

RAJYA SABHA

Friday, the 29th July, 1983/7 Sravana,
1905 (Saka)

The House met at eleven of the clock
Mr. Chairman in the Chair.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Affairs of Asiatic Society, Calcutta

*81. SHRI KALYAN ROY : †

SHRI LADLI MOHAN NIGAM:

Will the Minister of EDUCATION
AND CULTURE be pleased to state :

(a) what is the present state of
affairs of the Asiatic Society, Calcutta;

(b) what kinds of financial and
other irregularities have been detected;

(c) whether any responsibility has
been fixed; if so, the details thereof;

(d) what are the details of documents
which are missing or have been stolen;

(e) what are the reasons for delay
in taking over completely and save
this internationally known society
from disintegration and decay; and

(f) whether Government have any
proposal to appoint an administrator
to run it; if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE
MINISTRIES OF EDUCATION AND
CULTURE AND SOCIAL WELFARE
(SHRIMATI SHEILA KAUL) : (a)
The Asiatic Society is a voluntary
organisation registered under the West
Bengal Societies Registration Act 1961.
Ministry of Education and Culture
have been giving an assistance of
about Rs. 2.00 lakhs on matching basis
with the Government of West Bengal
annually.

†The Question was actually asked
on the floor of the House by Shri
Kalyan Roy.

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(b) to (d) The Society, being a
voluntary organisation, is functioning
independently and the Department of
Culture has no administrative control
over its day to day affairs. Hence the
information regarding financial irregularities
or any loss of documents etc. is
not readily available in the Department.

(e) and (f) The Society recently
approached the Government to declare
it as an institution of national importance
and the matter is under consideration.

SHRI KALYAN ROY : Sir, you are
aware, this Asiatic Society is the
oldest institution in the world, especially
in oriental studies. This was set up in
1784 by Sir William Jones under the
patronage of Warren Hastings. The tragedy
is, Sir, that it will complete 200 years
in January 1984 and this internationally
famous institution is on the verge of
collapse, totally insolvent, disintegrating
and in totally decaying condition. Sir,
you know that this Asiatic Society has
got priceless treasures; 42,000 rare
manuscripts in Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian;
2 lakh books and periodicals—all rare
books; 24,000 coins including gold coins
dating back to second and third century;
175 most priceless rare paintings....

MR. CHAIRMAN : We know all
that; it is one of the treasure houses
of antiquities.

SHRI KALYAN ROY : Sir, some of
the paintings, rare manuscripts and
books, you will find, being sold in
Bombay, Delhi and Calcutta. There is
no supervision. Neither they have the
adequate machinery to administer it
nor is their air-conditioning equipment
functioning. The whole thing is in
shambles. Will the Minister agree
that the main reasons are: Utter
calousness of the Central Government;
although Mr. Pranab Mukherjee two
months back opened a Book Fair
there and said it was an institution of
national importance. Although in
1977 a comprehensive scheme was

submitted to the Central Government, no action has been taken. Its total income is about Rs. 3 lakhs; its expenses are over Rs. 28 lakhs. In spite of serious constraints of financial resources, the State Government is contributing Rs. 5 lakhs and the Central Government which considers it as an institution of national importance, is contributing a meagre sum of Rs. 3 lakhs.

My question is, how long this callousness and apathy will continue, what steps the Minister is immediately taking to see that....

MR. CHAIRMAN: This is called a loaded question. 'Have you stopped beating your wife?'

SHRI KALYAN ROY: I would not have been tempted to ask this question if the Prime Minister would not have intervened and directed—as it has been reported in the Press—Mr. Pranab Mukherjee to go and talk with the authorities. When it is going to be declared as an institute of national importance? This is my first question. What is the time-limit?

SHRIMATI SHEILA KAUL: Sir, it is quite true to say that this Society has been functioning since 1784 and it does contain many valuable pieces as has been mentioned by the hon. Member. I have also got the details, but I would not like to repeat them because we have all come to know about them. But this Society, as I said, is a voluntary organisation and at present functions under the regulations which are in force since 1972. Under these regulations, the management, the administrative set-up and the direction and affairs of the Society are entrusted to a Council and the Council has got its own members and it meets regularly. The Society is not financially very sound just now and since it is not under the administration of the Department of Culture, the Department has not conducted any enquiry nor has it gone into the affairs, financial affairs or the other irregularities which have been reported in

the Press from time to time. But now, in April 1983, the Ministry had received a letter from the General Secretary of the Society mentioning that the Society is financially in a very very bad shape and suggested to the Government of India to come to its rescue and that it should be declared as an institute, of national importance. This was only in April 1983. Then, discussions took place with the office-bearers of the Society and the General Body of the Society in its meeting held on 6th June, 1983, passed a resolution authorising the Council to have a dialogue with the Central Government about the modalities of declaring the Asiatic Society as an institute of national importance. This resolution was confirmed at the General Body meeting on 4th July only. We are now looking into the matter and 4th July is not a very far or a distant date.

SHRI KALYAN ROY: Unfortunately, either the Minister is not well-briefed or she is trying to whitewash the thing. A question was asked in this House by me as early as 7th March, 1979. The question was, whether a comprehensive scheme for the improved functioning of the Society has been submitted to the Central Government. The date of the question was 7th March. The reply said 'Yes; in October, 1977. 'Now, it is absolutely falsehood to say that you have received it only on 4th July.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I think, what you said is not right. You withdraw the word "falsehood." You can say it is not accurate.

SHRI KALYAN ROY: I stand corrected. It is worse than that. This reply was given by the then Minister of Education, Dr. P. C. Chunder. I would have expected the Minister to do some work at some time. Anyway, my question is, whether the Minister of Education had held discussions with the authorities of the Institute and the Education Minister of West Bengal regarding the modalities of taking over this Society and, if so, whether it is a fact or not that the hon. Minister, Shri Pranab Mukherjee, declared

at the Institute itself that very soon it is going to be declared as an institute of national importance? If it is so, what are the reasons for the delay in view of the crisis, as she has herself admitted; it is insolvent, it is bankrupt, it is unable to meet the wage bill and its books are being sold in the market?

A group of categories have taken it over. All periodicals have been stopped. It is not getting any material from outside. In view of the crisis you cannot reproduce Persian or Sanskrit manuscripts. They cannot be brought and sold in the 20th century in Connaught Place. What is the delay in declaring it an institute of national importance when you have had the discussions with the Finance Minister?

SHRIMATI SHEILA KAUL: We all know that it is not possible to interfere in voluntary organisation affairs unless they ask for the help or they ask for our advice. These are all autonomous bodies and we all know that we cannot interfere in their affairs unless we are asked to do so. We are quite aware of this and that is why I myself went to see the affairs of the Society I went to Calcutta to see the condition myself and I am sorry to say that the conditions were not good as you are saying. There are 100 workers, I am told. I go and visit things without any fanfare. I just creep in, go there and see the things myself. This is what I did here also. The things were not so good as they should be and that is why we are at it and I say that we are looking into it.

SHRI KALYAN ROY: 'Looking into it' is not the answer. The present Minister is saying that the report has been submitted on the 4th July, but the report was submitted, as per the reply of the Minister, as early as in 1977.

MR CHAIRMAN: That is the past history.

SHRI KALYAN ROY: She should know the past history. She said that the report of the 4th July was being considered and I am sure.....

SHRI A. G. KULKARNI: The point is that the institution of such an importance, which is a treasure, has to be saved. Why don't you direct the Government not only to look into it or gloss over it....

MR. CHAIRMAN: I do not direct.

SHRI A. G. KULKARNI: The Education Minister herself should have come forward....

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Kulkarni, I do not direct in the House. I do it in another way.

SHRI A. G. KULKARNI: You do whatever you like but you see that the institution is saved, books are saved. Nothing else we desire. I thought that the Madam herself will say that.

SHRIMATI SHEILA KAUL: That is exactly what I have said. I was so much concerned with it that I myself went to Calcutta.

SHRI A. G. KULKARNI: Shri Pranab Mukherjee went there. He announced something else. At least, have some coordination between yourselves and save the institutions. What else are we demanding?

SHRI KALYAN ROY: The Minister says that she is highly concerned with the affairs of the institution. In the meantime, would the Minister make the finances available so that the books are properly preserved and not sold outside? That answer can be given by her.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Appoint a watchman, a sentry.

SHRIMATI SHEILA KAUL: I would like to inform of the finances and the financial help that has been extended. You know that West Bengal Government gives a grant of Rs. two lakhs and so does the Central Government, it gives Rs. 2 lakhs per year. In 1982-83 the Central Government released a grant of Rs. 3.96 lakhs and in 1983-84 the Central Government has released Rs. 2 lakhs of which Rs. 60,000 are for repairs of water tanks. Now the problem is that their expenses are inflated, if I may say so.

SHRI A. G. KULKARNI : Then take it over.

SHRIMATI SHEILA KAUL : But it does not belong to the Central Government. It is in West Bengal. It is a voluntary organisation. If they were to ask....

SHRI A. G. KULKARNI : What is the type of our country where such a treasure is wasted ?

MR. CHAIRMAN : You better look into it promptly and do whatever you can to save this institution.

SHRIMATI SHEILA KAUL : This is exactly what I have said.

MR. CHAIRMAN : If you give an assurance that you will act promptly, I think that will satisfy them. That is all about that.

श्री लाडली मोहन निगम : आपने मंत्री जी का बयान सुना है आप की भी इस में कुछ न कुछ धारणा बनी होगी । मैं बहुत सीधा सवाल कर रहा हूं और वह यह कि पुरातत्व के सम्बन्ध में हिन्दुस्तान में कानून है । अगर किसी व्यक्ति के पास या संस्था के पास पुरातत्व की चीज है जो दो सौ वर्ष की है तो सरकार को अधिकार है कि उस को ले ले उस के लिए अलग से कानून बनाने की जरूरत नहीं है । कई ऐसे दस्तावेज और चित्र हैं जिनकी कीमत आज आंकना असम्भव है । अगर वहां उन का रख-रखाव नहीं हो सकता और आप के पास उन को देने को पैसा नहीं है तो आप उन चीजों को नष्ट होने से बचाने के लिये—भले ही अपने ताबे में न ले—उन संग्राहलयों या देश की उन बड़ी लाइब्रेरियों को क्यों नहीं दे देते तब तक के लिए जब तक ये इस काबिल नहीं हो जाते या आप उन को इमदाद नहीं देते किये उन का ठीक तरह से रख-रखाव कर सकें ? उस समय तक के लिए आप उन को दूसरी जगह क्यों ट्रांसफर नहीं कर सकते ? यह मेरा पहला प्रश्न है ।

दूसरा सवाल यह है कि आप की सूचना में आया कि चोरी हो रही है चीजें बिक रही हैं बाहर के देश में जा रहा है । मैं जानता हूं कि ऐसी किताबों को 40-50, 100 रुपये में खरीद लेते हैं फिर रिप्रिंट कर के पुराना कागज लगा कर सैकड़ों रुपये के हिसाब से लोग बेचते हैं । एक धन्धा बन गया है । हिन्दुस्तान में इस धन्धे को रोकने के लिए आप ऐसी व्यवस्था करिए ताकि ऐसी कोई किताब जिस की उम्र 50 वर्ष से ऊपर हो चुकी हो, 60 वर्ष से ऊपर हो चुकी हो उस को कोई पब्लिश नहीं कर सकता अगर कोई करेगा तो सरकार ही करेगी । इस तरह की व्यवस्था जब तक आप नहीं करेंगे तब तक इस राष्ट्रीय क्षति को बचाने में आप कामयाब नहीं हो सकते । आने वाली पीढ़ियों को देने के लिए हमारे पास कुछ नहीं है हम कुछ देते तो आसमान टूट जाता लेकिन जो धरती पर चीजें हैं उन को बचाने के लिए कुछ न कुछ तो संवेदना होनी चाहिए । तो मैं आप से इतना ही कहना चाहता हूं कि क्या तरद्दुद है आप को क्या हिचक है कि इन चीजों को बचाने के लिए—जब तक वे लोग उन्हें रखने लायक नहीं हो जाते—तब तक कलकत्ते में नेशनल लाइब्रेरी में नहीं भेज सकते ? उस के बाद आप जो चाहें करें ।

श्रीमती शीला कौल : जनाब इन्होंने जिज्ञा किया है कि एशियाटिक सोसाइटी की कीमती चीजें उठा कर हम लाइब्रेरी में भेज दें । मैं यह समझती हूं कि खाली बचाने से हमारा मतलब है—वह हमारी तो नहीं हैं वह एक आर्गनाइजेशन की हैं अगर हम उन के यहां जा कर ऐसा कुछ करें तो वह हमारे ऊपर मुकदमा कर देंगे कि हमारी चीजें उठा कर ले गये ।

श्री लाडली मोहन निगम 200 वर्ष की चीजों के लिए कानून है आप ले

सकती हैं। हम उन को सुरक्षित रखें जब वह इस काबिल हो जायें कि उसका रख-रखाव कर सकते हैं तो उन को दे दीजिए। मैं तो फौरी इलाज बता रहा हूँ अन्ततोगत्वा उस का इलाज तो यही होगा कि आप उन्हें अपने ताबे में ले लें।

श्रीमती शोला कौल : मयह कहना चाहती थी कि बेहतर हमारे लिए यह होगा कि जो एशियाटिक सोसाइटी है उसी को हम बेहतर करें, उसी की हम देखभाल करें, उसी को सम्भालें उस में जो सामान हैं उन को कायदे से रखें। इतनी पुरानी चीज है उस को तितर-बितर करेंगे तो एशियाटिक सोसाइटी जो सब से पुरानी सोसाइटी है हिन्दुस्तान की उस का नाम मिट जायेगा। हमारी यह कोशिश है कि इसी को ठीक कर के इस की चीजों को हम कायम रखें।

श्री लाडली मोहन निगम : श्रीमन् मेरे प्रश्न का जवाब नहीं हुआ। अभी चोरी हो रही है चीजें नष्ट हो रही हैं, आप की जिम्मेदारी है कि उन को बचायें। मैं नहीं कहता कि आप ले लो एशियाटिक सोसाइटी को कुछ और दे सकते हो. तो दे दो। मेरा मतलब है कि उन को बचाने के लिए आप अपनी हिफाजत में देंगे या नहीं? मेरे मकान में ताला नहीं लगा है चीजें पड़ी हुई हैं कोई भी ले कर चला जा रहा है आप क्या व्यवस्था करने जा रहे हैं?

श्री सभापति : वह मामला देख कर आयी हैं कुछ न कुछ तजवीज निकलेगी।

श्री लाडली मोहन निगम : क्या यह व्यवस्था नहीं हो सकती? उस में हिचक क्या है? मैं टेक-ओवर की बात नहीं कर रहा हूँ।

श्रीमती शोला कौल : जब तक हमारे वह चीज नहीं आ जायेगी—जैसा मैंने

जिक्र किया है बातचीत हो रही है। एशियाटिक सोसाइटी एक नेशनल इम्पोर्टेंस की चीज बन जायेगी तब हम देख सकते हैं। जब तक यह वालंटरी आर्गनाइजेशन के पास है मुझे अफसोस है कि इस में हम इस तरीके से दखल नहीं दे सकेंगे।

SHRI SANKAR PRASAD MITRA: Sir, on the question of the Asiatic Society, I wrote a letter to the hon. Prime Minister. During the last session of Parliament, I also made some representations to the hon. Education Minister, along with Dr. Asima Chatterjee and the General Secretary of the Society. At that time, a different scheme was being discussed. Later on, it came out in newspapers that the Government of India had decided to declare the Asiatic Society to be an institution of national importance. The Union Finance Minister went to Calcutta and made a similar declaration. When the President of India was visiting Calcutta, the representatives of the Asiatic Society met him, and the President of the Asiatic Society himself told me that they had no objection to the Asiatic Society being declared as an institution of national importance, they were quite prepared to hand over the entire financial responsibility to the Central Government. All that they wanted was academic freedom for Research etc. This is the only thing they wanted. Now what is it that is holding up a final decision by the Government? That is what I want to know.

SHRIMATI SHEILA KAUL: Sir, I just now mentioned that we are at it and we are working on the modalities of the whole thing, how to work it and how to get things done. I mentioned this just now.

SHRI V. N. TIWARI: Sir, I would like to know whether there is any case registered about the stolen pieces from the Asiatic Society. That is No. 1. And No. 2 is about a point raised by my learned colleagues where I want the position to be clarified by the

hon. Minister. They want the institute to be taken over by the Government as one of national importance. But from the reply I have understood that the Society wants to be financed by the Central Government. Until and unless this demarcation is made, whether they want to hand over this national institute to the Central Government or they just want finances to be made available to the Society to run this institute, I think things will not be clear to anyone in this House as to what exactly the position is of the Asiatic Society? Everybody wants to preserve this treasure, but how to do it? The only way is to take it over, or to help it. What is the policy of the Government in this matter? This is what I want to know.

SHRIMATI SHEILA KAUL: The Asiatic Society Council itself has recommended to the Government that it should be declared as an institution of national importance, and they have also passed this in their different meetings. As I said, we are looking into this matter. They actually just want money for the time being. But their real thing is that they want the Government to come in and look after the affairs of the Asiatic Society. It is only for the intervening period that they want some money and other things.

SHRI V. N. TIWARI: And what about the stolen pieces about which our colleagues mentioned?

SHRIMATI SHEILA KAUL: Since it does not come in our purview, we

do not know if certain things have been stolen. The only thing is that we have read it in the newspapers.

Distribution of surplus land under the Sixth Five Year Plan period

*82. **SHRI K. CHATHUNNI MASTER:** Will the Minister of RURAL DEVELOPMENT be pleased to state:

(a) the agricultural land declared surplus, acquired and actually distributed in each State/Union Territory during the last three years and so far during the current year; and

(b) what steps Government have taken or propose to take to plug the loopholes in the existing ceiling laws so that more surplus land may become available for distribution and to what extent the steps already taken in this regard have been successful?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT (SHRI HARI NATH MISHRA):

(a) A statement is laid on the Table of the House.

(b) The land ceiling laws enacted in the light of the national guidelines of 1972 have by and large plugged all loopholes experienced in the implementation of land ceiling measures. Most of the laws have also been placed in the Ninth Schedule to the Constitution and it is proposed to include some more laws also shortly. However, parties do resort to legal processes, to contest the State's right to take possession of surplus land, resulting in unavoidable delay in taking over and distribution of such land.

Statement

(in acres)

Name of the State/UTs.	Areas declared surplus		Area taken possession		Area distributed	
	Till March 1980	Till June 1983	Till March 1980	Till June 1983	Till March 1980	Till June 1983
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Andhra Pradesh.	10,84,590	10,09,323	3,78,922	4,42,766	2,60,202	3,17,583
Assam	5,74,073	5,64,849	5,00,727	4,89,408	3,07,475	3,26,909