a level playing field. Mr Gandhi's fight on this front is laudable, but nothing will succeed without setting his own house in order. He cannot be seen as fighting as a

loner, but as a leader heading a strong pack, which he must develop speedily.

Firstly, he must clear his mind on whether he wishes to perpetuate the current de facto model of Congress leadership, intends to lead from the front, or is prepared to give a chance to someone else. In any situation, decision-making should not become a casualty. It is because of indecisiveness and opaqueness in the AICC's functioning that things have worsened by the day.

Someone might say that even Mr Modi is far removed from the BJP's rank and file, yet his graph has been rising for the past decade. The strong organisational system, backup support, and capacity to take hard decisions make the difference in his case. There is a multi-tier mechanism in the saffron party's organisational setup which keeps both Mr Modi and his party going through all seasons. An opposition leader like Mr Gandhi, who is continuously under the scanner of his political opponents, cannot afford the luxury of remaining oblivious to emerging situations or the challenges with which his own party has been beset.