



EDITORIAL

Unwarranted interference?

The introduction of the Waqf (Amendment) Bill, 2024, in the Lok Sabha has ignited an intense debate between the government and opposition parties. The Bill, which seeks to reform the Waqf Act of 1995, has been presented by the government as a necessary step to usher in transparency and efficiency within the administration of waqf properties. The opposition parties, on the contrary, contend that the proposed amendments are a thinly veiled attempt to undermine Muslims’ religious rights and the federal structure of the Constitution.

The core of the controversy lies in the inclusion of non-Muslim members in the Waqf Boards and the transferring of certain decision-making powers from Waqf tribunals to district collectors. Critics argue that these changes will likely erode the autonomy of Waqf Boards and infringe upon the religious freedoms of the Muslim community. The opposition’s concerns are not without merit. The Waqf system, deeply rooted in Islamic tradition, has historically been managed by Muslims for the benefit of the community. The inclusion of non-Muslims in Waqf Boards raises questions about the appropriateness of allowing individuals who do not share the faith to make decisions on matters that are inherently religious. Such an interference is completely unsolicited—particularly in the absence of any concrete judicial re-interpretation.

Union Minority Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju has asserted that the amendments are necessary to address issues of corruption and inefficiency within the Waqf Boards. He pointed out that the proposed reforms were recommended by committees set up by previous Congress-led governments but were never implemented. According to Rijiju, the Bill aims to protect the interests of ordinary Muslims by preventing the misuse of Waqf properties by powerful individuals or groups. The minister claims to have been “privately told” by many opposition leaders that State Waqf Boards have “turned into a mafia”.

The opposition, on the contrary, has described the Bill as ‘draconian’ and accused the government of using it as a tool to polarise voters ahead of upcoming Assembly elections in Maharashtra and Haryana. The Bill’s proposal to empower district collectors to determine whether a property is Waqf or government land—a responsibility that previously rested with Waqf tribunals—has also come under considerable scrutiny. This shift in authority is seen by many as an attempt to centralise power and diminish the role of the Waqf Boards. The opposition has warned that this could lead to the wrongful appropriation of Waqf properties by the government.

Notably, the Waqf system plays a crucial role in maintaining the social and economic fabric of the Muslim community. Even if a reform is imperative, it must be undertaken with the utmost sensitivity and in consultation with all stakeholders. The essence of the matter lies in grasping the vulnerabilities and sensibilities on the ground, rather than manoeuvring the tenets of law and logic to force one’s way through majoritarian sentiments. The degree of resentment against the government’s reform endeavour is mostly a result of arbitrariness of the Bill’s provisions; and partly that of mistrust it has earned in the Muslim and secular circles over its term. Winning the confidence of subjects becomes important before initiating big-ticket reforms. The debate over the Waqf (Amendment) Bill is indicative of broader concerns about the erosion of religious freedoms under the current government.

The Bill has been referred to a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) for scrutiny. It is expected that the JPC will propose a version that respects the religious rights of Muslims and upholds the tenet of federalism enshrined in the Constitution



MEENAKSHI GIRDHAR

Health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity

Beneath the surface of India’s booming healthcare sector lies the threatening prevalence of diseases like diabetes and hypertension—requiring comprehensive restructuring of existing lifestyles

According to the latest data available, the population of India has crossed 1.44 billion—partially registering a decline in the rate of infant mortality, an increase in life expectancy, and outcomes pertaining to better healthcare services. As per a report in *Economic Times* (April 7, 2024), the Indian healthcare industry is witnessing a boom of 22 per cent Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR). Data reveal that the telemedicine markets and over-the-counter drug markets, too, are estimated to show an upward growth of USD 5.4 billion and USD 6.73 billion, respectively. The above data clearly signify an increased health consciousness among Indians; however, another aspect of declining health has surfaced among the population.

With advancements in medicine, technology, and the abundance of available knowledge, humanity has succeeded in gaining control over most aspects of a rich and lavish lifestyle. However, it remains overburdened with lifestyle disorders. Reports from the Institute of Health and Family Welfare suggest that India is recording a sharp increase in lifestyle diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, irritable bowel syndrome, cancer, obesity, sleep disorders, heart diseases, and digestive problems. According to a report by the Indian Council of Medical Research, India has 100 million confirmed diabetic patients, and another report by the WHO (2023) estimated 188.3 million Indians to be hypertension patients. In addition to lifestyle diseases, there has been a significant increase in the number of suicides, teen pregnancies, broken marriages, drug abuse, and juvenile crimes in the last few decades (NCRB, 2022), significantly an indication of not a healthy society.

With the parallel rise of the healthcare sector and lifestyle diseases, along with psy-



There must be an integrated approach towards improving health, wherein all aspects of personality are targeted simultaneously

cho-social maladjustments, a focused and detailed understanding of the term ‘health’ and the means to achieve a healthy persona becomes a dire need for an aspiring healthy society.

Health has been conceptualised in three ways. Primarily, there is the pathogenic approach, indicating the absence of disability and disease. Next is the salutogenic approach, indicating the presence of positive states of human capacities and functioning in thinking, feelings, and behavior. The third is the complete state model, derived from the ancient word ‘hale’, meaning wholeness, being whole, sound, or well. According to the World Health Organisation (1946), health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. There must be an integrated

approach where all aspects of personality are targeted simultaneously.

According to a report by the International Market Bureau, Indians’ healthy lifestyle is part of a trend to look fitter and well-groomed. But actually, being healthy connotes psycho-social balance along with physical robustness. While some people in the general population may require extra care, precautions, and medical help, there should also be a parallel system to promote a healthier population. To cultivate a healthy persona and society, incorporate this simple three-point formula into your daily routine:

- Early to bed and early to rise.
- Eating fresh, home-cooked food at regular meal times.
- Practicing yoga/breathing exercises/meditation/mindfulness, along with physical exercises.

One of the most common attributes among today’s most successful people is the habit of waking up early. Indian sciences have long affirmed the benefits of early rising, identifying it as the best period for concentration and focus, providing an extra boost to cognitive and mental abilities. Around the world, the benefits of a disciplined and scheduled lifestyle have been scientifically proven. However, today’s Indian generation, with no set time to sleep and wake due to late-night work culture, is playing havoc with its circadian rhythm, disturbing the very nature of human existence and survival.

The significance of food is not a novel concept in our culture. It is mentioned in the Gita: *āhāra śuddhau sattva śuddhiḥ* (7.26.2), meaning, “By eating pure food, the mind becomes pure.” The reverse is also true—people with pure

minds prefer pure foods. Therefore, we should constantly monitor what we eat, as it has a direct effect on both our bodies and minds. Even in Chapter 17 of the Bhagavad Gita, the significance of fresh food is stated:

yāta-yāmam gata-rasam pūti paryuṣhitam cha yat uchchhishṭam api chāmedhyam bhojanam tāmasa-priyam

Foods that are overcooked, stale, putrid, polluted, and impure are dear to persons in the mode of ignorance. It has been clearly mentioned that food, once cooked, must be consumed within three hours. Ironically, today’s generation is largely dependent on packaged foods with longer shelf lives.

Both in Indian and Western systems, for a human to reach their maximum potential, ‘*Annamay Kosh*’ (subtle body) and ‘*Manomay Kosh*’ (psychological body) must be trained simultaneously. Strengthening one’s physical body is essential, but the significance of practicing yoga, breathing exercises, meditation, and mindfulness should not be ignored. With the rise of gym culture and the neglect of mental vitality, one does not fully embody the definition of being healthy. There is no doubt that physical exercises help in reducing our stress hormones, but the impact of breathing exercise in our neuroplasticity is well established by scientific results.

We all aim to reach the top of the ladder—whether in physical, financial, or social growth—but one must start with the first step. A three-point formula to succeed in any domain of life has been mentioned above. For convenience, one can start with any of the three points, practice it wholeheartedly, and observe the transformation within oneself. Once one of these habits is mastered, it is easier to incorporate the other two into one’s daily lifestyle.

Best wishes on your journey towards ‘Being Healthy’!
Views expressed are personal

Listen to your genes

Preventive genetic testing has taken off in India providing invaluable insights into avoiding future ailments

As I age, I find myself most fascinated by treatments and therapies that can naturally improve health and general fitness; perhaps even reverse the corroding effects of old age. Obviously, following the trend of biohacking is a favourite downtime activity. But my interest is deeply personal too. I have seen my parents suffer with ill-health caused primarily by poor lifestyles, and frankly, callous days of youth. Not just them, many in the middle-aged to senior citizen age bracket, rue their heady days of indiscipline and yesteryear’s fast metabolism. Disease and hospital visits are triggering for me — when your folks go in and out of hospitals sooner than they take holidays, and you find yourself outside many ICUs and doctors’ chambers — it can cause stress, even PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder). No wonder that there are therapy sessions and counselling for caregivers. But if you’re a determined person, you’ll swear not to go down that same beaten path as your parents, if you can help it.

About eight years ago, I developed acute digestive problems. Several doctors, tests, and medication later, for years, I remained emotionally distraught, mentally depressed, and physically flatulent, distended, and often, in pain. When the last two years of extreme discipline didn’t help either, I knew that something else needed to be done. If you lead a purportedly healthy life and still have chronic health issues, the doctor will almost always say that it’s genetic. Our genes are connected to our family history of diseases, dictating how we react to everything from infections



Preventive genetic tests are quickly garnering favour among the young and health-conscious

to medicines to food. We know that diabetes, cancer, cardiac issues, and so on, can be hereditary. Now imagine being privy to this information before you even show a symptom of that ailment; that’s a game-changer for anyone who wishes to live a healthy, disease-free life.

So, from often blaming my parents for passing on poor genes that caused all my gut and hormonal issues, I decided that true to my proactive personality, I would tackle my chronic issues with both hands. For this, I would need knowledge, awareness, and guidance from specialised people. As I stood at the cusp of turning “middle-aged” this year, and while people give themselves materialistic objects for birthdays, I gifted myself a DNA kit. And thus, started my journey into healing through genetics (disclaimer: this is work-in-progress and may not suit everyone; it’s advisable to consult medical

professionals before following any treatment/ regime).

Coming from mixed parentage, I had always wanted to know my hereditary roots (interestingly, I’m almost equal parts Bengali and South Indian, and 5.5 per cent Malay! Go figure). This experience piqued my interest further — what more can my genes tell me? To further understand that I underwent a ‘Predictive DNA’ test that laid out my genetic profile and the diet, exercise, supplements that would benefit me. It also charted a ‘Genetic Risk Assessment’, what diseases I am prone to, along with an Omega test (to see how my body reacts to various Omega acids), and a gut microbiome test (evaluates DNA of the gut bacteria). The next step was to educate, prevent, and action a lifestyle plan that would sidestep risks and manage (if not completely heal) chronic issues.

Preventive genetic tests are quickly garnering favour among the young and health-conscious. From helping stay fit and achieving optimal skin health to cancer screening and prenatal/newborn testing — genome testing offers invaluable insights. From healthcare majors such as Apollo Clinic to startups such as MedGenome and MapmyGenome, there are numerous companies that are offering affordable tests. Reportedly, around 20 gene testing labs and 50 startups are currently functional in this sector. As per Research and Markets, the genetic testing market in India was valued at USD 61 million in 2022 and is predicted to grow at a CAGR (compound annual growth rate) of 6.94 per cent touching USD 91 million in 4 years. While the tests are reasonably priced for the financially able (ranging from Rs 7,000/- to upwards of Rs 22,000/-), prices

are still not at mass testing levels. A huge potential for startups to level the playing field and democratise access to the larger populace.

Preventive healthcare is one of the most significant health trends that promises to keep evolving and improving as newer innovations and discoveries continue to revolutionise the health space. Genetic testing will also strengthen the fight against rare diseases by enabling early intervention. As per reports, there are about 7,000 rare diseases afflicting over 7 crore Indians; around 80 per cent of these diseases are genetic. Equipping oneself with vital knowledge about one’s constitution, can reduce chances of disease, reduce future healthcare costs, and prevent comorbidities. Prevention is better than cure.

The writer is an author and media entrepreneur. Views expressed are personal

DEMISE OF A REFORMIST

This is in reference to the news report, "Former CM & veteran Marxist Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee no more". Undoubtedly, Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, the last communist Chief Minister of West Bengal was a Marxist with a difference. The CPI(M) stalwart — a quintessential Bengali 'bhadralok' with an austere lifestyle and an incorruptible image — will go down in history as a pragmatic communist who was willing to keep aside his ideological convictions and embrace capitalism for the industrialisation of his State. It was during his tenure as Chief Minister from 2000-2011 that the State became a preferred investment destination. Within two years of formulating the IT policy in 2003, the sector registered 70 per cent growth. In 2000-01, West Bengal was second only to Gujarat in terms of investment realisation. His biggest initiative was attracting Tata Motors to establish a small car plant at Singur, a fertile agricultural area not far from the city. However, it faced opposition from farmers, a key vote bank of the Left parties, and eventually became one of the key reasons, along with the Nandigram agitation, for the downfall of the Marxist government. Mr Bhattacharjee's open defiance of the party line on key issues signalled the start of ideological churning in the Marxist party, a process that still continues.

— KHOKAN DAS, KOLKATA via email

millenniumpost.in

Log on to write letters to the editor or send them to letter2editor.mp@gmail.com. You can also send your comments to The Editor, Millennium Post, Pratap Bhawan, 5 Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg, New Delhi 110 002