

S . K . S H A H



**INDIA**

**shining**  
**and**  
**sinking**

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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.'*

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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 16<sup>th</sup> 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

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 mollicoddled 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

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.

## An Ungrateful Nation Does Not Honour the Freedom Fighters Who Laid Down Their Lives for Us

Any man endowed with the spirit of nationalism, someone who will lay down his life for this country, must be on the cusp of courting severe depression at the shocking attitude of our government—in that it does not recognize its freedom fighters.

Gandhiji may have earned the credit for bringing freedom to India and recorded his name in the annals of history, but we cannot lose sight of the fact that the entire British Empire was shaken when Bhagat Singh hurled a bomb in Central Legislative Assembly in New Delhi—it was then that the Britishers realized the anger and angst of freedom fighters and Indians in general. The revelation by veteran actor Manoj Kumar (who played the role of Bhagat Singh in a Hindi film) that Bhagat Singh's name has not been recorded in government records as a martyr sent shockwaves across the whole country. The people of India have revered their freedom fighters. Several movies have been made about Bhagat Singh and other freedom fighters, the best being the one produced by Manoj

Kumar in 1965, *Shaheed*. But I believe there cannot be any more brutal injustice done to freedom fighters than pushing them into the dark tunnel of obscurity—the way our government is doing.

The Punjab government gave the infamous Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale the title of martyr, and the Centre looked the other way. If people who are at the helm of affairs tomorrow give the title of martyr to Ajmal Kasab or Abdul Karim Tunda, it should not come as a surprise to us. Because we are a nation with leaders who are morally bankrupt.

I don't have any intention of belittling Mahatma Gandhi, as he was instrumental in getting India independence—but at what cost? Gandhi endorsed the division of the country and Pakistan was born. And Pakistan has been a thorn for India since then. Gandhiji was practising non-violence, whereas Bhagat Singh believed in tit for tat. If Britishers killed thousands at the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, they should have been given an equal response rather than indulging in grovelling genuflection. It is a fallacy to believe that the Non-Cooperation Movement alone led to the shattering of British control over India and to independence. The freedom fighters and revolutionaries who laid down their lives during the freedom struggle played an equally important role. There's a general feeling that Mahatma Gandhi chose to ignore the many young freedom fighters who were fighting for their country. The Mahatma might have saved their lives by asking everyone to oppose the death sentence awarded to our heroes. But Mahatma Gandhi stuck to his stand that violence should be abjured and not pardoned. Bhagat Singh was only twenty-three when he gave his life for the country.

Once the country became independent, did Bhagat Singh not deserve a Bharat Ratna? While on the other hand, veteran actor,

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Manoj Kumar, who played the role of Bhagat Singh in a film, was given a Padma Shri. They even gave the Padma Shri to Akshay Kumar, a film star, who, at a fashion show, once held a woman's hand and pressed her to unzip his pants.

It is not only Bhagat Singh who deserves to be decorated. Our government has done grave injustice to many other people. Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw, the first man in the Indian army to earn that title or General Thimayya are as deserving.

Who will give me one good reason why Bhagat Singh has been dumped from the government's list of honours? It is sheer hypocrisy to deny him martyr status even though many official functions are held on 23 March every year, the day of his hanging by Britishers. Our politicians are ready to baptize anyone into politics and earn filthy lucre; but they have never motivated people to get together and act. I am not accusing the Congress alone of corruption; if the Congress is cholera, others like the BJP and BSP are epidemics. It is nauseating to see on roadsides names of current leaders with their photographs, 'wishing' people on Lohri, Baisakhi, Makarsankranti, Independence Day, Republic Day...the list is endless. And yet they do nothing to honour the freedom fighters responsible for bringing independence to the country!

When the issue of Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev not being given martyr status was raised by the Opposition, our prime minister called it opportunism. He said that we are indebted to those freedom fighters. But observe the discrepancy between this claim and reality! We have Jawaharlal Nehru University, Indira Gandhi National Open University, Rajiv Gandhi University, Indira Gandhi International Airport, dozens of roads, hospitals and schools named after other members of the Gandhi family... No such honour has

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been shown to Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev. Nehru acted as the drawing room crusader. Rajiv Gandhi and Indira Gandhi may have sacrificed their lives to fanatics, but it is no match for what Bhagat Singh and his comrades did.

Grave injustice has been perpetrated on our ideologues.

## Rape in India, and the Intellectual's Inertia

**I**n August 2013, a photo journalist in Mumbai was gang-raped by five men in the age group of twenty-two to twenty-five. Earlier, we used to hear that girls could walk free and safe on the city's roads, whether in isolated or crowded areas, evening or night. But with the erosion of moral values resulting from the upsurge of materialistic pursuits, this is no longer true.

After the rape of the photo journalist on 22 August 2013, the police was, as usual, clueless for the longest time. It took several days and the victim's own identification for the alleged rapists to be detained. In the meantime, people came out on the roads in various parts of the country, embarking on candlelight marches. If candles could frighten away these criminals, I would light lakhs and lakhs of them, praying for the soul of the victim as well as for the curtailment of such crimes—if not their total banishment. Sadly, this is not to be. Peaceful protest cannot deter crime.

After the incidents of 16 December 2012 in Delhi—the Nirbhaya rape case—a judicial commission was instituted to investigate the matter and make recommendations for the safety and security

of women across the county. Many people expected that the commission would recommend the death penalty for rape; but the committee's report left such expectations unsatisfied. The late Justice J.S. Verma, former Chief Justice of India, did not recommend the death penalty. I don't know why the soft and tender heart of the judge always cries for the accused and takes care of him. Whenever a debate about such matters takes place, intellectuals, human rights activists and NGOs come out of their cocoon of complacency, rubbing their eyes in disbelief at the sordid happenings—but still they pitch for what amounts to protection of the accused, saying that laws for retributive justice should not be encouraged.

If a man and his friends rape a girl, what punishment can be given to them? Certainly, we cannot say that the girl's brother will now rape these men's sisters so that justice is served. It is undeniable that an eye for an eye is not the way in which justice is carried out in civil society. But it is important to keep in mind that even human rights activists categorize gang rape as a crime which is most inhuman. In that case, if the charges are proved, what stops the government from awarding the death penalty?

Another area of concern about the Justice Verma Committee's report is the recommendation that those accused who are less than eighteen years of age not be treated as ordinary criminals but as juveniles only, with the sentence not exceeding the date upon which majority is attained, however heinous the crime. One thing I fail to understand is this: if a boy of sixteen years can drive a two-wheeler or a car at a speed of 120 kmph and injure a person, why can't he be punished in the same way that his father would be if he were the person behind the wheel?

I remember West Bengal under Siddhartha Shankar Ray. Within

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the space of six months, hordes of Naxalites were either thrown in jail or made to disappear. The chief minister had a free hand from the then prime minister, Indira Gandhi. But today, even if a notorious criminal is shot while running from the police, human rights activist try and colour it as a 'fake encounter'. When Maoists periodically launch attacks against police and civilians, and panels are convened to discuss the issue, social activists are all fire-and-brimstone in voicing their opinions about protecting the rights of the accused—who are the perpetrators of the worst kinds of crimes against humanity.

I strongly feel that those who oppose the death penalty are hypocrites who believe in posturing and grandstanding. Their obscurantist tendencies are symptomatic of rancid mental processes. How else can one explain the fact that their thoughts do not reach beyond showing concern for the criminal rather than the victim? There is no logical reason to protest the law taking its own course and espousing instead the cause of the criminals. These people undermine the legitimate concerns of the people at large.

The concept of stringent punishment for crimes in order to deter other criminals—in the present and in the future—seems to be disappearing. The findings of various committees and judicial commissions are colourful and often nonsensical, and law enforcement is patchy at best. The police force, from top to bottom, is drenched in corruption; it is the only organ empowered to act swiftly and cleanse the social system of crime, but it is in reality not interested at all. And so we need to act quickly and serve a lethal blow to get rid of a social menace such as rape. The Nirbhaya case judgement, wherein the death penalty was awarded to the four people on trial (one of the six accused originally committed

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suicide in jail, and the other was sent to a juvenile home because he was, thanks to the benevolence of our judiciary, not tried as an adult) is only the first step. Unless a number of exemplary executions take place, we cannot instil fear in the minds of the demons that torment India's citizens today. It is incumbent upon the government to bring into effect an ordinance and enforce this forthwith. I do not think any political party would have any empathy for such criminals.

## On Awards

Since the day Sachin Tendulkar scored 200 runs in a one-day match against South Africa, Sachin fans started crying themselves hoarse demanding the Bharat Ratna for him. Soon the intelligentsia and various groups too joined the chorus. And now the upshot is that Sachin has indeed been given the Bharat Ratna.

The Bharat Ratna and the Padma awards are conferred on people for excellence in the fields of science, technology, medicine, sports, arts and public life. It is nobody's case to say that Sachin should not have got the Bharat Ratna. But it is my argument that those whose achievements have been far greater than Sachin's should have been honoured first. It needs little imagination to come up with names of deserving people who have been omitted from the list of recipients of the award. One name that immediately comes to mind is that of the late Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw. Under his tutelage, India won the 1971 war against Pakistan. If the Government of India has not recognized Manekshaw's historic achievement, which raised India's prestige in the international arena, no right-thinking person can easily digest the fact of Sachin's Bharat Ratna. My problem is not why Sachin got the award; it is that people

of the calibre of Manekshaw have not been given the award, even if posthumously. Should we presume then that the Government of India is blissfully ignorant of Manekshaw's legendary contribution, and he must thus be content with the Padma Vibhushan while a cricketer enjoys the glory of being a Bharat Ratna awardee? I ask Sachin Tendulkar, who has built a fortune endorsing different products, what is your contribution to society?

The history of India's civilian awards has always been a murky one. Earlier it was the British who used to reward their stooges and cronies by conferring titles like Rai Saheb and Dewan Sahib; along with this came a bonanza of vast tract of lands. Post Independence, the Government of India instituted the Padma awards for those it wanted to honour, with the Bharat Ratna being the highest civilian award, followed by the Padma Vibhushan, the Padma Bhushan and the Padma Shri.

The 2010 Padma awardees included Sant Singh Chatwal, a businessman based in the USA. If one goes by his antecedents, he should have been kept at arm's length from this prestigious award given the accusations of malfeasance levelled against him. Giving the Padma Bhushan to Chatwal gave a fresh lease of life to the belief that the system of selection of Padma awardees is notoriously unreliable, and that our political system is rife with corruption and venality. The process of selection of Padma awardees is very opaque. Barring a few instances of genuine worthiness, these awards mostly go to those who have the right kind of connections. The awards committee too comprises those who have been handpicked on the basis of their ability to bend backwards and recommend any case that the political and bureaucratic bosses desire. Like the award of titles in the British era, it is not a wider appreciation for

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the recipients' contribution in any particular field that is recognized but their value to the corporate-political nexus.

Dogged by controversies, over time the Padma awards have come to be identified with sycophancy and political and bureaucratic clout. Among the 2010 Padma Shri awardees were Saif Ali Khan, Rekha, Virender Sehwaq and Saina Nehwal. It beggars belief that the awards committee found any exemplary achievement and contribution of Saif Ali Khan towards Hindi cinema. Rekha, a veteran actress of many years, who has acted in over 300 films and displayed impressive talent, was put on the same pedestal as Saif Ali Khan—this belittles Rekha's colossal contribution to Indian cinema. Few people can disagree that there are always prejudices and biases in giving these awards. Many deserving candidates for the awards have been neglected for decades; at the same time, people with the right kind of connections manage to swoop upwards as if propelled by a rocket and grab a Padma award for no conceivable reason.

Today, the Padma awards have lost their sanctity. Cases such as those of Saif Ali Khan have not gone unnoticed and there is legitimate scepticism in the minds of people that our system of honouring men and women for exemplary contribution in a particular field is always subject to extraneous considerations. Irrespective of which party is in power, there should be a mechanism that insulates the awards process from the unwanted incursion of those elements who want to play games of manipulation and hijack the awards. If India's highest civilian awards are to be conferred not on account of merit but for other considerations, the purpose and spirit of instituting them is defeated.

## Humanity before Politics

**G**iven the government's lack of empathy for Delhi's Kashmiri Pandits in refusing them their monthly monetary assistance without the production of Aadhaar card, I believe that it should insist that even those who get kickbacks in defence, 2G, CWG and like scams should produce their Aadhar cards to collect their filthy lucre. It is a brilliant idea for promoting the business of kickbacks, and the government should adopt it without batting an eyelid.

At times, we feel that there is a truth in the saying that you cannot choose your relatives. Likewise, you cannot choose a place or a country as your birthplace to lead a respectable and comfortable life. This is where Destiny comes into the picture. When we see malnourished children in Rwanda, we cry out at the insouciant attitude of mankind, wherein empathy and sympathy are dead. But we also treat our own people in a similarly callous and apathetic manner. We are, after all, a nation led by politicians and bureaucrats who remain confined to their own interests and living in their shell of complacency.

At the height of militant activity in the Kashmir, vast numbers of Kashmiri Pandits had to leave the valley with not even five

minutes' notice because their daughters and wives were being brutally raped by the separatists and militants. It is for over two decades now that those Kashmiri Pandits are living in squalid conditions across the length and breadth of the country, in ghettos and ramshackle buildings. Even those who were financially well off and leading lives full of joy, with good business establishments and secure jobs, are living in penury today. A new generation of Kashmiri Pandits, born in shanties, has not even seen or led the life their parents had once lived.

A measly contribution is given to displaced Kashmiri Pandit families by the government, with the maximum being Rs 6,600 per month per family of four. Those who have been living a well-settled life, can they run their household on Rs 50 per person per day, including the cost of food and education? No, certainly not. Now, adding insult to injury, the Delhi government has proposed stopping this aid unless they submit their Aadhar cards! The situation is akin to a road accident wherein the victim lies grievously wounded on a roadside but is not taken to hospital as there is doubt regarding medical insurance. These migrants have been getting this assistance for years, and now suddenly if you withdraw it—are their children and elders supposed to turn to begging with bowls?

Dear politicians, open your cataract-laden eyes to the plight of the poor! Before taking such measures, please analyse and understand the grave injustice you are doing to them and the pain they will go through. Do not play dirty with the lives and sentiments of people who cannot fight back. I beg of you: stop playing politics and be a little humane.