

# Editorial

Monday, July 22, 2019

## The justice juggernaut

The state Government has unfailingly led the way in condoning acts of crime in the society as any righteous and sympathetic institution ought to do. The public even witnessed tears of indignation and frustration shed publicly accompanied by assurances of bringing the perpetrator(s) to book and to deliver stern and swift justice.

To be fair, the Government did send some criminals and rapists behind bars. Yet no one can deny the fact that such instances where criminals are convicted is too little, and too late. Crimes which could only have been conjured up by fiction writers have been committed in the state. Crimes that shook the collective conscience of the society have remained a mystery, and there are criminals who went scot free thanks to the incompetency of those handling the cases. On second thought, are they just being incompetent or a case of competent enough to deliberately botch up the issues to such extent that conclusions can never be reached?

The possibilities are so very real and suspiciously familiar with the public, Ministers and heads of state harboring criminals and trouble makers to do their dirty works is not a novelty. There had even been more than one occasion where such outlaws and wanted criminals were arrested along with unauthorized arms from the official residences of powerful Government officials and representatives. It does not, however mean to imply in any way that the Government is incapable of acting swiftly and decisively when it feels the urgency or the necessity to do so.

The implicit question now is: what is keeping the judicial and the executive machineries of the state from performing to the best of their abilities, with all the powers and authorities bestowed upon them? Has they been compromised or are taken up by the lure of personal wealth and benefits offered in lieu of their leniency or complicity? The society was shocked beyond belief with the audacity of crimes such as that of Rabina and Sanjit who were gunned down in broad daylight in the heart of the city, with undeniable evidences contradicting the blatant lies of the state security force broadcasted through national media and creating chaos and unrest in the state.

That very particular crime has lost its importance with the passage of time, and is bound to slip into oblivion. Can the government really afford to publicly discard such sentimental issues just because it has the wherewithal to fuddle things up? Is saving the skin of a few loyal and compliant employees mean more than denying timely justice to its citizens? What chances have the public to fancy when even such evidently cut and dried cases have been made to drag on without a befitting conclusion in sight? What are the chances of the victims from the state affected by racial crimes committed against them outside the state for availing justice and assistance from the state Government? Is the Government justified in portraying itself the victim of social outburst and defamatory allegations when its own machineries fumbles and twisted the system beyond redemption?

Action speaks louder than words, and justice delayed is justice denied. If the government values the trust and cooperation of the public, it has to vindicate itself through actions. Brute force, coercion and deception are poor substitutes for transparency, empathy and integrity.

# The Dalai Lama and Social Media, Lost in Mistranslation

Courtesy The Wire  
By : Kaveri Gill

As someone who lived in the UK for over a decade, the BBC has been a staple, hallowed institution for me. It is also a channel the Dalai Lama says he tunes into daily. So it is little wonder that his office granted an interview to a BBC journalist, Rajini Vaidyanathan, in late June this year.

Unlike the extreme vetting that is routine in today's age for media engagement with global celebrities, the endearing innocence and openness for which the Dalai Lama and Tibetans are famed resulted in a free-flowing recorded conversation. During its course, Vaidyanathan chose to put two questions to him that he'd been asked previously, the first as long ago as 1992 by the editor of *Paris Vogue* — on whether his successor could be a female, and his position on immigrants.

The Dalai Lama stood by his previous responses and said his successor could well be a woman, that she ought to be "attractive", and that immigrants should themselves think about returning to their homelands.

After the interview, Vaidyanathan took to Twitter and social media to post these "controversial" video excerpts that naturally travelled far and wide. The bait was taken and within hours, a towering global figure and role model, rare in today's jaded times for his authenticity, was taken to task across the internet, for his supposed sexism and nationalism.

What no one sought to present was the context of the Dalai Lama's comments. In the Buddhist philosophical system, especially the Nalanda School from which Tibetan Buddhism originates, there are meticulously defined results of purified actions of mind, speech and body (or more simply put, *karma*, the understanding of which is taken to the pinnacle of sophistication in this system), including what might be considered an "attractive" form in the mundane sense. The foremost Nalanda scholar, Nagarjuna, delineates these in *Precious Garland* (Chapter 2), as



does Chandrakirti in *Entering the Middle Way* (Chapter 6, Verse 6).

The present Dalai Lama became a monk at the age of two — and eight decades later, is the embodiment of the best of the Nalanda philosophical tradition. One may choose to interpret his first remark as deriving from this complex understanding, of course, but only if the interviewer decides to see where the interviewee is coming from and not seek confirmation of an *a priori* bias.

Let's next recount the Dalai Lama's impeccable record on supporting women, in three contexts: the Tibetan Buddhist monastic tradition; Tibetan society; and more generally. In a monumental breakthrough from the past, all due to his vision and determination to see this change through in his lifetime, in December 2016, the Dalai Lama conferred Gesheema degrees — the highest academic accolades in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, the equivalent of a doctoral degree — on 20 nuns in a historic ceremony in south India. What was previously the preserve of male monastics alone has now become an avenue for female nuns as well.

It is in this light that his comment that the next Dalai Lama could be female signalled that the highest bastions of religious leadership in his tradition

were now equal opportunity in gender terms. As an aside, in the Vajrayana vehicle, to disrespect a woman is considered a serious infraction, and there is little chance that a monk who has assiduously kept his vows all his life as he has, will transgress that injunction by making some off the cuff comment, as was willfully misconstrued in this instance. Tibetan society is more gender equal than many societies. To hear firsthand accounts from Tibetan women themselves on how the Dalai Lama has been the pivot in ensuring that the community in exile sees a significant number of women in leadership positions, as well as in the Tibetan freedom struggle and across all spheres, it is worth reading Madhu Rajput's forthcoming book, *Occupational Mobility in an Exiled Community: A Socio-economic Study of Tibetan Women in Dharamshala and Dehradun*. Apart from contributions of many informants from diverse backgrounds, extensive interviews with Rinchen Khandro, former director, Tibetan Nun's Project; Dolma Yangchen, president, Tibetan Women's Association; Namgyal Lhamo Takla, an acclaimed Tibetan author and founder director of Songsten Library, Dehradun; Dolma

Tshering, member of parliament, Central Tibetan Administration; and Namgyal Dolkar Lhagari, the first female president of Gu Chu Sum, are especially telling in this regard.

As for women in general, the Dalai Lama has publicly said on more than one occasion that for a peaceful world, it is necessary to see more women in power across the globe, and that since physical strength is no longer the metric of value it once was in our evolutionary history, there's no reason for women to assume a secondary position in any field.

Turning last to the Dalai Lama's comment on immigrants and refugees choosing to return to their countries of origin, in order to contribute by transferring much needed skills and knowledge, the comment has to be understood in the context of his and most Tibetans-in-exile's desire to return to Tibet in their lifetimes.

The Dalai Lama is coming from a position of 60 years of upholding with great honour the Middle Way Approach in the struggle to get China to grant Tibet autonomy and allow its peoples cultural, linguistic and religious freedom. Nowhere is his heartfelt personal suggestion proscribing settling in foreign shores and a call for a forcible return for economic or other immigrants across the globe, such as the BBC journalist's own parents, who chose to make Britain their home, just as she as a second-generation immigrant is choosing to make their country of origin hers. It is truly ironic how many Tibetans born in India post-1959 might make the exact same decision Vaidyanathan has, were they given a real choice by China!

The interview's fallout on the fickle internet is not really going to dent the image of a globally beloved icon who wears the same pair of spectacle frames for decades on end; carries *tsampa* (barley porridge) in his monk's bag in case of delays in his travel schedule; and has tirelessly, yet skillfully and with great humour, carried the heavy burden of a people, a religion and a language's fate, almost single handedly resurrecting every single Tibetan institution in exile that was destroyed in 1959.

It is a life he has recently described as being a difficult one. And it is for a reason that he is the only Dalai Lama in the lineage for whom great masters of each of the four traditions of Tibetan Buddhism composed prayers of auspiciousness and long life, because they knew, as discerning others do, what disproportionate responsibility has been his since childhood. The Fourteenth Dalai Lama, inside and out, is a crystal clear reflection of each sentient being's finest possibility. It's plain to see in his lustrous, glowing, ever smiling, and dare I say it, extraordinarily attractive visage! Kaveri Gill teaches at Shiv Nadar University, as well as pursuing the Nalanda Masters Course at Tibet House, New Delhi. The views expressed in the piece are personal. The author may be contacted on [gill.kaveri@gmail.com](mailto:gill.kaveri@gmail.com)

## Science fiction

### The "golden age" of science fiction

Literature and performance  
Written By: Bruce Sterling

The previously mentioned Hugo Gernsback, an emigrant from Luxembourg based in New York City, made a living publishing technical magazines for radio and electrical enthusiasts. Noting the growing fondness of his youthful audience for fictional accounts of thrilling technical wonders, Gernsback began to republish the works of Verne and Poe and the early writings of H.G Wells in great profusion. Gernsback's magazine *Amazing Stories* (founded 1926) broke ground for many imitators and successors, including his own later periodicals *Science Wonder Stories*, *Air Wonder Stories*, and *Scientific Detective Monthly* (later known as *Amazing Detective Tales*), and a torrent of other pulp publications. This practice soon yielded so much fruit that many people, especially Americans, falsely assumed that Americans had created science fiction.

Cover of the November 1926 issue of *Amazing Stories* by Frank R. Paul. The issue featured a new story by Garrett P. Serviss and reprints of works by H.G Wells and Jules Verne. *Photograph, Christine E. Haycock, M.D.*  
By 1934 SF readership in the United

States was large enough to support the establishment of the Science Fiction League, Gernsback's professionally sponsored fan organization (with local chapters in the United Kingdom and Australia). Like a kind of freemasonry, SF fandom spread across the United States. Eager young devotees soon had their own stories published, and, as time passed, they became the hardened, canny professionals of the SF pulp world. Literary groups such as New York's Futurians, Milwaukee's Fictioneers, and the Los Angeles Science Fiction League argued ideology in amateur presses. Conventions were held, feuds and friendships flourished, and science fiction began its long climb, never to respectability but rather toward mass acceptance.

Another influential figure was John W. Campbell, Jr., who from 1937 to 1971 edited *Astounding Science Fiction*. Campbell's insistence on accurate scientific research (he attended the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and received his B.S. in physics from Duke University) and some sense of literary style shaped the career of almost every major American science fiction writer from the period. As a writer, Campbell is noteworthy for

his story *Who Goes There?* (1938) and its film versions (*The Thing from Another World* [1951] and *The Thing* [1982] and [2011]), but he is best remembered as an editor. Many fans refer to Campbell's early years at *Astounding*, roughly 1938-46, with his frequent publication of stories by Robert Heinlein, Isaac Asimov, A.E. Van Vogt, and Theodore Sturgeon, as SF's golden age.

Certain literary critics countered wittily that the "golden age" of science fiction is the chronological age of 14—the reputed age at which many fans become hooked on science fiction and the all-too-typical literary level of a genre relished far more for its new scientific "ideas" than its literary merits. Nevertheless, even the sharpest critic would have to admit that for all its often juvenile nature—particularly as conceived in the United States—science fiction was a singular source of scientific wonder and discovery that inspired generations of scientists and engineers to pursue in reality what they had dreamed about in their youth.

**Soviet science fiction**  
Only the gargantuan world of Soviet state publishing could match the production of U.S. science fiction. The Soviet promotion of "scientific socialism" created a vital breathing space for science fiction within Soviet society. The genre's often allegorical nature gave Soviet writers of science fiction many creative opportunities for relatively free expression.

**Aelita** Movie poster depicting the characters Goli (Yury Zavatsky; left) and Tuskub (Konstantin Eggert) in the Russian silent film classic *Aelita* (1924). *Herzhenson-Allen Archive*  
Soviet science fiction was broad and deep enough to spawn several subgenres, such as the techno-thriller *Red Detective* stories of Marxist world revolution and many Cosmonaut space operas. Among its masterpieces were the Constructivist silent film *Aelita* (1924), based on the 1923 novel of the same title by Aleksey Tolstoy. The film's imaginative set and costume designs had a strong artistic influence on Fritz Lang's film *Metropolis* (1927). Both *Aelita*'s design and its scenes of an Earthman leading a Martian proletarian revolt against an oppressive regime were echoed in the 1930s American film serial *Flash Gordon*. Another notable work of this period was Yevgeny Zamiatin's *My* (written in 1920, circulated in manuscript and not published in Russian until 1952; translated into English as *We* in 1924), which won a wide readership overseas, though the author's satiric daring led to his banishment under Joseph Stalin. The book's depiction of life under a totalitarian state influenced the other two great dystopian novels of the 20th century, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) and George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-four* (1949; films 1956 and 1984).

**Science fiction after World War II**  
**New directions in fiction**

After World War II, publishers largely abandoned the pulps in favour of paperback books and paperback-like "digests." By that time, however, science fiction had inspired such passionate devotion that it moved with ease into small specialty presses. Two new digest magazines in particular—*The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* (1949–) and *Galaxy Science Fiction* (1950–80)—prospered. Science fiction also grew in popular esteem after the advent of the atomic bomb (1945) and the launch of Sputnik (1957).

Under the editorial guidance of the new SF digests, American science fiction of the 1950s became more sophisticated, urbane, and satiric, with raw technophilia waning in favour of more anthropologically based speculation about societies and cultures. Many books (and film adaptations) from the decade were rife with Cold War-induced fear and paranoia. Perhaps the most representative novel is Walter M. Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1960; first serialized, 1955–57), which describes the postnuclear holocaust efforts of a Catholic religious order to preserve knowledge. Another work, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1955; films 1956 and 1978), in a clear case of communist paranoia, relates the story of ordinary people being replaced by look-alikes who operate as part of a collective body.

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