

## THE VOICE OF COMMON CAUSE And an Enduring Romance with Public Causes

Dear readers,

The journal you are holding in your hands has completed 36 years since it was launched in 1982. Prior to that, it was called *Public Notice* for a few years but was discontinued for the new title, *Common Cause*, launched in February 1982.

Our legendary founder Mr H D Shourie called it “The Voice of Common Cause” in both literal and figurative sense. At Common Cause, we try to make sense of policies and processes around us and intervene at the right time to break the conspiracy of silence, particularly in matters of probity in public life, justice and the rule of law. We do it with pleasure and without malice towards any particular individual, government or political party. And hence our mission statement, *A Romance with Public Causes*.

The journal is our main link with our public-spirited members. That the readers take it seriously is clear from the fact that your wide-ranging responses often come with donations -- varying from modest to considerable amounts. Regular readers would recall that the journal has changed many times in this long journey. From this issue, you would notice one more change: the editorial is addressed to the readers. The idea is to start a dialogue with our well-wishers while keeping them abreast of our activities.

So, let me begin with a piece of good news: Common Cause has completed the *Status of Policing in India Report (SPIR) 2018*. To be released in early May, the report will soon be available on our website. The SPIR 2018 has been in the works for many years. It is done in collaboration with our academic partners, the Lokniti Programme of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS).

The SPIR studies the performance of the police through official data and people’s perceptions through nationwide surveys. We believe that for a fair and democratic society, the police have to be responsive to the needs of the community. This fairness and responsiveness can be measured and improved through monitoring and participation by the community. The SPIR 2018 is a baby step in that direction. We hope to build on it in the coming years.

### **Whose Life is it Anyway?**

In this quarter, one of our PILs on Living Will or the right to die with dignity has made waves in the medical, legal, religious and intellectual circles. Our biggest success was that the apex court accepted that an individual can exercise autonomy over his/her life (and death). Our primary plea was that the right to die with dignity is part of the right to life under Section 21 of the Constitution.

A living will, just like any will, is a written document that allows an individual to give advance instructions about the medical treatment to be administered (or not to be administered) when he or she is terminally ill or no longer able to express informed consent.

The matter is quite simple: If my family members, doctors and lawyers can decide whether or not my life will be artificially prolonged, why can't I decide myself through an advance medical directive? We also know that the real test of the landmark Court order lies in its effective implementation.

The media coverage meant that the idea be also trashed by some. Priests and clerics from almost all religions argued on TV that a living will violates God's will. My humble submission is that God being the very epitome of nature, is best kept out of man-made matters like ventilators and artificial life-support systems. A hundred years ago, it was common to have six to eight children while the life expectancy averaged below 50 years. Today, two children or less is common but the life-expectancy is around 70 years. Is it because God is giving us Indians fewer children and longer life? True, we cannot create life but it is in our hands to improve the quality of life and terminate extreme suffering or meaningless existence.

### **Lokpal Returns or does it?**

The second Common Cause matter is of the appointment of the Lokpal, which hangs fire despite both Houses of Parliament passing the Act in December 2013. The apex court had earlier observed, while disposing of our petition in April 2017, that there was no need for the government to keep the appointment pending. The Court described the Act as a "perfectly workable legislation." Common Cause filed a contempt of Court petition in January 2018 after doubts cropped up on the government's intentions.

The government later submitted that a meeting of the Prime Minister, Lok Sabha Speaker, Chief Justice of India and the leader of the largest Opposition party in Lok Sabha will be convened in early March 2018. The Court directed that an affidavit be filed to this effect. After an assurance that the government was serious about Lokpal, the Court gave time till mid-May 2018. Common Cause is committed to pursuing the matter to its logical conclusion. (for more details please visit [commoncause.in](http://commoncause.in))

### **Air Pollution: A Time Bomb Ticking**

This issue of your journal is devoted to air pollution. We know that our readers are well aware of the hazards of polluted air. India is also fortunate to have substantial expertise on the subject. We also know that as many as 14 of our large cities are among the WHO's list of the world's most polluted cities. However, it is equally true that this heightened awareness and expertise have not led to consequential policy changes. The upshot is this: We all know the problem, and the possible solutions, but are still condemned to breathe poisonous air. The writeups in this issue deal with the most substantial aspects of air pollution from social, economic, legal, scientific, and environmental angles. These have been written by known experts, activists and practitioners. We hope the articles will awaken us to a time bomb ticking right before us. Do write in if you have any comments or suggestions.

**-Vipul Mudgal**  
**Editor**