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STRAIGHT FACE

In pursuit of the hirsute



PAMELA
PHILIPOSE

At this particular moment in our history when we, the people, seem like a huge consignment of tandoori chicken with voting rights, all duly disembowelled, dressed up in masala and ready for the spit, it's nice to know that somewhere in this troubled land there exists a great and inspiring personage. One who has steadfastly minded his own business, carried on with his lifetime's work and ensured that tranquillity prevailed around him.

As the guns boomed at Kargil and IC-814 did that famous stopover at Kandahar, as September 11 cast its shadow on the world and the Indian Parliament was attacked, as Gujarat burned and Ayodhya threatened to self-detonate, only one man among all of us, only one amazingly composed individual, did not lose his hair.

We can take courage from his example as he quietly went about his simple, unpretentious mission of peace and goodwill. Indeed, he has redeemed a nation on the brink of insanity, on the verge of a catatonic seizure, on the edge of a civilisational breakdown, by his daringly courageous experiment. Not many among us, I can tell you, would have the stomach, not to speak of additional attachments like the pancreas and spleen, for such a project.

You must by now be clamouring to know who this remarkable person is, so that he can be celebrated in film and poetry and possibly handed a national honour, a Param Vir Chakra, or something. I will, therefore, come straight to the point and reveal the man's identity.

The person I am speaking about goes by the name of Narayan Prasad Pal, who is all of 65 years. Doesn't ring a bell that name, does it? But that's just the problem in this country. Its noblest souls, those who genuinely deserve fame are invariably left unnoticed and unsung, even as the Jaipal Reddys and Ravi Shankar Prasads yabber on and on while looming large on national prime time screens.

Permit me, therefore, to try and correct this terribly unhappy and grossly unfair informational gap by going right ahead and acquainting you further with Narayan Prasad Pal. Let me, in this manner, salute, celebrate and exalt this man's steadfast dedication to a modest but honourable goal.

Pal, a farmer and resident of Podadiha village of Orissa's Balasore district, has been cultivating more than just rice, brinjals and other sundry agricultural produce all these years. For the last 15 years, to be precise, he has lovingly and diligently tending his hair.

What of that, you may ask me, there must be millions in this country who do that. Well, let me clarify that it is not the tresses on his scalp that occupy Pal. His special distinction lies in tending the locks — or should that be shock? — growing out of his ears.

Now, now, don't knock Pal's efforts out of hand in that haughty city-spiffy fashion we all sometimes affect. Pal's ear hair at this moment can almost do a Rapunzel. It measures 13 cm and he is all set to dethrone the man who currently holds the title of sporting the longest ear hair in the world — one B.D. Tyagi, a resident of Madhya Pradesh, I believe, and another great soul without doubt, whose ear hair has touched 10.2 cm on the slide rule.




I admire Pal not just for his ambition — he is currently bidding for a mention in that Bible for the quirks of quirkies of all description, the Guinness Book of World Records — but for his exemplary honesty. He grants that he has not achieved very much in life but wishes to state that even a humble ear hair grower deserves his place in the sun. As he put it: "I can safely say that I have the longest ear hair in the world. I am proud of my hair. Other than that there is not much I have achieved in life. I want to retain it until I die. I hope that it will grow longer." Quite.

The country would have been a far, far better, and certainly a more peaceful, place if there had been more Pals around. Think about it. If Ashok Singhal had diverted his considerable talent for hair-raising escapades to such harmless hair-raising, we may not have been up to our ears in trouble last week and been forced to mobilise 10,000 uniformed men in Ayodhya to keep the peace.

Consider this. We would never have had the fodder scam embarrassing us if Laloo Prasad Yadav, for instance, had concentrated on the mane growing from his ears. And if there is one man in the country who could have given Pal a run for his money, it is Laloo without doubt.

As for Pal, more power to his ear hair. Here's wishing him all the best in his pursuit of the hirsute. The nation cannot but be proud of his capacity to play it by ear.

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