

FROM THE EDITOR

FALL OF ANOTHER FORT TO NEO-TRIBALISM

By the time this editorial comes to the notice of the readers, we hope that the issue which inspired this would have been resolved, but we wonder if the disillusionment it has caused us would have lost its rigours. The trend the incidents exemplified would require some inner probing.

One of the last institution in which we had a strong faith was the vocation of the lawyer. An individual lawyer, like a member of any other profession, may occasionally prove a bully, but when the lawyers collectively championed a cause, this editor was among those who believed that they will champion only a cause which was just, which was in keeping with the ideal of their profession. And surely, the lawyers collectively stand for the rule of pure and objective application of law, unsoiled by prejudice, arrogance and emotion.

This faith has been belied. A Delhi lawyer was arrested, accused as a thief. He was handcuffed. There is a directive from the Supreme Court that a person merely accused of a crime should not be handcuffed unless there is reason to suspect that he might try to escape. No wonder that the lawyers should protest against the handcuffing of their colleague.

Whether the arrested lawyer was guilty of the crime attributed to him or not is irrelevant at the moment. (A lawyer is not expected to be a thief, but a thief, given the necessary degree or training, can be a lawyer as much as he can be a collector or a professor or a film star.) A question arises at this stage: if handcuffing is illegal, it is illegal for anybody in this circumstance, be he a lawyer or a tailor. Would the lawyers have raised their collective voice if it were a tailor? The question that follows is, what was the target of the protest— the act of handcuffing or the act of handcuffing a lawyer? (The police say that they did not know that the gentleman handcuffed was a lawyer.)

Let us be realistic. The answer lies distributed in both the facts. Handcuffing was unwarranted in principle; hence there was the reason's ground for protest. That a lawyer was handcuffed, is the emotion's ground for protest. Both were combined in this case.

So far there is nothing wrong. This is just human.

But the situation took a qualitatively different turn when the lawyers pin-pointed an IPS officer for discourtesy towards them and demanded her suspension. We can understand any other collective body making such a demand. But how can the lawyers, who uphold the rule of law, deliver a mob-judgement and insist on its execution? If she is to be suspended, is it not in interest of law (mind you, the lawyers thrive by law) that her conduct should be investigated into and action taken against her if she is found guilty either by her own department or by a court of law? And a team of two High Court judges is already at work to find out the facts!

Evidently, the lawyers are led not by any cool objectivity but by emotion--or if we can be pardoned for doing away with euphemism—by ego. They are not doing anything different from what so many other collective bodies do. That is the disappointment, for the lawyers were expected to do better than flexing muscle.

In recent times we have seen illogical polarisations galore on the basis of caste, religion and vocation. Such polarisations on wrong issues can only have a chain reaction. Since the police officer concerned is a woman, some women organisations of Delhi demonstrated against the demand by the lawyers. At this rate we can visualise a time when if I am accused of something and I am a left-hander, all the left-handers should rally round me or, if I am bald, the baldpates of the land should unite to defend me. Surely, the lawyers should not contribute to such trends of growing tribalism, at best neo-tribalism.

We hope, the lawyers should reflect on the future of the very philosophy of the legal system even if the authorities are obliged to concede their demand. Doesn't every lawyer feel proud of the fact that our legal system would rather let the guilty go scot-free than punish the innocent?

It is impossible for us to think that individually the lawyers—at least many of them—do not understand the implication of their action. But their individuality is sacrificed to the collective ego. That is the tragedy.

If the lawyers were brave enough to say that they have made a wrong clamour, it will be a triumph of sanity—something we so badly need.

ON THE TIDES OF TIME

SHUT FOR ART'S SAKE

Occasionally the newspapers carry good news though their display is insignificant when compared to the other loud items on display.

Such a news comes from Florence. Most avenues in the heart of Florence are now shut to traffic—a step taken to protect the art treasures. The spewed out chemicals eat away at the art works in the renaissance castles either forcing costly restoration or causing irreparable damages.

Once at both the ends of a road in Tel Aviv could be seen a warning: "Silence! Agnon is at work." This was even before Agnon received the Nobel Prize for literature. This was the nation's gesture of respect for one of its greatest writers. These are small but significant moves, for they show that we have not been totally drained of a dignified humility.

A SUBTLE FORM OF CHILD ABUSE

DPA reports: Audio-cassettes with new-fangled stories for children to suit the technological age (tales of space adventures, for example) are driving away from the market in West Germany the traditional folktales. This observation may hold good for other Western countries too.

And what is happening there, will soon happen in India. Our parents and guardians are only too ready to behave like the rats following the Pied Piper.

But let us remember—the trend is set not by children's well-wishers, but by commercial manufacturers ever eager to cash in on any new innovation. Let us pay heed to those who care for human values. Psychologist Peter Dettmering of Hamburg says, "Fairy tales give children a pattern for experiencing and overcoming their fears," A sociologist comments in *Die Zeit* that the suppression of folktales is the "most subtle and common form of child abuse."