

BY CHHOTEBHAI

“A Dirty Dozen” was a Hollywood blockbuster of yesteryears. “A Dirty Picture” is Bollywood’s latest rage. But I have selected “A Decent Dozen”. Let me tell you why. The recent nomination of Sachin Tendulkar to the Rajya Sabha has raised many questions in both sports and political circles. The Congress thought that it was a strategic masterstroke; while its political opponents cried “foul”. The nomination of film star Rekha did not attract the same attention, eventhough she is as attractive as ever. I have been incensed by these nominations to the Upper House.

In the past, sportspersons like Navjyot Singh Siddhu, Mohd Azharuddin and Aslam Sher Khan have won elections to the Lok Sabha. That was the choice of the electorate, with which I have no quarrel. Film stars like Sunil Dutt, Dharmendra, Govinda and Jayapradha have also won elections to the Lok

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Sabha. In Tamil Nadu, Andhra and Karnataka, film stars have wielded immense clout in the State Assembly elections. That again was the voters’ choice.

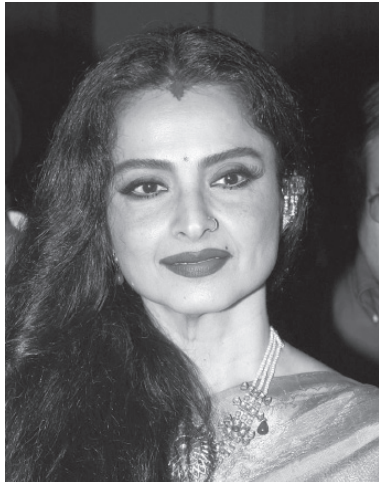
But nominating film stars and sportspersons to the Rajya Sabha makes no sense to me; be it Dara Singh, Hema Malini, Jaya Bachchan, or now Sachin and Rekha. The track record of such celebrities is dubious, so why have them at all?

Article 80(1a) of the Constitution says that the Council of States (Rajya Sabha) shall have “twelve members to be nominated by the President in accordance with the provisions of Clause 3”. That Clause states that such nominees “shall consist of persons having special knowledge or practical experience in respect of such

matters as the following, namely literature, science, art and social service”. Article 84b stipulates a minimum age of 30 years.

Why such a proviso? Nominations augment elections to accommodate such worthies who, for whatever reason, were not elected. The implication is that such “experienced” persons would contribute to the legislative





process and enlighten debates. Most film stars, sportspersons and celebrities just don't fit the bill, but the nation is expected to foot their bills!

I am obviously not the President of India and, therefore, do not have the authority to nominate anybody to the Rajya Sabha. However, as a citizen I have a right to express my views. Hence I have chosen "A Decent Dozen" to be nominated to the Rajya Sabha. Here they are.

ANNA HAZARE: Anna has been in the forefront of the anti-corruption crusade, or more correctly in pushing for what his team calls the Jan Lokpal Bill. It is a proposal that cuts into all the wings of Govt – the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary. A Bill with such far-reaching consequences and ramifications cannot be rushed; nor can it be brushed aside. Anna would therefore do well to be in the Rajya Sabha where he would have first-hand exposure to the nuances of legislation and governance. He has in any case admitted that he may not be able to win an election, so he is my first nominee to the RS.

BABA RAMDEV: From his hirsute pursuit of yoga postures he has now become a swadeshi

industrialist, with 34 companies under his belt. He is in hot pursuit of black money stashed abroad. He could begin his treasure hunt from the RS itself.

JAMES LYNGDOH: This former Chief Election Commissioner has gone on record that his greatest achievement was to conduct free and fair elections in Kashmir (perhaps for the first time ever). He has not retired. It is his organisation that filed a case in the Supreme Court objecting to the appointment of an allegedly tainted P.J. Thomas as the Chief Vigilance Commissioner. Lyngdoh's continued vigilance would be an asset to the RS.

N. RAM: He is the former Editor-in-chief of *The Hindu* that originally broke the Bofors story. He is known for his leftist and secular views and is a renowned journalist.

VINOD MEHTA: The editor of *Outlook* magazine is another erudite thinker, speaker and a familiar face in TV debates.

PROF YASHPAL: Former Chairperson of the University Grants Commission, and eminent scientist, who was able to connect with youth through his TV programmes, he would add a scientific temper (not ill-temper) to RS debates.

RAHUL BAJAJ: An industrialist from a family of nationalists that supported Mahatma Gandhi in the freedom struggle, Bajaj has his head on his shoulders in any TV debate, be it political, social or industrial.

AZIM PREMJI: Though one of the richest Indians, the head of Wipro does not believe in paying bribes, he walks up the stairs to his office, and flies economy class. He would add class to the RS.

MEDHA PATKAR: A sincere activist who advocates *jal, jangal aur jamin* for the rural and tribal people. When Naxalism and Maoism are spreading their tentacles we need another approach in the development versus displacement debate, and the rights of the tribals over natural resources like water, land, forests and mineral deposits.

ARUNA ROY: She is one of those who pushed for the Right to Information Act, and whose version of the Lokpal Bill is considered by many as better than both Anna's and the Government's Bills.

SHABNAM HASHMI: The widow of slain activist and dramatist Safdar Hashmi, she has continued undeterred with her late husband's crusade for justice and communal harmony.

SOLI SORABJI: Before the Parsis in India become extinct let us have one in the RS. He is probably the most erudite and sane person among contemporary legal luminaries. He would illuminate any legislative act.

I have no doubt that there are more than a dozen decent and deserving Indians to be nominated to the RS. The above are some of those who came to my mind. I wonder if any of my nominees will enter the hallowed portals of the RS, as its esteemed members. That does not deter me from exercising my choice. They are certainly better than Sachin and Rekha.

Jesus spent all night in prayer before making his choice of A Decent Dozen, the twelve Apostles. None of them was perfect, and one even betrayed him. Despite that, can we fault with his choice? I hope readers won't fault mine!

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