

YOUTH INITIATIVES

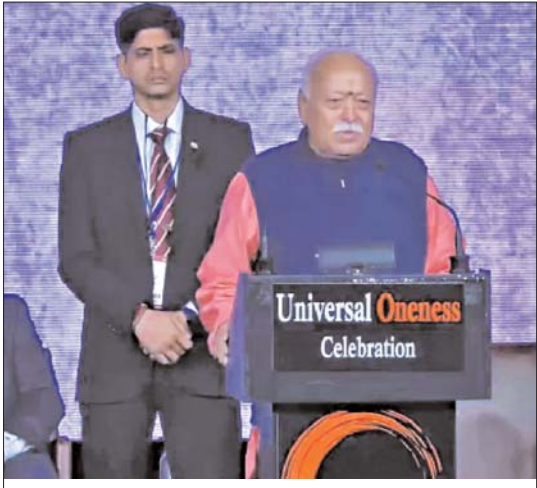
India is a huge country of 1.4 billion people; one-sixth of the humans ever born on the planer live here. It’s but natural for the land to nurture different shades of life, seasons, cultures, religions, languages and even thinking. The contrast is so visible and considered normal in this country; uniformity is considered drab and boring. In this context, while on one hand we saw the rise of Gen G - and the world jumped at the bait - on the other hand we are witnessing the phenomenon of the same generation taking charge of cleaning rivers and pathways. First it was river Manrama which a group of youth cleaned and which was mentioned by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his Mann ki baat programme and now it’s a Madhya Pradesh student who has single-handedly cleaned a river and attracting attention of global businesses. Thanks to social media such youth are becoming heroes and setting an example for all generations. In our J&K, Farooq Ahmed Ganai, a lawyer and a sarpanch of village Sidwara in Anantnag district has launched an initiative "Plastic Do, Sona Lo" (Give Plastic, Take Gold) to involve the village community in making their village clean and trash free. Under this initiative, anyone who deposits 20 quintals (2,000 kg) of plastic waste receives a gold coin. The young village head has shown how life of common people can change with a small imagination to mobile people. Interestingly, his Sarpanch Ganai’s wife has given her gold to her husband to reward people. In the coming days, we would see more young people coming out in open and emulating such initiatives and not leaving everything to the government. Lack of clean cities and towns is a major problem in India and unless youth feel enraged by it, things are unlikely to change.

Ratan Sharda

"The basis of this true belief, that my pain and pleasure lay in the pain and pleasure of the other is the reason for yearning for unity and its experience, harmony within humanity and feeling brotherhood. [...] This knowledge is safely stored with Hindus. No one else has it. It is the duty of one who has a treasure, to protect it and make it easily available to others. To shy away from this duty would not be the cause of our ruin alone but also of the world. This is the purpose for which we organize ourselves to create a strong society. Thus, our organization is for the good of the world. [...] People of the West are not aware of this science. Their senses are directed outwards and see outer world. They do not see inward, we see thus. Therefore, it is something worth doing for us to awaken Hindu society to such levels that it can teach the world, that has the inclination to see outward to see inward, this knowledge with firm resolve and confidence." These words would sound familiar to many who heard Dr Mohan Bhagwat ji's speech in the USA. However, they were spoken in 1954 in RSS meeting in Sindi by Shri Guruji. (M S Golwalkar: His Vision & Mission, Page 131) Dr Bhagwat presented this global vision of RSS to the world from New York.

The last stanzas of the 'Vishwa Prarthana' of Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh clearly state the global vision of Hindu thought: "Let our devotion to the cause be steadfast in organizing the people for the achievement of world peace and tranquility in the light of the universal Dharma.[...] In pursuit of the welfare of mankind, which indeed is the holy cause and inspired by the noble virtues of service and sacrifice, let my being O' Lord, be offered at your feet.

Though Sangh works only within Bharat, it is recognized as a force that changed the social and political landscape of Bharat. Heavy agenda-driven propa-



ganda against RSS and Hindus hurts the Hindu community globally. RSS is dragged in to paint targets on Hindu organisations as is apparent from the reactions and responses from various politicians, academics and media during Mohanji's visit. Having completed it 100 years of growth, consolidation and evolution from an organisation to a movement - it was time for RSS to present itself to global audience.

It is worth noting that religious heads of 30 countries, from 16 religions and 180 scholars came together for this event. They had a heart-to-heart conversation with Dr Bhagwat before the public event. Looking at this big outreach with 200+ organisations across USA, one may dare say that it was the first time after Swami Vivekananda's epoch-making speech in Chicago that a global vision about Hindu dharma and Bharat was presented before the world. USA was chosen as the stage, because whether we like it or not, narrative begins from USA and echoes around the world. Dr Bhagwat recalled Swami Vivekananda's words that every nation has a message, a mission and a destiny. Bharat's mission is the spread the word pluralism - see the divine unity in apparent diversity and celebrate diversity as an expression of unity in different forms, like nature. Hindu nation of Bharat stands as a living example of Spiritual Democracy

where every faith, every religion has been respected and welcomed. In the same spirit, persecuted people of different religions and races were given refuge in Bharat. Even in recent times, it has gone and supported refugees of war, people suffering from Covid etc.

The message of global relevance of Hinduness was in tune with what Shri Guruji had said decades back. It was about One aatman/soul within all the human beings of whichever race, colour, religion they might be - Universal Oneness. The day chosen was Raksha Bandhan that celebrates the bond of brotherhood of the humanity, a pledge to protect each other. It is not just a festival of brother and sister, but of the society for the society sending out a message of social harmony. Prafulla Ketkar recalls that Hindus and Muslims tied rakhi to each other when they launched a successful agitation against 'Bang Bhang' division of Bengal on religious lines.

The RSS chief stressed the Hindu philosophy that material satisfaction cannot give lasting happiness. There is something else, the spiritual hunger which needs to be satiated. This can be through thought or action of helping other living beings. He talked about the difference between human beings and other living creatures who live just for consumption and pleasure. Animal does not think beyond present, human being thinks of life and afterlife. He explained that an animal does not know the reason of its life, human being searches to know the purpose since eons. Only human beings have vivek - intellect - that really differentiate them from animal kingdom. And this awareness must be put to good use. He reminded the audience about the integral view of human beings and the nature of Hindus and importance of human beings living in harmony with the society and nature; not just as consumers but as a part of

this vast universe.

In keeping with the inclusive nature of Hindu dharma, he clearly stated that Hindu cannot be exclusivist like many other ideologies, hence cannot think of throwing out minorities when it talks about Hindu Rashtira. We should be clear that Hindu idea of nationhood is not that of nation state but of cultural spirit of Bharat, which is Hindu culture. This is the culture that binds us together for eons. This thought has been expressed at various times, from Shri Guruji's interview of 1971 to Balasaheb Deoras to Sudarshan ji. He presented the two diametrically opposite ideas that can make or break the world - 'Live and Let Live' or 'Only the people who follow a certain idea have a right to live. If they agree with us, we will protect them, or they have no place in the society'. And he reiterated the Hindu philosophy of 'Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam' as the only way for the world to survive, the thought that directs action of every conscious Hindu.

For the Indian diaspora, the message was what had been said much earlier by Shri Guruji to the swayamsevaks who came to meet him from overseas. You may take inspiration from your Janmabhoomi, your punyabhoomi, but your primary loyalty should be to your karmabhoomi and see what you can contribute to the society you adopted. Thus, it was a positive messaging from RSS to dispel all the negative propaganda by the western Left intellectuals, academia and media that could spread positivity. This speech of his, along with his speech in Toronto, Canada, will echo for a long time globally. If taken in right spirit, as enunciated in the joint declaration of the religious heads and scholars signed about Universal Oneness for world peace, this could be the beginning of leading non-state actors led push for peace.

Ratan Sharda is a well-known TV panellist and has authored several books. He has been a member of the RSS since his childhood days; Views presented are personal.

THE GHOSTS THAT ARE REALLY MEMORY

Lakshmi Puri

"Ghosts are all around us. Seek them out and you shall discover them," Ruskin Bond once said — an apt threshold into a disarmingly entertaining book. As someone susceptible to such phenomena, I read it hoping for insight as much as validation that the unreal is real. Roy's hauntings are never confined to ghosts alone — apparitions, premonitions, eerie presences, even an apparent possession.

Calling it a ghost-story collection under-sells it; this is closer to a supernatural memoir, part autobiography, part travelogue, part social history, where the unexplained becomes a portal into decades of lived experience. Roy begins with an advantage rare among writers of the paranormal: he isn't anxious to convince anyone. He owns experiences that challenged his rational understanding without claiming to be a mystic or seer; these, he suggests, are his reality. The reader decides.

That refusal to proselytise gives it credibility and charm; there is no grand theory, only an accumulation of experiences offered as: this happened, I cannot explain it, perhaps you can. The sixteen chapters move from Calcutta and Delhi to Khajuraho, Rishikesh and the Himalayas, then

Humour helps too — in Rishikesh, a feared tiger turns out to be light glinting off a packet of chips. The register darkens in "The Fire," where Roy's narrative meets the 1997 Uphaar cinema tragedy — an all-too-real horror of negligence and grief, a reminder its gravest terrors aren't always paranormal. Elsewhere the ghosts turn benign: the Nainital presence at Madam Durell's grows almost custodial, and the Valladolid apparition inspires curiosity rather than fear.

onward to Jerusalem and Valladolid. Geography is never decorative — Roy has an instinct for places where history seems to settle into the walls. That is the book's most compelling idea: places remember.

A Delhi neighbourhood conceals histories beneath modern construction; Khajuraho becomes a repository of centuries; in Valladolid, an apparition leads Roy toward the Inquisition and the persecuted Alumbrosos. His technique is effective: chapters often open cinematically — a child staring into darkness, Roy convulsing on a bus — before he wanders into a house's history or a memory, circling back to the

inexplicable only later.

At its best, this gives the book the expansive quality of conversation. A second memoir sits quietly inside the first: the story of an India changing around its narrator.

Roy's childhood spans Cochin, Calcutta, Bombay, Delhi and London; his father's naval career brings the 1971 war home; later come liberalisation, television's rise, and Teamwork's ferment through the 1990s, forming the world that produced the Jaipur Literature Festival. These are not interruptions; for Roy, the supernatural does not exist outside ordinary life — it

walks straight through it. Puneeta is one of its key presences, often more instinctively receptive than her husband; children, siblings, friends and pets lend warmth, and the paranormal unfolds amid marriages, meals and domestic chaos.

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Perhaps the truest ghosts are history, memory and attachment — people leave, houses change hands, civilisations build over ruins, yet something remains. Roy never tells us what it proves, and that is exactly why the book works. Warm, atmospheric and richly anecdotal, "There's a Ghost in

My Room" is less about fearing the dead than learning to live with the unexplained; believers will feel confirmed, sceptics may begin to wonder — and either way, you'll look differently at the rooms and memories we mistakenly think we inhabit alone.

The SCO and the illusion of moral multipolarity

Nilantha Ilangamuwa

China's rise is real. The SCO's institutional expansion is real. The erosion of the old assumption of uncontested Western primacy is real. But the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit in Bishkek last week has once again confirmed that global politics is moving away from the old assumption that one power can organise the international system largely on its own terms.

The SCO also insisted that it is not a military bloc and does not seek bloc confrontation. Yet beneath the familiar diplomatic language lies a more consequential development. The organisation is no longer merely a forum in which China, Russia, India, Iran, Pakistan and the Central Asian republics discuss security. Its 28 outcome documents extend cooperation into counterterrorism, narcotics, information security, artificial intelligence, computing infrastructure, ports and logistics, energy, climate, biodiversity, nuclear security, emergency assistance and cultural cooperation. The SCO is becoming an institutional network, and that makes it far more significant than the slogan of a new multipolar world suggests.

But there is a problem with the triumphalism surrounding this transformation. A world with several centres of power is not automatically a fairer world. Multipolarity describes the distribution of power; it does not determine how that power is used. This distinction is frequently lost in the political language surrounding the SCO. Western military intervention, sanctions, financial coercion and double standards deserve criticism where the evidence warrants it. Opposition to Western power is legitimate. But the fact that Washington has abused economic and military power in particular circumstances does not give Beijing, Moscow or anyone else a licence to exercise their own power without scrutiny.

The history of the SCO explains why this question matters. The organisation emerged from the Shanghai Five in 1996, when China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan sought to manage border disputes and build confidence after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Uzbekistan joined in 2001, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation was formally created. Its subsequent expansion changed its scale. India and Pakistan joined in 2017, followed by Iran

in 2023 and Belarus in 2024. Calling such a collection an anti-Western alliance is analytically lazy. It is more accurately understood as a mechanism through which states with very different interests can cooperate without accepting a single political centre. Politics

China's influence is more subtle and, in some respects, more consequential. Beijing has spent decades converting economic strength into structural influence. It has built trade relationships, financed infrastructure, expanded industrial investment, supplied telecommunications equipment, developed transport corridors and increased its role in energy and technology. In Central Asia, the Chinese presence is no longer confined to imported consumer goods or large infrastructure projects. It is increasingly entering productive sectors.

A Chinese-backed fertiliser plant in Kyrgyzstan's Osh region, for example, is intended to produce hundreds of thousands of tonnes annually, potentially exceeding the country's current domestic requirement. Such a project can reduce Kyrgyzstan's dependence on imports and create genuine industrial capacity. It can also connect production, Chinese technol-

ogy, distribution networks and regional transport corridors more deeply to China's economic system. Neither interpretation can be excluded.

China has become an extraordinary export power and continues to run enormous trade surpluses. Chinese manufacturing has produced competitive machinery, electronics, electric vehicles, batteries, renewable-energy equipment and industrial products on a scale few countries can match. Developing countries buy Chinese goods because they often offer affordability and availability. That is not exploitation by definition. But neither is it evidence of equality. China's trade with Central Asia is heavily tilted towards Chinese exports. Chinese customs data put trade with the five Central Asian republics at more than \$100 billion in 2025, with China's exports substantially exceeding its imports. Discrepancies between Chinese and Central Asian trade statistics make the issue even more important because governments cannot properly negotiate equitable commercial relationships when basic figures are difficult to reconcile.

China's enormous trade surplus with the world presents the same contradiction on a larger scale. Bei-

jing can legitimately argue that its exports reflect competitiveness and that weak domestic demand contributes to the surplus. It can also point to the enormous quantities of goods that developing economies have obtained at relatively low cost. But a persistent surplus on this scale means that other countries are, collectively, running the corresponding deficits. It cannot be defined as Chinese wrongdoing, but it is certainly evidence of an imbalance with consequential effects. If Western governments are criticised for using financial and economic asymmetries to pressure weaker states, the same intellectual standard must be applied if China uses its industrial capacity and market clout to manipulate target countries. There cannot be a duality in morality. Investing

The SCO's proposed Development Bank exposes the gap between political ambition and institutional reality. Yet the Bishkek summit did not launch an operating bank. Kyrgyzstan wants to host it, while Kazakhstan has offered to host the headquarters. Fundamental questions concerning capital, membership, governance and location remain unresolved. That is not a trivial administrative delay. It demonstrates how difficult it is to

convert declarations about financial autonomy into a functioning alternative financial institution. An alternative world financial system cannot be created by speeches about de-dollarisation. It requires capital, liquidity, credible governance, settlement mechanisms, investor confidence and institutions capable of surviving political disagreements.

The same caution should apply to claims about alternative payment systems. China's CIPS and Russia's SPFS can reduce dependence on Western financial infrastructure in particular transactions, and local-currency settlement can reduce exposure to the dollar. But neither system has displaced the global importance of the dollar, and neither has reproduced the depth and liquidity of the international financial architecture centred on dollar markets. It is perfectly reasonable for countries to seek protection against the political use of financial sanctions. It is unreasonable to pretend that an alternative system already exists when it remains incomplete. The SCO's economic future will be judged by what its institutions can actually finance, not by how strongly its communiqués denounce Western financial dominance.