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The Dr. S. L. Bhyrappa Memorial Lecture

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Inaugural Dr S. L. Bhyrappa Memorial Lecture by Hon'ble Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman ji

Namaskar. Vikram Sampath, Rajalakshmi ji, Devesh Varma ji, and a very involved distinguished audience. Thank you for giving me this opportunity. I can see some very rigorous and deeply involved organizational work done over now, as much as I know, 12–13 years by Vikram for putting it all this together. And I congratulate the winners of today's various categories of awards.



This is an exercise which has started, if you ask me, a bit late. That's not to undermine Vikram's efforts; India needed this kind of an effort for over at least four, five decades. We've missed out on it, and in fact, the missing out on these kind of efforts for over four or five decades has actually made the opponents far more powerful in propagating history or in propagating our social life in a very different and untrue fashion. Of course, I will partly refer to it as I go on while talking.

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and his birthday today—of course India celebrates that as Teachers' Day, while we celebrate Guru Purnima as our Teachers' Day. Radhakrishnan, for his scholarship and his extensive appreciation of India's Vedic traditions, will certainly be remembered September 5th. And India's secular history tells us that is Teachers' Day as well. So teachers can be worshipped any number of days: Guru Purnima and on September 5th.

So it's a privilege to stand before you this morning to talk about so many different things which are critical to our generation, the coming generation, whether it is Gen Z or Gen Alpha.

And I thank Vikram again for creating that opportunity to have this discussed on a very rainy day in Delhi. I'm sure there would have been a lot more people here to listen to all the great work done by Vikram. But the thinker and the teachers are not separable, so we worship both of them. And before I return to talking about Dr. Bhyrappa in the memorial lecture, the prizes and the naming of the prizes today deserve a special mention. These are three—three great heroes who kept the spirit up: whether it is R.C. Majumdar or S.L. Bhyrappa or Anant Pai.

The selection of these awards' names themselves tell us what giants have been missed out by either social and the historical common people of India and also the elite of India, who determined what went into our history books, what went into our newspapers, what went into our cultural academies, and so on. So this selection itself deserves such a commiseration and commendable effort from your side, Vikram. And it's very meaningful that India has come to celebrate S.L. Bhyrappa as a novelist or as a person who set the path for us to walk in an India which was increasingly making it difficult for people who followed his line.

His doctoral thesis bore a title that defined his entire destiny: *Satya Mattu Soundarya*, meaning "Truth and Beauty". It was submitted to the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda in 1966. His scholarly journey was very hard one. In his autobiography, *Bhitti*, Bhyrappa recalls a childhood marked by severe poverty, the early loss of his mother and an unstable home, the loss of siblings and relatives during the plague. Must have been a very difficult life you cannot gather in words.



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So he was raised in different periods by relatives in different parts of the state. He pursued his education through hardship. These realities that have been lived by him—he lived through this—but gave maturity to his writing. He was not bitter. Restraint was a character of his writing, an unsentimental realism. So that lived experience was matched by an extraordinary rigor of preparation. Bhyrappa did not write about world until he had tried to enter into it. Before writing *Mandra*, his major novel about classical musicians—and here is Vikram also working on music and musicians—he taught himself classical music and spent extended periods with singers.

So, he wanted to live that experience before he wrote about it. That is why when he wrote about it, there was so much authenticity, genuineness, and you

could feel it directly in every word he wrote. So, he lived and stayed extended periods with singers. He wanted to understand the art and lives behind that world: ambition, discipline, insecurity, and the complex relationships within that world. For *Parva*, the other classic that he wrote, he traveled to places associated with the Mahabharata, including going to Kurukshetra, Hastinapura. He also studied communities in the Himalayan region where forms of fraternal polyandry had survived into recent times.

He could have written Mahabharata, he could have seen all the secondary sources, he could have analyzed the various Mahabharata written in so many different languages in India already. But no, he went to those places. He wanted to get a sense being together with those people. The extent that an author who genuinely wants to communicate with his reader goes through—the pains he goes through—actually tells you so much more about the author himself, much more than what even the book would say. But Bhyrappa was made of that stuff. So this allowed him to ask how much and how such families and such family structures would actually shape affection, duty, jealousy, and also intimacy.

So he first entered the world, and only then did he recreate it for us. This immersion explains one of the greatest strength of his work: the subtlety with which he renders human relationships. His characters are never ideologically cut out. We see how people react under pressure, how duty and desire collide, and how a small change of feeling can actually alter an entire relationship. The reader does not merely follow the narrative; the reader feels present within it. So behind this method stood a clear philosophy of literature. In a book called *Naaneke Bareyuttene*—"Why do I write?"—Bhyrappa rejected the idea that literature should become an instrument of any 'ism', whether left, whether right, or otherwise, or a vehicle for a prescribed program of social progress.

So, drawing on Bharata's *Natya Shastra*, he argued that literature should immerse the reader in rasa: wonder, sorrow, courage, tenderness, and the full range of human emotion—the navarasa, as we call it. Its task is to deepen experience and refine sensibility, not to dictate a political conclusion. That is why his novels feel lived rather than manufactured.



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Allow me a personal reflection on how Dr. Bhyrappa first entered my consciousness. Decades ago, I watched *Vamshavruksha* performed as a play—very amateur group, but they played it. Sitting in the audience, watching those characters wrestle with tradition and duty, the tension of that performance stayed with me. This was in Tiruchi, in Tamil Nadu.

I bring this up because the stage is not merely a setting in my memory; it is a central metaphor of what I wish to place before you today. When we look at Dr. Bhyrappa's literary trajectory, he experienced two distinct peaks, separated by around 15 years. The first was an artistic peak between 1965 and 1979: the era of masterworks like *Vamshavruksha*, *Gruhabhanga*, and *Daatu*, which earned him the Sahitya Akademi Award

in 1975, and finally *Parva*. The second was the peak of unprecedented public resonance, starting around 2007, when *Aavarana* sold out before publication and saw 10 reprints in 5 months—a record in Indian publishing—while *Parva* has reached 19 editions.

Six of his novels were adapted for cinema by leading minds in Indian films. *Vamshavruksha* won Girish Karnad the National Award in 1971, while Girish Kasaravalli brought *Naayi Neralu* to the screen. Yet here lies a telling paradox: the very stalwarts who adapted Bhyrappa, earning national laurels for doing so, were among the figures who later turned on him with severe critical hostility. It is his honesty that got him boxed. Why was he boxed in this way? It had nothing to do with his literary craft. It had everything to do with his unyielding honesty of thought and articulation.

On complex historical figures like Tipu Sultan, he refused to soften archival findings to suit contemporary political comfort. At the age of 91, he stated his conclusions pointedly: "*Tipu moolatha kroori*"—in Kannada, that's what Bhyrappa said: Tipu was fundamentally a cruel person. And "*Tipuvannu hero maadikkondu bareyuttaare*", meaning "they keep making Tipu into a hero"—again, Bhyrappa's observation. And it is this kind of intellectual honesty—honesty in stating what he found from the historical records and honesty in articulating it—that made him be boxed.

It was convenient for everybody to put him into, "Oh, he belongs to that category of people who wants to bring in a different history, whilst this is the history we want to give you. Buy it, take it, or leave it. But no, we won't give place for the other history." The other history is not "other"—that was the fact. These words of Bhyrappa are not mine. He said it in Mysuru on 14th November 2022. I'm sure you will be able to get those details. And he said it at the launch of the play *Tipu Nija Kanasugalu*. What was, in substance, a statement of archival research was attacked as political harshness. Yet he was always clear about the boundary of his craft.

"*Bareyuvudu nanna maadhyama. Naanu bareyutheeni, benki haakodilla.*" He said this in Kannada: "Writing is my medium. I write. I do not set things on fire." And this was during the Nrupatunga Award address, 19th January 2018. So Dr. Bhyrappa was not suppressed into silence at all, but the gatekeeping occurred at the level of institutional ranking. U.R. Ananthamurthy, who pioneered the Navya movement in Karnataka, dismissed him—dismissed Bhyrappa—as a debater rather than a novelist. And this was sometime in May 2007 that Ananthamurthy thought he should just put Bhyrappa down by saying he can only debate, he can't do any writing as a novelist.

Chandrashekhara Patil, then president of Kannada Sahitya Parishat, attacked *Aavarana* in a very derogatory manner. He was celebrated by the reading public, but not by the institutional gatekeepers. Yet the entrenched ecosystem refused to rank him alongside its own anointed figures. Critics who judged him most harshly received the Jnanpith awards; Bhyrappa never received it. This brings us directly to fundamental distortion in the vocabulary of our national and intellectual discourse. In the conventional political lexicon, we speak easily of various shades. We hear



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of the conservative liberal, the liberal liberal, and the extremist liberal. These are titles given so that people can get boxed.

Yet in modern India, look at how the scale is arbitrarily rigged. An Indian conservative liberal who presents documented archival facts is instantly titled as an extreme right-winger. Notice that this label of extremism is never applied in the other direction. An objective, upfront, fact-driven scholar is never permitted to occupy the middle ground, never acknowledged as central liberal, a frank liberal, or an honest liberal. There is no scale in our public conversation that possesses a midpoint. It is as though the word "liberal" became the private monopoly of those who view Indian society from one left ideological corner alone. So leftist ideological corner—and here you have the Vice Chancellor Santishree facing it everyday.

This is the fault line between authentic Indian liberal values and an imposed liberalism. The first is an ancient habit of debate rooted in *purva paksha*: the requirement to state your opponent's case in its strongest, most articulate form before offering a rebuttal. That was Indian tradition; the *purva paksha* stated it. The second is an important membership card, where a self-appointed gatekeeper decides who gets entry into the stage or who doesn't. A confident civilization requires its public discourse to function like an open stage. There must be room on the left side of the stage and on the right side, and above all, at the center there should be a place.



Thinkers must be able to enter from both sides—they're the actors, they're going to come on, they will be in the center to play it out to you—on the right side and above all at the center. So thinkers must be able to enter from both sides, carry their arguments to center stage, and let ideas contend in the open. It is up to the viewers to think and form a view. Our memories call this a *manthan*, an intellectual *samudra manthan*. Just as Devas and Asuras took their position on either side of the Mount Mandara, it was only through the friction of opposing forces that the amrita of truth emerged. And that's our philosophy, that's our

tradition, that's in our DNA.

That play never ends. It sends the audience home with questions and seeds of independent inquiry. So, the audience see both the sides churning and churning, pulling from each of their own side, and what comes out is there for the audience to see. For decades, however, our cultural and intellectual ecosystem allowed one side of the stage to dominate disproportionately, while alternative traditions of thought were pushed to the back across literature, academia, music, theater, cinema—everywhere. This disproportionate presence of one side—one ideological side—to the extent that it could efface the other in total, but for a few Bhyrappas.

A stage with actors from only one side does not produce a play; it delivers an ideological monologue. Dr. Bhyrappa's intellectual courage lay in ensuring that the other wing remained occupied. While institutional juries resisted, he shattered that ceiling from the outside, supported directly by millions of his readers. He proved that the second wing had a vibrant audience that the establishment had long claimed did not exist at all. But this architecture of denial—I would like to leave that as the predominant point of discussion which should continue in this country.



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All this has a very long root. The crowding out of India's intellectual stage was well underway before 1947. It began in the colonial historiography. You heard the last speaker, the recipient of the award, telling you about the various points at which denial had set in. I didn't mean to say that here, but the history as we were today—Vikram was rightly saying Bengal dominates today's awards. Bengal: the war about which we hear when Clive fought the Battle of Plassey, Palashi. The history that we read does not ever say about the, like Tipu, the cruelty of the defeated ruler of Bengal.

That the people—look at our fate—that the people of Bengal, wherever post the Battle of Plassey Clive went, he was welcomed by the people for having defeated the cruel ruler! Unfortunate, but these are histories not shown. "Oh, an Indian king, nationalist king was defeated by an English merchant," is what you will probably hear, but you don't hear the cruelty of this man who was defeated. That doesn't make a virtue of Clive, but the fact remains: these are the ways in which history have been whitewashed. So in his Minute on Indian Education, Macaulay asserted: "I have never found one among them"—I quote—"I have never found one among them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia."



"All the historical information which has been collected from all the books written in Sanskrit language is less valuable than what may be found in the most paltry abridgements used at preparatory schools in England," unquote. I hope the gravity of the nonsense that is said in this quote is gone down into our heads. And this was recorded in the General Department, 2nd February 1835, *Selections from Educational Records* of Macaulay. He had opened that very Minute by admitting—look at the irony and the arrogance: the Minute that he wrote begins with the line, "I have no knowledge of either Sanskrit or Arabic."

But the audacity with which he would conclude! He confessed his ignorance first and delivered his verdict immediately afterwards, and at no stage did he trouble himself with the evidence. A verdict arrived at in that order is a sentence passed before the trial has even begun, and it became the education policy of a subcontinent. In 1817, James Mill published *The History of British India*, the standard text at Haileybury where the Company trained the men it sent to govern us. And this James Mill 1817 *History of British India* was written without ever setting foot in India or learning an Indian language, holding that a properly qualified man could learn more of India in a year in his study in England than in a lifetime of using his eyes and ears in India.

And contrast that with what I said about how Bhyrappa went to places, lived with people, understood the background, and then wrote the book. And he gets boxed in, and this is given continuously to us; this is what is being fed in our schools and colleges. The civilization they were dismissing had kept sophisticated historical registers for thousands of years. Kalhana, writing in Kashmir between 1148 and 1150 Common Era, opened the *Rajatarangini* by defining the historian's duty. And what does he say in Sanskrit? I translate it: "That noble person alone is praiseworthy," he says, "That noble person alone is praiseworthy whose speech, free from love and hatred, remains impartial like that of a judge while recounting past events."

Kalhana, *Rajatarangini*, record from 1148 Common Era. And you have Macaulay later in the centuries saying he doesn't know Sanskrit or Arabic, "but here I go, I'll give you a judgment on it." This is a definition of objectivity—



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the *Rajatarangini* one which I told you—is a definition of objectivity which any modern historian would happily subscribe to, written in Sanskrit eight centuries before Macaulay. And when early nationalist scholars such as R.G. Bhandarkar, K.P. Jayaswal, and Hemchandra Raychaudhuri recovered these indigenous archives, they demonstrated India's rigorous historical consciousness. You have now a new generation of them doing it; they're here before me, and it just makes me get goosebumps. Our historians, the tradition has increasingly coming to its own being, and this is what we missed out several decades after independence.



So what followed 1947 and the price of refusing it? One might reasonably have hoped that political independence would bring intellectual decolonization along with it, and that did not happen. And no wonder Honorable Prime Minister standing on the ramparts of Red Fort had to say, "Panch Pran: get out of this colonial mindset, get out of everything that is colonial." He had to say it now. In the late 60s and 70s, under the patronage of the central education ministries, premier research institutions like ICHR, NCERT, ICSSR, and university faculties became ideological fortresses of networks. Huge, and they were supported hugely: funds, patronage.

And as a result, they succeeded in doing so many things that even till today we find it difficult to weed them out; they've been so deeply entrenched. The NCERT textbooks institutionalized class conflict and economic determinism across every epoch: Romila Thapar, *Ancient India*, 1966; R.S. Sharma, *Ancient India*, 1977; Satish Chandra,

Medieval India, 1978; Bipan Chandra, *Modern India*, 1971. Wow! Volumes and volumes, and the circulation and the mandate going to schools and colleges and universities! They became the centerpiece around which everything was narrated. The civilizational continuities of Vijayanagara, the Pallavas, the Cholas, Pandyas, the Ahoms, the Marathas, and our maritime empires were reduced to footnotes, while conquerors were allocated entire chapters.

And the price of refusing that official line was demonstrated by Bhyrappa himself in 1969. We saw that as a piece of the video on Bhyrappa himself. The central government appointed a five-member national committee headed by the diplomat G. Parthasarathi to review textbooks—school textbooks—under the banner of national integration. When the committee moved to remove documented references to the destruction of Kashi Vishwanath and Mathura temples, Dr. Bhyrappa objected on first principles. He pointed out that lakhs of pilgrims go to Kashi and Mathura every year and can see for themselves the mosques standing on demolished temple structures.

He asked directly: if history is not based on truth, what value does it have? And this I have sourced it from Bhyrappa's own account in *Vijaya Karnataka*, 8th October 2006. Parthasarathi privately—G. Parthasarathi, the diplomat, privately conceded that objections were academically valid, but maintained that state policy required the deletions. And that's why when I say patronage for the historians who distorted was huge and from the state itself. Bhyrappa refused to retreat, and about a fortnight later, the committee was reconstituted without him, which he says in the interview which has been captured in that video that we saw. His place went to an approved historian, Arjun Dev.

Memory is very rarely managed in the name of dishonesty; it is almost always managed in the name of prudence. And that is precisely what makes it so hard to resist. And this asymmetry continued in language after language. This asymmetry continued into Telugu literature. Sri Sri—Srirangam Srinivasa Rao—captured the radical imagination in *Maha Prasthanam*, writing. He says in Telugu:

"Ee desa charitra choosina emundi garvakaaranam?"



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Narajaati charitra samastham parapidana parayana bhaavam."

Look at the history of any country—I'm translating those lines—look at the history of any country: what is there to be proud of? The whole history of human race is in the pursuit of oppression. He says this in his poem called *Desa Charitralu* in *Maha Prasthanam*, 1950.

Chalam, another famous Telugu writer, went further, directly challenging established family and social structures. On the other wing stood Kavi Samrat Viswanatha Satyanarayana, who was boxed later, who defended India's civilizational continuity. When asked why the world needed another Ramayana, he opened *Ramayana Kalpavruksham* with that defiant question: "*Marala nideela Ramayanam... bannacho?*" meaning: "If you ask—the quote is—if you ask, 'Why the Ramayana yet again?', there I go: *Ramayana Kalpavruksham*." In Telugu, the gatekeepers and the way they would allow some, and the way in which they will box some others.

So Viswanatha was honored with Sahitya Akademi Award in 1962, and then the Jnanpith Award in 1970, which Sri Sri never received. He had readers, he had followers; readers were everything for him. But did any of that play equally on the stage—the metaphor that I'm creating before you? It did not. The critics and the journals, the syllabus, and the literary map were all drawn around the other wing. Viswanatha was filed away as a revisionist, revivalist, a man clinging to old meter. His scholarship was acknowledged and set aside. So if you thought that this was only in Karnataka and it was only in Andhra, worse was to come in Tamil Nadu.

I'll start from later and go backward for a minute. In February 2009, in a budget speech, the minister—I think it was Professor Anagaran—in his speech says that we restore the honor and dignity of 28 writers. Budget speech, 2009 February: "We restore the honor and dignity of 28 writers." Who, pray, are these 28 writers? I'll name them, but before I name them, these were the very writers who since 1949 or a little before that—1949 is when DMK as a party was born, and before that the Dravida Iyakkam or the Dravidian movement had already started in the name of Dravidar Kazhagam, which was more social-cultural organization than a political party.

So since then, any writer who had two features in his writing—nationalism or Hinduism or literature related to Hindu, whether it is Ramayana or Mahabharata, any of this being influenced in the writing—those writers were boxed, they were ignored, they were, if anything, even harassed, publicly shamed, and so on. Several of them. And this movement was virulent. Again, it had the state support. After the defeat of the Indian National Congress in Tamil Nadu, the party in power had always been influenced by the Dravidianism, which was against nationalism, against Sanskrit, and against anything that which was influenced by Hindu thought.

So, a simple example: *Kamba Ramayanam* is a great example of Ramayana in Tamil, written by Kamban. It's not an exact translation of Valmiki Ramayana; a lot of Tamil thought also goes into it: way of life in the sea coast, mountains, lifestyles—all that is infused into the Ramayana of Kamban. It was severely criticized by the Dravidian movement. I'm not naming, but a very prominent Tamil political leader wrote a very abusive version of some elements of Ramayana which were on Shringara rasa. It was written in such a fashion that it was treated that Ramayana was obscene. To that extent, they vilified Ramayana.

So there was this very patriotic Tamil who said, "No, I'm not accepting this. Rama is my hero, Rama is my God, and Ramayana tells me so many good things that I want my children and future generation to know." So he sets up Kambar Kazhagam all over Tamil Nadu just as a rebelling point against the ruling establishment, which went against anything Hindu, anything nationalistic, anything Sanskrit, anything of Hindu thought. He establishes Kambar Kazhagam all over. Even today, that Kambar Kazhagam is flourishing in spreading the *Kamba Ramayanam*.

Similarly, there was another author called Rasikamani T.K. Chidambaranatha Mudaliar. Even he was a great scholar in Ramayana. He wrote *Kamban Tharum Ramayanam*, meaning "The Ramayana which was given by Kamban". He was ostracized: "How could you do it?" There are several: Vaiyapuri Pillai was a great scholar, he was a literary critic; he was banished. So the 28 that in February 2009 the Finance Minister of Tamil Nadu says "We are restoring the honor and dignity" are all of those who were banished for being nationalist, banished for thinking about India, India's ancient culture.



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That a party which also was part of the Dravidian movement had to come to power and in the budget speech say that "I want to restore the honor, we will give money for what the valuation would reflect in terms of the number of books they published in their lifetime"—some of them were not even alive by that time this restoration happened, and some of them even protested because they were nationalized, the books were nationalized. The families which were suffering because of this harassment over several decades because of Dravidianism had their own little publications bringing out what their grandfather, father had written, who were rejected by that Dravidian culture. They said, "We are publishing, you don't need to come and tell us anything. We may publish 200 copies, 500 copies, but where are you to nationalize it? You were the one who dishonored it all the while."

But never mind, they were nationalized. But that is the history of boxing people for ideological lines which went against the gatekeepers of our free India. These are people who wrote with pride about Indian culture. All 28 of them had to be, in a budget speech, restored for honor, and that was in 2009. So this entire apparatus of gatekeeping had a lot of support. Tell me how many of us wouldn't have been influenced by the Soviet Land Publications? What wonderful books! What beautiful books they published, but propaganda material! And in that, I benefited by understanding Pushkin. What beautiful drawings! But the Communist International funded it all.

In every house in Tamil Nadu, the book about why Vietnam War would reach. But there were no books to say why we had to come to a situation to import wheat from the United States. There were no books to tell us that! I've read copies of *Yen Indha Vietnam Por?*, meaning "Why is this Vietnam War going on?" in Tamil. But this fund which came to support all these publications and beautiful cultural house—I'm sure Santishree can tell us much more about it. The effort taken to infiltrate your mind through these wonderful publications have taken us till about year 2000, I would think. And after which, of course, many Vikram Sampaths are doing their own.

This is a pattern globally. You would have heard how—I missed out on talking about Kerala: Prabhat Book House in Kerala ran 28 branches, sending books into villages in mobile vans—all propaganda material. Even writers like Paul Zacharia once remarked, "I was a hardcore communist by the time I was 12." Imagine the impact it has had on children! I spoke to you about Kambar Kazhagam started by Sa. Ganesan in Tamil Nadu to keep Kamban alive. But even as late as 2013, Joe D'Cruz—I don't know how many of you all have heard of it—belongs to the fishing community from the southern parts of Tamil Nadu, wrote a book called *Aazhi Soozh Ulagu*, the world which is surrounded by the sea.

Sahitya Akademi announced his award. But before he could receive the award, the publisher said, "No, no, we won't publish your book, sorry." And there was a huge scene. Why, pray? He had praised the Chief Minister of Gujarat for having a very good administration, industries coming, multinationals understanding. He himself had worked for a multinational, but wrote this wonderful book about the fishing community and the coastal area to which he belongs. The publishers refuse to publish his book! Said, "No, no, how can you praise Chief Minister like that?" So that continued even as late as 2013.

That Soviet era, Andrei Zhdanov in August 1934 says: "Yes, Soviet literature is tendentious, for in an epoch of class struggle, there is not and cannot be a literature which is not class literature. And therefore we will publish." It was an open statement. And that publication didn't stop with just *Soviet Land*; it went all over the world. They went to the extent of even a wonderful musician, Tchaikovsky, was branded, rebranded, and then, after quite a lot of dressing up, he was accepted as a true Russian genius. But he was first branded out, and after a lot of whitewashing, he was brought back.

In Britain too, till recently you would have heard Roger Scruton talking about things. He described how publishing *The Meaning of Conservatism* in 1979, his book, effectively blighted what remained of his academic career. Even as late as 1979 in Britain, somebody who was writing more from the right side of the stage was finished for writing *The Meaning of Conservatism*. Noting, he said that in his Cambridge college library, he found Marx, Lenin, and Mao, but no Strauss, Voegelin, Hayek, or Friedman. He says this in 2003. He asked: why are right-wingers marginalized in the education system, denounced in the media, and regarded by a political class as untouchables?



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And that was in his book *Fools, Frauds and Firebrands*. He says that. So that is the kind of harassment even in a country like United Kingdom. Margaret Thatcher defined the resulting consensus as—I quote—"the process of abandoning all beliefs, principles, values, and policies in search of something in which no one believes, but to which no one objects," unquote. Very typical of Margaret Thatcher to kind of capture it so beautifully. It's worth my recalling it: "the process of abandoning all beliefs, principles, values, and policies in search of something in which no one believes, but to which no one objects."

So today, we are seeing that the objecting is happening loud and clear. That is precisely what was demanded of thinkers here: surrender to an artificial political consensus or face institutional erasure. We saw that over the decades. The gatekeeping continues. I don't need to say, look right here: Dr. Vikram Sampath, despite having a doctorate in history and being an elected Fellow of the Royal Historical Society, with multi-volume works built on thousands of primary documents and a hundred private papers, there were active attempts to dismiss him as a non-historian, a popular writer, and an amateur because his findings did not conform.

The message from these gatekeepers could hardly be clearer: whatever your doctorate, whatever your citations, without their membership card, you do not get onto the stage. The same gatekeepers hold university chairs and sit on the committees that decide what a child will and will not read. They decide which research is funded and which is quietly not funded. They write in foreign newspapers about a country they had already judged. And they are the inheritors of what exactly the machinery I've been describing. The Comintern is gone, the Communist International is gone; the habit it left behind us is not. The habit is to settle in advance what the evidence will be permitted to say, and then to treat anyone who reads that evidence differently as an enemy rather than an opponent.

It is deciding the verdict before the trial. And therefore, in conclusion, what am I asking for today? We are not asking to silence one side of the stage, nor are we interested in shifting the monopoly from one side to the other side. If the actors simply change sides while the monopoly remains, nothing is liberated; only the management changes. When a film from the opposing school like *Ghattashraddha*—you would have heard of it—was made, India watched it. Some in India appreciated it, and some even celebrated it. That generosity must be reciprocal.

That generosity must be reciprocal. We are asking for the entire stage to be restored: room on the left, room on the right, and an open center where thinkers from across the spectrum can meet. Let ideas clash before a discerning public that is trusted to weigh the evidence for itself. India today is self-assured and quite unapologetic about it, and we have stopped waiting for anybody else's permission to study our own heritage. We are reading our inscriptions again, working out our maritime trade, going back to our mathematics, telling these stories with real pleasure as well as real precision. This, I think, is what decolonization ought to mean.

It cannot simply be matter of swapping one prescribed textbook for another. It has to mean a wider archive, more languages, harder questions, and a much larger circle of scholars who actually get read. Above all, it should mean that no establishment gets to decide beforehand what the evidence is allowed to say. This is the purpose of honoring diverse voices today: historians, novelists, illustrators, and storytellers alike. These are fresh voices stepping onto the stage. Dr. Bhyrappa left us in his 95th year. He might not be infallible, and we do not honor him by pretending he was. He was, however, profoundly honest, and honest at the great professional cost. He summarized his vocation simply: "The work of literature is to refine human sensibility." He never sought to mobilize an army of followers; he sought to refine how human beings perceive truth: *Satya Mattu Soundarya*—Truth and Beauty. For a civilization as old as ours, this is really an act of intellectual swaraj. Yes, you were right, Prosenjit, in saying '91 we had our economic independence, but I think it is only now that intellectual freedom is gaining strength. So intellectual freedom has to give us the right to know ourselves. The finest tribute we can pay to our teachers today, September 5th, and thinkers today, Dr. Bhyrappa, is to keep both wings of India's intellectual stage brightly lit so that the act can go on. Let the churning continue, and let the evidence, rigor, and conscience have the final word. And together, let us carry India forward into this golden era of intellectual swaraj. Thank you very much.



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