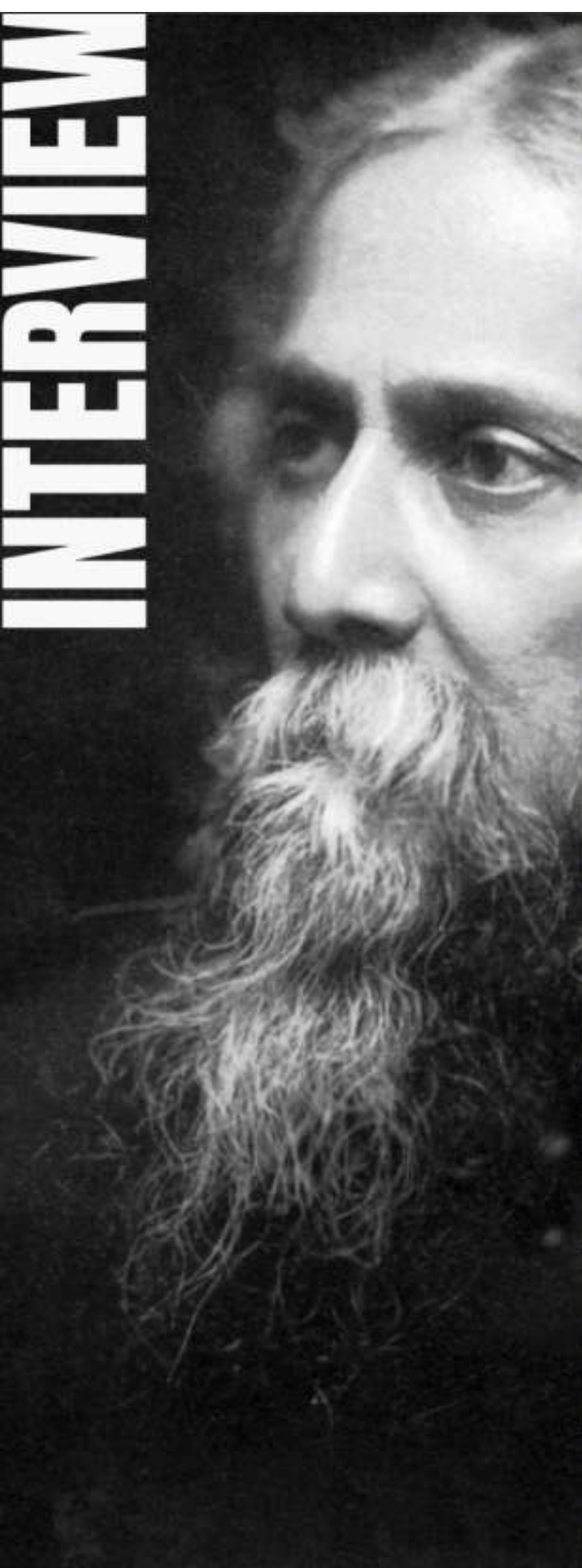


INTERVIEW

**WHERE
THE
MIND IS
WITHOUT
FEAR
AND THE
HEAD
IS HELD
HIGH...**



THE RATIONALE

The magazine "DEMOCRACY ON THE BRINK?" has all its views on the previous pages but without the views of college professors, it is incomplete.

The Research and Editorial Department with help of Digital Media had taken their Panel interview of all recently recruited professors of the Political Science Department of Deshbandhu College for the year 2022-23. Interacting with them was a pleasant as well as knowledgeable experience. To make the magazine intriguing and informative as well, we are embracing their views on the theme of our magazine.

The professors who accompanied us were Dr. Monika Gupta; Dr. Geeta; Ms. Revathy V Menon; Dr. Vimal Nayan Pandey; Dr. Rahul Chimurkar and Dr. Sumit Kumar Maurya.

There were four sets of questions that were asked by the core members comprising of Research Heads Jayantika Khurana, Palak Agrawal, and Editorial Heads Biswajit Sahoo, Sameer Ahmed Ansari

Q1- The professors are requested to give a brief introduction about themselves and their learnings so far

Dr. Monika Gupta completed her graduation from Avadh Girls' Degree College, University of Lucknow, and her post-graduation, M.Phil. and Ph.D. from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. As a researcher, she

interacted with the South Asian diaspora in the UK particularly women from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh who were residing there for over 40-50 years so she interacted with two generations. She writes extensively on gender issues and Indian foreign policies and European issues. She has presented her papers on global platforms including the Oxford, England & Dublin City University, Ireland

Dr. Rahul Chimurkar graduated and post-graduated from Hindu College, University of Delhi, and did his Ph.D. from JMI University. His area of research is "tribal politics" but apart from this, he also has an interest in Indian politics and governance and policy-related issues and currently doing a project for National Commission for Scheduled Tribes.

Dr. Geeta completed her graduation and post-graduation from Allahabad University and then completed her M.Phil. and Ph.D. from the Centre for South Asian Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. Her interest area is Indian foreign policy and climate change and environmental politics/disaster management.

Dr. Vimal Nayan Pandey did his graduation and post-graduation from GNCS, Pt. Ravishanker Shukla University, and his M.Phil. and Ph.D. from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, and his research core area was Africa. He also wrote a book about "security dimensions in India – South Africa Relations".

Madam Revathy V Menon did her graduation from Shivaji College and post-graduation with a Master's in Public Administration from JMI. She had done her M.Phil. in Development Studies from the Centre of Jawaharlal Nehru Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia and now pursuing her Ph.D. from the Department of Political Science at the University of Delhi. Her area of interest is "sub-public administration and public policy". She has also received Doctoral Fellowship from ICSSR, New Delhi.

INTER



VIEWS



Dr. Sumit Kumar Maurya graduated from K.N.I.P.S.S, Sultanpur, UP, and post-graduated from Banaras Hindu University, UP, and did his M.Phil. and Ph.D. from JNU, New Delhi. His area of research is Russian and Central Asian Affairs and Foreign Policy Issues.

Q2- Democracy as a form of government has always been put on a pedestal of questions and remarks. How do you see democracy in contemporary times and how will you preach this to the readers?

According to Dr. Vimal, democracy in present times is different from ancient democracy. Contemporary democracy starts from the 15th century onwards and keeps on changing. So, we have different types of democracy but we can differentiate them based on "Democracy in the concept" and "Democracy in practice/process". Pakistan is an example of legal democracy but not a stable one in process and India is an example of a substantive democracy.

Dr. Rahul has his views that democracy from a Western perspective, from where the concept originated, is more about limiting or putting restrictions on the power of king

while Indian democracy is about the welfare of the masses when we look at Ambedkar's definition of democracy, he said that democracy is a form of government whereby it brings social and economic changes and it could be known as revolutionary changes.

Dr. Revathy added that some recent issues like the global democracy index 2021 in which India placed as flawed democracy (46th rank). On one hand, we say that India is the largest democracy but on the other hand, we are placed within a flawed democracy idea or within a category that raises questions about it. Female flawed democracies are nations where elections are fair and free and basic liberties are honored but may have issues.

Dr. Monika firmly holds the basic definition of democracy as nothing but the "government of the people, for the people, and by the people." So, ultimately people are integral to this entire notion of democracy. India is the largest democracy, the mother of democracy, and also likes to add two more adjectives to it, i.e., oldest democracy, and the most successful and powerful democracy. Apart from that, democracy also includes an element of inclusiveness, taking everyone together.

Dr. Geeta highlighted the point about which democracy we are discussing whether about the Western perspective or the Asian perspective. According to her, if we are talking about an Asian continent or perspective, democracy has been already part of our system, and whatever democratic characteristics or values are talked about by the West, we have always been aware of it but owing to the Eurocentric view of the Western countries we are still not there. So, firstly we will have to distinguish the democratic perspective of Western scholars from the democratic perspective of Asian scholars.

Q3- Last but not least how will you describe democracy in one word?

Dr. Revathy: DECENTRALISED ,Dr. Geeta: PARTICIPATORY

Dr Vimal SUBSTANTIVE, Dr. Monika: EVOLUTIONARY

Dr. Rahul: SPIRITUAL DEMOCRACY, Dr. Sumit: PEOPLE



Interview with Prof. Rajeev Bhargava

Prof. Rajeev Bhargava is currently the director of its newly launched Institute of Indian Thought and Director of CSDS from 2007-2014. He has been a Professor at the Centre for Political Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi (1980-2005), and between 2001 and 2005 was Head, of the Department of Political Science, University of Delhi. Bhargava did his BA in economics from the University of Delhi, and his MPhil and DPhil from Oxford University. He has also been a Fellow at Harvard University, University of Bristol, Institute of Advanced Studies, Jerusalem, Wissenschaftskolleg, Berlin, and the Institute for Human Sciences, Vienna. He has also been Distinguished Resident Scholar, Institute for Religion, Culture and Public Life, Columbia University, and

Asia Chair at Sciences Po, Paris. He is an Honorary Fellow, at Balliol College, Oxford, and currently a Professorial Fellow at the Institute of social justice, ACU, Sydney.

How can the Indian Political system sustain its Secularism without being heavily burdened by Communalism?

If you define community as a religion, then people have begun to think that they are either Hindu or Muslim. Okay, if people identify and define themselves as Hindu or Muslim, that's not communalism. But, if people start defining themselves that belonging to any religion is to have mandatory hate for other religious communities, and the interests of their community should be necessarily opposed to other's community, that's communalism. Today secularism: where no community or communities should marginalize or dominate other communities, is not overburdened by communalism, it has been destroyed by communalism. Secularism and Communalism are not compatible with each other. Today, India is in a permanent state of anxiety where everybody is at war. Indians need to think twice about their identity and should open their arms to accept other communities like brothers. Today, we stand in complete contrast to how Tagore describes this land: "Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high; Where knowledge is free.....". But we still have hope, we still have a chance.

Please help us understand your idea behind this compilation of 100 essays, 'Between Hope and Despair'. In what ways do you want it to yield a change in society?

I feel that apart from some young people and some students, most of the adults I meet- academics who aren't well-read in these matters(of social interest), lawyers, or doctors have no idea of society and ethics. Many middle-class adults have finished their studies, but they forget everything. This book is for them. If you do not understand the meaning of the values that govern our lives, or end up misunderstanding them, you would make too many mistakes; you would act inadequately. Take, for example, the concept of freedom. While it can be defined as not being bound by chains or being behind the bars, many other levels of freedom are equally important. These can be your freedom to think, and your freedom from fear.

Let's talk of women. They are free to walk at night. But how many of them do it? Freedom is not something limited to the confines of your private domain; it goes beyond to cover the public sphere as well. If you don't know how to drive, you would have an accident. In the same way, if you don't understand Democracy then Democracy will surely face an accident...

Likewise, there are many other principles, which need a more comprehensive understanding. This book intends to play its role in doing just that. With time, we are losing sight and our moral compass. We are becoming too self-centered. Defining ethics helps you attain a moral meaning in life.

There was a movie called, Hum Dono, there Lata ji was singing a very beautiful bhajan: Allah tero naam, Ishwar tero naam. It's an anti-war song, and I have written about it in Chapter 94 of my book, A Prayer of Our Times. There's a line in that song, which goes, "nirbal ko bal dene waale, balwaano ko de de gyaan..." This is something so important for our times! We should be wise, but when we all are so self-seeking, where is the wisdom there?

When we talk of ethics, it has two implications- We are a generation of people who are losing their sense of distinction between right and wrong. We are becoming unethical, poorly ethical, immoral, and poorly immoral. We need to consider this very seriously. All of us have desires, but ethics requires us to evaluate our desires based on what's good and what's not. For example, smoking is a desire that we must not possess. Ethics would therefore require us to have a better desire while abandoning the wrong desire at the same time. In this case, it would be a healthier lifestyle.

Our knowledge of ethics also saves us from moral indifference, from the apathy that plagues not just the government, which often fails to address the public needs, but also the citizens, who seldom speak up about the wrong they witness around themselves. My book, which brings over 100 essays together, is about topics ranging from racism, secularism, and our constitutional learnings to reason and the need for academic freedom. Each of its essays, written in lucid language can be read gradually by the reader at their convenience, without worrying too much about the length of the text. I hope this answers your question.



In the current scenario, Is the role played by the opposition getting diminished? If you think so, then please give your views on it.

I believe that positive opposition is back, and I don't feel that opposition is poor. I think there is a general decline in politics and political leaders. These are two things that exist, one is if you don't want to share your powers in your party then how can you believe in sharing power with the opposition? In all parliamentary democracies, the leader of the opposition has the status of the council of ministers. There is no such important role of the opposition party in the current scenario.

In 2013-14, the ruling party, Dr. Manmohan Singh in particular was ridiculed at the time. Every Minister of Congress was on the talk at that time. There was corruption, and scams all around that were highly protested against by citizens and the media. During the time of the Narasimha Rao Government, Atal Bihari Vajpayee was sent to defend India's stand on Kashmir. The ruling party thought the opposition would handle the situation better than the member of the ruling party. So, the identity of the opposition depends on how it is treated, if you treat them as insignificant and valueless then the opposition will be seen by everyone as trash. Oppositions are not given the same status which is very bad for democracy.

Q. Since we decided to keep the theme of our magazine Democracy on the Brink? We really wanted to understand the perspective of common people, so we explored through field visits. Is there any difference in the idea of democracy between segments of society based on the privileges people carry?

a) Is Democracy on the brink? If it is how do we move ahead and revive?

That is a really difficult question to answer! To answer your question I have a bicycle reference based on Abraham Lincoln's definition of Democracy, of the people, for the people, by the people. In a village, the Sarpanch has a cycle and goes to the market to buy things and he gives the cycle to people as he likes. Initially, he used to give the cycle to some people then slowly started giving it to more people so they can go to the market and buy things themselves (For the people). This analogy can be held by the king as well. A king can also do the same. Now the nature of the wants of people changes. Now they do not just want the cycle but they want to be a part of the decision-making and explore, experiment, and compare to new markets, and better options. (By the people for their benefit). Now the Sarpanch wants his cycle back, but people felt it is their cycle and if not, then they should have their cycle (Of the people).

Now if we talk about the privilege of people to even think about Democracy comes from what they aspire for. Against arbitrary power, people need protection, which is also called law and order. People can peacefully do their activities and have fewer restrictions in running their businesses, which is an example of good governance but this does not alone guarantee Democracy. Just by getting something, everyone getting ration, the gas cylinder does not guarantee Democracy again. Participation, and shaping the policy by beneficiaries, and stakeholders are also necessary at the same time. For example, when you make food yourself by selecting the ingredients or choosing the specific fabric and getting it sewn by a tailor with measurements is a far different experience from restaurant food or ready-made clothes.

Democracy is not like a human invention, that you make it and will work like that. There is permanent participation required. If everyone thinks just about themselves and doesn't care about others, then if the govt does do anything as per its wishes only you will remember your mistakes, but by then it will be too late. Nowadays we know less about the government but the government knows everything about us. This continuous state of surveillance will break families, this totalitarian state makes it dangerous for a democracy to sustain. If we talk about the invasion of citizens' private space, then in that sense Democracy is really on the brink! Controlling everything through tech and algorithms, ending free speech, humor, opposition, and arresting stand-up comics, this is happening everywhere! Anti-Blasphemy laws used to exist in past with other nations but now we are doing it to ours too. We are trying our best to become the worst of the worst communities.

The way forward is that a time will come when people will become so frustrated that they'll revolt and reform. These will be the people who have nothing to lose, don't have power or wealth, and they'll change the world.

b) What would you say for the children watching the news, everything happening around them; the kind of reflections they will portray with time?

For children, it is our responsibility that we don't restrict their creativity and imagination. Their freedom of space to learn and grow should not be limited. Learn from them and let them learn, make them sensitive, and make a space for them where it's not bad to think.

Interviewing Panel: Biswajit Sahoo, Palak Agrawal, Sakshi Sharma, Piyush Dixit