

Delays And Disparities In Pakistan's Electoral Landscape

By Soumya Awasthi

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In the backdrop of Pakistan's eagerly awaited general elections, the nation finds itself entangled in a web of complexities, ranging from the delayed electoral process to egregious atrocities against minorities, public discontent, and regional dynamics shaping the political landscape.

The prolonged delay in the general elections, following the dissolution of the National Assembly in August 2023, has not only stirred up political upheaval but also unveiled stark challenges to democratic principles. Amidst the power struggles between civilian leaders and military figures, the Senate's announcement of an indefinite postponement, citing "security concerns" and the delineation of constituencies based on the latest census, raises eyebrows. Notably, the resolution was passed with a mere 15 members present out of 100 in the upper house, triggering concerns about the equitable balance of power in Pakistan's domestic and global political dynamics.

The intricate interplay between democracy and hypocrisy becomes apparent in Pakistan's tumultuous journey toward democratic governance since its inception in 1947 as the world's sole Islamic republic.

The democratic narrative in Pakistan is marred by persistent atrocities against minorities, creating a pressing concern for the international community. The August 2023 Jaranwala incident, where properties of the Christian community were set ablaze, serves as a reminder of the systemic challenges faced by religious minorities. The plight of Shia Muslims, Christians, Ahmadis, Hindus, and Sikhs, subjected to discrimination and violence, underscores the urgent need for government accountability. The legal framework, particularly the draconian blasphemy law, exacerbates the marginalisation of minority communities, as they face persecution and accusations used as tools for personal vendettas.

Various benchmarks illuminate the state of democracy in Pakistan, encompassing freedom of speech, press independence, the electoral process, and adherence to the rule of law. A critical facet of democracy, the freedom of speech and press autonomy, has been challenging to secure in Pakistan, ranking 150 out of 180 countries on the 2023 World Press Freedom Index.

The electoral process serves as another vital gauge of democratic maturity, with Pakistan ranking 104 out of 167 countries on the Democracy Index in 2022. Evaluating the rule of law is equally crucial, revealing pervasive corruption, political influence, and a lack of accountability. The judiciary, often criticised for delay, inefficiency, and susceptibility to corruption, remains a significant concern. Discriminatory measures, particularly against religious minorities, further tarnish democratic credentials.

The August 2023 Jaranwala incident stands as a testament to the acts of terror perpetrated against Pakistan's minorities, particularly the Christian community, whose properties were reduced to ashes.

Shia Muslims, Christians, Ahmadis, Hindus, and Sikhs, constituting the minority community in Pakistan, consistently face discrimination under both civil and military rule. Despite political rhetoric in favour of minorities, fundamental rights such as worship space, crematoriums, and medical facilities remain elusive. Furthermore, instances of vandalism targeting places of worship and residences, fueled by accusations of blasphemy, persist.

Apart from disenfranchisement, the minority community contends with violence from militant Islamist factions, with legal statutes effectively endorsing persecution, especially against the Ahmadiyya community. In the run-up to future elections, the caretaker government, led by prime minister Anwar ul Haq Kakar, has faced accusations of rejecting 3,000 nominations, including that of the Balochistan National Party-Mengal (BNP-M). Calls for increased minority representation and constitutional amendments prohibiting non-Muslims from crucial leadership positions underscore the shrinking political space for minorities in Pakistan.

The forthcoming elections in Pakistan risk impartiality and equity unless the minority community is inclusively engaged in the electoral process. Disputes over religious beliefs should not impede individuals' voting rights. Pakistan must prioritise creating a comprehensive and equitable framework for minority participation in the upcoming general elections, as recommended by the National Commission on Human Rights (NCHR), before contemplating the establishment of a separate ministry for minorities.

Throughout Pakistan's history, political parties have courted Islamist factions, as exemplified by the blasphemy law, where pressure from these groups marginalises minority religious communities. The evaluation of politicians and decision-makers based on their adherence to a specific brand of Islam often overshadows policy assessments. As the nation grapples with these issues, a discernible public outcry has emerged, highlighting the concerns of citizens who demand accountability and adherence to democratic principles. However, the political landscape is further complicated by the nuanced response of Imran Khan's supporters. The followers of the prime minister, who came to power promising a "New Pakistan," find themselves torn between allegiance to their leader and acknowledgement of the challenges confronting the democratic fabric. Balancing the admiration for Khan's governance with a critical assessment of the government's handling of minority rights becomes a delicate tightrope walk for his supporters. On January 10, 2024, around a dozen Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) workers protested in Islamabad against the alleged sale of party tickets in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). The protesters, who travelled from KP, gathered outside the PTI office in G8, accusing the party of being hijacked. Saud Shah Roghani, a nominee from the PK-55 constituency, accused the establishment of undermining Khan and the PTI, alleging that the party tickets were being sold, with a reported price of ₹40 million for one ticket. Roghani criticised the flawed intra-party elections in KP, claiming elected office-bearers had no value and were selected based on personal interests.

The forced ouster of Afghan refugees and the contentious merger of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) are pivotal factors shaping the prelude to the elections. The government's policies, including the eviction of Afghan refugees, not only amplify concerns about humanitarian crises but also impact the socio-political landscape. The forced merger of FATA has triggered protests from separatist groups against the recent census and forced merger of FATA, notably the Qabail Tahafuz Movement (QTM), which vows to boycott elections until the supreme court addresses the constitutional concerns regarding constituency delineation.

[Read complete article on website hindustantimes.com](https://www.hindustantimes.com)

Navigating AI: Insights from PM Modi, Pope Francis

By Ram Madhav

The writer is a president, India Foundation.

On December 12, Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence (GPAI) Summit in Delhi. For some time now, he and his ministerial colleagues have been talking about making India the hub for the AI ecosystem. The Prime Minister talked about the opportunities available for AI in India but also used the occasion to highlight some important concerns.

The explosion of digital age technologies is going to revolutionise the future of mankind. However, this frontier technology brings with it a set of serious challenges towards which the Prime Minister sought to draw global attention. While there are “many positive aspects” of AI, it can “also play the greatest role in destroying the 21st century,” he warned, referring to challenges like deep fakes, cyber security, data theft and terrorists accessing AI tools. The world has entered the era of Artificial Intelligence, big data and robotics. Machine learning, the process of creating “intelligent machines”, is taking new strides. Google developed an AI-driven chess program called Alpha Zero in 2018. Alpha Zero’s unique AI mind has the capacity to think and improve upon its playing skills. It practised against itself millions of times and acquired an ability that the most powerful digital chess programs, such as Stockfish, couldn’t stand up to.

In essence, we, humans, are using our own intelligence to create machines that we intend to call “artificial”, but, in reality, are more intelligent than humans. We are entering a world where the machines, not the humans, could become the masters. This scenario is causing anxiety and concern to many in the world. In March this year, thousands of eminent global citizens, including ones like Elon Musk of Tesla Motors, released an open letter titled “Pause Giant AI Experiments”, and demanded that all AI labs must pause experiments for at least six months to address some serious and real concerns. “AI stresses me out,” confessed Musk, while the open letter raised serious questions like, “should we let machines flood our information channels with propaganda and untruth? Should we develop nonhuman minds that might eventually outnumber, outsmart, obsolete, and replace us?”

OpenAI CEO Sam Altman and Apple co-founder Steve Wozniak, too, joined this bandwagon of AI sceptics and issued warnings about how unregulated AI can lead to uncontrollable harm to individuals and societies. A few years ago, on February 28, 2020, in an unusual initiative, the Vatican hosted a dialogue in Rome “to promote an ethical approach to artificial intelligence”, where Catholic priests rubbed shoulders with AI industry leaders, deliberating on the concerns about AI. The dialogue released a six-point charter, “Rome Call for AI Ethics”, that coined a new concept “algorithcs” – ethical algorithms. “Grant man his centrality” – the Vatican fervently appealed to the AI industry.

Signatories to this Rome Call included Brad Smith, president of Microsoft, John Kelly, executive vice president of IBM, and Paola Pisano, Italian minister of innovation besides Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, a senior Vatican cleric.

The Rome Call was intended to promote an ethical approach to AI. The participants insisted that digital innovation and technological progress should serve human genius and creativity and “not their gradual replacement”. They wanted a sense of responsibility among organisations, governments, institutions and the private sector towards that end.

The Delhi Declaration, released at the end of the G-20 Summit in September this year, also underscored the concerns and gave a strong call for a “Responsible Human-Centric AI”.

Insisting that a framework is needed “to prevent misuse of AI”, the Delhi Declaration appealed that like the agreements and protocols for various international issues, “we have to work together to create a global framework for the ethical use of AI”. PM Modi took the lead in adding urgency to it, saying, “Bharat calls upon the entire world that we should not waste even one moment. There are only a few days left in this year. The new year is round the corner. We have to complete the global framework within a given time limit. This task is very important to protect humanity”.

As we prepare to end 2023, came the New Year message from Pope Francis titled “Artificial Intelligence and Peace”. The Pope also expressed concern that the “remarkable advances in the digital sphere” may have “serious implications for the pursuit of justice and harmony among the people”.

The Pope raised “urgent questions” about the consequences, in the medium and long term, of these new digital technologies, their impact on individual lives and on societies, and on international stability and peace. He highlighted the need for preserving fundamental human values like “inclusion, transparency, security, equity, privacy and reliability”.

The human race has progressed in the last two millennia on the basis of faith initially, and then reason, after the dawn of Enlightenment. But the reason that guided mankind until now is facing its biggest challenge in the new strides that AI is making. The new reality will be created not by human reason anymore but by the machine mind empowered by artificial intelligence. In many respects, it is inscrutable, too.

The world has witnessed many transformative technological advancements in the past. The last time that it happened during the Enlightenment, a strong philosophical and moral framework followed its evolution, providing it with necessary ethical foundations. But now, the Meta era is being conceived and offered to us by the big-tech as a *fait accompli*, while no philosophical, moral and ethical interventions seem to be in sight. “While the number of individuals capable of creating AI is growing, the ranks of those contemplating this technology’s implications for humanity — social, legal, philosophical, spiritual, moral — remain dangerously thin” bemoaned Henry Kissinger in the book, *The Age of AI: And Our Human Future* (2021).

Both Prime Minister Modi and Pope Francis are trying to highlight this major discrepancy. It is time the world leadership paused and thought about “algorithethics” – the ethics of AI.

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One Bharat, One Citizenship

By Dr. A. Adityanjee

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Bharat, that is India, is a civilisational state. There are very few civilizational states currently. Some have disappeared from the face of the earth. The mighty Persian state has gone, replaced by the Islamic Republic of Iran. Mayan and Incan civilisations are extinct. Civilisations don’t die. They commit suicide. No one wants Bharat to commit civilizational suicide. That would happen exactly if Bharat were to approve dual citizenship. Indian constitution does not allow for dual citizenship. There has been chatter in official circles about deliberations on approving dual citizenship for Bharat. Some of it is encouraged or triggered by the Indian business groups and by the non-resident Indian lobby. Dr. S. Jaishankar while interacting with entrepreneurs at the TAKEPRIDE 2023 summit organized by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) stated that there are challenges to the notion of dual citizenship in Bharat while the debate is still going on. There are economic arguments as well as philosophical arguments in favour of approving dual citizenship in Bharat.

Human migration is a complex, multi-determined process ongoing for thousands of years.

It cannot be controlled or stopped. It is dependent on a multitude of factors that include demographic, economic, religious, climatic, wars, famines etc. However, citizenship is a tightly regulated legal process by the Westphalian nation-state that has a bearing on national security. Philosophically speaking, if Bharat's motto is Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, there is no reason not to grant dual citizenship.

The liberal argument would be to allow dual citizenship to anyone who has relinquished Indian citizenship because the borders don't matter. Emotionally, this is a seemingly correct liberal approach but rationally it would open a can of worms. Historically, persons of Indian origin (PIOs) were taken as indentured labourers by the British colonialists to their former colonies to work in sugarcane farms and rubber plantations. Most of the NRIs who left Bharat are arguably economic migrants. Others went for higher studies abroad got jobs overseas and chose to stay there.

Some could not get jobs or academic placements locally in Bharat because of a culture of corruption, connections, and caste-based reservations. Since the transfer of power happened in 1947, the new rulers of Bharat adopted a regime of licenses, permits and quotas that did not encourage innovation or fair play, forcing citizens of Bharat to migrate abroad looking for opportunities that were not available locally.

There is also a recent concern that many high-net-worth Indians (HNWIs) have chosen to give up Indian citizenship and acquired foreign citizenship for tax purposes. As many as 6,500 high-net-worth Indians are likely to leave Bharat in 2023, according to the Henley Private Wealth Migration Report 2023. This makes Bharat the second-highest country in terms of HNWI outflow, with China taking the lead with a net loss of 13,500 individuals. The report reveals that the top destinations for HNWI migration in 2023 are predicted to be Australia, the UAE, Singapore, and the US.

Allowing dual citizenship will probably prevent such individuals from relinquishing Indian citizenship. Having dual taxation agreements with some key countries can prevent this partially. Countries like the US tax their citizens on their worldwide income. Hence, dual citizenship will not help such individuals because taxation rates in the US are high. There is an ongoing global discussion about some countries making money by selling their Golden passports and citizenship to high-net-worth individuals through investment schemes for citizenship.

A recent book by Kristin Surak suggests a \$4 billion industry of worldwide network of lawyers, consultants and advisors who facilitate investment migration by selling such golden passports to millionaires. In fact, the US spearheaded this new phenomenon much earlier by starting a program of granting green cards by investment that leads to the path to US citizenships after five years. Wars, political stability, higher taxes, and personal freedom to travel have always been key reasons for millionaires to migrate.

Many Russian oligarchs are starting to get Golden passports to escape US financial sanctions. High net worth Chinese wish to have a second home because of the lack of political freedom at home in the communist system. The priorities of high-net-worth individuals are metamorphosing into their children's prospects, the quality of their lives, and the legacies they leave. Wealthy Indians want to ensure that their children get higher education in top-notch academic institutions to pave the way for their success instead of being rejected locally in Bharat owing to caste-based reservations.

Once Narayan Murthy famously stated in a CBS 60 Minute interview that it is more difficult to get admission to an IIT as compared to MIT. HNWIs from war-torn countries always look for safe havens where they can raise their families. Half of the population of Ukraine has emigrated owing to the war. HNWIs are looking to migrate to places that are more resilient to climate change and that offer a good quality of life. Such economic citizenship may suit these persons temporarily, but such betrayal must not be rewarded by granting dual citizenship provisions.

The likes of Vijay Mallya, Lalit Modi, Nirav Modi, and Mehul Choksi who fled Bharat after committing white-collar economic crimes and embezzling bank loans should not be beneficiaries of dual citizenship.

Mother India lost her independence because of betrayal by domestic actors like Raja Jaichand, Raja Man Singh and Mir Jafar. There are serious security risks to Bharat as there are enemy states next door. People of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origins should not be routinely able to acquire dual citizenship of Bharat owing to the grave security risk they pose.

Similarly, one would not approve the agents of foreign intelligence agencies, like David Headly (Doud Gelani), Tahawwur Rana and Patwant Singh Pannun to be able to acquire dual citizenship of Bharat. There are too many enemies and strategic adversaries of Bharat currently. Granting dual citizenship will open a floodgate for the deep states to milk the cow of the dual citizenship scheme dry. We are already facing Chinese intelligence agents masquerading as Tibetan refugees in Bharat.

[Read complete article on website myind.net](http://myind.net)

When Did The Betrayal of Palestinians Start?

By Vappala Balachandran

The writer is a former Special Secretary, Cabinet Secretariat.

It was depressing to read the National Catholic Register (US) report that Bethlehem has cancelled the Christmas festivities this year because of the Gaza War. Hanna Hanania, the Christian Mayor of Bethlehem, was quoted as saying: “Bethlehem, as any other Palestinian city, is mourning and sad...We cannot celebrate while we are in this situation.”

Bethlehem is a unique city which celebrates Christmas thrice according to the centuries-old ‘Ottoman Status Quo’ (1757) which recognised the practice of different churches. While the Catholics and those following the Gregorian calendar hold midnight mass on December 25, the Orthodox Church begins its celebrations on January 6, and the Armenian Church on January 18.

Historians say that Palestine, including Jerusalem, witnessed the longest period of peace during the 401 years of Ottoman rule from 1516 to 1917, the year the British Mandate started. Even the Jewish Virtual Library admits that the rule under Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent had “stimulated Jewish immigration”.

That was also the reason why even Christian Palestinians rose in revolt when Jewish migrants started pushing away others after 1948. George Habash, a Palestinian Christian physician, took up arms in 1948 when his family was driven out of his hometown Lidda. It resulted in the death of his sister during the Lidda Death March when 50-70,000 Palestinian Arabs were chased away by Israeli troops.

Habash then established a Marxist-Leninist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), distinct from Yasser Arafat’s Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO). PFLP organised the first airline hijacking by Palestinian terrorist organisations in the 20th century. That was on July 23, 1968, when the Rome-Tel Aviv Israeli EL AL 426 flight was forced to divert to Algiers. In 1970, PFLP hijacked four airliners bound for New York City and one for London. That became sensational.

The 1960s-70s were the era of glamorous women hijackers and terrorists. The first to be noticed was 25-year-old Leila Khalid, a victim of the 1948 expulsion from Haifa. The other was Patty Hearst, daughter of billionaire newspaper magnate Randolph Hearst in California, who was abducted in 1974 by the Left-Radical Symbionese Army and forced to take part in a bank robbery.

Leila was part of the August 1969 hijacking of Rome-Tel Aviv TWA 840 which was diverted to Damascus. As her photo with kaffiyeh with an AK-47 was pasted all over the world, she underwent plastic surgery on her face to prepare for another hijacking.

On September 6, 1970, she took part in another hijacking of EL AL flight (219) Amsterdam-New York which was diverted to London where she was arrested. However, she was released by Britain on October 1. In 1973, she published her autobiography 'My People Shall Live' with a foreword by Lt. General Sir John Glubb, who is better known as the legendary 'Glub Pasha'.

Sometime in 1973, I was asked by our central intelligence agencies to meet the Israeli Consul General (CG) at Bombay. I was then Deputy Commissioner of Bombay Special Branch, in charge of all security matters in the city including the watch over groups like PLO, PFLP, Abu Nidal, and others like the Japanese Red Army, Italian Red Guards, and German Baader Meinhof. In those days, we had no full diplomatic relations with Israel and their only presence was in Bombay at the consulate level.

My first introduction to Israel was a book gifted by the CG on Jerusalem jointly written by Teddy Kollek, mayor of that city from 1965 to 1993 and Moshe Pearlman, a diplomat. Later, during a visit to Jerusalem, I bought Kollek's second book 'Twelve Walks in the World's Holiest City' (1990) which beautifully describes its 4,000-year history and how it is a place of pilgrimage of the three great religions which exist cheek by jowl: the Western Wall for the Jews, the Church of Holy Sepulchre for the Christians, and the Dome of the Rock for the Muslims.

However, I was disappointed when I found that in 1993 Joost Hiltermann, noted Foreign Affairs columnist, had criticised Kollek for being responsible for initiating a process to erase historical Palestinian presence in Jerusalem on June 10, 1967, by introducing the 'bulldozer culture' with the removal of 100 families living in the Moghrabi (Morocco) quarter of the Old City for generations.

Later, I realised that this was not surprising to anyone who has read the history of betrayal of Palestinians beginning with the January 3, 1919, agreement, avowedly on Palestine, between Cham Weizmann, one of the founders of Israel and Emir Faisal, the future King of Iraq, son of Hussein, the Sharif of Mecca. Although this was presented at the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, it was clear that Faisal was only interested in being made the king in return for his revolt against the Ottoman Empire. Throughout the Palestinians were the losers.

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Who Will Deliver Quality For Us?

By Sanjay Sahay

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The emphasis and commitment to quality is the sine qua non of modern development and existence in every way. It provides you the comfort that you not being cheated and you can take it for granted that the product and service would *perform in the manner legally contracted. Assurance of quality throws away stress out of the system and faith; trust and credibility are built on the bulwark of quality. If you see the world around us, how much are we convinced of the quality of good and services around us? Is nearly everything suspect? The quality foundation across board that is taking us down.

Have the regulators and quality councils have been able to bring sanity into the system? Their mandate and resources based on the impact on the ground, can safely be presumed not up to the mark. These organisations and various others are fully involved in the practice of accreditations and certifications and the real field of quality on the ground seems to be no one's baby.

Road and bridges in this country seems to have been exempted from any quality considerations. And buildings too. They fall like a pack of cards at times. India registers the highest number of accidents in the world, compromised quality of infra cannot be absolved of the blame.

The driving licence or the quality of driving has its own story. How about the quality of education in this country, more so the government-controlled schooling system? If this were improved, to the desired quality, at least half of the ills facing the nation would automatically get sorted. From exam boards to school managements and a vast variety regulators and government departments / mechanisms in place, it is a wonder, *how we are able to deliver the unbelievably low quality, that we do. It is not the quality of education compromised; it seems education itself has been compromised.

The bounty of marks is clear cut case of compromise. Then the whole area of health. Notwithstanding the stretched healthcare requirements during the second wave of COVID, it made clear to the world, what the Indian countryside is delivered in the name of health. Compromising quality is an understatement, there are places where it is completely missing in operations, known to all and accepted by all. The stakeholders keep taking their pound of flesh. With education and health in the quandary for the masses, how far can we go. Not to say it is better in other sectors. With low or completely compromised quality, it is the proverbial end of the road for us.

A QUALITATIVELY COMPROMISED SYSTEM IS A WHITE ELEPHANT.

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India is Proud of: Rakesh Panchal of Vaso Taluka in Gujrat “He who gives, receives.”

One Man’s Free Tiffin Service Provides Meals to 500 Seniors Daily



Rakesh Panchal honoured his father’s last wish by starting ‘Visamo Tiffin Seva’. What began as a small act of serving food to a few underprivileged individuals has evolved into a significant initiative, providing over 2.5 lakh meals to seniors in need.

Just two days after his father Manubhai Panchal’s death, the 44-year-old started serving food to the underprivileged. What started as a wish to fulfil his father’s wish by doing seva (service) has grown into a full-fledged initiative to distribute full meals daily to over 500 senior citizens in Gujarat’s Vaso taluka.

Less than two days before the father passed away, he had a conversation with his son that sparked this important mission. It started as one person's effort to feed the poor and has now grown into a registered trust that employs 18 people, serving over 2.5 lakh meals until now.

Named 'Visamo Tiffin Seva', Rakesh's motto is 'He who gives, receives'.

Rakesh dropped out of college in his second year of BSc and started working in a local private news channel to pursue his passion for journalism. He then joined a news channel in Hyderabad and worked in cities like Delhi, Gujarat and Mumbai.

However, Rakesh decided to settle down in Vaso and eventually started expanding his father's construction material business.

"I spent three years working with my father. I learnt a lot about business as well as life in this time! I got an insight into the workings of his mind. He would keep a jug of cold water and give it to anyone passing by to quench their thirst. This was his way of doing seva," he adds.

Rakesh's father Manubhai wished to serve food to the poor.

During this time, Rakesh used to frequent the Vaso Government Hospital for work. After the construction was complete, the hospital authorities told him that food was a major problem for patients who were coming from neighbouring villages. They requested him to find a way to provide them with food.

Parallely, Rakesh's father Manubhai shared his wish to give free food to the poor. "He wanted to do Ram roti seva (free food for the poor). I told him that it would be expensive and we could do it after a few years. But just three days later, he died suddenly. That conversation kept playing in my mind and I felt very bad," shares Rakesh.

He then visited the hospital and asked the doctors what breakfast would be good for the patients, specifically pregnant women. As per the doctor's advice, he started getting sheera (a sweet made with semolina, ghee, sugar and dry fruits) and served it to three pregnant women. He planned to do this for 15 days to honour his father's wish.

"I thought that I would feel satisfied after serving these women hot breakfasts for 15 days. But I started enjoying it and wanted to do more. I met an old man behind the hospital on the 15th day who didn't even have one square meal a day. I asked a man who used to provide tiffins to everyone to give him one daily and take the money from me," says Rakesh.

Rakesh provides food to 500 seniors in and around Vaso village.

Initially, it would cost Rakesh about Rs 300 per day to distribute food. As he started paying for meals for abandoned senior citizens, his costs rose to Rs 500 per day. He posted about it on Facebook, and one of his friends donated Rs 500 to the cause. Soon, more donations started trickling in.

From feeding one old man, he gradually started feeding 15 old people, with each meal costing Rs 50 per day. He knew that outsourcing wasn't going to cut it anymore as more people reached out for food. During the COVID lockdown too, he couldn't serve food as the tiffin service wasn't optional.

To avoid such gaps, he registered 'Visamo Sarvajanic Charitable Trust Vaso' and started a kitchen of his own. "We first took a place in Vaso itself where we could cook for 100 to 200 people. As the number of people we served increased, we moved to a kitchen in Nadiad, which had a commercial gas line and could easily cook for 500 people," says Rakesh.

Today, the Visamo Tiffin Seva provides hot lunches consisting of roti, dal, rice and sabzi to more than 500 people in Vaso and four nearby villages. They have 18 employees and numerous vans to transport the food.

Rakesh also provides milk and biscuits for breakfast at the hospital daily. It costs him Rs 21,000 daily and he has been managing to bear the costs through crowd funding.

Rakesh provides food to 500 seniors in and around Vaso village.

Rakesh says most of these seniors don't have anyone and stay on the roads, or alone at home. "These people are dependent on the benevolence of others even for one roti. I found a widow whose house was strewn with Rs 5 snacks. On enquiry, she told me that she would fill her stomach with that, and it was years since she had eaten dal, roti or rice as she couldn't cook. I cannot forget the joy in her eyes after she ate a full meal," adds the social worker.

Rakesh found 'Visamo' (resting place) written on the cremation ground after he finished the last rites of his father. That's why he named the trust Visamo, as he wished it to provide relaxation to the elders.

"My father would often say that anyone can earn money through hard work. It's only a lucky few who get a chance to do seva. I'm trying to live by his words," he says.

Well ! sometime a human being does realize what is the meaning of life and what he has to do for not so fortunate people in the society . And such moment's changes the course of life and a person becomes beacon of passion, Rakesh's journey is one such example.

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