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December 10 is International Human Rights Day. On this day we reaffirm the importance of human rights in re-building the world we want, the need for global solidarity as well as our interconnectedness and shared humanity. In South Africa 25 November to 10 December is dedicated to activism against child abuse, gender-based violence, racism, and all human rights violations.

The continued inability of world leaders to mitigate climate change faster, and the lack of fairness in systems and processes lead to economic and social injustices in all parts of the world. The posturing of political parties following the local government elections indicates that local leaders are unwilling to meet each other halfway. This does not bode well for our democracy and for the delivery of basic services. We elect leaders to represent our interests to make this world a better place.

The 10th principle of the Arya Samaj speaks of subordination and liberty, wherein the laws of society should promote the well-being of all. This issue focuses on Democracy and Human Rights. Our feature article is on the Human Rights.

At the Gauteng Virtual Bridge Series webinar in September 2021 Sagie Pillay, CEO of the Wits Health Consortium, delivered a tribute to the late Vishwaprea Suparsad, son of the late Pt and late Mrs Dookran of Pietermaritzburg. Vish was founding chair of the Arya Samaj Gauteng and a human rights activist. We are grateful to Sagie Pillay for sharing his memories of Vish.

Salona Lutchman is an academic based in the Faculty of Law, University of Cape Town. She grew up in Durban and was actively involved in Veda Dharma Sabha, Isipingo under the tutelage of Dr Susheela Bhagwan. Salona shares her thoughts on "The Constitution, social justice and the rights of women: Relevance and importance for the Arya Samaj"

We thank Ujala Satgoor who hails from one of the pioneer Arya Samaj families, for the article on "Being in the Present". She is currently the Executive Director, Libraries at the University of Cape Town.

Veda Jyoti Editorial Committee.

Arthi Shanand, Divesh Cassiram, Karuna Mohan, Nishi Bundhoo, Ressa Rambaros, Sudhira Sham, Usha Debipersad.

All human beings are equal in dignity and rights



Hindu Dharma suggests that all should live in concord. Colonisation and apartheid were in total contradiction to this. Hence, the world declared apartheid to be a crime against humanity.

The Vedas state that all citizens should live in peace and harmony. The teaching of the Vedas enlightens us that we should treat all humans as brothers and sisters.

As Hindus subscribing to the religion of humanity "MANAV DHARMA" we are committed to building a common humanity, not just in our communities and, our countries but internationally.

It is time to actively realise the Vedic mantra "*Mitrasya chakshusha sarvaani bhutaani samikshe*" Yajur Veda 36.18. "May we all live in friendly cooperation and mutual trust."

This could become the Hindu contribution in building a post-apartheid society in conjunction with the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights.

O God lead us on to the path of righteousness "Aum Agne naya supathaa raye asamaan vishwaani deva vayunaani vidwan" ... (Rig Veda 1.189.1)

In South Africa over the years as Indians were freed from indenture and apartheid programmes offered opportunities to Indians, the caste divides fell away. The community became a settler-community with a stake in South African society as Black South Africans. All Black South Africans were denied the vote and privileges that white communities had.

Vedic norms are based on equality by birth and gender equality. The Vedas speak highly of equality and brotherhood, a socialist ideology based on principles of unity.¹

"Common be your intention, common be (the wishes of) your heart, common be your thoughts, so that there may be thorough union among you." (Rig Veda: 10.191.4 and Atharva Veda 6.64.3)

And in Rig Veda 10:191.2 "go together, talk together, let your minds apprehend alike: in like manner as the ancient gods concurring accepted their portion of the sacrifice."

"Common be the prayers of these (assembled worshippers), common be the acquirement, common the purpose, associated be the desire. I repeat for you a common prayer; I offer you a common oblation." (Rig Veda 10:191.3)

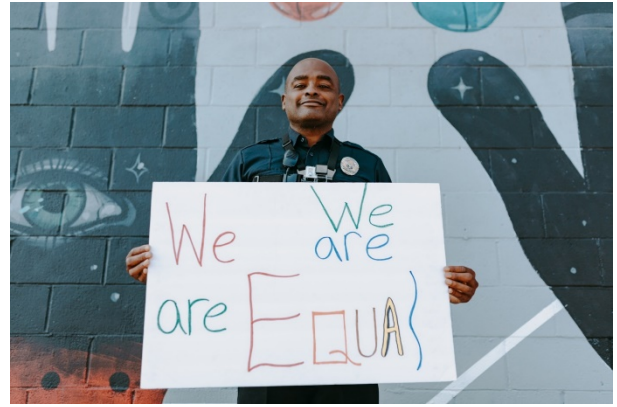
In modern society rights establish a broad social agreement based on agreed common values that all people in their variety and diversity can live together in the same country.

In this sense, rights link to the level of consciousness and the ability of people to be their own liberators and defenders. Rights give expression to what people expect and claim for themselves.

The United Nations theme for International Human Rights Day 2021 is "EQUALITY - Reducing inequalities, advancing human rights".

"Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home -- so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. ... Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerted citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world."

Eleanor Roosevelt, Chairperson of the drafting committee of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.



In 1996 South Africa's Constitution enshrined human rights and freedoms as inalienable rights guaranteed to all.

Human dignity, the achievement of equality and the advancement of human rights and freedoms are a part of the founding provisions of the constitution articulating the essence of what it means to be human and a citizen in South Africa.

The right to vote, the right to own land, the right to education, the right to strike and protest, the right to organise, the right to a fair trial, the right to trade, the right to associate and the right to freedom of movement are fundamental rights and freedoms.

Rights on paper in the constitution establish the framework within which we live and act. But this does not necessarily translate to rights in practice. We develop the protection, defence, and practice of rights through organisation and increasing the understanding and awareness of our people.

It is only when people themselves engage in social contracts to give meaning to fundamental rights that human rights become a reality and indeed a practice and a living thread of our social fabric. Thus, it is only when all people understand and practise human rights and freedoms that we will have a democratic society.

The right to freedom and security, the right to physical and psychological integrity, the right to privacy, the right to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief and opinion, the right to freedom of expression, the right to assemble peacefully and unarmed, to demonstrate, to picket and to present petitions, the right to freedom of association and movement, the right to be free to make political choices, the right to choose a trade, occupation or profession freely and the right to fair labour practices are perhaps the more cherished rights that we have

¹ VEDA-VIDYA Vol 24, July – Dec 2014, Ujjain ISSN-2230-8962

secured for our country, as these rights formed a major part of the tapestry of our history of struggle for liberation and are part of the precepts of Hindu Dharma.

Basic human rights such as the ability to read and write, access to clean water and sanitation, as well as preventative health care and equal access to all opportunities are high on the global agenda. The divide among people along access to services and opportunities is not beneficial for the growth and development of any country.



This has created a crisis on trust. There is a need to close the gap on the trust deficit. Humanity is fast losing faith in leaders and institutions. The restoration of ethics and values is paramount to ensuring a better future for generations to come.

As we move into the new decades of the third millennium and into the 21st century with new challenges and conditions such as the right to food, the right to shelter and the right to a safe and sustainable environment we can make a renewed commitment to being human.



South Africa has abolished the death penalty, decommissioned nuclear capacity, legislated against apartheid - the ultimate crime against humanity, but still does not have respect for human values and ethics in place.

Today we witness and experience greed, violent crimes, abuse, and neglect of children as well as divisions based on race, ethnicity, class, and gender. Recently disrespect for the rule of law, disrespect for life and property and the greed and endemic theft of state funds and abuse of power has unfolded.



Our society has not entrenched respect for our fellow humans, and we have not yet realised the responsibility that accompanies rights.

The Right to Equality, for women and for people of all race and ethnic groups will not automatically exist even though it is a key principle.

Equality, as ingrained in the South African Constitution and in the Arya-Samaj Principles, is merely an intention and is still to become a way of life.

We need to work to build food security, promote renewable energy sources, and we need to ensure that waste disposal occurs in safe and sustainable ways. This is essentially about development and sustaining our environment. We need to assess where the rights to food, shelter and a sustainable environment are being violated, be it in suburbs, towns, cities or villages and we need to build our society by looking at how to overcome these violations that impact on the quality of human life.

These freedoms and rights are about choice, correct action and responsibility. They indeed make up the kernel of our collective human value system, our common humanity, and are the foundations upon which global programmes of building a sustainable future exist.

For International Human Rights Day let us reaffirm the importance of human rights in re-building the world we want, the need for global solidarity as well as our interconnectedness and shared humanity and recite:

Aa Brahman Braahmano Brahamavarcasi
jaayatham.... Yajur Veda 22:22

We pray for bright and intelligent people to be born in our country. People who can take decisions and act for the common good of our society. Evil forces and enemies must be kept away by brave soldiers able to conduct diplomatic initiatives avoiding conflict.

This mantra calls for sufficient milk giving cows, strong oxen for agriculture and fast horses for transport. Although we do not use oxen to till the soil and horses for transport today – we know that without food production and transportation the economy and society will not work.

In the households of married couples may there be the development of skilled children and good citizens. Without a sound foundation on skills, the economy does not work, and the development of good citizens starts in the household. We all know that the mother is the first teacher.

The women of our country are mothers of all children of our land. Therefore, we refer to the country as she. Many in South Africa considered Winnie Mandela as mother of the nation for her efforts to bring about liberation of the downtrodden.

We pray for rain and abundance of fauna and flora that will ensure food security and an end to hunger. We know that some parts of our country are facing a drought and indeed water scarcity will be a problem especially as our one key defence against Covid-19 is to wash our hands regularly, using soap and water...

Finally, this mantra ends with the call for our country to thrive, flourish and prosper. In this respect we need to fight white collar crime and corruption and restore our economy to a state where we can attract investments to create jobs and bring about growth and development.

Message from the APS President Pt Arthi Nanakchand Shanand

NAMASTE

*Ajyeshthaaso akanishthaasa yete. Sam
bhraatarovaavrudhuh soubhagaya Rigveda 5.60.5*

No-one is superior or inferior, all are brothers. All should strive for the interest of all and progress collectively.

This mantra points us in the direction of universal brotherhood, embracing all, notwithstanding the caste, colour, creed, economic, political, and social status. If this becomes the mantra of every human being, there will be no need for us to be reminded of Human Rights. The need to proclaim one's human right arises from a shameful disregard for another human being.

We have those who uphold human rights, as this Journal illustrates, in speaking of the life of Vish Suparsad, and we have those who have a total disregard of the same, whether it is moral or legal rights. This is evident in the atrocities witnessed globally – warfare, abject poverty, people living without the much-needed water and sanitation, homelessness, malnutrition, and other socio-economic problems.

And yet the Vedas extol that every Being has a right to live on this Earth and off this Earth equally. The Vedas preach and teach Rights for Men, Women, Children and Animals.

The Arya Samaj is and always will be a Reform Movement, bringing about justice and equity for all Beings. Women especially have been given the highest respect from Vedic times to date. The Arya Samaj empowered women to take on the reins as leaders, by encouraging them to be educated, condemning femicide, the practice of Sati, and allowing widows to re-marry.

In South Africa, a Standing Committee of the Arya Samaj, The Arya Samaj Women's Forum hosts programmes to empower women - supporting many women, who have been unemployed since the beginning of the pandemic, to supplement their incomes through home industries.

I am proud to inform you that Arya Samaj South Africa not only has a female President, but that of the six Standing Committees, four are headed by our dedicated women.

My question to all of you is: "Do we have to be reminded by a date marked on the calendar that we need to be mindful of the human rights of all human beings"? Dear readers, let us remember that 'All lives matter'.

Tribute to Vishwaprea Suparsad: Arya Samaj South Africa's Human Rights Activist

Over the years of existence the Arya Samaj in South Africa produced activists who engaged in political activity and were fearless human rights activists. Vishwaprea Suparsad was a rare human being who crossed our paths. On 15 September 2021, at the Arya Samaj Gauteng Virtual Bridge Series webinar, a tribute to Vish was presented by his fellow activist Sagie Pillay.



Late Vish and local activists with late Swami Agnivesh

When I was asked to deliver this tribute to Vishwaprea Suparsad I was deeply moved because Vish has had such a tremendous influence on both my life, my wife Shirley and our children's lives. Together with Vidhu Vedalankar and Vish we shared an extraordinary political journey as comrades and are close family friends for over 35 years. Both of us met our wives in the struggle. Vidhu and Vish worked together as activists for many many years and in 1989 had a small an underground wedding because both Vish and Vidhu had to go underground in hot pursuit by the apartheid regimes security branch because of their political activities. In 1991 Viraj was born to an ecstatic Vish and Vidhu.

Lots have been said and many tributes written following Vish's untimely passing in 2006. The premier of KwaZulu Natal at his memorial in Durban described him as a 'hero and a revolutionary who lived a noble life and embodied all that we think a dedicated activist should be.'

In the 2007 the ANC NEC's January 8th Statement, on the 95th Anniversary of the ANC named Vishwaprea Suparsad together with other struggle stalwarts as "heroes of our revolution" and to deepen and

accelerate the struggle to advance the vision to which they dedicated their lives, the ANC National Executive Committee declared 2007, "The Year to Intensify the Struggle Against Poverty as We Advance in Unity Towards 2012".

The Arya Samaj said "He was no ordinary leader. He had a rare combination of spirituality, common sense, solid determination, team spirit, wisdom, and hands-on leadership. Everybody loved him and respected him. His gracious warmth enveloped all who met him."

Dozens of other organisations paid tribute to Vish in the year off his passing as an incredible human being, engaged dad to Viraj and loving partner of Vidhu, excellent cook, hero of our struggle, empathetic manager, servant leader and much more.

Most of what I share in this tribute to Vish captures his unique way of working with people and for people.

Fact is he left us too soon but left us with a legacy that impacted on everyone around him. Driven by the believe that this was his sacred honour, that it was his duty, his pursuit was selfless, despite the risks he faced.

I first met Vish in late 1977 when he became the first community worker at Tongaat Child Welfare. Vish had just returned from Canada having spent some years studying abroad. In Canada he also worked amongst the first nation peoples of the Inuit organizing them to address the problem of poverty, unemployment, racism, alcoholism, and other economic and social development problems. Vish hailed from Pietermaritzburg and relocated to Tongaat. He rented a back room with a family in Tongaat, lived frugally and shared a tiny office with other workers.

Community development workers did not exist anywhere in the country at that time. No one had any notion what was to follow with this appointment. In Vish's own words "community work had its own style of working, and it needed to be a lot more conscious about the other bigger issues and there was a political purpose for his being there"

This community development work and later work by other progressive organizations laid the foundation for the introduction of a new cadre of Community Development Professionals in the democratic South Africa.

Vish was introduced to us by Pravin Gordhan (now Minister Gordhan) who told us he worked in Canada and had engaged with leftist groups like the Sandinistas and other leading liberation movements in South America and elsewhere and we should work with him. The Tongaat activists' group and other similar groups was only just coalescing then trying to bring young students together and were taking first step to channel the energy of the post 1976 student protests.

Everyone who knew Vish even remotely will remember his unique character, his ethics and his values.

He was an amazing listener, humble, patient, charming and thoughtful, with this powerful ability to persuade people, young and old, using reasoned logic and without anyone feeling pressure.

Vish asked me to take on the role of treasurer of Child Welfare and took me through the organization, the purpose, why we need to take control, and how these fits into the bigger programme and despite my politically naivety then (and probably now), being terribly insecure, barely stammering my way in a public discussion yet Vish, convinced me that I can do this.

He had this superior ability to look for the strengths in individuals and use that to motivate people and to show them that they are capable that they can do it. the epitome of a servant leader, always in the background motivating others to come forward, to take the lead whether giving a talk, chairing a session, facilitating a workshop etc.

Many of us as young activists were insecure, lacked confidence and had no experience or political understanding and Vish mentored and nudged us along.

His phenomenal listening ability came naturally. He would let people talk without interruption. He always had this philosophical facial expression and a trademark gentle nodding of his head.

He provided feedback but deferred judgement, he made everyone feel we were making an important contribution and even when we were not. He never said so, rather with a hem would say something like "have you thought about this from this perspective." Always smiling he was available for everyone, and he had this talent to make everyone feel like you are the

only person in the room, despite the urgency for what we were doing. In all the time I knew him I did not hear him criticise anyone. He never said a harsh or negative word or put someone down. For him there were no bad people, nor bad ideas, just people that needed more work done on their ideas, thoughts, or values. Everyone can change he said.

This method comes from Paulo Freire whom Vish studied in 1985 while studying adult education at University of Manchester in the United Kingdom (and at the same time quietly slipping into the German Democratic Republic to receive intelligence gathering training for his underground work. Freire warned about fatalistic or naive consciousness and argued for a collective of activists with a critical consciousness, a self-awareness that would encourage people to act to change their objective conditions.

The use of this dialectical approach meant that Vish constantly challenged conventional wisdom and thinking whether in politics, religion, culture, strategy and tactics, encouraging us to question (today we call this critical thinking). He consciously stimulated activists to read, to analyse, to argue and debate. To empower us he organised open and clandestine workshops to ensure activists acquired relevant skills and competencies in strategy development, planning and organising, logistics, ongoing political education, life skills, and knowledge of systems and organisation.

He understood and acted on the basis that our problems are too big to be challenged by any one person and structure/organization is necessary. He was unequivocal that the realities of an unequal society were not our fate or something we did wrong in our past life, or punishment from some higher power. His approach and understanding that peoples' minds can be liberated by changing their consciousness, enabling their analysis of their objective conditions and then mobilizing the masses was a natural transition to challenge this construct and bring change. What he called OCMS (organise, conscientize, mobilize and structures) which he expounded in October 2002 in an interview he gave to "From the Voices of Resistance".

His foundational work in Tongaat sharpened his strategies on how to organise and mobilise people. Vish's OCMS work through community work at Tongaat Child welfare revolutionized the way all structures developed and coalesced into broader

networks (and together with similar work around the country which eventually led to the formation of the UDF). The OCMS approach was the spark that set the raging fire of mass mobilisation and creation of civic structures in Hambanati, Phoenix, Chatsworth, Merebank, Inanda, Lamontville, Northdale, Imbali and other communities.



The conscientisation process came through peoples' active involvement in their problems. This was linked with the apartheid racial system, gender inequality, market failure, materialism, and the capitalistic economic system and how it affects people. His ground-breaking work shifted focus from the tradition "case work approach" focussing on individuals to focussing on communities around their collective problems. Today we refer to this as tackling the entire eco system.

This approach led to the establishment of Tongaat youth group and several women's group, civic and sports structures were revived, then organizing structures and programmes in informal settlements.

A few of his firsts in the decade of 1980s that are still operational and fully functional in Tongaat.



LEAVE NO YOUNG CHILD BEHIND

- Suitcase toys and books libraries at community centres for preschool educational,
- Child-care programs for working parents,

- Funding to build a state-of-the-art preschool in a council housing complex,
- Training programmes for preschool teachers when none existed for black communities,
- Worked with older persons,
- Prevention and support community programmes on substance abuse.



The most remarkable of the firsts introduced by Vish was a health screening survey. Together with Noddy Jinabhai, Jerry Coovadia, hundreds of doctors and academic, religious and other organisations were mobilized in 1979 as part of the International Year of the Child to hold the first ever health screen project. This involved the mobilizing of over 150 volunteers to screen over one thousand children for health problems. Data was collected using simple research tools and then analysed to identify problems of widespread malnutrition which informed demands for improved services to women and children. This was many weekends of coordinating volunteers, assembling the infrastructure for examinations, specimen taking, providing health education and the like.

This was followed by social economic surveys across the entire Tongaat population with no personal computers, mobile phone, handheld devices and funding like we see today.

The social and economic surveys and health screening survey informed the early work in civics and housing and backed up demands to improve living conditions of the working-class people in council houses and better pay for workers. He quickly realized that research was key but must be subject to scientific scrutiny, be quick and directly inform policy and implementation. Today we know this as implementation science.

The late seventies and early eighties were the early days of the trade union movement of FOSATU. His

introduction to comrades such as Jay Naidoo, Jayendra Naidoo, Alec Irwin, Sam Kikine, Issac Ngcobo and others in the trade union movement, led to civics and unions working together to organize workers in the sugar and textiles industries in Tongaat and Durban linking community and workplace struggles and many of the union leaders and shop stewards in the late 70's came out of the vibrant civic and community structures.

Despite the challenges of the time he began links with our indigenous African communities in and around Tongaat. Working through Ian Mkhize, Sister Mkhize youth in Hambanathi and surrounding informal settlements were supported to established non-racial youth, civic and women's structures and participate in trade union activities.

Tongaat was the incubator. In just 3 years there were sustainable structures in place.

In 1980 he moved to Durban to start up the Community Research Unit (CRU) together with Vidhu Vedalankar, Yousuf Vawda, Jerry Coovadia and others. The work done in Tongaat pointed to the need for evidenced based approaches to the socio-economic struggles. Slogans and marches alone were not going to result in a free South Africa.

He knew that research and publications of results was important to win internal broad-based support for campaigns and to legitimately challenge the apartheid government and its policies (including opposition to the tricameral parliaments and Homelands). This unit grew into a respected national organisation and supported the programmes of DHAC (Durban Housing Action Committee), PWC (Phoenix Working Committee), Tongaat Civic, BHRA (Bombay Heights Residents Association). These organisations waged struggles on transport, housing, education and community-based campaigns. This work was also the catalyst for the genesis of health, public policy, labour, housing and other progressive academic units around the country. The role and influence of Vish and CRU was captured in the book "Translation of Analysis into Action" where Mike Sutcliffe (former municipal manager of eThekweni municipality in KwaZulu-Natal) highlights how this influenced his work in the housing advocacy and planning movement. Mike commented on how in the early 1980s, "Vish, then with the Community Research Unit, and the Durban Housing Action Committee, had approached him to work with

them on various campaigns and to use his skills in the interests of the broader struggle for social transformation. Others were drawn in through the efforts of Vish, his wife Vidhu Vedalankar, who later trained as a planner, and Pravin Gordhan"

Vish was a behind the scenes political organiser, coordinator, planner and strategic advisor on the establishment and launch of the UDF the political campaigns of the NIC and ANC.

Despite his hectic mobilisation work and the risks involved, in 1979 he had established contact with the ANC in Swaziland. Vish was active in the underground of the ANC risking his life, supporting various MK activities inside and outside the country and later in operation Vula activities. He surreptitiously slipped out of the country regularly to engage comrades in exile and to ferry weapons, MK operatives and as courier with instructions for internal underground political activities. Together with Thees Mistry he initiated contact in Manzini, with Mac Maharaj, Ivan Pillay and Indres Naidoo, and established a communication plan for regular contact between the ANC and the mass work that was being done inside the country. While he was under the constant radar of the security branch of the apartheid regime, he was disciplined to never draw attention to himself, his comrades and his activities. Under Pravin Gordhan and Ivan Pillay's leadership, he was active in Operation Vula which finally culminated in the release of Madiba and other political prisoners, unbanning of political organisations and the negotiating process in 1990.

In 1994 Vish did not go into politics in the democratic South Africa. The journey of building our democracy and progressing towards a just and equitable society was only just starting for him and more struggles will unfold. He then entered the complex world of corporate sector doing policy and planning work in Durban with the Sugar association and other organisations.



He moved to Johannesburg in 2003 joined the Banking Council focussing his attention on public housing policy and planning and financing low-cost housing. He was general manager in the Banking Council and with Cas Coovadia started transforming the conservative banking council to support the new government housing and social development programmes.



Vish was always active in the Arya Samaj in Durban and when he moved to Johannesburg, he led a group of enthusiastic people as the organizing committee to launch the Arya Samaj Gauteng. Many months of hard work, fundraising and liaising with officials of Arya Pratinidhi Sabha South Africa culminated in the launch of Arya Samaj Gauteng on Heritage Day, 24 September 2005 at the Marlboro Community Centre where Vish was elected the first chairperson. This has grown into a big organization with hundreds of followers and continuing the tradition of spiritual and community activities and balancing this with political consciousness activities.

We have seen extraordinary achievements in our country. We must recognize and celebrate those successes. Successes that Vish and other activists and leaders made possible through their many sacrifices, including risk and loss of many lives. Vish understood that the goal was not just the achievement of our democracy and that no struggle can either be completely telescoped nor completely compartmentalised.

He had a strong sense of spirituality and emotional commitment that underpinned his activism. He knew he was meant to be there and was driven by a sense of fate, of purpose and of political consciousness.

When history speaks of the very best examples of humanity, we include Vish in that group.

Vish's interpretation and practice of his version of liberation theology (based on the Arya Samaj principles six to ten which point out a person's duty towards society). Vish was a living embodiment of this.

Out of this privilege several of us were transformed to become better people and lifelong activists knowing the struggle never ends. I still use his lessons today in both my personal and professional life with success.

The disturbing events in July 2021, the looting of the state over the past decade, the indecisive political leadership, the threats to our constitution and what Mac Maharaj called "a growing sense of being marginalised in our democracy" is most troubling.

Like our struggle for freedom, we cannot stand on the side lines doing nothing. We can honour the legacy of Vish, by living his legacy, engaging, and nurturing a new generation of conscientized youth and actively accelerate all efforts to protect our democracy and defend our constitution. His values, the method of OCMS, his spiritual presence and commitment will live on through Vidhu and Viraj and the many people whose lives he touched.

To Viraj in particular, I know you did not have a lot of time with your dad, I know that this tribute does not do full justice to your dad's contribution to the nation.

To the Leadership of the Arya Samaj I sincerely appreciate this opportunity to share a simple personal tribute to an extraordinary person, a mentor, a friend, and a comrade-in-arms.

The Constitution, social justice and the rights of women: Relevance and importance for the Arya Samaj

With the 16 days of action against Gender based violence and human rights atrocities, this paper's value for the Arya Samaj is in reflecting about the role of the Arya Samaj in promoting and upholding the rights of women. It was first presented at the International Women's Day commemoration in 2021, organised by the Arya Samaj Gauteng under the Virtual Bridge Series.

The South African Constitution, 1996 is lauded to be one of the most progressive constitutions in the world. After the fall of apartheid and institutionalised and legislated racism, the Constitution envisioned a new life for all South Africans. In the epilogue of the Interim Constitution (Act 200 of 1993) we learn that it was intended to be,

...a historic bridge between the past of a deeply divided society characterised by strife, conflict, untold suffering and injustice, and a future founded on the recognition of human rights, democracy and peaceful co-existence and development opportunities for all South Africans, irrespective of colour, race, class, belief or sex.

The question remains – if the Constitution is a bridge, where does it lead us to? Where is our ultimate destination? The late Chief Justice Pius Langa famously said that the Constitution is ultimately about transformation – the constant transformation of society. It is a never-ending bridge for society because the work which the Constitution requires is constant - it is not about the final destination. Ultimately the Constitution is about social justice.

Social justice is about social, economic and political equality. When we think of social justice in this way, we must ask the question – who does our society leave behind? Who is excluded?

Women, and in particular women of colour, are the most marginalised in our society. Due to entrenched sexism and patriarchy in all spheres of life, women face discrimination and violence at home and in public life.



The Constitution addresses inequality by prohibiting unfair discrimination on the following grounds: race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability,

religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth (section 9, Constitution).

For those who have been previously disadvantaged, the Constitution acknowledges that formal equality is not enough. To promote true equality, special measures must be taken to provide access to opportunities to these marginalised groups. In this way, past injustices can be truly addressed. In addition to equality, respect for human dignity is a cornerstone of the Constitution (section 10, Constitution).

Importantly, the rights entrenched in the Constitution apply in the relationship between the state and individual, and in the relationship between individuals. This is known as the vertical and horizontal application of the Constitution. The state clearly has an important role to play in promoting these constitutional rights and principles. However, this responsibility lies with the individual too. This means that in everyday life, we must adhere to these constitutional principles. In this way, the Constitution envisages a society where all are treated with human dignity and equality.

The Arya Samaj has a crucial role to play to transform society from the bottom up. Patriarchy is deeply embedded in all societies. It is practiced in a conscious and at times unconscious manner. It typecasts women and men into particular roles which ultimately serve to devalue the talents and intelligence of women. In terms of patriarchy, men are seen to be superior to women and as such are the ultimate decision makers in the private and public spheres.

Men are associated with certain valued characteristics - for instance, physical and mental strength, rationality and reasonableness. Women on the other hand are viewed as being of weak mind, physically fragile and emotional, and as such are meant to operate in the traditional roles of caregiver and housekeeper.

Patriarchy does not value the education of women and her financial freedom. It stifles the talents and potential of women. Ultimately, it robs society of infinite benefits - great inventions, peaceful solutions to conflict, scientific discoveries etc. Melinda Gates has said the following,

From high rates of education, employment and economic growth to low rates of teen births, domestic violence and crime – the

inclusion and elevation of women correlates with the signs of a healthy society.²

This does not mean that women should not become caregivers and housekeepers. If that is what a woman chooses for herself then that decision should be respected and her contribution to society should be valued and appreciated. In fact, these important tasks are intrinsically important to society. The tragedy is that as a society we do not value, in monetary terms or otherwise, the painstaking work of caregiving and housekeeping. This unpaid work is the foundation upon which our society rests, yet we overlook it and view it in lesser terms to work which attracts an income. In this way, we perpetuate the subjugation of women.

The Arya Samaj has a long and proud history of promoting the rights of the marginalised in society. During the dark days of apartheid, the leaders of the Arya Samaj in South Africa were brave activists promoting racial and gender equality, often at great personal expense. It was clear to those brave women and men that the values of equality and human dignity are integral to the ancient philosophy and teachings of the Samaj.

However, as the Constitution teaches us, we should never become complacent about social justice. We should remember that transformation is an ongoing process, a never-ending bridge, requiring the difficult work of constant introspection. It is not enough to preach the words of equality - the best examples of equality can be seen in one's everyday acts.

As such, I believe that all organisations, can engage in small acts of organisational introspection on a regular basis. Questions to ask may be as follows:

- Who participates in the day-to-day activities of the organisation? What are the activities and do these activities promote gender stereotypes and gender roles?
- Who is sitting at the decision-making table? Who is excluded?
- How can we bring more women and girls into the core circles of the organisation?

- How can we create awareness of the importance of gender equality in the home? Are men and boys involved in these discussions or are women and girls predominately present when there are talks on gender equality (for instance Women's Day celebrations etc.)?
- Does the organisation discuss issues pertaining to violence against women? How are these discussions framed? Is abuse in all its forms (physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, financial etc.) addressed? Are men and boys' part of these discussions or are these discussions predominately attended by women and girls?

Perhaps, the most difficult challenge would be in unearthing deeply held and often unknown gender prejudice held by men and women alike. For many, gender inequality, roles and stereotyping may be justified in terms of religious texts, long practised customs, and traditions or "that's just how things are done" mentality.

Changing hearts and minds is a long-term process which requires dedication and commitment. As an organisation, the Arya Samaj should celebrate its ground-breaking achievements in promoting gender equality, but it should not become complacent. We are all walking on that never-ending bridging towards a truly just society.

We have not reached our destination and what is perhaps most important is what we think, say and do along the way. In looking forward, it sometimes helps to look at the past - the timeless words of Swami Vivekananda can inspire us all to do more:

There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly on only one wing. There is no hope for that family or country where there is no estimation of women, where they live in sadness. For this reason, they have to be raised first.³

"Yatra naryastu pūjyante ramante tatra devatāḥ"

Where women are respected, there live men of divine qualities.

Manusmriti

² Melinda Gates *The moment of lift* (2019)

³ Circa 1893

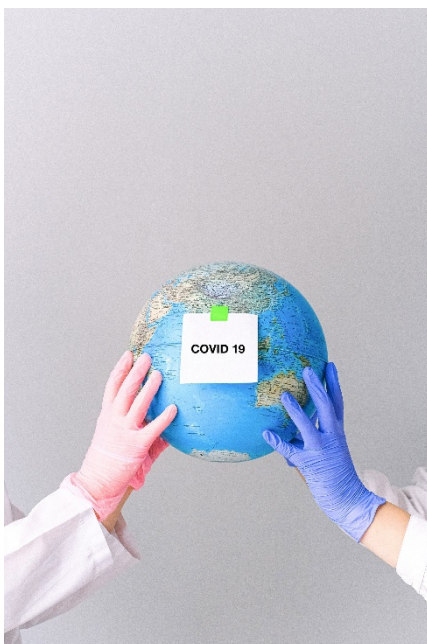
Being in the Present

As we move on from the festivities of Diwali into the 16 days of activism and International Human Rights Day, we present a talk delivered by Ujala Satgoor to the VDS Pietermaritzburg Sunday Havan. Her message is not just personal and poignant but is an inspiration to us to strengthen our inner resolve to act and live in the present.

Diwali in a continued pandemic has taken on a much deeper meaning within a new reality. It signifies deep reflection (self-awareness) and introspection (self-evaluation) and the strength to choose light over darkness; it also represents abundance and reaching out to and sharing with those in need, and drawing from the depths of despair, gratitude for family, life, renewal, and hope. As I reflected on this occasion, I chose to share this message in the form of three blessings.

May the spirit of Diwali permeate one's being and remove the darkness from the recesses of one's mind

As I cast my mind over these past 20 months under various lockdown levels, I am cognisant of how we have each reacted and responded differently and variously according to our personal circumstances and contexts since 26 March 2020 when we first went into hard lockdown. We have had to:



- Embrace “working from home,” which in reality translated to “you are at your home, during a crisis, trying to work”

- Monitor and address physical, mental and emotional health on a scale never done before
- Confront our sense of isolation and dislocation from our personal and professional worlds as we knew it
- Consider our individuality, adaptability and flexibility in terms of how we have responded to changed circumstances and new roles within long existing family structures and responsibilities
- Cope with the enormity of the loss of our personal freedoms
- Confront grief and loss precipitated by the unexpected death of loved ones and friends in ways we never imagined
- Live with fear, anxiety and relief linked to personal brushes with and recovery from COVID-19 and adapt to the lingering effects of long-Covid.

And most recently, we have witnessed natural disasters such as the fire that destroyed the Jagger Library and man-made crises such as that we witnessed in July 2021, which have exacerbated our insecurities, fears and anxieties.

And now with the increasing call for vaccine mandates, let us reclaim ownership of our lives by doing the right thing, namely, getting vaccinated and consciously choosing new ways of being, thinking and doing. Let us mainstream mental and emotional well-being so that there is greater courage and perseverance to get through each day and continue to protect or strengthen the fragility of our minds and physical vulnerabilities.

Going forward, we must now identify that which **inspires** us as we slowly emerge, re-define, and embrace a new outlook to life.



May the spirit of Diwali spread harmony between our thoughts and actions

The collective consciousness about COVID-19 and its impact on life has forced us to re-evaluate our relationships, behaviours, norms and values, and re-think everything we do and hold dear. I hope you have turned the corner and begun to see the positives of strengthening and nurturing your relationships with your partner, children and family; begun to change old habits and now adopting new behaviours as an individual and family; and re-prioritising and recognising what is important for the future at a micro and macro level. At this stage in our lives, we need to be courageous, we need to recognise and reduce that which stresses us.

Going forward I invite you to consider, at a personal and professional level, the Stop, Start, Continue Approach:

Stop – what are the things or behaviours which should be stopped?

Start – what are the things that I am currently not doing but which would be good to start doing?

Continue – things that are good/working well and which should be continued.

May the spirit of Diwali lighten our steps as we continue our life's journey

During this abnormal time, we have had to make huge adjustments in the face of fear, anxiety, loss, and uncertainties. The mental, physical, emotional, psychological, and intellectual adjustments, as well as juggling/balancing personal and professional demands and responsibilities have proven to be both highly challenging and rewarding at different levels.

We have had to rewire our thinking and adjust to a changed world of work, different ways of working, and leapfrog into a world of technology that enables us to communicate and be connected 24/7. We have had to re-prioritise what is important for the family's well-

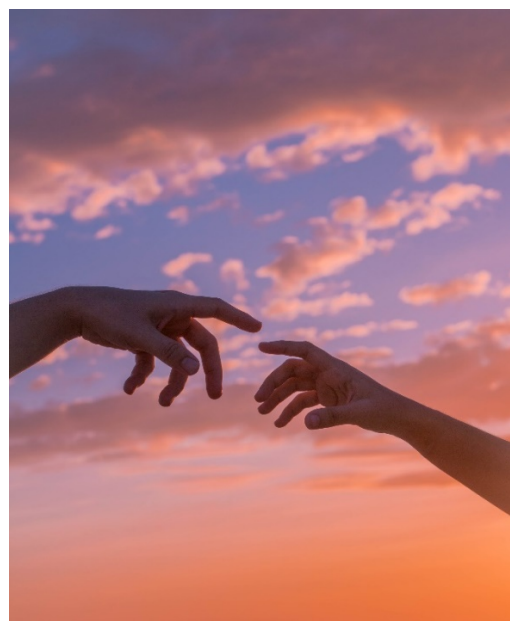
being, re-orient our social selves, and re-discover the value and beauty in doing things together and separately.

But most importantly we have had to re-assess what constitutes "quality of life." The standard indicators of the quality of life, which include **wealth, employment, the environment, physical and mental health, education, recreation and leisure time**, social belonging, religious beliefs, safety, security, and freedom have all been challenged in the face of Covid-19. Each one of us can attest how our personal indicators have been impacted and/or compromised. And yet amid all these challenges, the greatest survivor of all has been the resilience of the human spirit. It has enabled individuals to rise from the depths of personal despair and humanity to triumph against the worst unequal social conditions to face a new day.

And so, as you go forward with this resilience, may the burdens of the past 20 months be relegated to the past and the present celebrated for the gift it truly is. By consciously and mindfully shifting our thinking, a whole new world of possibilities will emerge. A world where we share our spiritual, professional, and intellectual values and gifts so that our social compacts are re-defined and re-constructed.

A world where Ubuntu and Vasudaiva Kutumbakam are realities.

In doing so, may you be the Light, be enlightened and enlighten others wherever you are during these challenging times!



Comments from Readers

An excellent informative issue. Well done to your team and thank you for sharing.

Sanjay Pillay

Great work being done here, well done.

Selvan Naidoo (Curator & Director 1860 Heritage Centre)

Thanks for these amazing messages in the monthly updates ... most appreciated and shared.

(Faizel Katkodia – Movement for Unity in South Africa)

"Krinvanto Vishwam Aryam" - Make the world noble

(Rig Veda 9.63.6)

Please send your comments and suggestions to admin@aryasamajsa.org

**"Mitrasya Chakshusha ...
samikshamahe"**

May we Look at All with an Equal and
Friendly Eye

(Yajur Veda 36.18)

To contribute to projects of the Arya Samaj
contact admin@aryasamajsa.org

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Tel: 031 2670544/0519
Arya Samaj South Africa,
87 Harbottle Road,
Sydenham Durban,
4091, South Africa
www.aryasamajsa.org
PBO No. 18/11/13/2971

