

Woodsmen, spare that tree!



REBECCA HAQUE

I remember a time, lecturing weekly in a classroom with windows to the west, how the rich scarlet-laden branches of the krishnachura trees, vivid against the blue sky, inspired me, soothed me, and allowed me the grace and benediction of 'Inscap' to share with younger, eager, pliable minds.

DID not Joyce Kilmer say, "I have never seen a poem as beautiful as a tree"?

There was a time, not too long ago, when the metropolis of Dhaka was a veritable arboreal wonder, with multi-coloured flowering trees and hundreds of fruit-bearing trees and canopied avenues flourishing in every neighbourhood. My own University campus bloomed bright red and yellow and mauve, and each *fulgun* was a riot of colours offering a serotonin rush of joy to the perceptive mind. Cognition was enhanced, allowing me the natural resource to "half-perceive and half-create", a phrase used by William Wordsworth to account for the autochthonous nature of the growth of the poetic mind.

I remember walking in thrall to the beauty of natural efflorescence on the green spaces between the Arts faculty and the Central Library, and languorously indulging my peripheral vision to glide from one gorgeous treetop to another as I went to the Registrar's building on personal or official errands. I remember a time, lecturing weekly in a classroom with windows to the west, how the rich scarlet-laden branches of the *krishnachura* trees, vivid against the blue sky, inspired me, soothed me, and allowed me the grace and benediction



PHOTO: SAZZAD IBNE SAYED

of 'Inscap' to share with younger, eager, pliable minds. This was a time when very important roads for very important people had not cut very ordinary me from a long and pleasant rickshaw ride all the way from the Staff Road railway crossing to Neelkhet. This was a time when a song would erupt, albeit silently in my soul, as I rode through Mohakhali and beyond, with the central line of flowering *krishnachura* guiding the lingering sight to the horizon. This was a quieter time, more mellow, more sane, more human, more humane.

I am thankful that one especially majestic tree still stands, protected by commemorative emotion and edict. This is my tree, for I am transported to a state of ecstasy every time I look up and blink at the transcendental beauty of the spreading foliage of the hundred-year old tree sheltering the Martyr's Memorial opposite the Vice-Chancellor's colonial-style palatial residence. I am completely and desperately in love with this tree. It defines me. It anchors my spirit to the core of my city. Woodsmen, spare this tree! Let this

tree speak to you. Let its branches lift you up from the desire for desiccation and deforestation. Let its soft rustling leaves beckon you towards veneration for the living, breathing flora. Let its cool shade save you from the noxious fumes of gridlocked motorways. Let it offer you wisdom to curb your greed for brickfields and more brickfields to build concrete jungles of squalid, suffocating tenements. Listen to the voice of the tree: female, feminine, life-giver, fruit-bearer. What does every sentient being need? Just a little breathing space, fresh

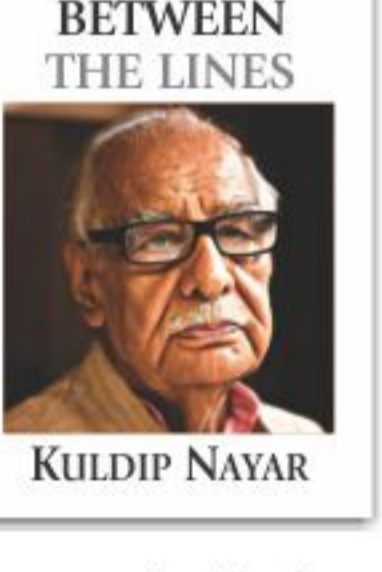
dew on the grass, a little patch of open sky to gaze at the floating clouds or up at the myriad twinkling stars on a clear moonlit night. Literature makes emblematic use of nature's intimate connection with the animal world. I recall Shakespeare's precious pastoral retreat, his Forest of Arden, with Rosalind as Ganymede; arbour, arboreal, natural, enchantingly transformational, restoring order and sanity to human will and society. I recall the wounded Wordsworth seeking refuge in the lap of Mother Nature. He has his sycamore tree and the secure, nurturing enclosure of Tintern Abbey, offering recuperation in warm uterine embrace.

And we in Bengal have the Banyan tree; indigenous, iconic, iconographic. Alas! So few of these old trees, with their mystical tangled roots, remain. Rabindranath Tagore has immortalised the Banyan tree in his famous poem, and the connection between the child and the tree becomes an allegory of the intimate, inchoate bond between mankind and nature. Today, the child's plaintive cry echoes my own heart's yearning as I mourn the massacre of a million trees by the woodsmen's axe:

O you shaggy-headed banyan tree standing on the bank of the pond, Have you forgotten the little child, like the birds that have nested In your branches and left you? ...He longed to be the wind and blow through your resting branches, To be your shadow and lengthen with the day on the water...

The writer is Professor, Department of English, University of Dhaka.

These are beefy issues



KULDEEP NAYYAR

BETWEEN THE LINES
THE demolition of the Babri Masjid and the ban on cattle sale for slaughter are two sides of the same coin. They reflect the prejudice of the majority

community. Both are fouling the air. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government, which completed three years in office just a week ago, is blessing the different expressions of Hindutva which is slowly but gradually engulfing the entire country. It looks as if the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has started its preparations for the next Lok Sabha elections in 2019. The governance by chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, Yogi Adityanath, shows that the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) has taken over in more senses than one as the state government has started appointing trusted men at key positions.

New Delhi is no better. The Nehru Memorial Centre is one example where the director has been removed and, in his place, an RSS ideologue has been installed. He is spoiling the very ethos of the organisation and supporting the rightist forces instead of the liberal atmosphere which is attributed to the Nehru Centre. The ongoing scuffles in the Jawaharlal Nehru University have political parties behind them with the same purpose. The present concentration of the rightist forces seem to be on the beef. Their imbedded arrogance is exhibited by its students' wings in one campus or the other throughout the country. This time it happened at Chennai's Indian Institute of Technology. What is different from the past is its frequency and ferocity of violence. The thrashing of students who eat beef is to re-emphasise their self-righteousness. The liberal atmosphere of the campus is now depended on the political party that dominates the state in which the educational institution is situated. Consequently, the BJP influences the

Hindi-speaking states in the north. The writ of the Congress and other regional parties runs in the rest of India. This has divided the country mentally and idea-wise. Prime Minister Modi, when he resumed office, had given the slogan: *sabka saath, sabka vikas*, meaning thereby that we shall be all together and advance further hand-in-hand. But subsequently he and his party, the BJP, appear to have lost the way.

And today, whether they like it or not, their government has come to represent a particular way of thinking — an intolerant India — which has the overtones of *Hindutva*. Probably, the party's think-tank has come to believe that they can win more votes by dividing the society, thanks to the Bajrang Dal and Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad which have begun vitiating the atmosphere. They are holding more and more exercises in different cities where *lathis* and other weapons are brandished.

This is something similar to the fear of Islamic domination that is being exploited by right-wing parties in the West. We forget that in the democratic structure that we have, everyone is free to eat whatever he or she likes. Nothing can be enforced. In a vast country like India where food and dress change every 50 kilometres, diversity is inevitable. Indeed, this is India's strength. Respecting diversity keeps our different units together in a federal structure which we follow.

The BJP hardliners, who believe that they have come to power because of a fundamental shift in national values, should think again. There is more than a grain of truth in the argument that voters gave them a chance because they had lost faith in the Congress and were looking for an alternative.

The Congress, on its part, will be failing them if it persists with dynastic politics. The party must realise — if it has not done so far — that Rahul Gandhi does not sell. Sonia Gandhi herself will be a far better bet than the other leaders so far available in the party. The disadvantage of being an

Italian has disappeared over the years and she is considered as much an Indian as anyone by birth. But the problem is that she has very little chance to head the country because the Congress has lost its shine. No doubt, the BJP has Hinduised politics but that is the dominant thinking which has caught the public imagination at present, thanks to Modi's leadership.

In a vast country like India where food and dress change every 50 kilometres, diversity is inevitable. Indeed, this is India's strength. Respecting diversity keeps our different units together in a federal structure which we follow.

This thinking may not last long since the Indian nation is basically pluralistic. The BJP itself seems to be conscious of this because there is some evidence that it is moving from the right-of-the-centre to the centre. The predicament that plagues the party is that its cadres come from the RSS. Maybe, that is the reason that there is no scam in the government. However

one may dislike the RSS ideology, its emphasis on integrity cannot be doubted. Yet, there should be no misgiving on its interference in the governance. Even top bureaucrats are judged how close they are to the *Hindutva* philosophy.

Former Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao appointed several officers, who were known to be secular,

and Uma Bharti with criminal conspiracy.

It would be a great let down if what the judiciary is doing is undone by the dominant political parties. Advani and his associates can appeal to the higher court but if the ruling party does anything which favours the accused, it would amount to mocking at the law. The Congress has asked for the



Supporters of the Bharatiya Janata Party attend a rally addressed by Narendra Modi. PHOTO: AFP

at key places so that the government reflected a pluralistic way of thinking. He felt personally betrayed when the Babri Masjid was demolished because he never thought that things would reach the point of pulling it down. But the fact remains that he connived at the whole operation. Now the thread has been picked up by a CBI court which has charged L.K. Advani, M.M. Joshi

resignation of Uma Bharti who is a minister in the Modi cabinet. If she were to be dropped by Modi, it would send the right kind of message. This is the least that the Prime Minister can do to assure the people that the government has no side to take except to support the court.

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.

A WORD A DAY

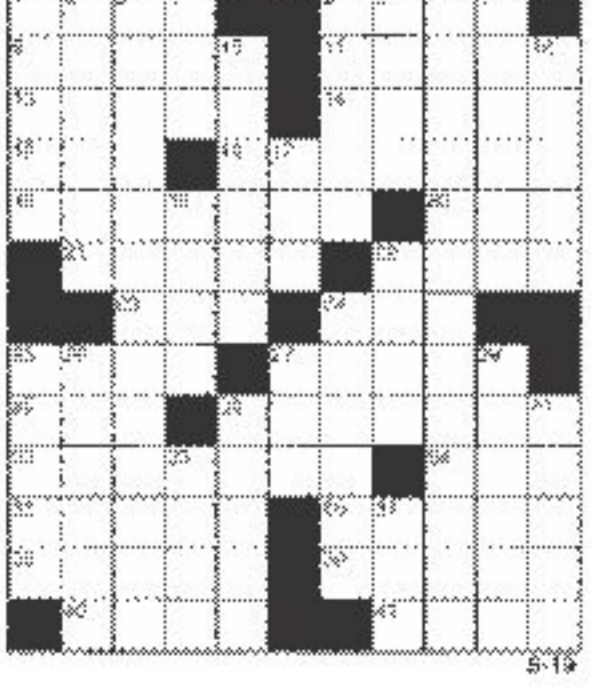


DENOUEMENT
noun

The resolution of a narrative

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 1 Hen holder
 - 5 Nervous signs
 - 9 Some messages
 - 11 Had longings
 - 13 Release
 - 14 Sculptor Henry
 - 15 Shade provider
 - 16 Lettering aid
 - 18 Paging gizmos
 - 20 Many a time
 - 21 Linger
 - 22 "Frozen" princess
 - 23 -- Palmas
 - 24 Snoop group
 - 25 Salon offering
- DOWN**
- 1 Star
 - 2 Diner dish
 - 3 Cookie choice
 - 4 Greedy one
 - 5 Breaks
 - 6 Clickable picture
 - 7 Cookie choice
 - 8 Letter strokes
 - 10 Also-rans
 - 12 River part
 - 17 Attempt
 - 19 Tot transport
 - 22 Half of zwei
 - 24 Kayaks' cousins
 - 25 Rings
 - 26 Book boo-boos
 - 27 Chicling sound
 - 28 Fuel gas
 - 30 Squad leader
 - 31 Warbles
 - 33 Nice fellow
 - 37 Beygone airline



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

T A F T P O P E S
I L I A D A M I N O
B I L G E P I N T A
E V E F E A T H E R
T E T H E R O R E
E A R S L E D
W O N T P L E D
S I N S O H O
A R T N E T H E R
L E A T H E R A X E
A T R I A E R I C A
D A I L Y S A T E D
S P O T S W I L Y

BEETLE BAILEY



BY MORT WALKER



BABY BLUES



BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

