



**A thought for today**

Indians do not like Indian teachers ... but there is a huge demand for Indian teachers around the world

BIKRAM CHOUDHURY

# Turning The Dragon Ultra-Pulta

Thanks to yoga, India could tie China up in knots and nots

Contrary to the old saying that you can't teach an old dog new tricks, India seems bent on showing that it can indeed teach an ancient Dragon new twists.

Even as China's export-driven economy is slowing down, India stands poised to boost its own exports to that country, starting with a typical and traditional homegrown product: Yoga.

After years of being subjected to a virtual flood of cheap Chinese goods – ranging from computer components to Diwali lights and images of deities like Lakshmi and Ganesh – India could turn trade tables on China thanks to an age-old physical and spiritual discipline whose many ardent espousers include PM Narendra Modi and Baba Ram Dev.

Indeed, the Patanjali tycoon has gone on record to claim that through yoga he can "cure" the "disease" of homosexuality, a pronouncement which suggests that, whatever else it might or might not be an antidote for, yogic practice is not a remedy for a condition characterised by the patient putting his foot in his mouth whenever he opens it.

Such hiccups notwithstanding, yoga is reportedly enjoying an enthusiastic fan following in China, a development which New Delhi could cash in on both economically and diplomatically, and add a new punch to Panchsheel.



Knowing that the Chinese have selective myopia where the fine print of copyright laws is concerned, the first thing for India to do would be to register a watertight patent for yoga, lest Beijing claims it to be of local origin and a variant of the indigenous tai chi.

Apart from possible royalty earnings from yoga, the ministry of external affairs should explore other possible areas of benefit from the Middle Kingdom's adoption of the lotus position.

In that the sirshaasana, which involves standing on one's head, is an integral part of the yoga regimen, New Delhi could advantageously use this posture to get Beijing to turn ultra-pulta its foreign policy on a number of contentious issues so that it comes to see eye-to-eye with India.

Indeed, the convoluted contortions indispensable to yoga could well help India tie up China not only in knots but also in a long list of nots. Such a roster of negatives for Beijing could include *not* claiming Arunachal Pradesh for itself, *not* issuing strictures against Dalai Lama, *not* aiding and abetting Pakistan for the sole purpose of needling New Delhi, and *not* blocking India's entry into the UN Security Council as a permanent member.

However, turning things topsy-turvy can have its own unforeseen hazards as indicated by the story of the reprobate who on demise was ushered into the nether region which was full of people standing neck-deep in poop, sipping tea. "This isn't too bad; at least we get tea," thought the sinner. Then an attendant said, "Tea break over. On your heads, everyone!"

Such cautionary tales show that upending oneself can sometimes prove to be a pain in the aasan.

# Is Anybody Home?

Bannon's "deconstruction of the administrative state" is already underway in America

Nayan Chanda



Is anybody home? One may not get an answer from the White House where the president is busy watching cable news and tapping out angry tweets. The US commander-in-chief's erratic behaviour and tweeter storm has been explained by commentators as his diversionary tactic, which it may well be.

But it raises serious questions about the kind of leadership the US might provide in an uncertain and volatile world. While institutions have continuity plans to deal with the incapacitation of individual leaders, it is far less clear who is in charge when the nation that has led the free world for seven decades finds itself paralysed by the eruptions and ill-conceived policies of a former reality TV star.

By accusing President Barack Obama (without evidence) of ordering an illegal wiretap presumably with the connivance of FBI, Donald Trump has diminished the moral stature of the presidency. Reputable figures like FBI director James Comey and former director of National Intelligence James Clapper have categorically denied the president's allegations. Meanwhile, members of his own party have been notable for their baffled silence on the question of how their standard bearer reached this explosive conclusion.

Their mealy-mouthed explanations to reporters leave the increasingly isolated president in a bind, demanding that Congress investigate illegal activity that only he seems to know about. While Trump remains obsessed with the tone and tenor of the media coverage as well as perceived insults from celebrities and other public figures, his administration is in the doldrums. Thousands of senior and mid-level political appointee jobs in all parts of the administration remain vacant for want of candidates prepared to serve this administration. Of the 551 key positions, only 18 have been filled so far.

At the state department, with the exception of secretary Rex Tillerson, UN ambassador Nikki Haley and half a dozen ambassadors, almost 120 policy and senior management positions are still empty. The situation is not much different across the Potomac river at the defence department, where only the secretary of defence and the army secretary are in place, leaving 51 policy positions vacant.

With its depleted ranks of policy-making staff, the state department has not held its daily press briefing since the inauguration. The media's questions on foreign affairs are routinely redirected to the White House, which has already distinguished itself by its spokespeople offering misrepresentations and plain falsehoods. The administration's amateurish lack of preparedness for the task of governing was on display when the news of a North Korean ballistic missile launch caught Trump and team scrambling for details in briefing materials, which they read under the flashlight of a cellphone in plain view of a restaurant full of diners.

Staffing remains a challenge because the president continues to harbour a deep grudge against those who opposed him during the election campaign, like the 150 national security professionals who signed an open letter against his candidacy. One senior hire in the department of housing and urban development was fired within a day after it was found that during the campaign he had criticised Trump. Trump's sustained pique at his perceived critics has deprived the administration of experience and expertise that could have been quite helpful to the new leadership team as it struggles to confront a full slate of legislative and security challenges.

With the US and concerned people all over the world shaking their heads at Trump's tweets and the self-inflicted injuries they cause to the credibility of his administration and the presidency, America's rivals and adversaries are having a field day. North Korea, which probably engineered the assassination of its leader's likely rival, has again launched a series of missiles off the coast of Japan, where it threatens to target US military bases.

Meanwhile, China has threatened "consequences" for the US deployment of anti-ballistic missiles in South Korea and has quietly gone about strengthening its military position in the South China Sea. Russians gleefully carry on their military operations to shore up the murderous Assad regime in Syria, regularly attacking US-backed rebels "by mistake". The White House's shocking inattention to world events was apparent in Trump's silence on the topic of foreign affairs during his recent address to a joint session of Congress.

Trump's strategic adviser Stephen Bannon, a self-proclaimed Leninist and darling of the alt-right white nationalist movement, has promised to work tirelessly to "deconstruct the administrative state". Trump's twitter rants echoing through the empty offices of the federal bureaucracy may be a sign that the deconstruction is already underway.

# When Compassion Isn't Enough

Society must wake up to the rights of those living with disabilities

Ashla Krishnan



I live my life on a wheelchair. I cannot move my lower limbs. I have only partial use of my arms and hands. I cannot hold a cup; I cannot even comb my own hair.

I have quadriplegia. I have two choices. I have a loving family. I am sure my mother, my sister and other family members will take care of me. I need only to stay in bed. They will feed me, bathe me, and do all they can to make my life comfortable.

But I want you to know that my paralysis does not define me. I want you to recognise that I am more than my body. My brain, ordinary as it is, still functions. I also have other abilities.

I am a Master of Computer Applications and can do several things. I can use my skills to earn a living. Not only that, I can even contribute to society. My family's loving physical support can only keep my body alive. To enliven my mind and soul, I need to be considered a human being.

I began by saying I am a quadriplegic. But I would want you to think of me as a human being with quadriplegia. I do not want to be a burden. I want to be able to contribute, to make myself useful.

There are hundreds of thousands of people with paraplegia or quadriplegia in India. Society today offers almost all of us only one option, compassionate care. Can you offer us option two, right to self-respect? Please do not shower us with love that will keep us incapacitated. Show us some empathy. We are only offering to do our bit for the community.

A few days ago, kind friends invited me to a posh restaurant for dinner. From where I stay, at Pallium India's Trivandrum Institute of Palliative Sciences, I could wheel my chair



across to the elevator, go out through a ramp and cross the street. The restaurant is almost directly across the road. But I could not accept the invitation.

The road is flanked by beautifully paved sidewalks, but there is no slope anywhere between the road and the sidewalk. There is no way I can wheel my chair into the sidewalk. And once inside the restaurant, there is a step. A normal step for you, perhaps – but a mountain for me.

However, kind friends and waiters in the restaurant would offer to lift my chair and take me to the restaurant. Imagine yourself in my position. Would you like to feel that you are burdening four or more people? Perhaps one of the waiters has a bad back and you are contributing to his eventual incapacitation? How would you like to be the object of

**I began by saying I am a quadriplegic. But I would want you to think of me as a human being with quadriplegia**

sympathy of a dozen eyes, curiously concentrating on this helpless body being carried up?

The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, recently passed in Indian Parliament to give effect to a related UN Convention of 2006, promises among other things equality of opportunity and accessibility. This is the follow up action to a UN convention India had ratified as early as in October, 2007! So, as much as I would want to be optimistic about the Act, doubts persist.

How soon will the responsible officials be posted, relevant rules be framed by the Centre and state governments and action be taken by concerned authorities to make public spaces and attitudes in India disabled friendly? Authorities should take measures to promote and protect the rights of all persons with disabilities to have a cultural life and to participate in recreational activities equally, helping them to pursue their interests and talents.

The Act offers protection against abuse, during natural disasters, armed conflicts, etc. What I am concerned about is the small stuff, like being able to cross the road in front of my house, enjoy an evening in the park, join a group of friends for an evening meal at a popular restaurant. But these too will have to wait, painfully long, stretching to years and years, caught in procedural delays.

I am lucky that I am in an institution where they broke down a couple of doors and created access for my wheelchair, even into my bathroom. They have given me a facility where I get physical help for an hour so that I can work on my computer and contribute to Pallium India's work during the day putting to good use counselling skills I learnt from a course to help people like me. I can help out in the half way home that this institution created for people with paraplegia. And so I can sleep in the night often feeling that my day has been worth living.

I am not writing this to get the attention of lawmakers. They could do more, I am sure; many of my friends are asking for more.

My request is to you – each one of you. If you have not thought about the word empathy, give a minute to put yourself in the place of someone who has a disability or paralysis. Allow us to be human beings. Break the barriers that prevent us from reaching your world.

# Like the 'Gujarat model' that is now getting exposed, AAP's 'Delhi model' is built on false publicity

Ajay Maken and Ruchi Gupta



The "Gujarat model" was much vaunted in the run up to Lok Sabha elections of 2014. It is only now that the model is getting exposed for what it is: false publicity and lopsided development. Something similar is underway in Delhi where chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, who tellingly flirted with the "Modi for PM, Arvind for CM" pitch, is publicising the "Delhi model" to expand his Aam Aadmi Party's (AAP) reach outside Delhi.

The "Delhi model" showcases AAP as advancing hitherto unrepresented public interest, chiefly through its government's high profile initiatives in health and education. Over the last year, the Congress party has done extensive groundwork to understand changes in both health and education. Mohalla clinics are AAP's flagship health programme and trained Congress volunteers surveyed each of the 105 mohalla clinics opened by Delhi government.

The survey revealed that the

"mohalla clinics" are less about public health and more about promoting AAP and its associates. There are no forward linkages to dispensaries or hospitals for patients who cannot be attended to at mohalla clinics. Furthermore, mohalla clinics were opened at random in small, dirty places – including a parking lot and a dairy shop – many within a few hundred metres of existing government dispensaries.

**Mohalla clinics were opened at random in small, dirty places, many within a few hundred metres of existing government dispensaries**

The Delhi government inherited a vast network of health infrastructure, including dispensaries. Yet not only was no effort made to strengthen existing better equipped infrastructure but in many cases, staff was transferred from dispensaries to nearby mohalla clinics.

Our volunteers found ample corruption too in the flagship scheme of this self-certified anti-corruption party: many mohalla clinics were operating from AAP



workers' premises at inflated rents; someone other than the empanelled doctor was attending to the patients in some clinics; prescriptions were being written on kachhi parchis in many instances; and patients listed in records denied having ever visited the clinic (doctors are reimbursed on a per patient basis). The outcome of AAP's focus on propaganda over public health was evident when the government was caught napping during the outbreak of vector borne diseases in the city.

In education too, AAP's propaganda has decoupled from substantive reform. Out of more than 1,000 schools, AAP has selected 54 schools to develop as "model schools". There is evidence of disproportionate allocation of resources towards

these 54 schools for AAP's publicity campaign. For instance, the school on Rouse Avenue was reportedly renovated at a cost of Rs 10 crore.

The total education budget of Rs 10,000 crore would be eaten up by such renovations if similar amounts were spent on all 1,000 schools, leaving nothing for more important aspects of public education such as teacher salaries, books, etc. Such disproportionate and unsustainable allocation of resources to select schools is discriminatory and calls into question AAP's commitment to egalitarian public education. There has been as well a virtual takeover by various NGOs, marginalising state DoE and SCERT functionalities in the process.

Amidst this high publicity, it

is startling that enrolment in government schools has fallen by around one lakh students for the first time under AAP, even as the total number of students in "all managements" Delhi schools went up between 2013-14 to 2015-16. Furthermore, Class X board results have dropped to their lowest level in six years after showing an increasing trend in pass percentage since 2010.

By now, it is evident that the common thread between AAP's "reforms" in health and education has less to do with public interest than publicity. In both areas, AAP has showcased a few "models" for the media and visitors. These few mohalla clinics and schools may indeed look good. However, this is by no means tantamount to reforming public health or education.

Congress has repeatedly demanded transparency of expenditure and "reforms" being undertaken by the Delhi government in these two areas. However the chief minister, a former RTI activist has ignored these demands. The question to be asked is why should Delhi government shy from transparency when it is spending so much money on publicity?

Ajay Maken is state president of Delhi Congress. Ruchi Gupta works with Congress SC department

## dilbert



## Sacredspace

Love What You Do

Your work is going to fill a large part of your life, and the only way to be truly satisfied is to do what you believe is great work. And the only way to do great work is to love what you do.

Steve Jobs

# Inscrutable Shiva And Shaiva Siddhanta

Pranav Khullar

As the curtain is pulled back to reveal the inner sanctum, one is drawn into the world of Nirakara Shiva, beyond even the physical symbolism of a Linga, where the vast expanse of the sky above and the ether zone are mirrored in the 'Akasha Linga' of Chidambaram. Shiva takes his devotees into an interiorised world of consciousness, mapping out the Akasha or sky-ether of the mind, beyond the noumenal world of names and forms.

But it is as abstract as it seems, i wonder, for the Thillai (mangrove) forest ground of the Chidambaram temple is witness to the ananda tandava dance of Shiva, in one of his most beautiful forms as Nataraja, the fountainhead of the creative impulse. Traditional lore views Chidambaram as the site of the original Cosmic Linga, an ellipsoid around which the rest of the universe rotates. This dance of creative

bliss is said to have been performed by Shiva for the two sages, Vyghrapada and Patanjali, who had asked for the boon to witness the dance.

Which one is the more seminal attribute of Shiva, i wonder – is it the ascetic yogic aspect of Shiva characterised by dispassionate withdrawal and penance, or is it the creatively pulsating energy of Shiva, which calls for an active engagement with the world, in the realisation that the outer embodied universe reflects the disembodied One, that the materiality is also actually spiritual only? As i move into the main dance hall of the Chidambaram complex, i marvel at the persona of Shiva, where different attributes complement each other, not contradict. His all-encompassing compassion and love for devas and asuras alike, without discriminating between the two, reveals a Being in love

with creation, not a destroyer. Perhaps what he seeks to destroy is the negativity and the baser elements of our nature.

John Marshall saw a Proto-Shiva in the famous Pashupati seal of Mohenjodaro where four wild animals – tiger, buffalo, elephant and rhinoceros – surround the yogi-God sitting in the meditation pose, the three faces representing Time in its past, present and future dimensions. The Mahakal, Controller of Time, the Rudra, God of wild beasts and Yogeswara, the Supreme Yogi aspects of Shiva appear to coalesce in this Indus seal. Other traditions like the Tevaram hymns and the Tirumurai compendium of songs in Tamil eulogise the Ashutosh svarupa of Shiva the God who melts at the call of a sincere prayer. The Tirumurai tradition maps out the philosophy of Shaiva Siddhanta,

with its formulation of three eternal entities of God, soul and bondage – Pati, pasu and pasam. The Shaiva Siddhanta states that God is One, souls are many and bondage happens because of the three impurities of anava which causes the negativity of soul – karma, the law of action-reaction and Maya the cause of all materiality. Maya is real in Shaiva Siddhanta and not an illusion as in Vedanta. Shiva's Grace alone can help in breaking this bondage and evolution of the Soul to an understanding of the relationship between the Nirakara aspect of the Self and the dynamic aspect of the Self's energy as it manifests.

They say that Shiva is finally within only. But the inscrutable and beautiful outer form of Shiva gives as much solace.

Post your comments at [speakingtree.in](http://speakingtree.in). The Speaking Tree is also available as an 8 page newspaper every Sunday for Rs 3. Book your copy of The Speaking Tree with your newspaper vendor or SMS TREE to 58888.

