

Yours Nationally

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I am a true nationalist. I want to serve my nation not only in my lifetime but even in my death. I am told that one way of doing this is to join the army and die fighting and killing for the nation so that I will be honoured as a national martyr. Much as I would love to be a national martyr, I hate weapons and have an aversion to killing. Surely, there must be a way that sissies like me who abhor violence can become national martyrs.

Also, I have a feeling that not all soldiers are selfless sacrificers for the nation. So many join the army as people join other professions. They do it for money, not for the love of killing or dying. I want to be a more selfless servant of the nation. I do not want to cost the government several years of salary, food, uniform, free booze and various other expensive benefits which army men get. The government would also have to spend money on buying me weapons if I joined the army. I want to serve the nation without causing any expenditure to the government, which, after all, is the owner of the nation. I want to leave the nation and the government richer by my death. That is how profound and selfless my nationalism is.

And from where do I draw my inspiration? Not from ministers and bureaucrats, nor from government servants, all of whom want others to serve the nation while they themselves loot and parasite on the nation. I draw my inspiration from the simple and poor people of Bhopal who, even

in their death and devastation, served the nation most admirably.

First, they made sure that overwhelmingly they were the ones who lived in the vicinity of the plant and therefore inhaled most of the poisonous gas from the Union Carbide plant; they saw to it that the rich did not have to suffer much from the effects of the poisonous leak. For, after all, it is the rich who are the real nation builders. The poor are but a drag on the nation. Thus, those who died voluntarily lightened the burden of the nation.

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Those who died from the Union Carbide gas also did so in the most profitable way for the nation and the nation's keepers. Imagine how much inconvenience and unnecessary embarrassment they would have caused the nation if they had been foolish enough to die on such a large scale from the various acts of commission or omission of our venerable government — such as the leaks from *sarkari* nuclear plants, fertiliser factories or in one of the routine epidemics of cholera, hepatitis and a host of other diseases that come bountifully with an unbountiful supply of municipal tap water. Neither would I have liked to inconvenience the nation by being murdered in police sponsored massacres, such as the one in Meerut in 1987 or of November 1984 in Delhi. Our *mai baap sarkar* would have been needlessly stigmatised for acting against the people. Such irresponsible criticism would unnecessarily





ly weaken and impoverish the nation. The government would wily nilly have had to announce an ex-gratia payment of at least Rs 10,000 for the dead and Rs 2,000 for those with serious injuries. True, the people would not receive more than half the amount; the other half would be more suitably pocketed by politicians and government functionaries, those who serve the nation by serving themselves.

But, since the Bhopal martyrs were sensible enough to die of an American company's poison, the nation's owners got an opportunity to claim billions of dollars in compensation for the loss of "national" lives. Indian lives are cheap if Indian poison or police destroys them, but Indian corpses become valuable if a claim can be made abroad.

Thus, not only did the nation's owners make a lot of money for themselves directly by coming to various unpublicised deals with Union Carbide. It also cleaned up by siphoning off the bulk of the money received officially for relief and rehabilitation of the survivors. Our venerable *netas* and *babus*

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are only too aware how easy money corrupts people easily, especially the poor. That is why the government passed a law disallowing individual victims from claiming damages, and has made sure that all the money came through the nation's owners. At first, many survivors staked their claims for compensation through lawyers who would fight for them for a fee. But the government, through an ordinance, taught them the sheer presumptuousness of their actions. The survivors had to accept the all enlightened nation's servants as their proxy in their suit, for they are truly government fearing and nation loving citizens.

Had they dared to do otherwise, I am sure the government would have been wise enough to pass an ordinance declaring them anti-national.

In addition, think of all the sympathy the Indian nation and govern-

ment gather internationally by the fact of these deaths. Our prime minister can actually hold his head high in self-righteous indignation whenever he talks to the foreign press about the Bhopal tragedy. But those who were foolish enough to be massacred at Arwal, Bhiwandi, Ahmedabad, or in Delhi in November 1984, prove as much of an embarrassment and liability in their death as they were a burden on the nation in their life. So, it is from these poor, government fearing and nation loving citizens that I draw my inspiration, and pray morning, noon and night for the following opportunities to serve the nation:

- May I be blessed with the opportunity of being poisoned to death at the hands of a foreign company and not an Indian one.
- If I have to die in an accident, may it not be an Indian train or bus. They seem to have a special fondness for plunging into rivers and valleys every time they see a half crumbling bridge or mountain road. I would rather die in an air crash on a foreign airline so that my death can bring much needed foreign exchange to the nation.

Shame be on all those who have learnt to keep watch on the poisonous leaks emanating from our own *desi* industries or to protest when people are killed by various acts of commission or omission of our nation's owners. It seems they do not want a strong nation. For, if they did, they would not try to weaken the hands of our government by constantly criticising it. For, after all, a strong nation means a strong government. And who else can a government test its strength on but its own people?

I appeal to all the trouble makers, the human rights activists, the civil liberties *wallahs* and all the self proclaimed democrats of various hues not to come in the way of our attempts to build a strong nation. □