The Arm of the Stubborn Yogi ( Hardeep Sabharwal)

If you read yesterday’s newspaper, you must have seen the item about the yogi. No, it wasn’t on the front page as it is not news of national interest; nor is it related to any romantic or sensational Bollywood updates. It is not on the second page either, where normally we find the remains of items from the front page. The third and fourth pages are for classifieds, matrimonials and advertisements for sex pills. Perusing those pages you might get the impression that the whole world is impotent, or soon will be. The fifth page contains news about state politics. Pages six and seven are for editorials and articles about doings in the lower and upper houses of parliament. And then comes page eight, where you can read the less significant and sometimes bizarre news, which seems to be just a page-filler. Pages nine and ten are reserved for business and the economy; page eleven for sports and page twelve is for pictures of celebs and other gossip. So let’s return to page eight, the upper left corner, where you will find news about a yogi from the Himalayas and his upraised arm. This yogi has held his arm in that position for thirty years.

Thirty years! I wondered. As if they were thirty hours.

"Have you read this?" I asked my brother

"Yes," he said.

It must be very painful, I thought.

As the yogi said, initially it was very painful, but god helped him and finally he succeeded.

"What do you think?" I asked

"It’s nonsense," he said. "Look at the picture, the arm looks too thin. It looks like all the ligaments have died. It’s lifeless; it can never return to its original position. It’s a dead arm now and the question is, what does he gain by doing that. Nothing."

I looked at my father; his view was the same.

"It is blind faith and nothing else. You can’t achieve anything that way. It’s useless."

"No!” I protested. "You can’t say what he’s achieved by holding his arm upright continuously year after year. If we look at people that way nothing can be judged. Can one say what Bill Gates has achieved by becoming one of the richest people in the world? Is material success everything? No, there are many other things also in life. We cannot measure success merely in terms of material losses and gains. So, only the yogi can tell us what he has achieved."

They did not argue, knowing my nature, and busied themselves with their work.

Thirty years, I wondered. I am 36 years old now. What have I achieved in life? I could ask. I have no answer now, but perhaps time will tell.

And then I remembered that exactly thirty years ago we moved to Punjab from Delhi, after surviving the 1984 [Sikh massacre in Delhi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1984_anti-Sikh_riots), following the assassination of then prime minister Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards.

Some 3,000 Sikhs (and another 8,000 in other parts of India) were killed, burned alive, their properties looted and families destroyed by the mob in New Delhi, which was openly supported by police and leaders of the Congress Party.

"When a big tree falls, the earth shakes," pronounced Gandhi’s successor, Indira’s son Rajiv.

This was the only acknowledgement by the government of India of what had happened. As if it was a sectarian government and the prime minister did not represent all Indians.

After that it became an issue in every election. We demand justice for 84 victims,” the opposition parties said. “It’s a national shame…” Blah blah blah. But they forgot about this shame for the next five years, until the next elections.

Sometimes I feel that the issue is a cold-blooded animal that hibernates for five years and awakens only when the election heat is on.

Jaswinder rang me on the day the court sentenced the perpetrators of the 2002 Gujarat riots. This was good news.

Maybe someday there will be justice for the 84 riot victims?

But these hopes are fading, as thirty years have passed and not a single perpetrator has been sentenced by the courts, although there are clear indications of involvement of senior Congress leaders and police officials.

My thoughts were disturbed by Satnam Singh beeping his horn on his scooter.

"Any news?"

"Nothing, Uncle," I said.

"I’ve been to the PUDA [Punjab Urban Planning and Development Authority] office..."

He began narrating what happened at the office, where he had inquired about allotting plots of land or flats to the 84 riot victims.

Satnam Singh is also one of the victims and he is struggling hard for the rehabilitation of those affected by the riots, those who have received no compensation or relief from the Punjab government.

“I wonder whether the Punjab government will give them anything as it has failed to rehabilitate them even after repeated demands from the High Court.”

"Nothing will happen, Uncle," I said.

I remembered the day when the CBI filed charges against Congress Party politician [Sajjan Kumar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sajjan_Kumar). Satnam Singh had brought us the news

"And what about other Congress Party politicians like Jagdish Tytler?" I asked.

"Let's see," he said.

"Nothing is going to happen; years have passed. Have we seen any justice done. There is no hope," I said in frustration.

"Yes, we all know that no justice has been done and perhaps we will never see it done. Two more generations have been born in the meantime. Our generation is old now. But don't say that about hope. Hope is life, my son, and our hope for justice will never die; our struggle for justice is not worthless."

I was speechless.

My heart was filled with respect for him and for all the victims and the people who are struggling for justice with at least some hope of getting it. Their voices are not dumb; they are not dead.

I turned to the newspaper again and looked at the picture of the yogi, with his upraised arm. It seemed so weak, so thin, but it did not look dead to me; it was still alive. It came to me that this upraised arm was a symbol of all the people in the world who are struggling for justice, no matter what their struggle, wherever they are, and whatever their race or religion. The voices of those demanding justice may be thin and meek, but still they are alive and have hope; they can't be dead, just as the upraised arm of the yogi is not.

Hardeep Sabharwal.