

S . K . S H A H



INDIA

shining
and
sinking

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RUPA

The Chairman Emeritus



Dedicated to my Bauji, the late D.R. Shah
(14 August 1922–14 March 2009)

A Padma Shri awardee and Founder-Chairman, Shah International School, Bauji spent his entire life helping the impoverished, deprived and downtrodden. His humanity, humility, values and selflessness endeared him to one and all. Focussed, fearless and forgiving, Bauji had an immense dislike for hypocrisy, self-righteousness and vindictiveness. It would be fair to say that words fail to describe his stature among those who knew him.

Till his last day, Bauji strived to make a difference to society.
He often said:

*'Yeh mana ki zindagi chaar dino ki hai, par bahut hote hain yaaron
chaar din bhi.'*

SOME EXCERPTS FROM:
INDIA SHINING AND SINKING

Introduction

Something is Rotten in the State of India

In the eyes of much of the world, India is shining. There is a tremendous degree of affluence in the country. Disposable income has never been as high as it is right now. People own cars and houses and unimaginable wealth to rival those of the global elite. Lists of the world's '100 richest' and '100 most powerful' people invariably have Indian names ranking high.

But India is also sinking—under the weight of its ambitions and its lack of concern for the greater good of the nation. The gap between the rich and the poor has never been wider than it is today, and justice and fair play have become things of myth.

Now, everyone accepts that India is today a hotbed of corruption. That our politicians are at best incompetent and at worst fanatics who pursue power no matter what the cost to the country. That our businessmen are unscrupulous and deceitful and will do whatever it takes to bolster their bottom lines. So why this book, anyone might wonder—what is the need to say the things that everyone knows already?

There is a need.

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Because we need to reflect on our history and our past conduct, and understand why we are in the situation that we are in today.

It is an unpleasant but undeniable fact that the vast majority of the Indian population is steeped in crime and corruption. 'Jugaad' is a way of life today, and no one thinks twice about achieving his ends as quickly as possible, no matter what the means. A man caught by a traffic policeman for running a red light or driving drunk is as ready and willing to pay a bribe in order to avoid getting a challan as the cop is to accept that bribe and turn a blind eye to any and all misdemeanour.

There has, over the last several decades, been steady and rising erosion of the moral fabric of the entire Indian polity. It is easy to blame politicians, bureaucrats, the judiciary, the police and all manner of persons for the shambles that our country is in today—indeed, it is fair to blame them, for we cannot deny that every way we turn we see examples of greed, whether for power or money. But somewhere down the road, we have to also pause and introspect. These people, who misuse their offices and authority to perpetrate their own purposes, are also members of our society. If they had not been bred and brought up on a diet of everyday malfeasance, they would not have grown up to be power-and money-hungry beasts that care not a whit about their responsibility towards the people they are supposed to be serving.

Take, for instance, the case of a child who is not punished for cheating on a class test. The day will come when he will think nothing of paying a bribe to someone to forge a mark sheet, or asking his father to buy him a seat at a medical college ahead of students who have slogged and slaved for that coveted honour.

A man does not one day suddenly commit rape. He commits

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rape when he has learnt, from observing the society he lives in, that women can be treated as objects for the satiation of his lust. What a sorry state of affairs for a country and a civilization that recognizes Woman as a repository of respect and reverence, whether in the guise of Aisha, Durga or Mary!

Indian society is in the grip of a pernicious fever of greed and immorality. The practice of ethicality in everyday life has been consigned to the flames—it is, by and large, considered as absurd as doing a degree in philosophy in the pursuit of becoming a rich man. Why, then, I ask you, should we expect the people who run this country to be any different? When we place on a pedestal Bollywood heroes and heroines who sell violence and lewd behaviour in the guise of entertainment, it is hypocritical to pretend that only politicians and the like are to blame for the corruption and criminality that riddles India today. We must all take responsibility for our actions, decisions and failings. A building is not made out of marble flooring and gilt railings alone—every stone, brick and masonry that goes into the foundation is responsible for the soundness of its construction. So it is for a country.

In order for our country to progress—to truly progress, and not just build castles in the air about higher GDP and increasing nuclear power—we need to introspect. We need to not just observe the actions of people whose names appear in the newspapers but also analyse our own motivations. We need to correct ourselves, teach ourselves lessons to become better human beings. We need to become conscious of all the issues that bedevil our nation as we go through the 16th general elections of Independent India and vote into office men and women who have it in their power to change the course of our lives. And thus it is that I have collected

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my thoughts together for readers. I hope my book serves, in some small way, as a stepping stone towards greater awareness of all the maladies that afflict our society today.

The Myth of Women's Safety

A Sunil Dutt Hindi movie titled *Yeh Aag Kab Bujhegi* made in 1991 told the story of dowry-related deaths. It would be relevant even now. The phenomenon of atrocities against women is as old as the hills. The most popular form of crime against women is thus: the bride is beaten up by a drunkard or drug-addict husband, or dowry-related torture. Shockingly, our government has failed miserably to curb atrocities against women. A woman bearing a girl child invites taunts from in-laws even today. So male-dominated is our society that not only illiterate and uneducated women but also literate, highly qualified and professional women have to go through the same ordeal.

If someone asks what is the most terrible threat to our society, I will answer that it is a certain section of human rights activists and armchair intellectuals. I simply want to know from an advocate or a self-proclaimed human rights activist who passionately defends hardcore criminals against severe punishment and death sentence: where is your activism when it comes to ensuring safety for our country's women? I think all NGOs and social activists should be debarred from intervening on behalf of the perpetrators of crimes

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against women.

When, after the Nirbhaya gang-rape case a committee was appointed by the government, even retired Chief Justice of India J.S. Verma floundered and did not recommend death penalty for gang-rape or rape. I don't know what is wrong with these people that they wear a mask of humanity, compassion and empathy for the accused and not for the victim. After the Nirbhaya case, the number of cases of rape and murder appears to have increased manifold. No one fears the law—people have to just spend a few years in jail, no matter the extent of the victim's mental damage. A five-year-old girl was brutally raped and murdered, and a bottle inserted into her private parts; but our judiciary has no qualms about taking a lenient stance towards the accused. Soon after, another girl faced an acid attack in Mumbai and after struggling for a month in Mumbai hospitals finally succumbed to her injuries.

The Supreme Court stepped in and asked state governments to regulate the sale of acid. It resulted in a nominal reduction of such crimes. What is desired is the sale of acid should be banned throughout India, and only those who require it for industrial purposes should be given the requisite quantity. And factories should ensure that workers don't pilfer.

Whenever any rape case emerges in the public domain, causing widespread outrage, certain areas begin to look like a city devastated by a bomb attack. The police, instead of rounding up the criminals, mercilessly beat the demonstrators against the crime. It is akin to letting lions roam free while imprisoning rabbits! Crime against women is considered a law-and-order problem—this is out of sync with reality. Crime against women is a social malady, which needs to be combated with the efforts of both law enforcement agencies

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and ordinary citizens. We need to pursue and create a society free from lunatics who don't regard women as anything more than a commodity. What we have to do is to instil fear in the offenders that they will face the gallows if caught. A rape case should be decided within three months, and appeals to the highest court should take six months, not beyond that—and then you send the accused to the gallows. I trust that such sick-minded people will then be scared to even look at their wives.

We saw a sea of humanity on Delhi roads when people braved chilly winds, water cannons and police lathi-charges and protested for days, demanding justice for Nirbhaya. And still we are not better off with any new law but slight changes to the same old law. It is only because Nirbhaya died, and it became a murder case, that her attackers have been given the death sentence. Whether it is the judiciary, the executive or the bureaucracy, they all play to the gallery. Even courts have floundered in delivering right and speedy justice. Courts deliver judgments which are based on sentiment and emotion, with a tinge of socialism. The judiciary should not work like this. If women are killed in acid attacks, gang-raped or murdered, it holds up a mirror to our inert and wobbling democracy.

Some people peddle a theory that retributive justice is for uncivilized society. Yes, these kinds of crimes—human trafficking, rape, torture of women—only uncivilized people commit—that is why we are committing them! The problem is that whether it is the Nirbhaya case or a five-year-old's rape, the shelf life of even such horrendous crimes is not long. Within months they are consigned to the capsule of time, and people forget about them.

The Canker of Cricket

The muck and slush floating on the cricket ground is as old as the game. No one can say that it is an aberration. It was around a decade ago that Mohammad Azharuddin, Ajay Jadeja and Manoj Prabhakar were caught fixing matches. Despite irrefutable evidence, they were let off easily and simply debarred from playing cricket forever. None of the cricketers served any other sentence. The new breed of cricketers who have established themselves in the last decade are an even worse lot. But given the way we treat them, we should not blame them for their ill-conduct and tatterdemalion image. They are molycoddled by the whole nation. Even the most celebrated film stars are not as revered as our cricketers, even though what they do in the field, their behaviour with their co-players and other teams, points to their questionable conduct. What is most shocking is we seem to have forgotten everything, which is evidenced by the fact that Azharuddin was rewarded by the people of Moradabad in Uttar Pradesh, who elected him to the Lok Sabha.

Cricketers today acquire an exalted stature for anything and everything. So much money flows like manna towards them that they go absolute crazy. If a player or a team makes a mark, the

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state governments and the central government vie with each other to shower the cricketers with obscene amounts of money, land plots and designer cars. Many other absurd and bizarre things happen: when there is a match, people hold yajnas or get their heads tonsured; some worship the cricketers and have temples with their photographs at home. By implication, the vices of our cricketers are glorified. People don't judge the conduct of the cricketers—they are simply professionals, nothing to do with the dignity of the nation. Even as the pride and glory of the nation is diminished by their behaviour, our cricketers get adulation. I fail to comprehend why people like Yuvraj Singh or Dhoni are chosen as brand ambassadors! Why does cricket rule the roost?

Things like betting and match-fixing can never happen unless the players are culpable. If bookie X wants a result with fewer runs for team Y, he has to be in touch with a player to get the desired result. This desired result can only be achieved if a player carries out the bidding of these bookies. Our cricketers also rake in moolah through endorsements. And we are so passionate about them that we are willing to forgive any and all indecorous behaviour they indulge in. Can there be anything more disgusting than the fact that a few years ago some cricketers who were to be decorated with Padma awards, conferred by the President of India, skipped the ceremony at Rashtrapati Bhawan as they were busy shooting an ad film?

And yet, cricket is feted in this country more than any other game, and all our resources are made available to cricketers.

The Poor Cousin

The war between the Hockey Federation of India and hockey players preparing for the World Cup betrayed an ugly aspect of Indian sports. Our hockey has not been in the pink of health due to abysmal neglect of the game, lack of infrastructure and no motivation for players. The players refused to practise before their arrears, fees and incentives were cleared, and the federation, crippled by lack of resources, expressed its inability to pay. It's a strange dichotomy that this is how the national game of India suffers while money flows like manna for cricketers and the entire country is all grovelling genuflection for them.

Cricket in India is like a eucalyptus tree that does not allow the growth of any other game. Even hockey, once our national pride, has ceded place to it. Cricket has become a national festival, celebrated across the length and breadth of the country, played madly for more than 250 days in a year and with the BCCI literally showering players with money. Cricketers get crores from endorsements and laugh their way to various countries to cash in on their talents. They stay in plush hotels and luxurious suites, and when they win a match or a tournament, the whole nation is thrown

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into a tizzy; while a victorious hockey team is made to travel by buses and put up in dingy guesthouses. It is shocking that even as war was going on between the hockey players and the federation, no government agency came forward to soothe the ruffled feathers. Rather, threats of coercive actions were issued against the players. It was only very late in the day that a compromise was worked out, after the dirty linen had been washed and hung out to dry in public.

It is inexplicable that cricketers today play not as much for love of the game as to amass maximum wealth by way of remunerations, prize money, endorsement deals. And whenever there is a significant feat recorded by the Indian team or any player, everyone rushes in to shower wealth on the players, be it cash prize or a plot or a car worth millions. When it comes to cricket, all talk of playing for the glory of the nation is posturing.

The pampering of cricket and the simultaneous shameful neglect of hockey has created a huge sense of humiliation and despondency among our hockey players. It is as if we are telling our hockey players that they are the poor cousins of cricketers. We are doing a great injustice to all other games by promoting cricket to the exclusion of almost all other sports. If this continues, hockey, within the next few years, will be relegated to the realm of imagination and confined to sports books, referred to by the next generation as an ancient game. As it is, given its current state of demoralization, it is not at all surprising that the Indian hockey team finished last at the 2012 Olympics. I am persuaded to believe that unless a drastic change occurs the team will not perform any better. This malaise that has permeated our national game needs to be attended to immediately, and our national pride restored.