THE EDITORIAL PAGE

FREEBIES CULTURE

Democracy may be the best form of governance available so far, yet we are familiar with some of its pitfalls. A major issue with democracy is that leaders have to please all the people all the time and it's almost an impossible task. Due to the compulsion of winning elections by securing majority votes, appeasement becomes a short cut way to target election victory. It's another matter that in the process even the best leaders abandon the economic reforms and fiscal prudence. The Supreme Court has expressed its disapproval of this growing trend. The government schemes offering free rations, and the overall freebie culture in Indian politics, sucks because there is no end to it. The Supreme Court has slammed the freebies culture, saying it was high time to revisit such policies that hamper the country's economic development.

The issue before the apex court was Tamil Nadu Power Distribution Corporation Ltd's plea, which sought permission to provide free electricity to all consumers irrespective of financial status. The court said it understands the state's support to the poor, yet the fiscal prudence demanded the people pay for the services. It pointed out that while many states were revenue deficit yet the leaders insisted on providing such freebies. This was not helping development and becomes a drain on the resources. The apex court questioned the motives behind such freebies and commented the amount wasted on providing freebies can be spent on creating job avenues and livelihoods for the people in the real sense of financial prudence. In India, the culture of giving freebies to voters and promising things like free electricity and cash was started by some of the states of the South. However, this disease spread and states like Punjab started the trend of offering free power supply to farmers irrespective of their status. This cultures needs to be put brakes.

When language becomes freedom!

Santhosh Mathew

On February 21, the world pauses to remember a truth written in blood and ink — that language is not merely a tool of communication, but the soul of a people. International Mother Language Day is not an abstract cultural celebration. It is rooted in sacrifice, in the streets of what was then East Pakistan, where young students laid down their lives defending the right to speak Bengali. Their resistance shaped not only the destiny of Bangladesh, but also the global conscience on linguistic justice.

The origins of this day trace back to 1952, when Pakistan's founder, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, declared in 1948 that "Urdu and Urdu alone" would be the state language of Pakistan. It was a decision that ignored demographic reality: the majority of Pakistan's population spoke Bengali. The imposition of Urdu was seen as cultural domination by West Pakistan over East Pakistan.

On February 21, 1952, students of the University of Dhaka defied Section 144 and marched in protest. Police opened fire. Several students were killed. Their martyrdom became the seed of the Bengali Language Movement, which later nourished the liberation struggle of 1971, when the Mukti Bahini - Bangladesh's liberation fighters - took up arms for political and cultural freedom.

Language was at the heart of that struggle. The fight was not merely about vocabulary; it was about dignity, identity, and the right to exist as a distinct people. In recognition of this sacrifice, UNESCO declared February 21 as International Mother Language Day in 1999. Today, the Shaheed Minar in Dhaka stands not just as a monument to fallen students but as a global symbol of linguistic rights.

The Bengali Language Movement teaches a timeless lesson: unity cannot be built on linguistic uniformity. Diversity is not a weakness but a strength. This principle resonates deeply in India, a country often described as a linguistic civilisation rather than a monolithic nation-state. India officially recognises 22 languages in its Eighth Schedule, yet it is home to hundreds of languages and thousands of dialects.

Scholars generally classify Indian languages into four major families: Indo-Aryan, Dravidian, Tibeto-Burman, and Austroasiatic. Indo-Aryan languages such as Hindi, Bengali, Marathi, and Punjabi dominate northern and central India. Dravidian languages - Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and Malayalam - flourish in the south. Tibeto-Burman languages are spoken across the northeastern hills, while Austroasiatic tongues survive among tribal communities in central and eastern India.

This mosaic is not accidental; it is the cumulative result of millennia of migration, interaction, and coexistence. India's post-independence leaders understood that linguistic aspirations could not be ignored. The linguistic reorganisation of states in 1956 was a landmark in democratic accommodation. States like Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, and Gujarat emerged on linguistic lines, not as acts of division, but as acknowledgments of cultural identity within the framework of national unity. The formula was simple yet profound: respect diversity to preserve unity.

But linguistic harmony has never been automatic. Colonial India witnessed its own battles over language. In 1878, the British passed the Vernacular Press Act to curb Indian-language newspapers that criticised colonial rule. English publications were spared, but vernacular presses were targeted. The Act revealed the colonial anxiety that native languages could mobilise political resistance. And they did. Newspapers in Bengali, Marathi, Urdu, and Tamil became platforms for nationalist awakening. Language became liberation's ally.

Even today, the vernacular press remains the lifeblood of Indian democracy. While English media often dominates elite discourse, regional newspapers and television channels shape public opinion in rural and semi-urban India.

Globally, however, the story is not always hopeful. UNESCO estimates that nearly 40 per cent of the world's 7,000 languages are endangered. India, despite its linguistic wealth, is not immune. Many tribal languages in the Andaman Islands, Arunachal Pradesh, and central India have already disappeared, taking with them unique worldviews, oral traditions, and ecological knowledge.

When a language dies, an entire intellectual universe vanishes. Vocabulary encodes culture; grammar reflects patterns of thought; proverbs carry ancestral wisdom. Extinction is not merely linguistic - it is civilisational.

This is why mother language education is vital. Children learn concepts best in the language they speak at home. Studies consistently show that primary education in the mother tongue improves comprehension, retention, and cognitive development. The National Education Policy 2020 in India emphasises teaching in the mother tongue at least until Grade 5, reflecting global pedagogical consensus. This approach is not parochial; it is practical and humane.

Consider Tamil, often described as one of the world's oldest continuously used classical languages. Tamil boasts a literary tradition spanning over two millennia, from Sangam poetry to modern novels. Its antiquity is not merely a matter of pride for Tamils; it is a testament to India's civilisational depth.

Likewise, Sanskrit, though no longer widely spoken as a mother tongue, continues to influence philosophy, ritual, and vocabulary across the subcontinent. Both languages illustrate different models of linguistic endurance - one thriving as a living vernacular, the other preserved as a liturgical and scholarly medium.

Across the border in Bangladesh, the memory of the language martyrs remains vibrant. The Mukti Bahini fighters of 1971 did not forget that their liberation struggle began with the assertion of Bengali identity. International Mother Language Day, therefore, is also a tribute to them. It reminds us that cultural rights are inseparable from political freedom.

In a world increasingly dominated by global languages such as English, Mandarin, and Spanish, smaller languages often feel pressured to retreat. Yet multilingualism need not be a zero-sum game. One can be proficient in English for global mobility while remaining rooted in one's mother tongue for cultural continuity. The challenge is not choosing one over the other, but ensuring that globalisation does not become homogenisation.

India's strength lies in its ability to say "unity in diversity" not as a slogan but as lived reality. Walk through a railway station, and you hear announcements in multiple languages. Look at Indian currency notes, and you see denominations printed in numerous scripts. Watch parliamentary debates, and members speak in different tongues, relying on simultaneous translation. Diversity is institutionalised, not merely tolerated.

For in the lullabies of our mothers, in the idioms of our villages, in the poetry of our ancestors, lies a truth no decree can erase: a people live as long as their language lives. And when we honour our mother tongue, we honour not only our past but also our future.

THE HEART IS PRICELESS YET INCREASINGLY UNAFFORDABLE

Sanjay Chandra

The heart is an amazing organ in the human body. It would probably not be an exaggeration to say that the heart has no match — both physically and metaphorically. It has always been considered precious, to be treated with the utmost care and reverence. It is not something to be casually given away.

Yet, in the flush of youth, and for a few even later in life, hearts are exchanged at the fluttering of eyelids - often with unforeseen and disastrous consequences. Lovers pine for their beloved because they chose to give it on a whim. Poets grow lyrical and reflective when they talk about the heart. The heart is at the centre of everything that may go right in someone's life, and go wrong without warning. It breaks at the hint of a disagreement. It heals itself as the two reconcile their differences. The heart is fragile, yet resilient; it bears the weight of joy and sorrow alike, often silently enduring trials that the mind cannot comprehend.

The life of a heart is not always easy. Wars have been fought, princesses kidnapped, emperors and queens have pronounced death sentences to gain the heart of someone who had already lost theirs to another. Wordsmiths have made a fortune writing dramas around the heart across cultures and centuries. Romeo and Juliet, Laila Majnu, Shirin Farhad, Sohni Mahiwal are only a few unfortunates who had the good fortune of being immortalised by playwrights or storytellers. There are many stories around us where the hand did not tremble or the heart did not quail at the thought of striking down a sister, a daughter, or another's son only because they dared to lose their hearts against rigid social norms and unforgiving traditions. The heart continues to inspire passion, rebellion, and courage, silently witnessing human triumphs and tragedies that may never be recorded in books.

As society evolves and civilisation advances through technology, the human heart has been reduced to an expensive accessory in modern healthcare systems. I discovered this recently as my nonagenarian father suffered a sudden cardiac event at the hospital. The doctors advised him to have an upgraded device connected to his heart to regulate the pumping of blood. Even the government-approved amount - half the actual cost - would remain beyond the reach of probably 95% of our population. It struck me then that despite technical advances in medical sciences and the improved longevity they bring, the majority of us remain unable to access even basic interventions for our own hearts. According to national health estimates, nearly 60% of healthcare expenditure in India is still borne out-of-pocket by individuals, pushing millions into financial distress each year. For many families, a medical emergency is not merely a health crisis but an economic catastrophe. The heart may be priceless in poetry, but in reality it comes with a price few can sustain.

Watching my father's heart steady on the monitor, I realised how miraculous yet vulnerable it remains - both as an organ and as a symbol of life, love, and resilience in fragile human existence. Perhaps the greatest lesson is that the heart, in every sense, deserves our care, respect, and attention — not only when it can be repaired, but always.

It is our responsibility to keep our bodies fit, live with discipline and awareness, and not take health for granted. Yet, individual effort alone is not enough.A heart may be priceless in metaphor, but it must never become unaffordable in reality.

Shivaji Maharaj: Power, Principle, and the Making of Swarajya

Harish Jain

Mera rang de basanti chola... Jis chole ko pehan Shivaji khele apni jaan pe...

The song that Ram Prasad Bismil and his comrades sang in jail was not an act of nostalgia. It was a recognition. In moments of supreme political courage, Indian revolutionaries instinctively reached for one name—Shivaji—because his life had already fused resistance, statecraft, sacrifice, and moral authority into a single legend.

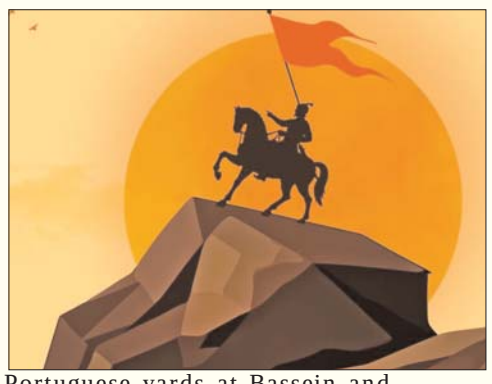
Born around 19 February 1630 at Shivneri Fort, Shivaji grew up amid fractured sovereignties. The Deccan was contested by the sultanates of Bijapur, Ahmednagar, and Golconda, while the Mughal Empire pressed relentlessly from the north. His father Shahji Bhonsle served these powers as a general; his mother Jijabai shaped his ethical and political imagination. From her, he inherited not only piety but an unyielding sense of justice.

By his mid-teens, Shivaji was already acting with remarkable autonomy. At sixteen, he seized Torna Fort, exploiting instability in the Bijapur court. This was not youthful adventurism; it was the beginning of a long experiment in building power without legitimacy, authority without a crown.

Shivaji's genius lay in recognising early that conventional warfare would fail against Mughal cavalry and artillery. Instead, he evolved Ganimi Kava—a form of guerrilla warfare that transformed terrain into a weapon. Hills, forests, narrow passes, and monsoon-fed rivers became allies. He avoided pitched battles, targeted supply lines, and forced larger armies to exhaust themselves in hostile geography.

His strength rested on people rather than mercenaries. Maratha peasants and Kunbis formed the backbone of his forces. Forts—nearly 240 to 280 of them—were not symbols of prestige but nodes of mobility, intelligence, and survival. From Raigad Fort to Purandar and Kondhana, forts were seized, rebuilt, and networked into a living military system.

Equally forward-looking was his maritime vision. Beginning around 1657, Shivaji purchased vessels from



Portuguese yards at Bassein and built India's first indigenous defensive navy. Sindhudurg Fort became its headquarters. With Muslim admirals like Darya Sarang and Goan and Portuguese sailors, his navy protected trade and coastline alike—an extraordinary innovation in an age when Indian rulers still looked inward.

Shivaji's revolution was not only military. He dismantled the Persian monopoly over administration and replaced it with Marathi and Sanskrit. His seal bore a Sanskrit legend; his officials compiled the Rajavyavaharkosha (1677) to substitute Persian–Arabic bureaucratic terms with indigenous equivalents. Language became an instrument of sovereignty.

Yet for all his territorial success, Shivaji lacked formal legitimacy. To rivals, he remained, technically, a jagirdar's son or a Mughal zamindar. The coronation of 1674 at Raigad—performed with waters from seven sacred rivers and Vedic mantras—was therefore a political necessity. He emerged as Chhatrapati, Kshatriya Kulavantas, and ruler of Hindavi Swarajya. His mother Jijabai witnessed this moment; she died shortly thereafter, as if her life's purpose had been fulfilled.

Shivaji's career unfolded largely in conflict with Islamic sultanates and the Mughal Empire under Aurangzeb. Inevitably, his politics acquired a Hindu coloration. Yet to reduce him to a sectarian ruler is to misread him entirely. He protected temples and Hindu customs, but he also employed Muslims at the highest levels of command, endowed mosques, and formed alliances across religious lines. He urged Aurangzeb to rule like Akbar. His army included Pathan units; Muslims led his navy. Pragmatism, not dogma, governed his choices.

He neither joined the Rajputs against the Mughals nor hesitated to ally with Muslim states when circumstances demanded. His tolerance was not rhetorical—it was administrative.

The last years of Shivaji's life were troubled. His elder son defected to the Mughals before being brought back; ministers quarrelled; enemies multiplied. Governing was as exhausting as fighting. He died in April 1680 at Raigad, worn down by illness and relentless strain. He had ruled as crowned king for barely six years.

Yet what he left behind was far greater than his lifespan. Under Bajirao I, the Maratha state expanded across the subcontinent, reducing the Mughal emperor to a nominal figure by the mid-eighteenth century. The architecture of that expansion—mobility, decentralised command, fiscal realism—was Shivaji's creation.

From Sabhasad Bakhar to 91 Kalmi Bakhar, early chroniclers elevated Shivaji almost to divinity. Colonial-era thinkers reinterpreted him again: Jyotirao Phule cast him as a hero of the shudras; Bal Gangadhar Tilak as an opponent of oppression; M. G. Ranade as the founder of modern nation-building. Jadunath Sarkar gave him scholarly permanence.

Each generation found its own Shivaji. That is both his power and his peril.

To see him whole is to recognise a ruler who fought tyranny without becoming tyrannical; who upheld faith without persecuting others; who empowered peasants and marginalised castes; who understood that language, administration, and dignity matter as much as swords.

The alternative is to shrink him into a narrow, chauvinistic emblem—and in doing so betray the very Swarajya he imagined.

When freedom fighters sang of the basanti chola, they were not invoking a sectarian past but a shared ethical inheritance. Shivaji stands there still—not as a weapon for the present, but as a measure against which the present must be judged.