



A thought for today

I am large, I contain multitudes

WALT WHITMAN

UP's Last Stretch

89 eastern UP seats will be critical in swinging fight for Lucknow

The UP poll is easing into its final stretch, where 89 seats in 14 districts in eastern parts of the state will go to polls on March 4 and 8 respectively. UP's eastern regions are vastly different from the western parts, Rohilkhand and Bundelkhand that have voted earlier. In a state that is more populous than Brazil and extremely diverse, elections in each region follow their own rhythm and are vastly different.

Twenty-eight districts in eastern UP have extremely low per capita incomes of Rs 12,741 annually, almost half that of western UP at Rs 21,659 annually. The geographical divide is reflected in a vast gulf in industrialisation and farm output as well. Western UP has the geographical advantage of possessing fertile land between Ganga and Yamuna rivers which makes it the most prosperous region of the state. It has almost seven times the number of factories (13) per lakh population compared to the east (2).



Eastern UP or Purvanchal is a hotbed of caste politics while a strong Muslim presence in the west makes it more about minority politics. BJP's Yogi Adityanath (Gorakhpur) and BSP's Mukhtar Ansari (Mau) represent the two (like) extremes of east UP's political cauldron where feudal satraps rule the roost. Unlike their better-off counterparts in the west, poverty in the east means that implementation of government schemes is a major electoral theme.

The yearning for a better future is embodied in eastern UP's voting pattern as well. Comprising 150 seats, it voted in favour of Mayawati's BSP in 2007, giving it 79 seats. SP rode the wave of disenchantment with BSP in 2012, bagging 85 seats while BSP was reduced to just 25. Last week, Mayawati reiterated that she will break UP into smaller states including Purvanchal if she comes to power. Neglect of regions like eastern UP has been a factor in the region's stagnation. Moreover it is the sheer diversity of UP, absent a 'wave' like the one that prevailed in favour of BJP during the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, that makes the assembly poll so difficult to call. But whatever the poll outcome might be UP remains a fit case for radical reorganisation for the sake of administrative efficiency, as has already been done with other large Indian states.

Is India Well?

While health indicators improve, more needs to be done to shore up Indians' health

India's health indicators have made significant improvements over the last decade. Indices such as infant mortality are down while institutional deliveries and sex ratio are up. Data gathered during the fourth phase of the National Family Health Survey show that even a state like Haryana has experienced a commendable change in its sex ratio at birth - it went from 762 females per 1,000 males in 2005-06 to 836 females per 1,000 males in 2014-15. India's total fertility rate also declined to 2.2 - close to the replacement rate of 2.1 - from 2.7 over the decade.

Add to this the increase in immunisation coverage across the country with almost 70% of children fully immunised, compared to 44% in 2005-06. There was also a significant 10% decline in stunting while the percentage of underweight children reduced from 42.5% to 35.7% in eight years. All of this shows that even moderate investments in the health sector backed by good policies such as the Universal Immunisation Programme can make a significant difference to society. If current standards of awareness and infrastructure can bump up institutional deliveries from 38.7% to 78.9% over a decade, then imagine the positive output if the government outlay for health was made commensurate with global levels.

Government expenditure on healthcare is a little over 1% of GDP today. In contrast, the world average healthcare outlay stands at 5.99%. While there does exist quality private tertiary care in urban areas, public hospitals are poorly staffed, overburdened and saddled with inadequate infrastructure. The situation is worse in rural hamlets. This dichotomy has made access to healthcare expensive and hugely cumbersome for the vast majority of the people. Add to this a shortage of nearly five lakh doctors in the country. Thus, while progress in health indicators is commendable, much more needs to be done to universalise access to quality healthcare in India.

Sense and Censortivity

The Secret Fantasy of the Central Bored of Film Certification

Bachi Karkaria



It was my secret desire to put on lipstick and throw away my burkha. But I've obediently thrown away the first and modestly put on the second because the Central Board of Film Certification has said stories cannot be 'lady oriented, their fantasy above life'. Great faith I have in Censor-ji, trusting him sau takka to preserve India's culture, traditions, morals, secular fabric and nozone layer. So, instead of that dangerous film, I'm settling down to watch another Prakash Jha production, 'Pahlaj-lal Ke Haseen Sapne'.

Yes-ji, this film is 'lady oriented', but, no-ji, it is not about any fantasy-mantasy. Indian women don't even know how to spell that word; in fact their spelling is almost as bad as Shri Nihalani's. But why bother about his spelling when he is so good at dictation?

This pure-as-desi-ghee film opens with a wide angle shot of disgustingly modern girls in offices, malls, pubs, etc. The camera sweeps over them, as frontal as a male gaze; a remix of 'Choli ke peechhey' throbs. Clever CG pixelates this image, and a small figure emerges in slo-mo. It pans to reveal a woman. She wears a tight martyred look. As the details emerge we see that she is in chains. No, no, not those kinds of chains, buddhu. This is not some S&M film with 'contantian sex scenes'. She's not chained to a bed, but to a stove. You see, ladies exist only to satisfy the appetites of men. Yes, yes, she can steam up some sex makkhanwala, so long as it's only the male who is getting the makkhan.

In Nihalani's earlier B Grade films, the buxom heroines cavorted khullam khulla with leering heroes, and emerged from pools in revealing, clinging saris. But this is the new, improving, washes-whitest Pahlaj-lal, remember. So, in his 'Haseen Sapne' there's nothing revealing. Nothing except stupidity.

Mad-or-wot? After her stuff is done, his lady does not light a cigarette. In our chaste arya-nari culture, there's no smoke without a censor's ire.

P.S. Nihilism, c.1900, found nothing to approve of in the established social order. Nihalanism, c.2016, finds nothing to approve of in films that question the established social order.

Alec Smart: "Not just Gurmehar, this is all that all of us can take."

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Being Vladimir Putin

Russia's president gets 20th century geopolitics, what he doesn't get is 21st century geoeconomics

Samir Saran



In 2009 we witnessed a watershed moment for geoeconomics when the credit crisis, born in the United States, spread across the world. The integrated global economy temporarily tilted over the edge of the financial abyss before being pulled back by concerted collective action involving large economies around the world.

In 2016, we witnessed a backlash against this economic interconnectedness and the ideal of collective governance with a plethora of populist anti-globalisation movements leading to outcomes such as Brexit and the election of Trump. It is increasingly apparent that we are at the beginning of a new epoch, where global arrangements will be defined by various shades of nationalism, reassertion of state sovereignty, and multidimensional contests over territory, both real and virtual.

These developments also shaped the conversations at the recently concluded Munich Security Conference. Beyond the interest and noise around the Trump presidency, and the US approach to some of the global challenges, it was clear to most that President Putin was by far the most influential global leader on all matters security, something that three contemporary developments demonstrate emphatically.

Let's start with West Asia. In less than 18 months, Russia has cleverly co-opted Turkey, firmly embraced Iran as a strategic partner and doubled down on its old ally Syria, bringing into its tent three diverging interests masterfully. In fact this alignment and the Russian relevance in this region stems from its understanding of how regional constellations of states and state-supported militias align. Guided by its partners, the US has faltered precisely on this aspect, erroneously programming itself into the Shia-Sunni schism, without realising that the nation-state still holds normative appeal in the region.

Second, Putin has managed to breach Fortress Nato by making Turkey pivot significantly towards Russia. Using President Erdogan's disillusionment with the



Obama White House deftly, Putin has managed to drive a wedge between Nato and one of its oldest member states.

And finally, Putin has turned the tables on the most powerful nation in the world, by using its own modus operandi against it - that of intervening in the domestic politics of other states. Through strategic leaks, Putin deftly placed his finger on the scale of the American elections, tipping them in favour of Trump.

In this age of renewed political gamesmanship, Putin is the only player who has retained a chess set from the 20th century. While others have long forgotten the craft of geopolitics, Putin continues to move pieces like a Grandmaster. But does he have an endgame?

And herein lies the rub. This most influential global political figure, a man who has formidable military and security capacities at his disposal, is an inconsequential economic actor with insignificant economic agency. Russia, a country with a military might rivaling that of the US, has a GDP smaller than that of Australia and is ranked only ahead of

Ironically it is Donald Trump, derided for his lack of diplomatic acumen, who is proving himself to be astute in this matter by reaching out to arguably the most influential man in the world - Vladimir Putin

South Africa among the Brics grouping that it helped create.

For all the accumulation of power and orchestration of geopolitics, Putin's tactics are not going to fill Russia's treasury. While 20th century geopolitik may be useful in 2017, Putin is also handicapped because he continues to view economics through a 20th century prism. Russia's fixation with large transcontinental connectivity projects has led it to support China's New Silk Road.

Without any significant expansion in Russia's industrial and manufacturing

economy, the country is fast being reduced to a political guarantor for Chinese economic expansion or a policeman for China's property. And what of the future? In a world where 3D printing may become de rigueur, the transportation of millions of tonnes of manufacturing goods could be a dying reality.

Connectivity in this century is not simply about roads and railways, but also about bits and bytes and hearts and minds. It is the networks - knowledge, digital, social - that transfer and transmit value in the new world order. Economic growth in the 21st century requires digital hubs, clusters of start-ups and liberal regulatory confines where young minds working with technology can push society forward.

The reality is that 20th century economic projects that Russia is undertaking benefit China, and 21st century economic projects in Russia suffer from the absence of a requisite ecosystem. This has led to a certain fragility in the global governance architecture.

I have argued before that the asymmetry between Russia's military potency and its economic state is dangerous. China, with its \$11 trillion GDP, has significant destructive and disruptive capability as well. The stakes that it holds in the global economy, however, ensure that it will never destabilise global systems because it stands to gain from them. Russia does not have sizeable economic stakes in these systems and therefore only its political capability motivates its actions. This is being Vladimir Putin.

US efforts to "isolate" Moscow through sanctions have not only failed but also proved to be counterproductive. They have reduced Russia's skin in the global economic game, allowing Putin to engage in exactly the same conduct that sanctions seek to deter. Washington DC must focus on cultivating a sense of ownership (and consequently the fear of loss) in Russia towards economic and trading regimes.

But this is easier said than done and ironically it is Donald Trump, derided for his lack of diplomatic acumen, who is proving himself to be astute in this matter by reaching out to arguably the most influential man in the world - Vladimir Putin.

The writer is Vice-President, Observer Research Foundation

St Stephen's is stuck at the level of kindergarten compared to its awesome potential, thanks to teachers' resistance to autonomy

Valson Thampu



Only a few days ago I surmised that the apparent calm on the campus of St Stephen's was due only to nothing significant being contemplated by the administration. I was wrong.

I stumbled upon, in real time, a photograph uploaded on the net of a faculty member addressing the students on Allnut lawn. On inquiring into the provocation for this resurrection of the familiar spirit, I came to understand that the governing body is considering a proposal to upgrade the college to an autonomous institution.

This is true to form. In 2008 when I replaced decades old blackboards and chalk with white boards and marker pens, the same set of teachers was immoderately agitated. A scene was precipitated. An emergent staff council meeting was requisitioned and held. At the meeting, the aggrieved teachers' beat a hasty retreat when I asked them to spell out the rational basis for their protest. The then protestors are now happily using the white boards.

Come now to the immediate provocation: the spectre of

autonomy. I have heard the proponent of the present turmoil argue vehemently in favour of autonomy. Every progressive move by the university was damned as an assault on the 'autonomy' of the institution or of education. Now the same phalanx damns autonomy.

It is scary that to teachers autonomy means no more than license and the unfettered right to do (or not do) as they please! What does autonomy to colleges entail? First, academic freedom.

Freedom is such a bad

Principled resistance, in academia, now means no more than the sledgehammer of laziness and inertia. The semester system was resisted tooth and nail. FYUP, likewise

thing? Really? That should make us think. The problem with freedom, as Dostoevsky said long ago, is that it entails responsibility.

Academic freedom - the freedom to design your own courses and conduct your own examinations - is hated by



teachers who fear that this could increase their 'work load'. You can trust them to fight this every nanometre. Principled resistance, in academia, now means no more than the sledgehammer of laziness and inertia.

The semester system was resisted tooth and nail for the very same reason. FYUP, likewise. The agitated teachers, who have no qualms in exposing themselves to public ridicule, seem to be ignorant that there are nearly 500 autonomous institutions in India already. I know at least a dozen autonomous colleges in Kerala alone. St Stephen's is far ahead of them. Wherever I go people are surprised, some shocked, that St Stephen's is still an affiliated undergraduate college.

Many colleges in Kerala

have post graduate, MPhil and doctoral programmes. St Stephen's remains in stragulation and stuck at the level of a kindergarten compared to its awesome potential. The teachers are to blame for this. In 1981, when the college completed 100 years of distinguished service to the nation, autonomy was offered to it as a special case. Then too the teachers stood in the way. It is an absolute disgrace.

Each time examinations are conducted, evaluations done and results announced, I used to hear my erstwhile colleagues in St Stephen's complain bitterly against the shoddy arbitrariness inherent in the University system. Statistical studies have been conducted to prove that the interests of our examinee students suffer in the University system. Comp-

laints about the substandard syllabi formulated and imposed by the University on the college have been heard far too often.

Now, an opportunity to emerge from the woods has come calling. But teachers protest.

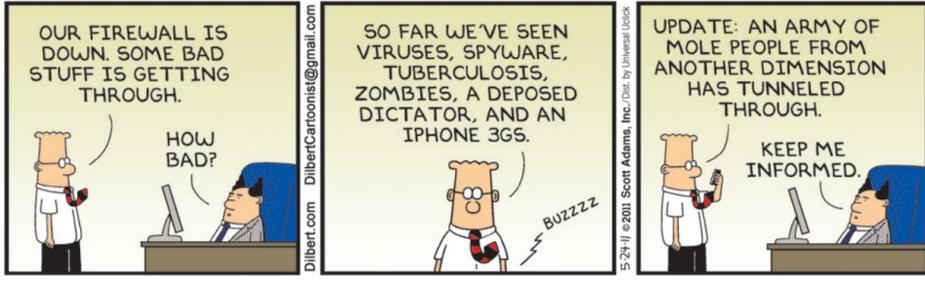
Not everyone, mind you. About 90% of the faculty members in St Stephen's don't have any opinion of their own on anything. They simply lay up whatever is dished out to them by a few expert provocateurs. If any one of them is called separately and quizzed on the grounds for their informed and principled opposition, you can see the fun.

Autonomy is not the invention of a private management. Nor is it a conspiracy hatched by an administration. Studies commissioned by the government of India came to the conclusion that standards of education will improve only if educational institutions are liberated from the stranglehold of - surprise of surprises - "regulatory bodies". Regulatory authorities were established to standardise and upgrade quality of education. They have become, instead, huge hindrances.

Should teachers be aggrieved at quality of education improving?

The writer is former Principal of St Stephen's College, Delhi

dilbert



Not Pakistan, But War Killed Her Father

Sumit Paul

A 20-year-old Delhi girl's extremely wise statement that, "Not Pakistan but war killed my father," is being viewed as anti-national. This young girl, Gurmehar Kaur, is being chastised by pseudo-nationalists and false patriots; this is terribly sad. Rather than learn from her and mull over her sage words on the utter futility of war, the whole country is condemning her. Why?

Gurmehar Kaur is right. It's war, not Pakistan that killed her father who was a Captain in the Indian Army when the Kargil war broke out in the year 1999. Remember the sagacious words of the US General Douglas MacArthur, the most decorated soldier in modern times and a key figure in the Pacific during the Second World War: "There's no enemy country. I'll shake hands with the 'enemy' soldier when there's no war and vice

versa but both will try to kill each other during the war."

British Field Marshal Montgomery echoed the same sentiment, "All nations are friends. War turns them into enemies." Ashoka the Great, after seeing the unprecedented bloodshed in the battle of Kalinga, exclaimed, "Why did I kill so many innocent soldiers? Were they my enemies? The main enemy was the battle." The Pali concept of the Buddha, 'Yuddham Parabhootam', is that the very idea of war must be defeated, and not the enemies, because there is no enemy. War itself is the biggest enemy.

The ill-timed and ill-interpreted nationalistic fervour has germinated the seed of the "other country" being our enemy India and Pakistan are surviving on this perpetual

strife and idea of enmity. We all seem to be hell bent on the perpetuation of this face-off, all this bad blood. French emperor Napoleon Bonaparte wrote to the British Admiral Horatio Nelson, "Admiral, whether you defeat me or I defeat you, nothing will happen. But one thing will remain forever intact: Not the countries France or Great Britain, but the battle that had its last laugh."

Yes, a battle or war has the last laugh. War is death's dance macabre. We all must get rid of the apparitions of war from our consciousness and stop blaming the other country for killing. A country doesn't kill. War does. Stop encouraging and nurturing such ill-conceived ideas and learn from this young girl. The anti-war poet Wilfred Owen aptly said, "War goes beyond country/ Killing is its foremost duty."

First of all, the whole world must think seriously about disarmament and stop spending trillions of money on weapons of mass destruction. Why are we letting ourselves become victims to the machinations of those who thrive on keeping conflicts alive, like say, for instance, the military-industrial complex? They don't want peace; they want us to wage war so that they can sell more. Theirs is not to agonise over who might be using the weapons and against whom.

If war is what kills people, not country A or B or C, we need to rise above geography and history; we need to come together, and work together to break free of boundaries both physical and mental.

We're still not evolved and are enamoured by our troglodyte past when we'd kill each other at the drop of a hat. War is a scar on the escutcheon of mankind. It's an anathema we need to get rid of.

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Sacred space

The Rhinoceros

The only way to save a rhinoceros is to save the environment in which it lives, because there's a mutual dependency between it and millions of other species of both animals and plants.

David Attenborough