

Editorial

Monday, March 19, 2019

Way to go as but hopes stir

Hope and ambition are an intrinsic part of human beings. People almost always find a way to wriggle out of any situation however difficult or seemingly hopeless it might seem. This irrepressible human trait can most vividly be witnessed and experienced in our state. Beset with problems and disappointments in every sphere of life- be it the crony politics and contract culture pervading every public development projects and schemes taking precedence over concepts of progress and development, the duality and conflicts on culture and increasingly alienating stands, artistic constraints and vigilantism that is slowly yet surely chocking freedom of artistic expression and individuality, or worse still, the rise of a breed of human parasites and opportunists ready to pounce on and capitalize upon the slightest hint of weakness of anybody or anything, employing any and every means at their disposal- connections, coercions, threat or even violence to have their way.

The perfect ingredients for a superhit blockbuster, one might even summarise with enthusiasm, only if it isn't for the grim reality of the situation. Just as the darkest hour precedes the dawn, so does the seemingly endless feeling of gloom and despondency in the society gives rise to an undying flicker of hope and expectations, for as things stand now, things couldn't get any worse than it already is, and that we can only go forward, for the uncomfortable fact remains that our society as a whole is standing with its back against the wall at the moment. And so we move, or at least we hope to.

The Imphal-Dimapur national highway has been assured of upgrading to make it withstand the vagaries of nature throughout the year which will translate to increased efficiency in connectivity, decrease in disruptions in transportation of essential commodities thereby stabilizing prices, increase in comfort and safety to travelers, among others.

The Thoubal Multipurpose Project which was scheduled to be made operational from this year onwards could not be converted into action, and efforts are being made to complete the project in the shortest timeframe possible, never mind the fact that the project commenced more than three and half decades earlier. After completion, and on operation of the multipurpose project, acres of fields and arable lands will be provided water for irrigation thereby helping in increasing production while thousands will have access to safe drinking water thereby improving sanitation and decreasing instances of water-borne diseases.

The project also proposes to help generate electricity which will add to the available resource at present and help make the state less dependent on others. The Solid Waste Treatment Plant at Lamdeng which begin operation serves little purpose in making the city clean.

Hopes and expectation of the project about making the city and adjoining areas clean turn as another flop show, not to mention the clogging of drainages causing flooding and water stagnation raising the threat of spreading vector-borne diseases such as Malaria, Dengue, Japanese Encephalitis etc.

A host of other developmental works are either in the offing or are already in various stages of completion. While the increasing pace and seemingly increasing amount of developmental activities bodes well for the state which has been reeling under numerous forms of disruptions mainly due to the lack of opportunities for development and infrastructures that could made it so, past experiences has put a huge question mark on the end result of these efforts. Those entrusted with the projects should take a proactive role in seeing that these vital activities are carried out according to specifications and in time for the people of this state to stand a fighting chance of catching up with the rest of the world. It is the end result which will ultimately prove the intentions of the leaders true- or otherwise.

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Darryl D'Monte, an Inspiring Editor Who Always Made Space for Young Writers

Courtesy BY: Anikendra Sen

An age in the Indian media is passing, and Darryl's departure makes the end of that age even more imminent.

This is now becoming a cliché. Even as our kind shuffles off the mortal coil one by one and alarmingly fast, the cry goes up: "The last of the Greats! They don't make them like that anymore!" Cliché or not, Darryl D'Monte deserved all that and more.

There were three of them who stand out, I believe all of them starting out as junior assistant editors: Darryl, Dileep Padgaonkar and Prem Shankar Jha. The first, fresh out of Cambridge, drove an old black round-bottomed Fiat from his home in Bandra to the railway station and from there took the "local" to Victoria Terminus. The third, from Oxford, on a tiny Rajdoot "Bobby" bike, was so overwhelmed that it seemed as if he was floating down the road on nothing. The second, from Sorbonne, perhaps India's first and only 'French' journalist to write in elegant English, drove straight into a tree and swore never to drive again, replacing the car with his trademark muffers and scarves. They all joined the *Times of India* in Bombay around the same time and made things incredibly different from the status quo.

Darryl clearly belonged to Bombay's aristocracy, although he would have been deeply embarrassed to be described this way. His ancestors settled on a largish tract of swampy land, I would like to believe around the time that Catherine of Braganza handed it over to Charles II of England as her dowry when India's first city was still a village and perhaps much before Bengal's later-day aristocrats were conferred with land and title by the British after the Permanent Settlement. That swamp later became Bandra, home to the Bollywood glitterati. There's a D'Monte Park built on land donated by the family close to where he stayed to testify to this. But Darryl never mentioned this. One thing he did mention, in passing conversation, was that he was "east Indian" as opposed to a Goan, as many outsiders mistook him for in the early 1970s. Since Bombay was in western India, this term did not appear to make sense. Govind Talwalkar, the late editor of *Maharashtra Times*, frequently caused further confusion in the newsroom of the Old Lady of Boribunder, calling him "Demento" for some reason. Clearly Darryl's grandfather, or maybe his great-grandfather, would have qualified as a Rai Bahadur or a Rajah but for their

religion. The snooty Brits were clearly loathe to elevate "natives" of their own faith, while seeing no problems in conferring titles and other paraphernalia like umpteenth gun-salutes to newly created aristocrats from among the Heathens.

Also read | Dileep Padgaonkar, Forever a 'Times Man', Long After The TOI Had Moved On Darryl came to the *Times of India* in 1969, four years before I joined as a trainee journalist. Apart from writing the usual "on the one hand this but on the other hand that and what will happen only time will tell" sort of non-committal edits that the *TOI* was and continues to be famous for, he also had a line function running the *Sunday Magazine*. This was spun off into a separate entity called *Times Weekly*. Darryl came into his own, encouraging others to write, not just famous names but plebeian in-house journo like me, as long as they had something to say, a passion, a desire and the ability to say it coherently.

I joined the *Times* group in 1973 and was working with the flamboyant Khushwant Singh, the iconic editor of the *Illustrated Weekly of India* and poster boy of the entire organisation. An "aristocrat" from New Delhi which his father, Sir Sobha Singh, built for the British, Khushwant had a background similar to Darryl, but they were poles apart in temperament. Darryl was more suited to the understated realms of the higher echelons of *TOI*. Khushwant, despite his age, was noisy and in your face. He got more and more boisterous as the circulation and fan base of *The Weekly* grew. Both Khushwant and Darryl were, however, the same when it came to encouraging young talent.

While Khushwant focused on explosive circulation-led growth, Darryl concentrated on creating "explosions" of his own, at least two of which shook the cultivated aloofness fostered by the *TOI* editors. Soon after I joined the *Illustrated Weekly*, Darryl and the *Times Weekly* set off a bombshell. Darryl has written about this in *The Wire*, so I won't dwell upon this at length. In Darryl's own self-effacing candid words:

"My editor was the formidable bibliophile and stickler for clear prose, Sham Lal. In 1973, it was only due to the fact that Sham Lal had a soft spot for his young bibliophile, Dileep Padgaonkar, freshly returned from Paris and also a junior assistant editor, that he permitted an entire issue of the *Times Weekly* guest-edited by Padgaonkar to be devoted to Dalit writing. It comprised translations from Marathi poetry and prose and was titled 'Dalit Literature: Voices of the Oppressed'.

"I was ignorant of any such genre as Dalit writing and relied entirely on Padgaonkar's judgment which, it turned out, was spot-on."

The issue had stories by subsequently well-known writers such as Daya Pawar and Baburao Bagul.

However, it was the poems published that were incendiary. The cover page had one such by Namdeo Dhasal that began: Man, you should explode Yourself to bits to start with Jive to a savage drum beat Smoke hash, smoke ganja Chew opium, bite lalpari Guzzle country booze—if too broke." The poem caused the normally reticent Sham Lal to explode and was replaced.

The issue created a sensation in the elite English-speaking world of Bombay and spread the Dalit voice to other parts.

A year later, Darryl made Sham Lal unhappy with an entire issue of *Times Weekly* focused on the Indian Left, notably the various communist parties. Nothing terribly wrong with that, except for the fact that virtually none of Sham Lal's left-wing friends got a look in. A virtually unknown M.J. Akbar and a total nobody (me) were given endless space to analyse and dissect the Left movement in the country. My efforts at examining the programmes of the various communist parties gained extra mileage thanks to the late A.R. Desai, who had it reprinted by the CG Shah Memorial Trust as a pamphlet.

Also read | Memories of Dileep Padgaonkar, the True Cosmopolitan

The late Sham Lal had another explosion. To his credit, he did nothing more than let Darryl know how angry he was. After all, Sham Lal was one of the world's great editors and a liberal the likes of whom does not exist anymore. In today's world, the issue would never have seen the light of day and the "conspirators" would have certainly been unceremoniously given the boot.

My encounters with Darryl, even as I went through the routine grind from the city morgue to Rotary Clubs, increased after Indira Gandhi imposed an Emergency all over India. After a short burst of defiance lasting two weeks during which the *Illustrated Weekly* ceased publication in protest, Khushwant caved in - only to re-emerge declaring Sanjay Gandhi the "man of the year", although Jayaprakash Narayan got the largest number of votes from the readers.

K.R. Sunder Rajan, an assistant editor in the *TOI*, was trundled off to jail for openly defying the Emergency and speaking in

support of JP in public meetings. However, Sham Lal refused to condemn or even criticise the Emergency, despite the fact that the court-appointed directors of the company had passed a resolution to that effect. He said he could not risk the livelihood of hundreds on a matter of principle.

In a burst of democratic fervour, Darryl and a number of us held a meeting in the *TOI* newsroom that met with enthusiastic support. The situation was very different in the bowels of the building, where the press workers met our fervent pleas to cease publication with just one question: "How will we feed our families and ourselves?" Sham Lal had been proved right.

After years of separation, Darryl and I once again came together in our labours in the 1990s, first in the *TOI* where we jointly produced the *Sunday Times of India* (which quickly became India's largest Sunday paper) and thereafter as resident editors of *TOI* Bombay and Delhi respectively. Darryl and his team rose splendidly to the occasion in their coverage of the Bombay riots 1992. We left the *TOI* together with Dileep and Arvind Das to establish our own company, the Asia Pacific Communications Associates (APCA), in 1994.

That experiment ended rather quickly, as far as Darryl was concerned, for a variety of reasons, mostly financial. We were far from doing well, unable to meet expenses leave alone salaries then. Besides, we were into television. Dileep and Darryl quickly and correctly concluded that this was not a medium meant for us. We went our separate ways thereafter, Darryl becoming a major champion for environmental journalism and an author as well, and I to focus more in the newspaper world of Nepal.

In our increasingly shrinking world of friends and people like us, word is doing the rounds that with Darryl gone just one of the four "APCA founders" is left. As I said earlier, of the three exciting talents that joined the *TOI* virtually at the same time, just one, Prem Shankar Jha, remains and continues to write in his erudite and feisty way. I guess it's becoming an increasingly lonely world these days. Perhaps what the last of the dinosaurs must have felt like. An age is passing and Darryl's departure makes the end of that age even more imminent.

Anikendra Sen is a journalist who shuttles between New Delhi and Kathmandu.

Note from the Founding Editors

Courtesy The Wire

Instead of the traditional models of family-owned, corporate-funded and controlled or advertising-driven newspapers, websites and TV channels, can we reimagine the media as a joint venture in the public sphere between journalists, readers and a concerned citizenry? One in which decisions over what to cover and how, who to hire and where to send a correspondent or photographer, are taken by editors on the basis of professional judgment, without worrying about what a proprietor or politician, official or advertiser might think or want. In a democracy, this is the least

that readers or viewers expect. And yet, the business model that underpins most Indian news media seldom allows editors the freedom they need. Worse, it has slowly eroded professional standards of reporting and contaminated the media ecosystem with toxic practices like rampant editorializing, paid news and 'private treaties'. Increasingly, media houses are reluctant to spend money on newsgathering; and as they develop secondary business interests and 'no go areas' proliferate, their newsrooms suffer further collateral damage - especially as these interests often depend on proximity to politicians and bureaucrats. Is it

any wonder that readers have begun to notice the erosion of professional standards, ethical breaches and fall in quality? They now feel shortchanged. The founding premise of *The Wire* is this: if good journalism is to survive and thrive, it can only do so by being both editorially and financially independent. This means relying principally on contributions from readers and concerned citizens who have no interest other than to sustain a space for quality journalism. As a publication, *The Wire* will be firmly committed to the public interest and democratic values. Apart from providing authoritative analysis and

commentary, the aim, as our resources grow, is to build ourselves as a platform driven by good old-fashioned reporting on issues of national and international importance and interest. Being on the web also means using new media technologies to change the way stories are told. With data and interactive charts, video and audio as integral parts of the narrative structure when warranted. We start today on a modest note, constrained not by our vision but by our resources. In the meantime, we make a simple appeal: read us, share and tweet our content, and send us your feedback.