



Tale of two sections

It's time 295A and 153A of the IPC are revisited, to end vexatious criminal prosecution

The Supreme Court has intervened to spare cricketer Mahendra Singh Dhoni the ordeal of facing a criminal trial for allegedly insulting the Hindu religion by being featured in the likeness of a deity on the cover of a business magazine. The court quashed a criminal complaint filed against him in Anantapur in Andhra Pradesh under Section 295A of the Indian Penal Code, a provision that makes "deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings" a punishable offence. The court said there was no deliberate intent on the part of the cricketer or the magazine to hurt religious sentiments. It drew upon the interpretation given to Section 295A by a Constitution Bench as early as in 1957 that it only "punishes the aggravated form of insult to religion when it is perpetrated with the deliberate and malicious intention of outraging the religious feelings of that class". It is a matter of satisfaction that the highest court intervenes from time to time to stymie attempts by those claiming that their religious sentiments are offended by some act or remark of celebrities and dragging them to courts in different parts of the country. Judicial relief does come in the end, but the bitter truth is that the process is the punishment; it is time our lower courts stop taking reflexive cognisance of trivial or vexatious cases filed on the basis that the religious, caste or cultural sensitivities of some group have been offended.

In essence, Section 295A is a thinly disguised blasphemy law – the only difference being that it is 'secular' insofar as it applies to all religions or all forms of religious insult. A close cousin of this provision is another much misused section of the IPC – 153A. Intended to punish those who promote enmity between different groups on grounds of religion, race, place of birth, residence and language, and doing acts prejudicial to the maintenance of harmony, this section has been employed to harass writers and artists and cast a chill on free expression. The problem with insult laws, irrespective of the form they assume, is that they are inherently subjective. There is no guessing what causes insult/offence/hurt to people, leaving it open for such provisions to be blatantly misused. In this respect, Section 295A and 153A resemble our controversial contempt of court law – there is no saying what will scandalise a judge and therefore no saying when and for what contempt may be invoked. The two IPC provisions encourage the creation of what novelist Monica Ali described as a "marketplace of outrage" – an economy that feeds on anger and hostility. They need to be read down, their scope narrowed in a way that moral vigilantes and those who affect an emotional victimhood can no longer exploit the law to serve their narrow chauvinistic ends.

At war with itself

Afghanistan and its allies need a coherent, gritty plan to roll back Taliban advances

The attack on a military base in Afghanistan on Friday, in which at least 140 people, mostly unarmed soldiers, died, speaks volumes about the state of security in the war-ravaged country. It was the deadliest attack by the Afghan Taliban since they were ousted from power in 2001. The 209th Army Corps base in Balkh province that was targeted is the army's northern headquarters, responsible for security in nine of Afghanistan's 34 provinces. By running over such a fortified structure, the Taliban are effectively challenging the professionalism, resolve and resources of the entire force. Over the last few years, the Taliban had lost two of their topmost leaders. Besides, there were reports of factionalism and fighting within the group after the death of Mullah Omar. Yet, the Taliban made steady and substantial gains in the civil war over the last couple of years, since most American troops withdrew from Afghanistan as part of the drawdown plan. Now the group controls or has influence in more than half the country. In recent years it had carried out multiple attacks on government buildings, including the Parliament building, sending a clear message to the government and its international backers that there is no place in Afghanistan that lies outside the Taliban's range.

Each time such an attack takes place, the Afghan government issues a statement on terror and vows to continue fighting. But despite these assurances, there is no real progress visible on the ground. Last year alone, more than 6,700 members of the Afghan security forces were killed, the highest since 2001. High casualties destroy the morale of the troops and erode the public's faith in the country's institutions, which already have a reputation of being highly corrupt. Kabul's erratic and sometimes incoherent responses to the Taliban threat also expose its lack of conviction. Its overall security approach, as the latest attacks suggest, is in a shambles. The armed forces are not able to stall the Taliban's advances. Its political reforms and attempts to reach out to the rural populace get nowhere as the Taliban are expanding their hold in the countryside. Even the attempts to reach a negotiated settlement were counterproductive, given the lack of cooperation from Pakistan and the Taliban's refusal to make any meaningful compromise. But why would the Taliban compromise at a time when they think they're making gains in the war? In order to forge a long-term political solution, the Afghan government first needs to alter the balance of power on the ground; and for that it needs international support. The U.S. would do well to help the Afghan security forces craft a credible, sustainable military strategy and provide them more resources and training to take on the Taliban. Theatrics such as dropping the biggest non-nuclear bomb in the mountainous regions of Afghanistan may make headlines, but, as last week's attack suggests, they hardly deter the militants.

Towards complete justice at last

A brief history of the ups and downs in the Babri Masjid demolition case



RAJU RAMACHANDRAN

By any standards, 25 years should be a long enough period to find closure for crimes which affect the social and political life of a country. But it has taken this length of time for the real beginning: the trial of political leaders for conspiracy to commit what is conveniently described as "political crimes". If ever there was a case where the invocation of the powers of the Supreme Court to do "complete justice" under Article 142 of the Constitution existed, it was the Babri Masjid demolition case. As Justice R.F. Nariman recognises in his judgment, the underlying basis of the Article is the Latin maxim *fiat justitia ruat caelum* (let justice be done though the heavens fall). The court's unhesitating resort to Article 142 mitigates to some extent the consequences of the failures of the Uttar Pradesh government and the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), and the judiciary's own tardy processes. Each of these deserves some attention.

Procedural flaw

The charge of criminal conspiracy against L.K. Advani, M.M. Joshi and six others failed to fructify only because of the view of the Lucknow Bench of the Allahabad High Court in its judgment of February 12, 2001 that the insertion of the separate FIR 198 of 1992 against these eight individuals in the original notification of the State government



DEEPAK HARICHANDAN

directing the cases to be tried by a special court at Lucknow was procedurally flawed. And that procedural flaw, which the High Court itself held was curable, was that there had been no consultation with the High Court.

On June 16, 2001, the CBI requested the State government to cure the defect. The request remained pending with the State government for a year-and-a-quarter and was rejected on September 28, 2002. This period spanned the chief ministership of Rajnath Singh, a short spell of President's rule under the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government and finally the chief ministership of Ms. Mayawati, whose Bahujan Samaj Party government depended on the outside support of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). This rejection was not challenged by the CBI during the tenure of the NDA government at the Centre till May 2004 or even subsequently.

The Supreme Court in its judgment of April 19, 2017 highlights the failure of the CBI to challenge the refusal of the State government to rectify the procedural flaw by consulting the High Court. The directions now given by the Supreme

Court, namely transferring the case against Mr. Advani and seven others from Rae Bareilly to Lucknow and the framing of charges of criminal conspiracy by the Court of Lucknow, are only to remedy, in the court's own words: "what was expected by the Allahabad High Court to have been done shortly after its judgment dated 12th February 2001".

To the top court

The route by which the present case reached the Supreme Court needs to be mentioned. Skipping the unnecessary details, the special court at Lucknow by an order dated May 4, 2001 dropped proceedings against 21 persons, including the Advani batch of eight, taking the view that there were two sets of accused, namely the innumerable *kar sevaks* who actually demolished the masjid and the limited number of others who were the instigators. The special court chose to drop the proceedings against these 21 persons so that the case against the *kar sevaks* could go on. The revision filed by the CBI against this order of the special court remained pending before the Allahabad High Court for a good

nine years before it was dismissed by a judgment on May 22, 2010. It is this judgment which was challenged by the CBI in the Supreme Court after a long delay. Considerable time of the Supreme Court was spent on examining the question of delay.

The case picked up pace in the Supreme Court only after March 6 this year when it came before a bench of Justices P.C. Ghose and Nariman. The oral observations of the Court on that day gave a sufficient clue to its mind and the case was finally heard and judgment delivered with remarkable promptitude in a month and a half. But it is necessary to remember again that in this round of litigation starting from May 4, 2001 the case has remained pending for a good 16 years in the superior courts.

Judicial reactions

It is also worth looking at the varying judicial reactions in the Supreme Court in the same case over a span of four years. Last week's judgment had no hesitation in recording that the case with which it was concerned pertained to crimes affecting the secular fabric of the Constitution. But in 2013 the reaction of a bench headed by Justice H.L. Dattu, later Chief Justice of India and now Chairperson of the National Human Rights Commission, was different. At that time the much respected senior counsel, P.P. Rao, was appearing for the CBI. He is not known for courtroom dramatics or the use of hyperbole. In support of his plea for early hearing he referred to the incident as a crime and described it as a matter of national importance. He had not described any individual as a criminal. According to newspaper reports, he was sharply

pulled up. While reminding the CBI of its own delays in the matter, the bench reportedly said, "Do not say it is a national crime or matter of national importance. We are yet to decide it. Unless we or the trial court decide this way or that way you cannot make such a statement."

A distinction between roles

There was another related proceeding which the Supreme Court did not and was not required to notice in the present case. It is still worth mentioning. On September 19, 2003, the special court at Rae Bareilly discharged Mr. Advani, then the Deputy Prime Minister, in the case relating to the making of inflammatory speeches on December 6, 1992. It drew a distinction between the role of Mr. Advani and the seven others, including Mr. Joshi. Newspaper reports indicate that while Mr. Joshi promptly tendered his resignation from the Union Cabinet, he made it clear that there was no logic in the distinction made by the Court between Mr. Advani and the others, including him. If this judgment had stood, there would have been no case against Mr. Advani in the Rae Bareilly court which the Supreme Court could have transferred to Lucknow last week and to which the charge of conspiracy could have been added. This judgment of the Rae Bareilly court discharging Mr. Advani was however set aside by a Single Judge of the Lucknow Bench of the Allahabad High Court on July 6, 2005. That is why Mr. Advani, Mr. Joshi and six others are in the same boat again.

Raju Ramachandran is a Senior Advocate, Supreme Court of India

Racism and the reality in Japan

Keeping in mind the 2020 Olympics, Japan is beginning to address deep-rooted discrimination



PALLAVI AIYAR

In central Tokyo's bustling neighbourhoods, it's common to find signs outside establishments, from barber shops to taverns, stating: "Foreigners Welcome". That these are necessary only highlights how there are places in Japan – guest houses, massage parlours, restaurants – where foreigners are unwelcome.

Justifications for barring entry to foreigners range from worries about communicating with non-Japanese speakers (although many foreigners do speak Japanese), to the notion that foreigners don't know how to behave in Japanese settings (such as taking off their shoes and speaking softly). Some claim that the real aim of these restrictions is to keep large groups of loud-mouthed Chinese tourists from "spoiling" the atmosphere. Other foreigners are merely collateral damage.

Results of survey

A new survey carried out by Japan's Justice Ministry reveals that nearly a

third of foreign residents in Japan say they have experienced derogatory remarks because of their racial background, while about 40% have suffered housing discrimination. Of the 18,500 foreigners surveyed, 4,252 responded, the majority identified as Chinese and Korean. Over 40% had lived in Japan for more than a decade.

One in four job seekers said they were denied employment because of being foreign, and one in five believed they were paid less than their Japanese counterparts for similar work. Putting paid to the notion that such discrimination is related to language, 95% of foreigners whose job applications were rejected, and over 90% of those whose housing applications were denied, were able to speak Japanese "conversationally, professionally or fluently".

Because racism is thought of as discrimination by white people against those of colour, non-white countries such as Japan have been loathe to admit that it is a problem that they too must grapple with. It is only recently with Tokyo gearing up to host the Olympic Games in 2020, and a related, governmental-push to increase tourism to 40 million visitors by then (up from 24 million last year), that fledgling steps are now being taken to acknowledge and redress racially-based



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discrimination.

In Japan, racism tends to take two forms. There is virulent hate speech by far right groups aimed at Korean and Chinese people, which draws on deep-rooted historical animus. There is also more casual racism towards other foreigners, which springs from unchallenged stereotypes. One of many examples of this latter strain: a train conductor in Osaka last year made a public announcement to Japanese passengers apologising for any "discomfort" due to the "number of foreign passengers on board".

Linked to a uniqueness

At their core, both kinds of racism are rooted in a false narrative of Japanese uniqueness and racial purity. In 1889, the Meiji constitution established a state based on the no-

tion that the Emperor was a direct descendant of the "original" Yamato clan, and that all Japanese were organically related to the emperor, giving birth to the idea of a single, homogeneous, racial identity. Today, many scholars believe that the Japanese are in fact a mixture of Korean-like "Yayoi" people who immigrated to the archipelago around 400 BC and an indigenous population who walked over land bridges that connected the Japanese islands to the continent during low sea levels of ice ages some 12,000 years ago.

The average Japanese, however, remains unaware of academic research into demographic origins. Even the Ainu – a people in northern Hokkaido who are markedly distinct from the majority of Japanese – were recognised as a minority group with a "distinct language, religion and culture" only in 2008.

Regional animosity

Racial discrimination against Koreans and Chinese in Japan has a long history. After the 1923 Great Kantō earthquake, incensed by rumours that "Koreans are poisoning the wells" and "Koreans will attack us," Japanese vigilantes murdered thousands of Koreans and hundreds of Chinese. Even today these ethnic groups are subject to similar "panic" rumours made more perni-

cious by social media. In 2014, for example, mudslides in the Hiroshima Prefecture led to false allegations of burglaries of evacuated homes by *zainichi*, as ethnic Koreans in Japan are called.

Moreover, the racism survey results were announced against a political backdrop where Japan's Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe, is facing censure over purported ties to a nationalist kindergarten accused of denigrating Chinese and Korean people.

Given its ageing population and shrinking demographics, Japan needs immigration despite popular notions that robots can address the need for foreign labour. That the government is finally taking cognisance is reflected in a series of recent moves taken by Japan to curb racism.

Last year the Justice Ministry carried out its first ever video analysis of anti-Korean demonstrations. The Ministry confirmed that 1,152 hate speech rallies were held from April 2012 to September 2015. Subsequently, a law was enacted to eradicate the kind of hate speech that is often used in these demonstrations.

Necessary moves, but not yet sufficient.

Pallavi Aiyar has reported from China, Europe and Indonesia. She is currently based in Tokyo

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

Protesting farmers

The report, "Protesting T.N. farmers drink urine" (April 23), is disheartening. Being a civilised society, we have to hang our heads in shame. Their agitation had been on for over 30 days and they tried almost everything to draw our attention to their plight. That there was no response for so long from the authorities concerned is unacceptable.

MUDGAL VENKATESH,
Kalaburagi, Karnataka

Thermocol experiment

It is strange that a Minister in Tamil Nadu, while floating a peculiar idea, forgot simple physics when he wanted to beat the sun: his failure to factor in another natural force, wind ("After thermocol fiasco, Minister plans plastic balls experiment", April 23). Why others did not bring it to his notice that the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board has classified thermocol as a hazardous waste is stranger still. It is shocking that the Minister ignored the fact that he was attempting to contain evaporation in Vaigai dam. This is not a tank or a well that can be covered. Did he spare a

thought for the public money squandered? Can he or his party compensate for this loss?

G. VENKATAPURUSWAMY,
Bengaluru

■ The Minister's move to now try and use plastic shade balls is bizarre to say the least. Did he seek the guidance of a scientific institution on the pros and cons of an unknown experiment? We should not use the argument of such methods being used in advanced countries when we hardly know anything about their impact here before extensive testing. If we go ahead with the plan without taking into account our tropical conditions, there is the danger of even the available water getting polluted. One only wishes that the government had taken up desilting on a war footing earlier to increase reservoir storage levels, and which could have averted a precarious water situation now.

V. SUBRAMANIAN,
Chennai

■ The experiment is a disaster and an example of 'non-application of mind'

by those at the highest level. These strange experiments may only end up harming the river's ecology and in turn affecting people. It is time Tamil Nadu revives the directive on rainwater harvesting.

ANMOL GULECHA,
Chennai

Free speech

I admire and respect the sacrifice Ruchir Joshi's parents made for the freedom of India ("Column width" page - "Of edicts then and now", April 23). But I disagree with the columnist in using the example of his father's struggle for freedom to justify insult to national symbols. He further says that the right to free speech allows him to express an absence of pride in his country. Well, if there is an absence of respect in me towards fellow citizens does that allow me to be abusive or disrespectful towards them? Absolutely not.

KRINENDRA PROJWAL,
Thane, Maharashtra

■ Not respecting the Union Jack in India and not being ready to respect the Indian

national flag by an Indian citizen in India are two different issues. I doubt whether the columnist's father, a freedom fighter, would have accepted his contention. Freedom of speech is not absolute. Today's government can't be equated with the British Empire of yesteryears. The problem with most of our columnists is that they present their coloured personal opinions as public opinion as they have a forum to publish and ventilate whatever they feel. Irrespective of the grievances one might have with the present government, one has to show one's respect to the national flag and national anthem, which are symbols of the pride of this nation.

R. RADHAKRISHNAN,
Chennai

Fighting noise pollution

A celebrity has kicked off yet another round in the battle against loudspeakers. It is a pity that those in the business of religion have taken offence and countered him by bringing up the point of 'hurting religious sentiments'. There is nothing religious about

loudspeakers or air horns for that matter. It is against the edicts of the Supreme Court and in defiance of the Constitution. Loudspeakers bristling from places of worship have taken pride of place atop scaffolding and towers and only create disturbance, ill health and animosity. Noise pollution serves no practical purpose other than blast people into submission, creating heart, lung and mental problems. It should be put down with a firm hand once and for all.

M.E. AVARI,
Kodaikanal, Tamil Nadu

No free-tipping

The selfless act of 52-year-old social activist Angad Thakur, who fights ticketless train travel, should be an eye-opener to our so-called public

representatives who go the other extreme – of waiving all dues when their party comes to power. While Mr. Thakur fights for the nation, our parties fight for the sake of power at the cost of the nation ("Gandhigiri keeps a train running", April 23).

K. MANASA SAANVI,
Hyderabad

Umpiring at the IPL

There is absolutely no doubt that this year, the IPL has so far witnessed some of the worst instances of umpiring, especially by local umpires. To avoid acrimony, it would be ideal if the BCCI introduces the DRS system even in IPL tournaments.

N.V. KRISHNAN,
Chennai

MORE LETTERS ONLINE:
www.hindu.com/opinion/letters/

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

A sentence in the Editorial, "At the crossroads" (April 22, 2017), read: "But the outcome is anything but uncertain, given that a substantial chunk of voters remains undecided and that the kind of anti-establishment anger that helped Mr. Trump and Britain's pro-Brexit camp remains strong in France as well." It should have been: "But the outcome is anything but certain ..."

It is the policy of The Hindu to correct significant errors as soon as possible. Please specify the edition (place of publication), date and page. The Readers' Editor's office can be contacted by Telephone: +91-44-28418297/28576300 (11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday to Friday); Fax: +91-44-28552963; E-mail: readerseditor@thehindu.co.in; Mail: Readers' Editor, The Hindu, Kasturji Buildings, 859 & 860 Anna Salai, Chennai 600 002, India. All communication must carry the full postal address and telephone number. No personal visits. The Terms of Reference for the Readers' Editor are on www.thehindu.com

The line between fiction and fact

As the debate on 'fake news' rages worldwide, we need to understand its local manifestations in India



GAUTAM BHATIA

North-east Germany is home to a number of neo-Nazi groups. They are small in number, yet their views on the purity of the Aryan race are straight out of 1930s Germany. That they have lived in relative obscurity for half a century is due thankfully to the absence of the Internet. However, for the last decade or so, their hateful presence is being felt not just in a country inundated with Syrian refugees, but on a host of websites too. Without digitisation, the lies they perpetuated would never have appeared in public forums, and would have perhaps died off in a few years. But the Internet gave them a larger voice and the power to spew hate in an altogether new medium.



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Propaganda becomes news

The dangers of such Internet media are now beginning to be felt in India. We have today 160 million WhatsApp users, 150 million Facebook followers, and over 22 million Twitter accounts. A right-wing WhatsApp group sends out thousands of nationalist videos around the country every day, spreading a host of lies: that Muslims will overrun the country, and northerners are Chinese agents. The Bharatiya Janata Party's proficiency in new media was itself visible throughout the recent Assembly election campaigns. Knowing full well the advantages of such instant messaging, the party pushed its agenda on Twitter aggressively. Whatever the messages, they are often taken on their word; private opinion is mistaken for public proclamation, propaganda accepted as news. A largely illiterate citizenry is more likely to gain information, like the neo-Nazis, without a filter. Whom to believe, how much, and under what circumstance becomes impossible to verify when the source is a tweet, a private opinion, a like.

When people look only to private media for factual information and news, chances are that a lie doing the rounds eventually establishes itself as truth. It travels the full course — passed on from Facebook, tweeted into shared accounts, across thousands of unsure minds, spreading

like wild fire without proof or doubt — till opinion becomes fact, and belief becomes total. A well-known doctor in Bihar was announced dead on WhatsApp after an income tax raid at his house declared vast hoardings of illegal currency. It took a press conference for him to pronounce both his innocence and existence.

Earlier, the absence of social media allowed incendiary private opinion to die before it left the walls of your home. Now, every private utterance has the possibility of making it big in the public space. You can make claims and arguments without facts; you can raise outright lies to the level of conspiracies. Fake news is a sort of Photoshop for words and ideas. When you can put together a convincing picture of Sachin Tendulkar's head on the body of Vidya Balan and pass it off as real, it isn't unusual to suddenly conjure up Jayalitha's daughter in some remote corner of the U.S. as fact. Factors of believability lie in the medium itself. A photo of Narendra Modi sweeping the floor at a Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh rally was circulated in 2015. The RSS's denial of its legitimacy was accompanied with the pre-Photoshopped picture of the actual person with the broom.

In a world where there is no difference between broadcast journalism, print, or social media, anything

is capable of becoming news. Thanks to U.S. President Donald Trump's irresponsible statement that former President Barack Obama was foreign-born, millions in the U.S. now believe that Mr. Obama is a foreigner, despite the retraction. Mr. Trump, of course, uses the phrase "fake news" rather liberally, mainly to discredit the mainstream media and direct people's attention away from his own lies and gaffes. Within the world of the Internet, in fact, the distinctions between making news, reporting news, and sharing news is all the more blurred. News may be reported in papers and news channels, but when political parties and business groups promote their ideological agendas and Facebook becomes the primary source for news, then fact, opinion and propaganda become one and the same.

Unreliable information

This is true of other forms of information as well. In the 1960s, the Encyclopaedia Britannica was the single most valuable compendium of relevant information gathered into alphabetically arranged volumes. It served students, institutions and private researchers for basic information. Its entries were the work of scholars and specialists whose credentials were impeccable and duly recorded in the book. Wikipedia, on the other hand, al-

lows anyone to propose information related to its growing archive, however inaccurate — all in the hope that the open format will itself act as an editorial corrective, and eventually the inputs of many will inform and embellish each sketch into coherence. Is this any way to work a legitimate entry into the world's most informed network encyclopaedia?

Obviously it is not a crime to spread opinion, but it certainly is when it masquerades as real news. Every second person in the U.S. has a Facebook profile, and the chat rooms are filled with ideas about institutions failing, democracy on the decline, rigged polls, fake news, racist rants. In a country like ours, however, with cultural and religious diversity practised, but with social inhibitions still strong, and the freedom to speak openly, a constitutional right but a public handicap, private media platforms present a challenge. For a population still largely uneducated and entirely unused to a cosmopolitanism co-existence, the urgency to believe in something, anything, is often a need not based on informed opinion. When something happens, the consequences are unlikely to be contested in courts, but more likely to be tested in the battlefield of the city.

Gautam Bhatia is a Delhi-based architect and writer

It's triple-check for science reporting

Medical stories should be complete and carefully verified



A.S. PANNEERSELVAM

Since the office of the Readers' Editor was established in *The Hindu* in 2006, one reader has been relentless in his pursuit for accuracy. He has an excellent eye for detail and a phenomenal memory of sporting events. Dr. Maniyur Raghavendran is a consultant urologist and transplant surgeon. While most of his letters are about slip ups in sports stories, his recent mail questioned the credibility of a journal cited in a medical story.

The report, "Woman takes risk, achieves motherhood after 20 miscarriages" (April 15, 2017), was filed by the Nellore staff reporter. It was a moving story about a woman who wanted to have a child despite difficult medical conditions, and who was ready to take a risk because her husband's family was pressuring him to marry again. The report was based on interviews with the woman and her doctor. It was a good human-interest story, but was marred by the strapline which read: "In view of the rare nature, her medical report entered the International Journal of Reproduction, says expert."

Dr. Raghavendran wrote: "I tried searching for this journal, but this seems to be an open access journal where you pay and get your report published. Does *The Hindu* need to highlight such cases entered in fictitious journals?"

Guidelines for science reporting

I agree with Dr. Raghavendran. It is important for staff reporters and regional desks to read the 2012 internal circular that spelt out the rules for reporting on science and health. The operative part of that circular is this: "Medical stories should be complete and carefully verified; cutting corners for whatever reason, including competitive pressures, is impermissible. Please run such stories by the Science Editor or senior health writers before pitching them to the editorial desk. Do not mail these stories to the Net. If you are not a designated health reporter in a bureau, all stories on press releases on medical claims must be routed through one of our senior editorial experts and not filed directly by general reporters. If such a process takes time, so be it: a story could be held over to check the claims made."

In my column, "Tall claim is not science" (January 18, 2016), I shared some of the best practices in science and health reporting. The article dealt with the quality of ac-

ademic journals, and what a reporter can rely upon. Those guidelines are: "Check the quality of peer review, as different journals have different criteria and practices, and the quality of their peer review varies accordingly. Try to find out the limitations of the study: was it too preliminary or too small a sample size to be accepted in a higher quality journal? Be critical if the claim is made in a public statement. How credible is the scientist among his/her scientific peers? Is the scientist based at a recognised scientific institution? How is the study funded? Finding an independent expert to comment is the most reliable way to judge the validity of a study."

Predatory journals in India

R. Prasad, Science Editor of *The Hindu*, in "Predatory journals make desperate bid for authenticity" (April 20, 2017), explained how India has a huge and growing number of predatory journal publishers. He looked at data from the India office of the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) since March 2014, when the new criteria for DOAJ listings were put out. Mr. Prasad wrote that out of 1,600 applications from open access journal publishers in India, only 4% were found to be from genuine publishers and accepted for inclusion in the DOAJ directory. While 18% of



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the applications are still being processed, Mr. Prasad contends that the main reason for the rejection of 78% of the applications is the predatory or dubious nature of the journals.

There are some fine journalistic clues in Mr. Prasad's article. For instance, he cites Bengaluru-based Leena Shah, DOAJ ambassador, India, who gives two important entry points to assess the journal: "Nearly 20% of the journals have a flashy impact factor and quick publication time, which are quick giveaways... Under contact address, some journal websites do not provide any address but just a provision for comments."

While reporting human-interest stories that have a substantial scientific component to it, general reporters should imbibe the rules and norms of science reporting. While double-check is the norm for general reporting, it is triple-check for science reporting.

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SINGLE FILE

It's not all despair

The Indian Left could seek to emulate the new shoots in the developed world

SRINIVASAN RAMANI



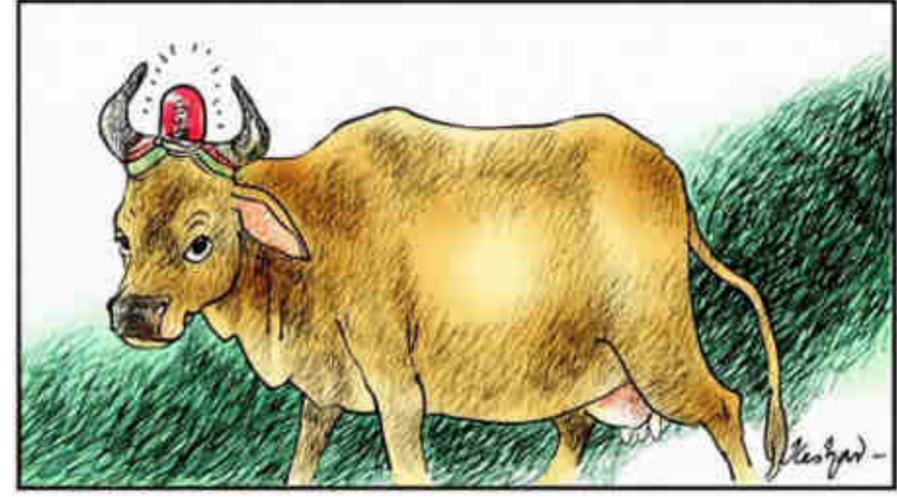
AP

Have a conversation with anyone from the Indian Left and the mood inevitably turns morose. A decade ago, when the Indian political Left was in its strongest parliamentary moment, its supporters and adherents fervently spoke of and debated over how to influence policy on welfare, redistribution and accountability, as advances to be made in the progressive project since Independence. Today, they are back to defending core values that were long settled in India's constitutional debates: secularism, civil liberties, and individual rights.

The framework of public debates over economic issues has been reduced to right-wing populist talking points, some of which have been implemented as policy — the dubious demonetisation exercise, for instance. That the Left's political strength has weakened significantly — much due to its own failures — has also dented the political response to the effects of a policy as badly designed and implemented as demonetisation. But the Indian leftist and the progressive are not alone. In Latin America, the pink tide has waned significantly as seen in Venezuela and Brazil. This sepulchral moment for leftist political forces in countries practising electoral democracy may well pass, but there is a sure crisis. The social democratic project stands for constitutionalism and privileging civic over ethnically determined issues. It allows for an equal hearing or at least heeding the voices of representatives of labour as much as captains of industry and commerce. It values equality, reason, science, globalism and empathy over status quo, tradition, narrow nationalism and short-termism. Parties that stand either for a radical or a plain version of social democracy are clearly on the decline; so are articulations of these values.

But the emergence and popularity of some shoots that adhere to the strands of social democracy and progressivism should give the Left some hope, something to learn from. Self-declared socialist and former Democratic party challenger Bernie Sanders is still quite prominent in the U.S., and is working towards expanding his progressive support base, comprising largely of the youth, to a movement that could upend the elite-run Democratic party. Presidential candidate Jean-Luc Melenchon (in photo) has reinvigorated the Left platform by again tapping into the youth to drive a project that seeks reform of the European Union and a re-imagined welfare state in France. Labour party leader Jeremy Corbyn seeks to return his beleaguered party back to its true labour roots in Britain.

The political Left in India should see in these projects many common factors — a belief in the inevitability of civic democracy, reliance on newer and popular means of communication, an absence of partisanship and a coming together of strands of the Left under the rubric of ideas rather than party one-upmanship. The Indian Left still derives its organisational inspiration from the doomed socialist project of the 20th century, and continues to base its programmes on resistance and negativism rather than projecting positive goals that appeal to the youth. These have pushed prospective adherents to identitarian outfits. The Left could well seek to emulate the new shoots in the developed world even as they embark on their own long march back to relevance.



CONCEPTUAL

Politics of recognition

POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

As a concept, politics of recognition owes its philosophical roots to Georg Hegel who postulated that the individual identity is constructed through a process of mutual recognition between different persons or subjects. Thus, social recognition, or acceptance, is essential for the development of one's idea of self. Politics of recognition, as developed by political philosophers including Charles Taylor and Nancy Fraser, played an important role in the fight for the rights of marginalised sexual, ethnic, linguistic or religious minorities, who saw themselves as both equal and distinct from the dominant majority within a nation-state.

MORE ON THE WEB

Dhoni the finisher returns
http://bit.ly/Dhoni6I

SHELF HELP

Keeping the background score

Music is a virtue not only for its own sake

ANURADHA RAMAN

Is there a connection between singing and running? Singing and reporting? Not just singing, but the constant practice of serving notes that go into making a composition — the goal of perfection towards which one is constantly striving? The connection becomes apparent, for example, when one begins to run and sing — it is often found that one enables the other. The more one runs, the longer one can hold a note and perhaps the more one can explore a composition.

The connections come to play in Alan Rusbridger's *Play It Again: An Amateur Against the Impossible*. Mr. Rusbridger, a former editor-in-chief of *The Guardian*, set himself a goal, which was to learn within a year Chopin's Ballade No. 1. This composition is regarded as challen-

ging even for professional musicians. His journey could have been a song if he could just have just stuck to playing, but the year that he set for himself also witnessed the Arab Spring, *The Guardian's* breaking of both the WikiLeaks and the *News of the World* hacking scandals — all of which Mr. Rusbridger had to anchor as the editor-in-chief, which meant ferreting out time to play Chopin. The book is a diary and offers a glimpse into the incremental, but significant, steps towards the author's goal — to play Ballade No.1. "By making time, life improves: under the great pressure and stress of the year, I discovered the value of a having a small escape valve — something so absorbing, so different, so re-balancing," he writes. Does he play it? Yes, he does. In fact, he conquers it. The book serves as a re-

minder to everyone to set aside some time from their crazy-busy lives for the one thing, or the many things, that they have always wanted to do. The pursuit of those passions could be a life-affirming and a life-altering experience. Mr. Rusbridger missed his deadline by a few months, but he stayed the course. "Yes, there's time," he writes. "No matter how frantically busy one's life..." *Absolutely on Music* by Haruki Murakami, whose books have always had music keeping the background score, is about a maestro (Seiji Ozawa) and a writer (Murakami). Two creative people wake up at the crack of dawn to concentrate on the one thing they are passionate about. For the writer, it is the word, and for the composer, it is keeping score. The book comprises of six conversations between them.

FROM The Hindu ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO APRIL 24, 1967

The road to independence

The British High Commissioner in South Arabia said on Thursday [April 20, Aden, (South Arabia)] that the only hope for bringing independence to the territory with a minimum of bloodshed lay in the present controversial Federal Government, if the U.N. proved unable to provide an alternative solution. The High Commissioner, Sir Richard Turnbull, predicted in an exclusive interview at his heavily guarded hilltop residence that South Arabia would attain independence "not very happily." The High Commissioner said there were only two possible "ways ahead" for the area.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO APRIL 24, 1917

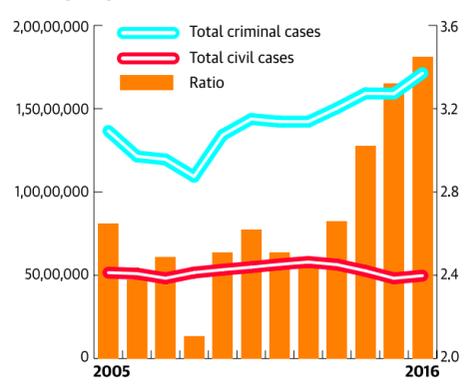
A strike at Erode

The Tranship Porters and Cooly Porters employed at the Erode junction of the Broad and Metre gauge systems of the S I Railway numbering 20 and eighty respectively struck work on the morning of the 21st instant and every endeavour to persuade them to resume work is proving vain and as a result of the energetic measures taken by the Traffic Inspectors of Salem and Podanur the normal work of the Company is carried on up till now by employing loco men and coolies from each of the neighbouring stations. I understand that there was a case of death from amongst the relations of some of the Tranship porters and some were obliged to stop away for attending the funerals of the deceased. The next day they came to work as usual but were prohibited from doing work and the cooly porters who are not paid any monthly or daily wages were asked to do the work and these also refused.

DATA POINT

More criminal than civil

Since 2005, the number of civil cases filed in district and High Courts in India have plateaued, while criminal cases have gone up resulting in a greater criminal-civil case ratio



ALOK PRASANNA KUMAR, EPW, APR 22, 2017, FROM SCL.NIC.IN/COURTNEWS.COM