



AMERICA DIMINISHED

- Clamour grows for Trump's prosecution
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MISCELLANY

MODERN WITH TRADITION

A fascinating chronicle of the evolution of Delhi's Modern School

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Is India's treatment of its minorities better than that by Pakistan?

APARTHEID IN AHMEDABAD

Muslims are systematically kept from buying properties in most localities across Gujarat. Officials often interfere suo motu or at neighbours' behest to reverse even fully legitimate property deals, effectively ghettoising Muslims permanently



AAKAR PATEL

When segregation in the United States was legally ended in the 1960s, the government passed laws that sought to integrate the races, like the Fair Housing Act. It prevented discrimination in the buying and selling of properties which was keeping the races separate. All across Gujarat, in all major cities and in several towns, the government has done the opposite. Muslims are deliberately forced into ghettos through a law called the 'Gujarat Prohibition of Transfer of Immovable Property and Provision for Protection of Tenants from Eviction from Premises in Disturbed Areas Act'.

The law was initially meant to be temporary and to protect during an episode of communal violence, those who would be vulnerable to forced eviction or could be coerced into eviction. What has happened instead is that 35 years after the law was introduced and 18 years after the 2002 riots, the law remains active even in cities when there is no violence.

Every three years, on 30 June, the law has been renewed for another three years. The tenth time will come on June 30, 2021.

In 2009, the Modi government amended the Act to give discretionary powers to the Collector to hold an inquiry suo motu and to take possession of property under the Act. In July 2019, another change was introduced. Now, it would not matter even if the sale was with free consent, and the fair value was paid to the owner.

The Collector could stop a sale of property if he felt at his discretion that there was any 'disturbance in demographic equilibrium' or 'improper clustering of persons of a community' or 'likelihood of polarisation', if the transfer took place. Punishment for transferring property without clearance was raised to six years in jail (it was six months when the law was first introduced).

Writing in *Counter Currents* ('Disturbed Areas Act: A tool to fuel the communal divide', August 10, 2019), Aman Mansuri explained that when the law was written in 1985, "Land

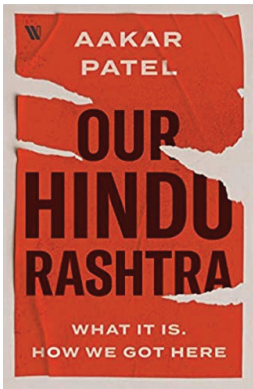


Is it the most 'integrated' city in New India?

neighbourhoods that Gujarati Muslims could not. When the BJP government legislated the 2019 change in the law, Congress MLA Imran Khedawala opposed it for its targeting of Muslims. He said it was ironic that the BJP was insisting that all Indians be allowed to buy property in Kashmir when Indians couldn't even buy it in their own state of Gujarat. Why this double standard and why was it that the BJP had claimed it had brought peace to the state when it was also continuing to officially say that its cities were disturbed? Why was this law still required 39 years after it was written, he asked, saying that the law violated the constitutional rights of Muslims.

The changes in the law have taken place amid the BJP vastly increasing the geographical areas where it is applicable. In 2017 and 2018, the BJP notified parts of Surat — where no large-scale violence took place even during the 2002 riots— and Bharuch as disturbed, because of a demand from BJP MLAs.

As of August 2019, there were 770 parts of Ahmedabad alone that were declared disturbed. On 25 February 2020, the Disturbed Areas Act was imposed in the town of Khambhat after violence against Muslims. *First Post* reported that the decision came after a mob of over 5,000 people gathered by the Hindu Jagran Manch was addressed by BJP leaders who raised communal slogans



'It is ironic that on one hand BJP insists that all Indians be allowed to buy property in Kashmir, but on the other it is not allowing Gujarati Muslims to buy property in their own home state'

and called for all Muslim families to be ousted from Khambhat. *The New Indian Express* reported Gujarat's minister of state for home Pradeepsinh Jadeja as saying that "such clashes are happening because of demographic changes".

The Act is currently in force in large parts of the state's three largest cities, Ahmedabad, Vadodara and Surat, and also in Bharuch, Kapadvanj, Anand and Godhra. These are also the places Gujarat's Muslims are concentrated, effectively ghettoising them permanently.

On June 4, 2020, Gujarat imposed the Disturbed Areas Act in more of Ahmedabad, covering areas in the Vatva and Narol police station jurisdiction. Chief minister Vijay Rupani announced the decision, saying it was "to provide safety and security to the people of Gujarat".

The decision came after Hindus opposed the redevelopment of some Muslim neighbourhoods. PTI reported ('Disturbed Areas Act extended to more localities in Vadodara', August 22, 2020) the addition of three more neighbourhoods in Baroda after a demand by BJP MLA Manisha Vakil. None of the areas had seen communal violence in the 18 years after the Godhra riots.

One scholar I spoke to explained how Muslims were being prevented in areas like Ahmedabad's Paldi from redeveloping old and dilapidated housing schemes. Redevelopment

would mean the construction of high-rise buildings with more flats in them than in the original structures built in the 1950s or 60s. This would mean more Muslim families moving into the neighbourhood, something that the Jains of Paldi found offensive (Rupani is also a Jain). They blocked this by declaring Paldi disturbed though it has not seen any violence, let alone be vulnerable to distress sales.

The intent of the BJP is clear here and the bureaucracy follows their directions. On March 18, 2020, *The Indian Express* reported that the Gujarat High Court had struck down the order of a Vadodara official rejecting the sale by brothers Dinesh and Deepak Modi of their shop to Onali Ezazuddin Dholkawala and Iqbal Hussain Asgar Ali Tinwala.

A sale deed was executed and presented before the sub-registrar for registration. The official conducted an inquiry through the police on whether the transfer was taking place of free consent and if the transfer was likely to "affect the balance in the majority Hindu/ minority Muslim strength" or "affect the neighbourhood" or if there is "a likelihood of a law and order problem in future".

The official concluded that "there could be a possible law and order situation", which was also reiterated by the deputy police commissioner, following which the deputy collector rejected the application for the transfer of property.

The judge who reversed this noted that the police inquiry was "completely out of context with the provisions of the Disturbed Areas Act". The judgment observed, "It is undisputed that the property in question was sold on a fair value and with free consent, as it is evident from the statement recorded by the seller and the purchaser. When the scope of inquiry is that of free consent and fair value, the role of neighbours in the context of such sale becomes irrelevant."

But of course, the neighbours are part of the problem. On September 22, 2019, *The Indian Express* reported that the sale of a Rs 6 crore bungalow by a well-known businesswoman, Geeta Goradia, to another well-known businessman and educationist Faizal Fazlani was blocked after fifty residents challenged the sale ('Vadodara Collector orders probe into sale of property under Disturbed Areas Act').

Vadodara District Collector and Magistrate Shalini Agarwal stayed the sale. In December the Gujarat High Court again found her intrusion to be non-maintainable and let the sale go ahead.

But such victories are rare against a nasty state and a polarised society. The officials often neither approve nor disapprove of a sale, keep-

The NCRB data shows Gujarat does not witness more communal violence than other states. Yet, state government is marking more and more localities across the state as 'disturbed areas'

mafias used to take advantage of the insecurity of people during the time of riots and coerced them to sell their property at a cheaper rate. The Act was introduced to save people from such exploitation."

In May 2018, two activists, Nishant Varma and Danish Qureshi, challenged the constitutional validity of the Act in Gujarat High Court. The petitioners cited Gujarat's reports to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) which consistently showed that the state does not witness communal violence at a higher rate than other states. But the state government had still been increasing coverage of the law to cover more localities across the state.

The activists asked why, if the NCRB reports were true and communal harmony prevails in Gujarat, there is a need for the Disturbed Areas Act. I spoke to Qureshi who said permission was being refused on the ground that the area was communally sensitive to violence even though there were no FIRs filed to show that. He said the law had produced the strange reality that even foreigners could buy places in

Myth of Muslim Appeasement

AAKAR PATEL

There is no material difference between the overt exclusion of minorities from high office and power in Pakistan and the covert exclusion in India. In both cases the exclusion is real. And yet Muslims are accused of being the recipients of 'appeasement'

- India's Scheduled Castes are about 16 per cent of the population, and are given 84 reserved seats in the Lok Sabha. The Scheduled Tribes, which are 8 per cent of the population, get 47 reserved seats.
- There were 27 Muslims elected to the Lok Sabha in 2019. By their share of the population Muslims should have 74 seats in the Lok Sabha. They have never got more than 49 (in 1980). Their average is 28 seats, about a third of what they should be getting.
- Among BJP's 303 Lok Sabha Members of Parliament, not one is a Muslim as was the case with its previous 282 Lok Sabha MPs.
- In UP, a Hindu holds the cabinet portfolio even for minority affairs and Waqf, overseeing Muslim charitable endowments.
- In Uttar Pradesh, the BJP has 307 MLAs and no Muslims. There are over 40 million Muslims in UP, the largest unrepresented group in the democratic world.
- The Sachar Committee report noted that some banks had identified a number of Muslim concentration areas as "negative geographical zones" where bank credit and other facilities were not easily provided.
- Article 29 gives all Indians 'having a distinct language, script or culture of its own... the right to conserve the same'. But often,

Urdu schools had teachers who had no knowledge of Urdu. The problem was compounded by the fact that these posts were reserved for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes and such candidates were not available.

• From 1969 till today—RAW's current staff strength is about 10,000—it has avoided recruiting any Muslim officer. Neither has the National Technical Research Organisation (NTRO), a crucial arm of external intelligence.

While security and intelligence agencies have avoided recruiting Muslims, treating them as treasonous by birth, there have been several attempts to reverse this policy. Former RAW chief A.S. Dulat argued persuasively for a change. The Intelligence Bureau, which began recruiting Muslims only during the-then PM Narasimha Rao's tenure, acknowledges their role in countering militancy in Kashmir and propaganda and infiltration by Pakistan.

During Atal Bihari Vajpayee's tenure, when intelligence agencies were being revamped, officials again pushed for a change. While new organisations were being set up, a senior bureaucrat approached the then National Security Advisor (NSA), Brajesh Mishra for guidance. "I asked him if we could induct Muslims into the organisations that were being set up. He promised us that he would look into it. I never heard from him after that," the bureaucrat said.

The matter was taken up once again when J.N. Dixit took over as the NSA in the UPA government under Manmohan Singh. The report quoted an officer saying that Dixit, "... heard us out and gave instructions that there should be no discrimination on the basis of religion while recruiting competent officers. Days later he passed away and the instructions were not recorded on file and did not become official policy."•

Free consent and fair value are not enough for purchase of property. Collectors are empowered to stall the sale for 'demographic imbalance' or law and order problem in future

ing it pending long enough for the buyer and seller to lose interest.

And since Gujaratis know of the law, they steer clear of properties in the Disturbed Areas. Often the neighbours apply so much pressure that the buyer and seller back off. On November 25, 2019, *The Indian Express* reported ('As Vadodara residents protest, owner cancels plan to sell property to Muslim') that the sale of a house was reversed because of the objection of the neighbours.

Among other things, the Hindu residents said that if Muslims came into the neighbourhood, property prices would drop. The society had 170 houses of which two were owned by Muslims and a third was leased by a Muslim. The Disturbed Areas Act was not needed here because the neighbours successfully kept the Muslims out. During their protest against the lawful sale, the report said, "Police were present in the area to ensure law and order."•

(Extracted from the book 'Our Hindu Rashtra' by Aakar Patel, published by Westland)

FARMERS MOVEMENT

Stir that sparks healing

Beneath its calm outer manifestation, the farmers' agitation has ignited a rejuvenating flame in the Punjabi society, giving people a unity of purpose first time in decades. From nonagenarians to middle aged women, teenagers and toddlers, they are all here

VIKAS BAJPAI

*"Yakeen ho to koi raasta nikalta hai
Hawa ki ot bhi lekar chiraag jalta hai"*
(A firm belief opens the way forward/
Lamps can still burn taking the cover of winds)

These lines of Manzoor Hashmi come to mind at the sight of farmers braving heavy rain, a harsh winter, adverse conditions and a ruthless government. Being city bred, I have always marvelled at the conviction of the downtrodden that the future can be better. It takes belief of a supernatural kind to even dream of changing the world under conditions that plague their lives.

And yet 'comrades' from Punjab have always been earthy and gregarious, full of verve and vitality. Adversity, it would appear, is meant to whittle down under their robust ways, whatever be the challenge. It was fascinating therefore to see them bring their robust spirit, their ability to celebrate in adverse conditions, their courage, grit and determination to the door steps of Delhi.

90-year-old Sharam Singh's village is sandwiched between India and Pakistan. As he explained, *"Darya Ravi ne sadde pind nu Hindustan ton kattaya hoye hai"* (river Ravi has cut off our village from India's mainland). Fields the villagers plough are on both sides of the No Man's Land. *"Par Pakistan wich assi sirf kanak vejeh haan"* (but, we sow only wheat on the Pakistani side).

He submitted humbly, "Indian authorities almost treat us as though we are Pakistanis, but the Pakistanis always treat us as Pakistanis." Thoughtfully he added, *"Saddi ikko hi ardaas aa, je Hindostan ate Pakistan di dosti ho jaye, te sadde layi bahot saukha rehna"* (if only India and Pakistan become friends, everyone's life will be easier and better).

I do not know if this *ardaas* of Sharam Singh qualifies him to be counted as a Khalistani; but if it does, I would be more than happy to be counted as one.

Time has etched many more furrows on 91 years old Nabha Singh's mind than on his face, from 1947 to 2020, but his never-say-die spirit has brought him with his comrades to once again take up cudgels for the cause of justice.

The misadventure of the government to roil the *Kirat* (glory) of these two volunteers of 'Kirti Kisan Union', the affiliate organization of All India Kisan Mazdoor Sabha in Punjab, was too much to take lying down, explain the two nonagenarians.

Dalbeer Singh Dhindsa is a relatively prosperous farmer from Batala, but at the borders of Delhi they are all one- the rich, the middle class, the small and

the marginal peasants alike. Talk of the difficulties and the inconvenience of spending the nights of harsh, open, this Bibi couldn't care less. A shrug is all that she allows in response.

A leading peasant leader claims that since the peasant movement gained traction in Punjab, farm suicides have declined. The movement has managed to turn despair into hope. Now that's what I would call 'Movement therapy' that has inspired a certain self-assurance in them and courage to see the government and oppressors in its eyes.

There is a popular story that Mao narrated to the Chinese, that of an old man moving a mountain. Well, not exactly a mountain, but Punjabi youth moved boulders weighing several tonnes and made short work of the deep trenches dug to stop the farmers on their way to Delhi. They took water cannons on their chest, braved tear gas and pepper guns in their stride and stood by the elderly peasants.

We also meet an ex-armyman on the phone who seems to be relaying: "We've reached Delhi, staging a siege and are ready for the showdown,



Focused: Seeing just the eye of the needle



Photos: Vikas Bajpai

Over and out."

A friend of mine is an excellent neurosurgeon and a kind soul who has set up a successful super-specialty hospital of his own in a Punjab town. He is also among the regular recipients of my mails, though I have no idea how many of them delete the messages straightaway. But I presume at least a few do read them, and that is my reward.

In a recent conversation with this friend, I broached the subject of the ongoing farmers' agitation. Before asking him of the situation in Punjab, I informed him of our efforts as PMSF (Progressive Medicos and Scientists Forum) to reach out to the farmers with medical aid.

His reply was, "I do not know who the people staging protests at Delhi's borders are, but there isn't much disturbance in Punjab. My driver tells me there is little impact of this agitation in his village, and as to urban areas, there isn't any impact at all."

It would have been perfectly understandable if one were to be ideologically opposed to the cause being espoused by the agitators, but to say "I do not know who the people staging protests at Delhi's borders are"



Bitter winters? Doesn't matter, says this bibi



90-year-old Sharam Singh

was disheartening indeed.

My portrayal of the 'zeal and the verve' of the agitating peasants in the midst of a harsh north Indian winter was met with the counter, *"Boss aap na alag hi dunia mein rehte ho"* (Boss, you live in an entirely different world).

"The reality is very different. I get these rich farmers who come to my hospital. They are addicts and spoilt brats, while the actual hard work is done by the migrants or those who are poor peasants."

The observation may well have some grains of truth. However, I felt it necessary to emphasize the difference in our respective world views. For my friend the reality of the world is perceived after it sieves through filters of class, privilege, hearsay, subjective prejudices or an assiduously cultivated 'ignorance' of inconvenient realities.

In my world our worldview insists upon understanding people, their failings and strengths, as being shaped by their social, economic and political circumstances. Those of us who choose to live in my kind of world cannot but derive purpose of their existence from an everlasting pursuit of making this world a better world. To put it in the words of Bhagat Singh: "A world free from exploitation of man by man."

We hardly enjoy the luxury of insisting upon supply of 24 carat Indians devoid of any imperfections. In our world we insist that neither are we perfect nor are the people who are the subject of our exertions. We are all shaped by our circumstances. The need is to change the material reality that engulfs and shapes us for the better.

'*Khapper sabhyachaar*' (decadent culture) diligently percolated in the Punjabi society by the satraps created a dystopian image of the Punjabi youth manifested in *Uda Punjab*, the 2016 Bollywood movie on the problem of addiction. Many more insinuations, alien to *Punjabiyat* were added to their detriment.

Yet, these are the youth who have been instrumental in extending the battle lines from the borders of Punjab to the borders of Delhi in what they perceive is an all-out battle against *'saddi hond te hamla'* (an attack on our very identity). In the process they have caught the country's imagination.

As conversations with a cross section of Punjabis would tell you, the reverberations of the farmers' movement are just beginning to rejuvenate and heal Punjab's society. To put it in the words of those forbearing the change - *'Ek nava itihās sirjaya jaa reha aa'* (a new history is being written).

(Dr Vikas Bajpai was part of a health camp set up by the Progressive Medicos and Scientists Forum (PMSF) for the farmers at Delhi's borders)

Preserving the protest for posterity through photos

SUKANT DEEPAK

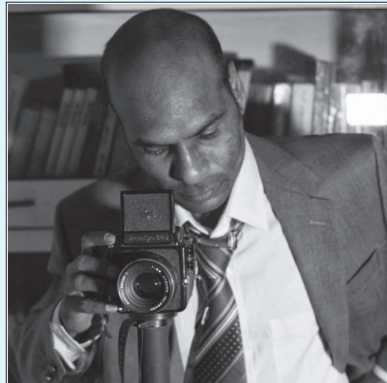
Photographer and filmmaker Randeep Maddoke at the Tikri border remembers the time when he worked as an agricultural labourer and a daily factory worker near his village in Moga, Punjab for Rs 50 a day. He also remembers how once he had to borrow Rs 12,000 from a teacher to pay tuition fee at the Government College of Art in Chandigarh.

"All such experiences open your eyes to the sharp divides all around," says Maddoke, who went on to be the first Indian to be invited to the prestigious Market Institute of Photography in Johannesburg, that too on a full scholarship, but could not attend due to health reasons at that time.

His film *Landless*, that was screened at multiple festivals last year gives a voice and face to the landless Dalit labourers and raises multiple issues, including farmer suicides, unfair working hours, social boycott, contract labour, exploitation of Dalit women and role of moneylenders.

The photographer-filmmaker, who has been with the agitating farmers from the time the new farm laws were announced, was summoned by the President of the Bharatiya Kisan Union (Ugrahan), Joginder Singh Ugrahan, to form a team of photographers, filmmakers, painters, and multimedia artists to document the agitation.

"Ugrahan told me that this movement is going to be historic, and must be recorded for generations to come. Earlier, documentation of the protests only involved collecting newspaper clippings. Now, we now have a team of 12 volunteer artists from across the country



Randeep Maddoke has already archived data worth two hard discs of 2 TB each

which is constantly archiving different moments."

The photographer and filmmaker, who has extensively documented the class struggle of Dalits in Haryana, Punjab and Tamil Nadu besides chronicling the making of the democratic Republic out of the monarchical Nepal and later, the devastating earthquake there, feels that it was important that the volunteer artists were from diverse Indian cities and not just Punjab, so as to break the narrative that the laws would affect only the Punjabi farmer.

"Some are from the deep south and many from the western part of the country. All of them are looking at the agitation with their own unique perspective."

Having already archived data worth two hard discs of 2 TB each, Maddoke finds it interesting that a lot of youngsters, from both urban and rural areas are coming forward to be volunteers. "Earlier, the 'face' of farmer agitations used to be the old agriculturist. This has changed now. In fact, we are witnessing a lot of volunteers from both urban as well as rural areas, something that could be seen during the CAA-NRC protests."

Stressing that as an artist, the farmers' agitation has been one of the most interesting movements he has documented, the artist says that he has always believed that art emerges from society and cannot function in isolation.

"This is very close to my heart. People like us who have attached themselves with the movement to document it are not doing that from the proverbial 'distance'. We are here for the farmers."

(IANS)

'People never lose, even when the battle is lost'

She was 14 when she joined the union after her father, who opposed the Khalistan movement was killed in 1991. When 43-year-old Harinder Bindu, President of the BKU (Ugrahan) Woman's Wing looks back at all these years, there is no regret.

Stationed at the Tikri border right now, where the protests are more somber than at the Singhu border, Bindu says with a smile, "I have not had a home for years now. My son, who I get to see once a month stays with my mother. That's the life of a full-time worker."

As we negotiate our way near the different stages in Bindu's car, with her behind the steering wheel, she says she does not really miss the 'ordinary' life of a 43-year-old woman with a kid. "There is a certain satisfaction that comes from being able to educate and encourage women to demand their rights."

Boasting of a membership of more than 40,000 women, Bindu says that the union is convinced that no change can take place unless women participate pro-actively in the process. "Precisely why we go from village to village and organise them. This includes women farm labourers too."

Instrumental in pushing the government to award Rs 96 Crore as compensation to the victims of farmers who committed suicide, Bindu says: "It is important that women trust us and are comfortable discussing every issue. We have been working with rape victims and demanding rights for Dalits."

Talk to her about criti-

cism for some quarters on children being brought to protest sites in the biting cold, and she asserts that in order to make masses involved with any movement, it is important that every segment be involved.

"It also helps reflect the true narrative. After all, we are fighting for the rights of the coming generation. To achieve that, everyone has to be involved - precisely why you see even the aged participating actively. The young must understand that one needs to struggle in order to achieve anything."

Her union raised posters of jailed activists including Varavara Rao and Umar Khalid during the International Human Rights Day. Responding to criticism that this had politicised the farmers' movement, she says: "Writers, activists, poets and artists have

been instrumental in making us aware of ramifications of different policy decisions. Just because they criticise certain government decisions, doesn't necessarily make them terrorists."

Adding that the movement has already managed to 'win' -- on the level of thought, she says, "You know, people never lose, even if the battle is lost. This is a very long fight, and we have been able to successfully convince people that the fight is not just against the political establishment but also corporates. Also, this battle is too long and goes beyond the current agitation. The key is not to give up, not get disappointed."

(by Sukant Deepak)
(IANS)



Harinder Bindu heads the Women's Wing of BKU (Ugrahan)



A DARK CHAPTER IN US HISTORY

AMERICA DIMINISHED

The United States of America, hailed as a cradle of democracy and liberty and as the land of the ‘free’, may never be the same again. As Trump supporters, instigated by the US President and fed with falsehood on social media, stormed the Capitol in a bid to restore Trump to the White House, the world watched in horror. The Presidential election was decisive with Joe Biden polling eight million more votes than Trump. In the electoral college his tally was 306, comfortably more than the 270 required. Yet, Trump supporters, fed on fake news, were convinced that the election had been stolen from him. Are there lessons for India ?

ASHIS RAY IN LONDON

At 3.32 am on 7 January, 65 days after voting, the United States’ antiquated, tortuous and unending electoral process eventually concluded. At an all-night joint sitting of the country’s two legislative wings – the House of Representatives and the Senate, together known as Congress – in a culminating step certified Democrat Joseph Biden as the next president of the US. This, notwithstanding objections from fanatical supporters of the outgoing President, Donald Trump, who baselessly objected to the results in the states of Arizona and Pennsylvania.

But before that four people died in



‘Not dissent but disorder bordering on sedition’

CLAMOUR TO PROSECUTE DONALD TRUMP

Making America Great Again?

‘We will never give up. We will never concede,’ said Donald Trump to his cheering supporters he had instigated to reach Washington D.C. and disrupt the proceedings in the Capitol. Rudy Giuliani, the President’s personal lawyer, said the election disputes should be resolved through ‘trial by combat’. Donald Trump Jr, the president’s eldest son, declared, ‘This isn’t their Republican Party anymore.’ This is Donald Trump’s Republican Party, he added. Hours later the mob stormed the Capitol

Here are some reactions:

● January 6 will go down as one of the darkest days in American history, a final warning to our nation of the consequences of the demagogic president, the people who enable him, the captive media that parrot his lies and the people who follow him as he attempts to push America to the brink of ruin.

-Senator Chuck Schumer

● Not since 1812 has the U.S. Capitol been attacked. I re-watched footage from the capitol today. A few things are clear: 1. This was highly planned+coordinated. They knew the entry points+vulnerabilities. 2) A number of men had clear military experience. 3. Some key D.C. policemen aided+abetted the mob. 4. Some had pre-assigned targets.

-Don Winslow, author

● All through history, Presidents have been disciplined by courageous leaders of their own party in Congress, but,

in defiance of this history, Trump has been allowed to run roughshod for four years. Always remember those who enabled Trump for four years and who let him take our democracy to the edge of the abyss.

-Michael Beschloss, presidential historian

● The eyes of the world are upon us, and the President’s incitement of violence, his inducement of chaos, and his inability to faithfully “discharge the powers and duties of his office” make it clear. The President has refused to protect our democracy and must be removed.

-Lucy Mcbath, US Representative in Congress

● Shortly after Donald Trump was elected US President, I told Joe Stiglitz that it was great news for African autocrats: each one of them would look like Nelson Mandela when compared to Trump ! Joe laughed and asked me jokingly, ‘Can I quote you on that ?’ Well, Joe, yes, you can!

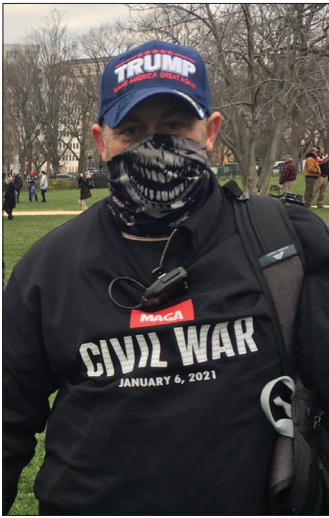
-Celestin Monga, economist



clashes between Trump rooting anarchists and police as hundreds out of the thousands who marched to the parliament building known as the Capitol, in Washington DC, stormed into it to stall the confirmation proceedings.

Since his defeat, the incumbent had been exhorting his irrational, far right supporters to assemble in the city on 6 January - the day of the certification. In a 70-minute speech at a park near his seat of office, the White House he maintained: “You will never take back our country with weakness.” His followers then committed what were acts of sedition and treason arguably incited by Trump.

A lawmaker belonging to Trump’s Republican party Liz Cheney was categorical in telling the Fox News TV channel: “There’s no question the



President formed the mob. The president incited the mob. The president addressed the mob. He lit the flame.”

As per Section Four of the 25th Amendment to the US constitution, Vice-President Mike Pence and 13 of Trump’s 24 cabinet members have to “transmit to the President *pro tempore* of the Senate (since the vice president is the ex-officio president of the Senate) and the Speaker of the House of Representatives their written declaration that the President is unable to discharge the powers and duties of his office”. The vice-president may then “immediately assume the powers and duties of the office as Acting

disorder. It is chaos. It borders on sedition.”

Republican senator and erstwhile presidential candidate Mitt Romney told his fellow party legislators who chose to subscribe to Trump’s “dangerous gambit” they “will forever be seen as being complicit in an unprecedented attack against our democracy”. The influential Republican leader in the Senate Mitch McConnell, like Pence, also defiantly turned against Trump. He declared: “We will not be kept out of this chamber by thugs, mobs and threats.”

Biden is scheduled to be sworn in on 20 January.●

AB KI BAAR NO TRUMP SARKAR

Were the ‘Indian’ waving the tricolour at the US Capitol and the Indian PM’s tweet interference in the internal affairs of the US?

A J PRABAL

India’s national flag being waved outside the US Capitol in Washington D.C. drew immediate attention. This seemed to be the only flag of a foreign country carried by the mob of Trump supporters who stormed the Capitol Building, meeting place of the US Congress (Federal Legislature comprising the House of representatives and the Senate), on January 6.

While some condemned the misuse of the national flag in the course of rioting in a foreign country, there was not much surprise. The Overseas Friends of the BJP had openly supported Donald Trump’s bid to be re-elected and the Indian Prime Minister had famously endorsed the bid by calling for *Ab Ki Baar Trump Sarkar* at the ‘Howdy Modi’ rally at Houston in 2019.

The Indian Prime Minister, who likes to believe that all world leaders are his personal friends, had brushed aside objections to invite the US President in an election year and host the ‘Namaste Trump’ event in 2020 at Ahmedabad. Foreign Policy wonks had raised eyebrows and questioned the utility of the overture to a leader who could be voted out a few months

later. But the Indian PM went ahead with the event nevertheless.

On January 7, however, Prime Minister Modi was seen to be making amends by tweeting, “Distressed to see news about rioting & violence in Washington DC. An orderly and peaceful transfer of power must continue. The democratic process cannot be allowed to be subverted through unlawful protests.” He seemed to have finally dumped his friend Trump.

But while the Indian PM was not the only world leader to express concern at the violence and rioting in Washington, D.C., critics were quick to ask if like the Indian who waved the tricolour, the Indian PM too was not interfering in the internal affairs of the US. The jibe was triggered by the Ministry of External Affairs routinely asking foreign countries to refrain from commenting on India’s internal affairs.

Tweeted Michael Kugelman, Deputy Director of the Wilson Centre, a think tank in Washington, “Narendra Modi has weighed in on today’s attempted insurrection in the US. I think this means he has locus standi to comment on America’s internal matters. Suhasini Haidar, the diplomatic affairs editor of *The Hindu* was also

quick to point out, “In one month, our govt has issued statements on events in US (capitol riots), Sri Lanka (devolution), Pakistan (Temple attack) etc..., and also told half a dozen countries they have no right to comment on Indian ‘internal matters’ (farmers protests, CAA,J&K etc).”

How the outgoing US President is going to react to the Indian PM’s ‘betrayal’ is hard to predict. But

Trump did publicly say on several occasions that PM Modi was a good man, a great man, a tough man and how he enjoyed a special relationship with the Indian Prime Minister. Modi, he said, was “a man I am proud to call my true friend”. Modi reciprocated by saying about the US President, “What he has done for realizing the American dream is well known.”

Not surprisingly, the outgoing US



President last month presented the ‘prestigious Legion of Merit’, one of the highest military honours bestowed by US Presidents, to the Indian Prime Minister for his “leadership in elevating strategic partnership of the two countries and emergence of India as a global power”. The Indian Ambassador to the US Taranjit Singh Sandhu accepted the award on behalf of the Indian PM less than a month ago.

The US arguably benefitted a lot more from the strategic partnership as India’s import of military hardware from the US ballooned. The US also took advantage of the special relationship the Indian PM shared with Donald Trump to bargain for lower import duty on US products and more favourable trade deals. Many experts suspect that the controversial farm laws against which Indian farmers are agitating at the moment, are prompted by US lobbies seeking to enter the Indian market.

But even as the US President played on the vanity of the Indian PM, he drove a hard bargain and in 2018 India was dropped by the US from the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) for the first time since the 1970s. The system allowed developing countries to sell to the United States with-

out tariffs on a number of different products- everything from buffalo hide to AC motors.

Even more damaging was the US President imposing restrictions on H-1B, F-1 and J-1 visas which allowed Indian IT professionals, students and exchange visitors to enter the US. Between 2007 and 2017, a disproportionate number of recipients were from India. More Indians received the H-1B visa than nationals of the next five countries combined. Therefore, the restrictions, imposed ostensibly due to the pandemic and till 2021, hit the Indians harder.

In the fourth volume of his autobiography released posthumously this week, former president Pranab Mukherjee frowns upon the ‘personal friendship’ that the Indian PM so eagerly pursues with world leaders. Friendship, the former President writes, is forged between countries and not between leaders. Such friendships, he adds, are mostly impersonal and even cold, and geared to promote national interest.

As the US President goes down in history as the only elected leader to incite a mob to disrupt the Legislature, the Indian PM could be ruing not heeding the advice of the late president Mukherjee.●

Grim tale of India's unwanted babies

Though there are policies in place for 'safe surrender' of unwanted babies, the reality on the ground presents a morbid picture

MONIKA ARYA

The lockdown made it easier to abandon newborn babies, says Meera Bharati, co-founder of 'Where Are India's Children'. She was explaining the reason behind the spurt in the number of abandoned babies found in 2020 in the six states of Bihar, UP, Jharkhand, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Haryana.

"With everything shut down, it was possibly more difficult to abort and easier to give birth and abandon the babies," she reasons. With people not venturing outdoors, it made it easier to abandon the babies on roadsides, in ditches, leave them in garbage heaps or by the side of ponds.

Many of the abandoned babies in the six states failed to survive. In her own home state of Telangana, she informs, the survival rate of abandoned babies is higher because people tend to leave them at temples or places where they are easily found and rescued. The babies are then brought up in childcare homes and put up for adoption.

But in the Hindi heartland states, the systems remain weak and supervision of creches or childcare homes is lax or non-existent.

The numbers are the tip of the iceberg, quips former Chief Secretary of Jharkhand Sanjay Kumar. The scale of abandoned babies, he believes, is much higher than the numbers suggest. Many of the babies are never found; many are just picked up and taken away and do not get reported. Some are dragged away by wild animals and birds of prey. The numbers hide much more than they reveal.

Available records indicate that between January and November, 2020, 154 abandoned babies were officially recovered in the six states. As many as 65 are reported to be male children but the gender of almost as many, 67 to be precise, intriguingly could not be identified.

Significantly, in five of the six states the number of girls



In the Hindi heartland states, the supervision of creches or childcare homes is lax or non-existent

abandoned were two or three times higher than boys. But in Jharkhand 30 female and 24 male babies were recovered. But the survival rate of the recovered babies in Jharkhand was the lowest. Experts believe this is because of inadequate public health system and delay in the hospitalisation of the babies.

Some experts also believe that male babies generally display far less instinct and fighting spirit for survival than females. And a high number of male babies abandoned in Jharkhand might explain the higher mortality rate in the state.

There are policies in place for 'safe surrender' of unwanted babies. There is also provision on paper of cradles but which are non-existent in most districts. Some which were started were shut down. Nor are public health workers sensitised or trained to deal with abandoned babies.

Member of the Children Welfare Committee at Palwal (Haryana), Alpna claimed that abandoned babies are found more in the districts of Sonapat, Kaithal, Karnal, Panipat and Hisar. In Palwal only one abandoned baby was found last year and she was found wrapped in a blanket and left at the gate of the Childcare Home. Haryana however has reported the recovery of 33 abandoned babies during this period. Only 12 of them were alive at the time of recovery.

CWC member at Hardoi (Uttar Pradesh) on the other hand claimed because of the lockdown only one baby was found abandoned compared to the annual average of four to five before the lockdown. Uttar Pradesh however reported recovery of 65 abandoned babies, only 32 of them alive.

"It is a serious issue but obviously not a priority with either the central or the state governments," concedes a bureaucrat. Surely a better and safe system can be ensured for unwanted babies? ●

All eyes on Sasikala's release from jail

Political equations in Tamil Nadu have greatly changed during her stay in jail. Will old loyalists welcome 'Chinna Amma' into the party?

KALYANI SHANKAR

Jail term of Sasikala, a close aide, and companion of the late Tamil Nadu chief minister J. Jayalalithaa ends in February. Will she be a factor in Tamil Nadu politics ahead of the Assembly elections in April-May? Since she cannot contest for the next six years according to the law, she can however remain as the power behind the throne.

It was a proverbial slip between the cup and the lip in 2017 when she was about to become the chief minis-

united so far.

She might try to grab the AIADMK back as she still has many loyalists in the party. But her possible re-entry would further complicate the political environment in the state. Her one-time loyalists - the current chief minister E. Palaniswami and his deputy O. Panneerselvam - will resist this. Some second-rung party leaders however would like to strike a "working relationship" with the Sasikala-Dhinakaran camp.

The AIADMK is now run from Delhi. Above all, the party has also announced an alliance with the BJP

for the upcoming assembly polls. The BJP seems to be promoting the idea of a coalition government in the state, an idea that the AIADMK has rejected flatly. The party has never shared power with any party so far.

The sudden rennai on Sasikala's property in Chennai's posh Poes Garden and the Income Tax Department's attachment recently of a new palatial bungalow under construction opposite Jayalalithaa's house indicates that BJP will continue to keep her on a leash.

The next best option for her is to head her nephew T.T.V. Dhinakaran's Amma Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam (AMMK). Even this can pose a serious challenge to the incumbent AIADMK in Tamil Nadu polls. TTV won his seat in R.K. Nagar bye-elections but his party did not do well in the 2019 polls. He had floated the party with Sasikala's approval in 2017. AMMK had taken away five per cent of AIADMK's votes.

The AMMK, meanwhile, has claimed Sasikala's release would have an impact on state politics. "We are eagerly awaiting Chinna Amma's release," said AMMK spokesperson CR Saraswathi.

Sasikala is not short of resources and has also political insights following her experience of working with Jayalalithaa. It is said that she and her nephew have some influence in the South of Tamil Nadu. This might also cut into the AIADMK votes. The silence of Dhinakaran is also an indication that there could be some deal in the works. There is also talk of a merger of the AIADMK and the AMMK, but it is unclear what role Sasikala will play in this set-up.

She may also prefer taking a back seat and support the AIADMK till 2026. But will she?

But for the jail term, Sasikala might have played a much bigger role in AIADMK and Tamil Nadu politics. But then 2021 is not 2017. ●

(IPA)



Sasikala cannot contest polls for now but can pull strings from behind the curtain

ter of Tamil Nadu after Jayalalithaa's death, but destiny took her to jail. However, people close to her say that her ambition remains intact though politics has changed in these four years.

Much has happened in the state during her jail term. Chief Minister E. Palaniswami has not only consolidated his power in the government and the party but is also on friendly terms with the BJP. His biggest achievement is keeping the party

If Sasikala decides to head Dhinakaran's AMMK, this can pose a serious electoral challenge to the AIADMK

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SOUTHERN NOTES BY SHIV KUMAR

Road travel in Covid times

It is only when one actually hits the roads that one gets a clear picture of movement nine months after lockdown. Travel restrictions have been mostly lifted for trips within states and between states in the South. The vehicular movement is not regulated, except for Kerala.

On paper, the state requires that visitors register with the Kerala Covid Jagratha portal, which demands full particulars of every passenger coming into the state: name, age, ID document number, port of entry etc. Visitors are permitted to stay up to eight days; if anyone wants to stay longer, they need to get a Covid test done (and clear it). So, this writer - based in Chennai - on deciding to travel to the Idukki district

of Kerala, complied with the requirements before setting out by car.

Goodbye to masks

Leaving Chennai at the crack of dawn, the route to Theni in the southwest of the state, from where one can cross into Kerala's Idukki district, is straightforward. Tiruchi, Indigul and onwards across tolled access highways, a distance of some 550 km. You don't actually go through any of the major towns, because the highways bypass most of them. Some 125 km from Chennai, a huge crowd is gathered in a nondescript village by the side of the road, with a bon posse of policemen in attendance. The throng is celebrating 'Shani Peyarchi' - the transit of Saturn from one planetary house to another, celebrated every 2.5 years. It is interesting to see that masks are almost non-existent and so is social distancing. Many policemen wear the mask, but not many of them don't care to wear it correctly.

The inter-state border

The usual route from Theni to Idukki district is through Kumily, about 10 km of forested ghat road; but we are turned back at the first forest checkpoint after Lower Camp, a village from where the climb begins. The guard points to a notice across the barricade which says bridge repairs are being carried out; the road is out of bounds for 10 days until Jan 5. He helpfully asks us to take an alternative route to Kambammettu [Kambam Height/Top], which we duly locate and take. Again, there is a short, steep climb of about 8 km, on a narrow road with traffic both ways, and 18 hairpin bends [switchbacks in US parlance] and vehicles coming down at reckless speed. But the destination, Kambammettu is reached soon; one last curve and that's it.

Crossing into Kerala

Kambammettu is a tiny town (village?) lying half in Tamil Nadu and half in Kerala. We hit the border checkpoints, mentally prepared for a grilling by overzealous officials and policemen, but the crossing is open, unguarded, the barriers down on both sides. There's a Tamil Nadu cop too busy

writing something to even give us a glance; his Kerala counterpart too seems to have no interest in a car carrying a TN number plate. That's it, we are across the border in a flash, and heading towards Kattappana on our way to Upputhara, about a couple of hours away. No fuss, no frills, no bother... can't believe this, but we'll take it. A friend in Theni district had earlier reported the same thing at the border crossing in Kumily, the gateway to Thekkady, about a week earlier. In fact, he said it was in contrast to a trip a month ago, when it was a 2-hour ordeal before getting across. So, regulations on paper, but the ground reality is something else!

Another airline lands at KIA

Kempegowda International Airport, aka Bangalore International airport, which has been growing by leaps and bounds, added another feather to its cap on Dec 27 with another airline beginning operations to Karnataka's capital city, Flydubai, the government-owned carrier of the emirate of Dubai, sent its first flight to the city on the Sunday, arriving at 12.30 pm and taking off for the return leg an hour later. Before the lockdown in March, Dubai was the most popular destination for passengers flying out of Bangalore. KIA has more destinations in sight now: 2 direct flights to San Francisco [Air India and United Airlines] are due to commence shortly. Bangalore-Munich and Bangalore-Seattle flights are also on the cards for this year [2021].



KCR's adopted daughter

Telangana Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao's adopted daughter, C Pratyusha got married in a Christian wedding ceremony in Hyderabad on December 28. Pratyusha, 24, who works as a nurse tied the knot with Charan, a software techie, in the presence of ministers and other dignitaries. Pratyusha was adopted by the CM from a home for abused children and young women in 2015; she had been admitted there after facing abuse from her stepmother, reports said. She was found with cuts and burns when she was rescued by the state family welfare authorities. KCR had visited her in the hospital after her rescue and adopted her as a second daughter. He and his wife K. Kavitha helped the girl get admission in a nursing programme and find a job after her graduation.

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN THE ISLAND NATION

To cremate or to bury is the question

Sri Lanka asked Maldives to bury Sri Lankan Muslims dying of Covid, claiming that burials would contaminate groundwater

SAURABH KUMAR SHAHI

March 30, 2020, was a normal day in Negombo, a lagoon city north of Sri Lankan capital Colombo. At least normal by the standards of a pandemic year. While there had been a few deaths here and there but by and large Sri Lanka was coping well. Coping well before it saw its first Muslim Covid-victim. Mohammed Jamal had left behind a wife and a daughter to mourn him. Except he was cremated before they were even told about his passing. This would be the first such incident in the series of several others that have rocked the Sri Lankan Muslim community.

In complete disregard of the WHO's or similar guidelines, the Sri Lankan government made it mandatory for all Covid victims to be cremated, including Muslims and Christians. Till date about 50 Muslims have been forcibly cremated.

Sri Lankan Muslims have done well for themselves in all these years. Mercantile spirit coupled with the penchant to stay under the radar has helped them create a life that is relatively more prosperous than what their brethren lead across the Indian Ocean. During the Sri Lankan Civil War, Sri Lankan Muslims, also colloquially known as Moors, had to strike a very precarious balancing act.

However, their luck ran out when the ethnic cleansing that followed a massacre perpetrated by the LTTE saw many taking shelter and starting a new life in the Sinhala dominated areas. However, following the culmination of the Civil War, a section of Sinhalese Majority has turned towards them. Now that the Tamils have been taken care of, they are the new sore thumb.

The Buddhist-Muslim relationship in Sri Lanka is becoming progressively bad. Since at least 2012, there have been several agitations and movements targeting Muslims. Most of these movements have been led by Buddhist clergy with tacit support from the ruling dispensation. The watershed moment in the Buddhist-Sinhala relation was the Dolahey Karalla agitation started by Buddhist clergy in 2012. It has been followed by a campaign of terror by BodhuBalaSena, a paramilitary like organisation that in its ideology and structure is similar to our own famed "cultural organisation" that sees its name in the FIR of every communal riot. The agitation of Aluthgama was a dark chapter in the violence against Muslims which was followed by a similarly despicable Ampara agita-

tion. All these agitations were based on Islamophobic conspiracy theories. What has been remarkable in Sri Lanka, however, is the fact that unlike other places where they have been suppressed, Muslims in Sri Lanka have not retaliated violently. They have time and again reposed their faith in the internal mechanism and institutions of Sri Lanka. However, that faith has been shaken.

The statements issued by the government and the leaders are mostly measured. However, they hide more than they reveal. The government has struck by its stand that this is being done on the recommendation of the scientific panel which said that the burial of Covid patients would lead to contamination of ground-water. Although this is preposterous and has no scientific value, the government has stuck by it.

However, as in India, the messaging from the government is sent from two levels. The official channels continue to say non-controversial things

so as not to draw censure from international bodies but the unofficial channels, their cadres and supporters both online and offline, are told through dog-whistles to create an anti-Muslim environment.

While the leaders from the ruling dispensation and the government channels are sticking by the fig-leaf that their scientific panel has given them, the supporters and cadres of the party are openly saying that if bodies are handed over to Muslims for burials, they will "weaponise" the virus.

The mainstream Muslim elites in Sri Lanka were slow in reacting to this policy. However, they have woken up belatedly when they realised that their silence and inaction will permanently discredit them in the eyes of their constituency. Azath Salley, a very senior leader of the National Unity Alliance (NUA) and an ex-Governor has condemned the move. Ali ZahirMoulana of the Sri Lankan Muslim Congress has also

condemned it. Similarly, Rauff Hakeem, another senior SMC leader has condemned the decision. However, these condemnations are seen as too little and coming too late.

Experts in Sri Lanka are fearful that new Muslim leadership that is not entrenched economically and politically with the Sinhalese-ecosystem will start to emerge which will see its redemption in global Islam rather than putting its faith in the Sri Lankan institutions. This will have a catastrophic effect. Particularly bad is the judgement by the Sri Lankan Supreme Court that upheld the government's unscientific decision without giving any valid argument in its favour.

The Muslim community in Sri Lanka, which is well-educated is aware of the WHO guidelines vis-à-vis disposal of dead bodies and understands that barring burials has no scientific basis. Not surprisingly, the ruling dispensation,

and by that extension, the Sri Lankan state, has lost its trust. Muslims now believe, accurately, that since there is no scientific backing behind this policy, it is a matter of politics now and the decision is political and the policy will not be reversed.

If that was not enough, the ruling dispensation rubbed salt to the wound when it asked the Maldives to facilitate the burials of Muslim Covid victims in the Maldives. However, the majority of Muslims in Sri Lanka condemned this move as it further promoted Islamophobic and racist views in that it gives the signal that Sri Lankan Muslims are not Sri Lankan and that they have another home in the Maldives.

The proposal was so ludicrous that the veteran Sri Lankan diplomat Dayan Jayatilika in his regular column in a broadsheet lambasted it by asking rhetorically that if Muslim victims are to be buried in the Maldives, where shall Catholics be buried, in Kerala?

As expected, the issue has caught the attention of regional and international bodies including United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Belief, Amnesty International and the OIC who have all condemned the decision. Carrying on with the policy will attract further censures globally, a situation that Sri Lankan diplomats want to avoid what with Colombo not having very many friends globally. However, pulling back will be seen as a political defeat. This is one neat bind the ruling dispensation has found itself into.



Muslims in Sri Lanka protest against government's decision to cremate bodies of those dying of Covid



President Gotabaya Rajapaksa

Veteran diplomat Dayan Jayatilika in his newspaper column rhetorically asks that if Muslim victims are to be buried in the Maldives, where shall Catholics be buried, in Kerala?

RESPONSIBILITY FOR PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS

Government or Gates?

RAJIV SHAH

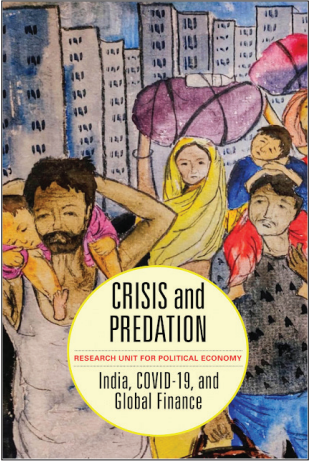
A new book, published by the New York-based Monthly Press Review (MPR), has blamed Microsoft founder Bill Gates for "crowning" the crisis engulfing India's health sector; alleging the top American billionaire's foundation of late has acquired "extraordinary influence" over India's public health governance, giving a fillip to a policy that deprives access of public healthcare facilities for majority of the country's population.

The book states, "So great is Gates' authority that, in May 2020, Modi urged him to 'take the lead in analysing the necessary changes in lifestyles, economic organisation, social behaviour; modes of disseminating education, and healthcare, that would emerge in the post-Covid world'," but believes, Gates' influence has been "profoundly harmful".

The book titled *Crisis and Predation: India, Covid-19 and Global Finance*, prepared by MPR's Research Unit for Political Economy, claims that under the scheme of things worked out by the Gates Foundation, India has begun to put "private corporations in the driver's seat" assigning "technological interventions the key role – a magic bullet for each disease. This will not ensure public health, but it will deliver private profits".

This, thinks the book, comes at a time when there has been "long-standing refusal of the government to spend on public health", which has led to "chaos and distress" during the Covid-19 period.

"...Policy of fiscal starvation may have informed the government's choice of a lock-down as a 'low-cost' strategy to tackle Covid-19", without realising that "such a draconian measure" does not by itself "reduce the ultimate number of deaths on account of the virus," it says. The book cites a November 2019 report by the Niti Aayog ('Health System for a New India: Building Blocks– Potential Pathways to Reform'), which "acknowledges that the principal reason India's health system 'lags behind comparable countries on multiple dimensions' is its low public expenditure", and yet "rules out this possibility".



It quotes Niti Aayog report as saying, "India's fiscal funding of healthcare, around 1% of GDP, is among the lowest in LMICs [low-middle income countries]". However, the report adds, "Fiscal funding is likely to remain at 1.0-1.3 percent of GDP", ruling out the possibility of achieving the target set by the National Health Policy, 2017 of achieving 2.5 percent of GDP. In fact, the report explains the main reason for the constraint is, while the private health facilities accounted for only 8 percent of the total in the sector in 1947, today things have just reversed.

Thus, "In 2010-11, there were an estimated 1.04 million private health enterprises across India, including roughly 80,000 private hospitals and 575,000 private medical clinics. The private sector thus employs 88% of doctors. By comparison, there were fewer than 200,000 government-run health care facilities across all provider levels in 2016." Worse, "69% of primary health centres function with only one or no doctor, and 65% of community health centres report a shortfall of specialists".

"As a direct result of the government's refusal to spend, people are forced to divert their meagre incomes to health care. It adds, "The sum India spends on health – about Rs 5 trillion in 2015 – is not the problem; the problem is the breakup of these expenditures. Thus, of India's total health expenses of nearly Rs 5 trillion in 2015, public expenditure accounted for only one trillion and contributory schemes for Rs 0.7 trillion. The burden of the remaining Rs 3.2 trillion was borne by out-of-pocket expenditures."

Continues the book, "The consequences for ordinary people are both financial and physical. The National Sample Survey found in 2017-18 that private sector hospitalization costs were six times higher than the public sector ones in rural areas, and 8 times higher than the public sector costs in urban areas. In the case of other medical treatments (those not involving hospitalization), the costs in the private sector were two to three times those in the public sector."

Things have reached a point where, the book says, even according to the Niti Aayog, "Large corporate chains and standalone hospitals dominate the top-end of the private market. Generally, these companies provide highly specialized services employing state-of-the-art technologies in tertiary and quaternary facilities located in major urban centres."

It admits, "Corporate chains have started to expand beyond major cities to establish large (100+ bed) hospitals in Tier II and III cities, indicating a desire to broaden their target demographic. This expansion has been encouraged by government, including through favourable tax policies."

Not without reason, says the book, the Oxfam report comments, while India ranks "5th on the Medical Tourism Index", ironically, it is 145th among 195 countries "in terms of quality and accessibility of healthcare", adding, the slogan "Universal Access to Healthcare" has been replaced with "Health for All". According to the book, this stands in sharp contrast to the emerging "global" view that an "increase in public spending on health and public provision of healthcare leads to better and more efficiently achieved health outcomes", whereas an increase in private healthcare expenditure is "actually associated with higher mortality rates."

Not without reason, it adds, India has "the dubious distinction of being the world leader in tuberculosis infections and deaths."

(This report first appeared on Counterview.org)

NFDC Film Bazaar (January 16-21)

Shopping for films in Goa, virtually

NAMRATA JOSHI

Over the last 13 years, NFDC Film Bazaar, held annually in Goa, parallel with the International Film Festival of India (IFFI), has become a kumbh mela of sorts for independent cinema, a platform for non-mainstream filmmakers to showcase their work to the national and international film fraternity and a support for debut filmmakers in the country.

In the light of the ongoing global pandemic, for the first time since its inception in 2007, South Asia's largest film market, organised by the National Film Development Corporation (NFDC) will be held as a virtual event from January 16-21.

But there'll be more to it than just logging in to the event online through a website. A one-of-a-kind virtual 3D interface has been created from the scratch to make the screenings, pitching sessions, networking events and video meetings and stalls as real as possible with distinct virtual areas allotted for the same.

The focus is on discovering, supporting and showcasing South Asian content and talent. *Lunch Box*, *Margarita with A Straw*, *Chauthi Koot*, *Qissa*, *Court*, *Anhey Ghorey Da Daan*, *Dum Laga Ke Haisha*, *Liar's Dice*, *Village Rockstars*, *Balekempa* and *Aamis* are just a few of the recent celebrated titles that have made it to the marquee and to prestigious film festivals via various verticals at the Film Bazaar.

This year's edition of the NFDC Film Bazaar, the 14th, will continue with its usual programmes. The Knowledge Series will feature panel discussions, webinars and masterclasses. There will also be virtual stalls from various state tourism offices to provide production guidelines for shooting locations and from exhibitors for promotional purposes.

Viewing Room will provide a glimpse into the new films on the horizon. VR is a platform where independent filmmakers can show their films (complete or still in progress) to potential investors, buyers, world sales agents and festival programmers and curators.

This year 195 films will be available in the Viewing Room Library of which 129 are feature films and 66 are short films. Film Bazaar Recommends (FBR) curated list highlights 20 feature films. *Newton*, *Lathe Joshi*, *S. Durga* have been some of the films featured previously in FBR.

In the prestigious Work-in-Progress (WIP) lab, filmmakers are mentored by internationally-renowned producers, writers, editors and film festival heads to fine-tune their ongoing projects. This year it includes films made in five Indian

This year 195 films will be available in the Viewing Room Library of which 129 are feature films and 66 are short films



languages and four of these are debut features. The titles chosen are *Aiz Maka Falea Tuka* (Konkani, Today me 'Tomorrow you) by Sreejith Karanavar; *Ghaath* (Marathi, Ambush) by Chhatrapal Ninawe; *PAKA - The River of Blood* by Nithin Lukose (Malayalam); *Powai* by Kuldip Patel (Hindi) and *Sikaisal* (in Tiwa language) by Dr. Bobby Sarma Baruah.

The director and editor of the selected film showcase their rough cuts to the panel of mentors and receive an in-depth one-on-one feedback. The international editor assigned to the film guides the director and editor of the selected film through two sessions of the editing lab. The aim is to help the filmmaker achieve an accomplished final cut of the film.

Since its inception in 2008, the Work-in-Progress Lab has shaped films which have gone on to premiere at top international film festivals and received critical acclaim. Some of the past projects include *Laila Aur Satt Geet* (The Shepherdess and the Seven Songs), *Fire in the Mountains*, *Eeb Allay Ooo!*, *Aise Hee*, *Nimtoh*, *Soni*, *Moothon*, *Bombay Rose*, *The Gold-Laden Sheep and The Sacred Mountain*, *Lipstick Under My Burkha*, *Thithi*, *Titli*, *Killa*, *Miss Lovely* and *Ship of Theseus*.

This year's selection for the

other significant vertical—Co-Production Market—includes 21 projects from India, Bangladesh, Canada, China, France, Nepal, Netherlands and Sri Lanka and in languages as varied as Hindi, English, Tamil, Bengali, Kannada, Khasi, Kumaoni, Kashmiri, Gujarati, Malayalam, Manipuri, Marathi, Nagamese, Pahadi, Sinhala, Urdu and Nepali.

International collaborations featured this year include Onir's *We Are*, co-produced by India's Anticlock Films and Canada's Fae Pictures. There is the India-Netherlands collaboration *Dengue*, directed by Prantik Basu and produced by Jan van der Zanden. Paromita Dhar's *Last Time On Earth* is produced by France's Yohann Cornu and Pradip Kurbah's *The Elysian Field* by China's JS Studio.

Other notable titles include Franklin Jacob's *Writer* produced by Aditi Anand's Little Red Car Films, *My Home Is in The Hills* by Arun Fulara, Shanawaz Nizamudeen's *Queen Doll* (produced by Pa Ranjith's Neelam Productions; Haobam Paban Kumar's *Water*, Anjali Menon's *Rasa* and Assam-based filmmaker Bhaskar Hazarika's production with Shyam Bora—Subhadra Mahajan's *Second Chance*.

Umesh Vinayak Kulkarni's Arbhaat Films & Samir Sarkar's Magic Hour Films bring Gourab Kumar Mullick's *Starfruits* and Suchhanda Chatterjee & Shubha Shetty's *Quest Films* are the producers for Ananth Mahadevan's *The Storyteller*.

HERALD VIEW

Virus of 'vaccine nationalism'

India's handling of the coronavirus vaccines made in India has been amateurish, if not unprofessional and unethical. As the world's largest producer of vaccines India was well placed to come up with an effective vaccine sooner or later. But the political desire to be one-up appears to have led to the hurried approval given to the indigenous 'Covaxin' developed by Bharat Biotech. The reluctant approval was also given to 'Covishield', a vaccine developed by Oxford University and AstraZeneca and produced in India by the private sector Serum Institute of India. The Drugs Controller General of India's emergency approval added to the confusion by declaring that the approval was granted "for restricted use in emergency situation, in public interest as an abundant precaution, in clinical trial mode, to have more options for vaccinations, especially in case of infection by mutant strains". The convoluted statement made no sense to people or experts. Poor use of the English language was not the only problem with it. The statement carried far too many caveats and gave the impression that the regulator gave approval under duress. The suspicion that the DCGI had acted under pressure of political bosses was strengthened when both Serum Institute of India and Bharat Biotech engaged in a slanging match over the efficacy of the vaccine produced and the processes followed by the other. Bharat Biotech founder Krishna Ella claimed that 'Covishield' had reported more adverse side effects while Adar Poonawalla of SII made the snide comment that 'Covaxin' was as safe as water. Between the DCGI and the two companies, the credibility of India's regulatory regime and efficacy of the two vaccines took a beating. It is no secret either that Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) had tried to arm-twist Bharat Biotech to come up with a vaccine by August 15, the Independence Day. The attempt was abandoned only after a public uproar by experts. The refusal of the DCGI to answer questions, the lack of transparency and absence of data related to trials reinforced this perception. The remaining doubts were removed by politicians, union ministers and TV channels, the latter falsely claiming that India's indigenous vaccine had been pre-booked by 190 countries.

The virus of 'vaccine nationalism' promoted by politicians had earlier been visible in China, Russia and even in the United States. The outgoing US President Donald Trump claimed 'victory' for his administration when Pfizer and Moderna developed vaccines in record time. The outgoing President also proceeded to issue an order that no other country would receive the vaccines until all Americans were vaccinated. The order gave the President an alibi to defend the shortage of vaccines for Americans but did not stop the US companies from selling their vaccine to other countries. Both China and Russia had claimed to have developed coronavirus vaccines several months ago. But by the end of the year both these countries had vaccinated barely one percent of their population. Vaccines developed by the two countries are also struggling to gain international acceptance. Their experience should have alerted the Indian establishment to the perils and pitfalls of promoting untested vaccines and difficulties in vaccinating the population. With doubts raised about the efficacy of Indian vaccines and regulatory laxity, the damage to the Indian pharmaceutical industry could be serious and take a long time to overcome. In this game of one-upmanship, people have sadly been left in the lurch.

Wanted doctors who communicate

Lack of empathy is at the heart of violence against doctors. A change in MBBS curriculum that currently emphasises on rote learning and produces robotic armchair physicians is much needed



DR AMOD GUPTA

Since disasters strike without notice, we need to create a front line of responders in addition to the current NDRF teams. These frontline workers (Paramedic) should be able to do initial triage, provide resuscitation, measure pulse/BP, be able to defibrillate if need be, ensure clear airway, start oxygen, fluid infusion, help transport the critically injured without aggravating the injuries. Currently our frontline responders are untrained and mostly illiterate drivers of ambulances.

All healthcare workers should clearly be battle-ready at all times, trained and certified after undergoing brief refresher courses annually. There should not be any exception to this including the professors and health administrators. All workers should possess a valid certificate at all times that they are competent to provide primary care. In the next 10 years we must have plans to introduce these courses in schools.

Instead of putting the focus on buildings, the focus must shift to provide a centralised ambulance service that should respond to a central number like the 911. In 'Digital India', it should be possible for these ambulances equipped as these are with trained paramedics and the required equipment, to have real time data on the availability of beds and facilities (in a radius of say 100-200 kms) both in the private sector and the public sector.

Emphasis must also shift from the knowledge-based to competence-based education and evaluation. Presently there is too much emphasis in the MBBS course on learning by heart everything known in medicine creating armchair physicians who are unable to even start an infusion or correctly measure the blood pressure.

The MBBS doctor should possess knowledge, knowhow, skills and attitude that are clearly aligned with the objectives of what an MBBS doctor should be able to do and what he is expected to do, when he should refer or pursue with further labs/testing. He should know when a patient needs to be seen by a cardiologist but for him to learn by rote the steps of coronary angiography or bypass surgery is

redundant. The objectives of MBBS course must be deliberated at length to produce a skilled primary care doctor or a (Better still call him a Community doctor as a constant reminder that he has to serve the community) rather than create a doctor for whom MBBS is a stepping stone for a post graduate course. The latter most unfortunately is currently the scenario in India.

Communication is at the heart of healthcare, yet this has been the most neglected area in medical courses across the board for the last one century or more of modern medicine. Even 73 years after independence we have not been able to get rid of the yoke of colonial mindset- the English language.

This puts at disadvantage the students in medical courses who come from rural and backward areas. They constitute more than 50 percent of the students. While there is absolutely no need to translate medical course books (every student is expected to have a working knowledge of reading the English language) into Hindi or any other regional/ vernacular language, the teachers must use the vernacular language to teach and communicate with the students so that every student in the room has a level playing field in understanding the subject matter.

This becomes critical as doctors have to communicate with patients mostly in the vernacular and are not always comfortable in following or understanding the complaints/ symptoms that they learnt in an alien language. They also often find it difficult to communicate the course of the disease and the treatment to the patient in the vernacular for better compliance. Compliance is a major casualty of poor communication.

Not only during the classroom teaching but even in case presentations and lectures the teachers must use the vernacular except while using technical words and phrases. Even for the theory papers and practical exams, students should be at liberty to answer in the vernacular language. Teachers and students who are not familiar with the local language must be provided courses to learn. Medical institutes should tie up with the local universities to facilitate this.

Students learn by imbibing the mannerism of their teachers. And of course, teachers themselves have never learnt the art and skills of communication. The doctor-patient interaction must become an integral part of the training, using a variety of tools including dummy

patients. This must be subjected to both the formative and summative assessments.

For the last 100 years we have been producing robotic doctors who are short on any sensitivities and empathy towards the sick patients. They lack empathy- they don't feel the pain of the patients or the loss of the dear and near ones. They are impatient and don't listen to what the patients have to say.

Doctors and paramedical staff are callous. They have zero tolerance towards patients who dare ask any question. The common refrains are, "Are you the doctor or am I the doctor?" "Do you know better than me?" Surely, the wearer knows where the shoe is pinching. Lack of empathy is at the heart of violence against doctors and nursing homes/hospitals.

No amount of legislation will resolve this problem which is growing by the day. This comes from absolute lack of exposure of students to liberal arts, poetry, literature, history that teach finer qualities in life and this can come only if doctors in the making are exposed to humanities as a part of the curriculums. Many universities in the world are now making courses in humanities an integral part of the medical courses.

Amazingly, medical teachers/faculty are the only teachers who have had no exposure to art and craft of teaching. Even for becoming a kindergarten teacher, you have to have a degree/diploma in education, but for becoming a medical faculty member/teacher you need merely to be selected as a senior resident in a teaching hospital, a job primarily looking at patient care. There is an urgent need to revive the regional technical teachers training program for creating and regularly updating the skills of medical teachers in various aspects of teaching including the curriculum development, evaluation, communication skills, conducting and communicating research etc.

Most of the members of the civil services as well as the armed forces, have to undertake upskilling courses from time to time and this is taken into consideration during their appraisal for higher positions. University teachers and college teachers have to participate in summer schools for updating their knowledge and skills. There is an urgent need to bring in regular courses for the medical teachers as well. Earning certain number of credits by attending the CME programmes may be good for practising doctors but are no good for the medical teachers.

(The author is a Padma Shri awardee and Emeritus Professor, PGIMER, Chandigarh)

NEHRU'S WORD

Imposition of ideas is bound to fail

The complacency and even arrogance that tends to characterise our political leadership today is in sharp contrast to the way Jawaharlal Nehru was constantly thinking about fundamental questions such as the meaning of life, the contradictions posed by the progress of science and exhaustion of civilization, can wrong means lead to right ends, the ineffectiveness of violence, and sharing his doubts and thoughts with his colleagues

Unless we have some clarity of vision or, at any rate, are clear as to the questions posed to us, we shall not get out of the confusion that afflicts the world today. I do not pretend to have that clarity of thinking or to have any answers to our major questions. All I can say in all humility is that I am constantly thinking about these questions...

On the one side, there is this great and overpowering progress in science and technology and of their manifold consequences, on the other, a certain mental exhaustion of civilization itself...religion comes into conflict with rationalism. The old question still faces us, as it has faced humanity for ages past: what is the meaning of life?

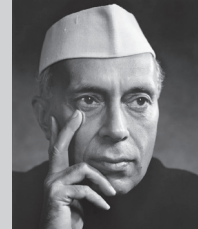
The old civilizations, with the many virtues that they possess, have obviously proved inadequate. The new Western civilization, with all its triumphs and achievements and also with its atomic bombs, also appears inadequate and therefore, the feeling grows that there is something wrong with our civilization...

I have the greatest admiration for many of the achievements of the Soviet Union. Among these great

achievements is the value attached to the child and to the common man. There the systems of education and health are probably the best in the world. But it is said, and rightly, that there is suppression of individual freedom there.

And yet the spread of education in all its forms is itself a tremendous liberating force which ultimately will not tolerate that suppression of freedom. Unfortunately, communism became too closely associated with the necessity for violence and thus the ideal which it placed before the world became a tainted one. Means distorted ends. We see here the powerful influence of wrong means and methods...

This is completely opposed to the peaceful approach which Gandhiji taught us. Communists as well as anti-Communists both seem to imagine that a principle can only be stoutly defended by language of violence, and by condemning those who do not accept it...It is not the approach of tolerance of feeling that perhaps oth-



JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

ers might have some share of the truth also.

Speaking for myself, I find this approach wholly unscientific, unreasonable and uncivilized, whether it is applied in the realm of religion or economic theory or anything else. I prefer the old pagan approach of tolerance,

apart from its religious aspects. But whatever we may think about it, we have arrived at a stage in the modern world when an attempt at forcible imposition of ideas on any large section of people is bound ultimately to fail. In present circumstances this will lead to war and tremendous destruction. There will be no victory, only defeat for everyone.

This was exemplified by the Suez incident in 1956. Also, what happened in Hungary demonstrated that the desire for national freedom is stronger than any ideology and cannot ultimately be suppressed. What happened in Hungary was not essentially a conflict between communism and anti-communism.

It represented nationalism striving

for freedom from foreign control. If the society we aim at cannot be brought about by big-scale violence, will small-scale violence help?

Surely not, partly because that itself may lead to the big-scale violence and partly because it produces an atmosphere of conflict and of disruption. It is absurd to imagine that out of conflict the social progressive forces are bound to win.

In Germany both the Communist Party and the Social Democratic Party were swept away by Hitler. This may well happen in other countries too. In India any appeal to violence is particularly dangerous because of its inherent disruptive character. We have too many fissiparous tendencies for us to take risks. But all these are relatively minor considerations. The basic thing, I believe, is that wrong means will not lead to right results and that is no longer merely an ethical doctrine but a practical proposition."

(Extracts from a note sent as enclosure to a letter to the chief ministers dated July 13, 1958. Selected and edited by Mridula Mukherjee, former Professor of History at JNU and former Director of Nehru Memorial Museum and Library)



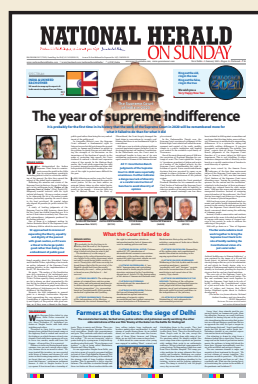
BY: Rajendra Dhodapkar



Public policy and governance are primarily matters to be resolved in the public domain. Over-dependence on judiciary doesn't serve democratic purpose. And when it's known that judiciary is not in the best of health, resort to judiciary only proves a small point--that the institution is not in best of health.

SUHAS PALSHIKAR
POLITICAL COMMENTATOR

Letters to the Editor



VANITY IN TIMES OF PANDEMIC

As was widely expected, the Supreme Court has given the go ahead to the Prime Minister's ambitious project of construction of a new parliament building as

well as one for himself. The decision has not come as a surprise. The court had earlier allowed the groundbreaking ceremony to take place as scheduled and had refused to grant a stay. The writing on the wall was as clear as daylight. The hurry with which the apex court has dealt with the case has left many to wonder why similar alacrity is missing when it comes to hearing and deciding cases pertaining to the rights of the citizens. The allocation of a whopping Rs 20,000 crore to the vanity project of redoing the central vista comes at a time when the government's coffers are empty, the economy is in deep crisis, the states are begging for their share of the revenue and the coronavirus pandemic is posing severe healthcare challenges that require huge resources and funds to fight. But the PM's priorities are clearly different.

Ravinder Pal Singh

SC ACTING LIKE EXTENSION OF THE EXECUTIVE

The promptness with which the Supreme Court has given its approval to the government's central vista project once again strengthens the appearance that the court is acting like an extension of the executive. Over the last few years, it has hardly ever stood up to protect the citizens' rights guaranteed by the Constitution of India as the central and state governments have wilfully ventured into grey areas and sometimes even come up with ordinances that are downright illegal such as the new anti-conversion law promulgated by the Uttar Pradesh government. Normally the courts should have taken suo motu cognizance of this mockery of the Constitution but sadly that has not happened. Looks like 'My Lords' are busy securing their post-retirement careers. Not only have some of them accepted political offices but as a

FARMERS' DEATHS A NATIONAL SHAME

That more than 60 farmers, who travelled to the borders of the national capital to protest against the farm laws, have died over the past 40 days in a national shame. Reports suggest the deaths were caused by harsh conditions and exposure to the elements in most cases. These deaths are a shame for a country that has an agrarian economy and where 60% of people continue to depend on agriculture for their livelihood. The deaths have, however, not bothered the government a bit. Not a word of condolence from the PM or the Union agriculture minister. Multiple rounds of talks have failed. On the other hand, the topic of discussion on social media have been why farmers are eating pizza and biryani.

Sumant Singh

recent report suggested, a majority of Supreme Court judges have accepted post-retirement assignments, mostly from the government.

Pravesh Shrivastav

DESECRATION OF PLACES OF WORSHIP

Over the last few years, India has clearly moved away from a pluralistic society that respected each other's choices and places of worship. Desecration of places of worship not belonging to the majority religious beliefs has become quite frequent and normal. In fact, it's being systematically normalised. In Madhya Pradesh, the Hindutva goons vandalised mosque and burnt homes of Muslims and when the local Muslims reacted in Ujjain, the police instead booked them under National Security Act (NSA). Is the state now backing the hooligans, throwing the raj dharma

to the winds? Isn't the government supposed to be the guardians of all citizens irrespective of their religion?

Shariq Khan

VACCINE DEADLIER THAN THE VIRUS?

As the government clears two vaccines - Covishield by Serum Institute of India and Covaxin by Bharat Biotech - against COVID-19, the apprehensions among the general public are growing. Many experts too are sceptical about the safety of the vaccine in the absence of credible data of the phase-3 human trials. The impression has gained ground that the vaccines are being rushed and that the government's word cannot be trusted in the absence of transparency and actual data in the public domain.

Sathyam K

CINEMA

Buck up for these thrillers in 2021

The 25th James Bond film with Daniel Craig, Tom Cruise in Mission Impossible 7, a Salman Khan starrer and more are scheduled to be released in theatres this year

SUBHASH K JHA

2020 proved to be a losing battle for movie theatres. They failed to lure back the audiences. But 2021 may turn the tide. There is a slew of seductive movies lined up which audiences would hopefully find irresistible on the big screen.

SOORYAVANSHI: The redoubtable Rohit Shetty teams up with Akshay ‘Jubilee Star’ Kumar for the first time. Need we say anything more? Ajay Devgn and Ranveer Singh make guest appearances. Katrina Kaif adds to the omph factor.

GANGUBAI KATHIAWADI: Sanjay Leela Bhansali’s gangster epic takes Alia Bhatt to another level of performance. She is virtually reborn in the avatar of a brothel Madame and dreaded don. SLB considers this his best work to date.

KFG2: Kannada superstar Yash tells me everything in Part 2 of the KGF saga is larger, more spectacular, dramatic and hardhitting than Part One. “We made the first part for my Kannada fans, little knowing that it would be liked by audiences in every language. Now Part 2 has been consciously designed for a pan-India



audience and an international audience,” promises Yash.

RRR: S S Rajamouli after *Baahubali*!! The only problem here is the audiences’ inflated expectations. Why do I get the feeling that Rajamouli would be able to fulfil all those expectations, then some more. Raja’s dad K V Vijayendra Prasad who wrote RRR tells me the film has shaped up as a suitable followup to *Baahubali*. I believe him.

RADHE, INDIA’S MOST WANTED BHAI: Two words to bring the audiences back running to the theatres -- Salman Khan!

‘83: Cricket and Kapil and Ranveer Singh plus Deepika Padukone. Can Covid really keep the audience away? Director Kabir Khan is confident they will return with this one.

NO TIME TO DIE: The new James Bond film is supposed to be so slick and tactile that cine-soothsayers are already predicting this would be the one to bring the film-viewing community across the globe back into theatres. The 25th James Bond film is also the last time we will see Daniel Craig as 007. Yup, it is time to start preparing for the movie theatres again.

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE 7: Shot through the pandemic, the title of this fabulous franchise is rationalized on this occasion by the hardships it faced during the shooting. Tom Cruise is the world’s most popular actor. If he can’t do it, who can?

BELL BOTTOM: Akshay Kumar again. This time in a crime thriller set in 1980s has Akshay Kumar playing a RAW agent. This was the first film to be shot abroad (in Scotland) after the Covid lockdown.●



REALITY BITES

Hopes galore in 2021



RUPA GULAB

There are encouraging signs that 2021 will be better than 2020. The Covid-19 vaccine is ready to roll out across the world, masks may soon be off, and the worst hit industry of them all, the lipstick industry, must be heaving a sigh of relief. Just as reassuring is the fact that from the 20th of January Donald Trump will be known as the former President of the USA. We may even get a spot of light entertainment if he has to be dragged kicking and screaming out of the White House.

India, however, continues to look bleak. Our Dear Leader is so busy trying to decide what he’s going to wear for his three daily costume changes, he has absolutely no time to decide which vaccine India will go with. Inaugurating everything from *paan* shops to temples comes first. His Man Friday has no time to save Indians from Covid-19 either. When he’s not eating with adivasis, Baul singers and with Dalits for sweet photo ops, he’s busy deciding which opposition members to buy, which state governments to topple, and which students, professors and activists to arrest.

Interestingly, the Dear Leader and Man Friday are unmasked nowadays, so we suspect that they got their vaccine shots on the sly, tut. Sort of like those entitled class monitors who are entrusted to share a bag of sweets with the entire classroom, but sneakily polish off the entire lot in the toilet, and then shrilly accuse fellow classmates of stealing the sweets.

Pity, because those two being injected with the vaccine in their flabby arms would actually have made great photo ops. We have seen world leaders like President-elect Biden take the vaccine shot on camera to reassure citizens that it is fine (PS: Biden’s arm muscles were toned). The global lipstick industry should grimly take note that they may not get business in India for a long, long while.

I’m trying very hard to think of positive things for India in 2021. Okay, here’s one: The only way we could be happy and inclusive again is if all secular opposition parties forget their differences and create a united force against the BJP, but that doesn’t seem likely. All they are interested in are petty political gains for themselves, not the plight of Indian citizens. But suppose, just suppose that they have a change of heart, here are two things we can look forward to:

1. While Bihar’s new dwarf Nitish Kumar won’t voluntarily part with the chief minister’s chair, surely his elected party members can part ways with him? If they are as secular as they purport to be, they can join the big secular alliance and still be in power. That’s one state less for the BJP to practice bigotry and violence in, cheers! Which reminds me, with prudish Nitish Kumar finally out of the way, bootleggers may well be out of business. So, cheers again.
2. If secular forces join hands, West Bengal will continue to have an inclusive government, Hindus and Muslims can safely fall in love, beef kathi rolls will still be a hot selling item in street stalls and clubs, and Bengalis will continue to murder Hindi in their charming manner. So what, if Didi promptly forgets that she owes her victory to other secular parties and starts throwing tantrums and heavy objects at them? At least the people will be happy! Also, I would dearly love to see that annoying, partisan West Bengal governor cry.

Now, another reason for hope: Hurdles have come up at the Ram temple site in Ayodhya. Experts have discovered loose sand a few feet deep into the earth. Something tells me the gods are sending a message to the BJP, and it’s not a very polite one! It’s heartening that many Indians hope the delay in construction will last longer than their lives. Injustice is ugly to witness, after all.

Finally, a quick quiz for Mahabharata fans: we know there was a blind king, but was there a deaf king too-- someone who could hear the voices of his courtiers and corporate cash cows, but not the common man? If not, I’m going to write a contemporary version of the Mahabharata and get rich quick, so happy 2021 to me!●

“A quick quiz for Mahabharata fans: we know there was a blind king, but was there a deaf king too, someone who could hear voices of corporate cash cows, but not common man?”

BOOK EXTRACT



Delhi’s Modern School, founded in 1920, has been an integral part India’s capital and its history is a fascinating chronicle of the evolution of a ‘modern’ school

RAKESH BATASYAL

In the big, new school building on Barakhamba Road, each teacher was assigned a room so they did not have to hop from class to class. This was a good practice and helped teachers develop an identity in the minds of pupils. Many Modernites will recall, either with dread or delight, the exact room in which a particular teacher taught a particular subject.

One of the critical areas in which the school experimented since the 1930s was the amount of leave granted to teachers. In the school’s earliest days, teachers wore many hats and to grant them leave meant to significantly impair the functioning of the school. With the many foreign teachers at the school because of the Montessori system it followed, the consequences of leaves were even more stark.

Modern School soon understood it was vital, and cheaper, to have permanent local teachers and to accommodate their ambitions. The school began to grant increasingly long leaves to teachers to take up fellowships and posts abroad, giving teachers up to a year, or even two, to return to the school. And most did. The school has maintained its accommodating approach to teachers who request sabbaticals and leaves to take up training opportunities, when other schools have largely prevented their teachers from expanding their skill sets.

One of the earliest decisions taken regarding the Modern School was to appoint Kamala Bose as the school’s first principal, and it was an excellent one. Over the next twenty-

seven years, Ms Bose would serve the school with distinction. Indeed, Ms Bose was so devoted to the school that her salary remained unchanged for years, until the board of trustees thrust a raise upon her.

Kamala Bose came to Delhi in 1920 to lead the newly founded Modern School; Kamala Sengupta led Lady Irwin School. J.D. Tytler was the first principal of Delhi Public School. In later years, Din Dayal, the principal of Delhi Public School, Mathura Road, was another such visionary, while Rajni Kumar singlehandedly created Springdales School and led it as principal. This phenomenon has been peculiar to Delhi.

In Calcutta, for instance, it is individual teachers, rather than principals, who have become prominent and even famous. The upright principal with totalitarian instincts, who rules his school with an iron fist, was portrayed by Amitabh Bachchan in *Mohabbatein*.

If Ms Bose was the first and most important jigsaw in the puzzle, Raghubir Singh was equally circumspect when it came to the composition of the school’s board of trustees and the management committee. They comprised an eclectic mix of people: the principal of St Stephen’s College, S.K. Rudra; prominent builders of the empire’s new capital in Delhi, such as Sobha Singh and Basakha Singh; eminent academics, such as N.K. Sen and D.S. Kothari, of Delhi University’s philosophy and physics departments respectively; two of the city’s leading doctors, Rai Bahadur N. Sen and Dr S.K. Sen; and even British civil servants, despite Raghubir Singh’s obvious attachment to the nationalist cause.

The school, he knew, would be essential to an independent India because its mission was to enable its students to confront and perhaps even answer for themselves the question of identity for the modern Indian. How must the modern Indian be educated; what must he know and understand?

Gandhiji was to the point when he commented in the school guest book about the school’s quest for modernity and his own concerns about it: “I have only one fear. If in the flush of the modern, the ancient is lost it would greatly harm the young girls and boys. I take the liberty of saying this because I see the purity of the motive of the inception of the school and I want this institution to progress.”

The cultural life of Delhi was moulded by patrons and institution-builders such as the great Hindustani classical vocalist Vinay Chandra Maudgalya, artist Bhabesh Sanyal, the writer Shankar, arts patron Sumitra Charat Ram, and artist and actor Sarada Ukil. Their efforts were

part of a larger nation-building quest, the product of a national mood of hope, optimism and duty after Partition. India was independent and at its helm was a sophisticated Prime Minister who understood that culture emerged from the freedom to experiment.

It was at this critical moment, when India was making its institutions and setting out its values, that Modern School had M.N. Kapur as its principal. And it is because of MNK’s leadership that Modern School took its place among the foremost institutions of independent India. It became a place, as his daughter Anuradha has written, for those who ‘desire alternate visions’ and lead ‘idealistic lives’.

Looking through old issues of the school magazines, Adarsh and Sandesh, it is striking how often MNK is photographed with his wife, his family, or in convivial spirits with staff and board members. The impression conveyed is genuinely familial, of everyone pulling in the same direction. The idea of the school as a happy modern family was anchored around the Kapur household. This was an ethos that bound students to the institution even when it had been decades since they were there; it’s an ethos that, till date, makes the Modern School Old Students Association one of the closest-knit and most effective alumni organisations in India.

MNK ran the school like a family, often coaching student successes and failures in how they reflected upon the family rather than the individual. This quite often ran counter to the telos of a liberal education, the foundation of the school’s pedagogical promise that it would allow for the evolution of the student as an individual and provide him autonomy.

The school’s philosophy did not have room for family as an organising principle; instead the building blocks were modernity and nationalism. This apparent contradiction of rejecting family and at the same time structuring the school as a large family created a dynamic tension among students, prompting them to embrace the institution while building the self-confidence to leave it behind.

It is worth noting that, in many ways, MNK brought back the centrality of family to the school’s zeitgeist, a notion that the school’s founder, Raghubir Singh, wanted to marginalise. He succeeded in tempering the school’s mission of creating a ‘free individual’ by reminding students, in Donne’s words, that no man is an island, that humanism must be qualified with an understanding of one’s obligations to society.●

(This is an extract from ‘The Modern School (1920-2020)’ written by Rakesh Batasyal and published by Westland Publications)



M.N. Kapur
(Principal, 1947-1977)



Kamala Bose
(Principal, 1920-1947)



Raghuvir Singh

COMICS IN THE LINE OF FIRE

Who's afraid of the satirist?

The Big Bad Wolf has stretched its claws to snatch away the comic refuge we take when the unreality of the world weighs too heavy on our heads. Will arrests and FIRs dampen the spirits? Not likely

SANJUKTA BASU

The 'New India' has certainly moved a long distance from the post-Independence days when cartoonists and satirists' works were admired by even those who were at the receiving end of their formers' jibes. Today comedians are being stuffed into jails, and not before they have been roughed up by state-backed goons.

Keshav Shankar Pillai, remembered as Shankar, shared a friendship with Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister, despite lampooning Nehru mercilessly. Nehru had famously remarked, "Don't spare me Shankar." And it was he who launched the *Shankar's Weekly* in 1948.

"Shankar has that rare gift, rarer in India than elsewhere, and the least bit of malice or ill-will, he points out, with an artist's skill, the weaknesses and foibles of those who display themselves on the public stage. It is good to have the veil of our conceit torn occasionally," Nehru had said.

Shankar's Weekly spawned a large number of cartoonists, the most celebrated being R K Laxman. How would they have fared in today's 'New India', one wonders.

In any case 2020 did witness a spurt in comics and cartoons, despite the pandemic and the lockdown on the one hand, and also a crackdown on satire on the other.

The Attorney General of India sanctioned the prosecution of Web-comic creator Rachita Taneja and stand-up comic Kunal Kamra for alleged contempt of court. In Karnataka Roy Ponnanna was booked on charges of promoting enmity between communities for his cartoon character Gopaiah who questioned the poor shape of roads in Kodagu and land conversion among other issues. It took him five months to secure anticipatory bail.

As 2020 gave way to 2021, police in Madhya Pradesh's Indore arrested a young stand-up comic Munawar Faruqui for allegedly insulting Hindu gods and goddesses. His show was disrupted by a group led by a BJP MLA's son who claimed Faruqui was a serial offender and had cracked jokes on Hindu gods. The court refused him bail. Days later, media reported the police officer in-charge of the area as saying that they had no video evidence against the comic.

Soon after the sudden lockdown was clamped in March 2020, a Gujarati man popped up on Twitter with political satire targeting Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Since April, he has posted one video every day.

Urvish Kothari's videos seldom exceed two minutes. He never raises his voice and he is always respectful and delivers his punchlines with a straight face. The day after the video in which the Prime Minister posing with peacocks went viral, Kothari

bringing out a publication like MAD magazine in the US," he says with a chuckle, "We will be jailed".
"I do this to save myself from being dragged into the muck...I am doing this so that I can respond to my daughter tomorrow when she asks what I was doing when India was going through such dark times," Kothari underlines.
He laughs off the Gujarat model. "There has not been any human development in Gujarat in the past 20-25 years, and not a single significant new institution was built in the state," he says before adding, "But even the most cosmetic projects like a ferry service or a sea plane remain incomplete, without any maintenance. For each such event corporate bodies get a business contract from the government. That's his formula. Gujarat model is a hoax."

R Prasad who draws for the Economic Times reflects on the year gone by and says, "A pandemic of this proportion gave us no scope for humour. The year was a long journey of misery and protest, on railway tracks, on highways, from Shaheen Bagh to Singhu village. All these can be chronicled only in satire. In the midst of this misery, we - comedians and cartoonists - try to bring a smile on your face. It is those who cannot tolerate that smile who proceed against us through ways like legal traps, physical attacks and social media lynching."

Rachita Taneja, a 29-year old Webcomic creator, is facing criminal contempt of court proceedings in the Supreme Court. Her popular web comic 'Sanitary Panels' was launched in 2014 after two people were arrested for posting comments against Narendra Modi. Since then, her distinctive stick-like figures and spartan but sharp barbs have become popular.

In a recent interview to Priya Ramani, Taneja explained, "We saw the clear clampdown of dissent. Dissenters were detained, there was the attack on Jamia [Jamia Millia Islamia meeting in Delhi] and we faced the serious issue of free speech not being a right in this country... There's UAPA, sedition...all ready to be used when someone dares to question those in power..."

Saloni Gaur, whose impersonation of Nazma Aapi, a Hijab wearing Muslim woman reflecting on life and politics, has kept her audience in splits on Instagram and now on SoniLiv's OTT platform. "Modiji last night said he would leave social media. I do not understand why this man announces everything at night...Just because you do not get sleep, does it mean you would disturb our sleep too?" pouted she indignantly in one of the episodes.

"I am usually careful with what I am saying, but then times are such that people get offended at anything. There is this artist, who cracked a joke on his own father and people took offence," she points out.

Bengaluru based Aravinda Tegganamath, who now runs his own IT company after working in Bengaluru and Boston, created ButtSir comics during the lockdown. Initially the character was meant to be a secretary in the office of the Prime Minister, who would not be a 'Yes man' but would point out the flaws in decisions. Since then, the comic strip has grown and diversified. "A recent favourite is the one made on the sharp decline in the GDP in the past quarter," he says about his work.

With the government taking over control of the digital medium, there are uncertainties in the new year. What would rules be and how will they be interpreted? The year 2021 will tell.●

Can you live with 5 lies a day, Mr President?

Political satirist Garry Trudeau holds that he never faced crunch for content as Trump continued serving up a banquet of lies, obfuscation and cruelty almost daily



SHALINI SAHAY

Garry Trudeau, the creator of *'Lewser: More Doonesbury in Times of Trump'* published in mid-2020, continued lampooning the US President, who he first trolled in the 1980s. The Doonesbury creator had shot to national fame with his spoofs on President Richard Nixon and his Trump collection is a fitting finale, some would say.

"With other presidencies, you could forget who was in office for whole stretches of time: weeks, even months...But with Trump, the powerful stench is refreshed daily. There's no escaping it..."

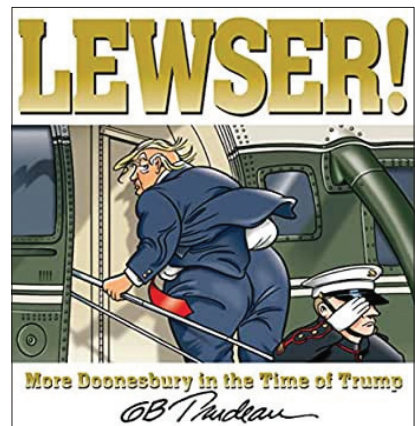
There has been never the slightest danger of running out of inspiration with Trump serving up a banquet of lies, obfuscation and cruelty almost daily.

"Sometimes I put words into Trump's mouth — or reframe what he actually said so as to highlight its fatuousness," he continues.

"In other strips, I just make the case for common decency, or explore the intellectual cul de sacs so favoured by his base. Often Trump isn't even mentioned, but his implied presence darkens or destabilizes every conversation."

In one of his strips an aide tells the President that he had averaged 22 lies a day last year; and if he could cut it down to just one or two lies a day, people's trust in his Presidency would be restored. A pause follows and the aide hastily adds, "What about five? Can you live with that?" The President replies, "Fine. But not press conferences."

Try doing that in 'New India'.●



Title: LEWSER!: More Doonesbury in the Time of Trump (Paperback)
Author: G.B. Trudeau
Publisher: Andrews McMeel Publishing
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We must be irreverent to powers that be

If we all become docile and submissive, who will point out to the emperor that he has no clothes?
One must not forget when they get offended by a joke, they become a joke



RAJENDRA DHODAPKAR

I live in Uttar Pradesh and every day I live in fear of being picked up on some or the other charge. This is not an exaggeration. This period is entirely different than what we have seen so far in Independent India. There is the fear of losing jobs, not being able to sustain, there is immense pressure on media houses not to hire those who are perceived as outspoken.

There is social media trolling all the time. It is very easy to generate pressure on social media, easy to make too much noise without substance, which should be ignored but recently even the *New York Times* threw away a cartoonist under social media pressure. It does indeed remind you of Charles Dickens who said, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times..."

When tyranny grows, it tests our limits of tolerance. Kunal Kamra's stand example of the Supreme Court is one fine example of humour and dissent in 2020. More people should have done what he did. But when you get offended by a joke, you become a joke. Unapologetic and defiant editors and artists are now rare and India is becoming more reverential.

Our society needs to be more irreverent. There is bound to be reaction to this constant demand that we become docile and



Humour is the weapon in the hands of the small, the weak, the disempowered and the disenfranchised

be submerged in reverence, that we must not question. The more the push, the more people will be there to stand up to say the "king is naked".

Till recently, the courts of law maintained a certain dignity and independence and citizens respected the judiciary. But clearly there has been an erosion. I noticed a range of cartoonists this year critiquing the Supreme Court. Kunal Kamra and Rachita Taneja were not the only ones. There were several others. The social media reactions I see on the Supreme court, I could not have imagined the same in old days.

Satire and humour are the most potent forms of protest, said Charlie Chaplin. When you are beyond the capacity to cry, you laugh. Humour is the weapon in the hands of the small, the weak, the disempowered and the disenfranchised. I am also reminded of Kundera, who wrote, "Rulers came in the

name of communism and oppressed us, they then came in the name of democracy and oppressed us; we have seen the smallness of grand ideas, that's when the pandemic created a crisis we had not witnessed in our lifetime. Who could have imagined to see in the 21st century millions of people walking for thousands of kilometres? But the uncalled-for suffering of those migrant workers did not elicit any sympathy from the middle class. We have become immune to the pain of others.

I believe even if I am not paid for my work, I would still keep making the cartoons. It is not art but activism for me. I do not go out for public rallies or movements but this is my way of protest.●

(As told to Sanjukta Basu)
(Rajendra Dhodapkar has drawn cartoons for Hindustan, Indian Express, Jansatta, Satyagraha.com and National Herald on Sunday)