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Citizens can reverse the tide

State-funded programmes alone cannot revitalise India's rivers

There are many rivers in India, at least on the map, but they have no water. Many rivers have dried up. If we do not take up the responsibility of protecting rivers, it will cause great harm to mankind'. This was Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the release of 'Narmada Pravah'—a work plan for the river for policy work and conservation. Conservation of rivers was one of the key manifesto promises of the NDA government, which completes three years later this month.

Mr Modi is correct. The state of Indian rivers is pitiable. The Indian subcontinent is home to seven major rivers systems and more than 400 rivers. Many originate from the Himalayan glaciers as well as forested catchments and find their way either to the Bay of Bengal or to the Arabian Sea. But anthropogenic pressures have adversely affected the river system, which has been indiscriminately dammed, diverted, channelised, encroached upon and polluted. Rivers, as ecosystems, have been neglected. At last year's Indian River's Week, experts conferred on this important question: What needs to be done to save India's rivers? "Rivers know just one religion—that is to flow," said late Anupam Mishra. While acknowledging greater investments and focus from the government's side, he indicated that unless these are backed by the right kind of measures to involve the communities long term success will not be achieved.

He was spot on. If states have to improve the state of the rivers, they have to involve communities. And there are several examples of how communities have revived rivers in India. Ramon Magsaysay awardee Rajendra Singh showed that the importance of community involvement when he rejuvenated the streams of Aravari river in Rajasthan. Recently there was another heartwarming story from Kerala: The Kuttemperoor river in Alappuzha district had been a cesspool full of pollutants and weeds for about 10 years. But it was recently revived thanks to the Budhanoor Gram Panchayat.

It is time to get the House in order

Derailing assembly proceedings isn't what our lawmakers were elected to do

The first session of the new Uttar Pradesh assembly was a picture of anarchy with MLAs from the Samajwadi Party (SP) and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) flexing their collective muscle by disrupting governor Ram Naik's address. Throughout the 35-minute address, SP legislator Rajesh Yadav kept blowing a whistle to ensure Naik couldn't be heard. His colleagues also used the opportunity to throw paper balls at him, some of which hit the governor despite marshals trying to shield him with files. Indulging in behaviour that would put churlish schoolchildren to shame, the MLAs ensured that the customary address of the governor to the joint sitting of the two Houses of the state legislature was drowned out in the commotion.

The incident isn't an aberration. A few months ago, during a trust vote for EK Palaniswami in Tamil Nadu, Opposition DMK legislators broke the furniture and microphones, threw files and even occupied the Speaker's chair. The mayhem began when speaker P. Dhanapal rejected a demand by former chief minister Panneerselvam and the DMK for a secret ballot. TV visuals showed DMK legislators surrounding and pushing the Speaker. "They tore my shirt," Dhanapal later told reporters. In 2009, the Andhra Pradesh assembly had seen a brawl where 46 MLAs including N Chandrababu Naidu refused to leave the House even after their suspension. Normally, damaging public property or smashing tables, chairs or microphones outside the precincts of Parliament or assembly would invite criminal prosecution. But owing to the immunity built into our constitution, shameless lawmakers get away with bad behaviour.

At a time when the SP and the BSP should be looking inward and analysing the reasons for their electoral debacle, they were busy disrupting the assembly. Derailing the proceedings of a state assembly at taxpayers' expense isn't what our lawmakers were elected to do. It is time they set their house in order.

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BOBBY GHOSH



Hurriyat faces a credibility crisis

By not condemning attacks by militants on civilians, it has lost the moral high ground

In the summer of 2000, the summer of 2000, I met Yasin Malik in the small study of his home in Srinagar. He was 32 then, and as chairman of the Jammu & Kashmir Liberation Front, the most prominent face of Kashmiri separatism. And it was a face that made many Indians uncomfortable, for it had been grotesquely disfigured by torture at the hands of the authorities. As we sat on the carpet, I noticed a collection of Mahatma Gandhi's works on his bookshelf. This was not what I expected to see in the home of a former militant who defended the violence of the Kashmiri 'mujahedin'.

When I asked him if he had read the books, he pulled out a well-thumbed volume. "Of course," he said. "He was a great revolutionary." But how, I asked, did he reconcile his admiration for the apostle of non-violence with his support for the militants. After all, Gandhi had defeated his enemy with peace. "Yes, but Gandhi's enemy was much gentler with him than mine have been with me," Malik said. "They never did this to him," he added, pointing to his face, its youthful features frozen in an agonised rictus.

I didn't get to see Malik on my recent visit to Srinagar—I did meet other, prominent separatists of the All Parties Hurriyat Conference—but I was reminded of his stated admiration

for Gandhi when, on the day before my arrival, militants killed seven men in Kulgam district. Five of them were policemen, guarding a van used to deliver money to bank branches; the two others were civilians.

All were Kashmiris, and their killing sent a shock through the Valley, even among those who had no love for the Indian state. In WhatsApp and Facebook groups, many Kashmiris agreed it was one thing for the militants to attack Indian security forces, but to kill civilians was another thing altogether.

But neither Malik nor the Hurriyat was heard from. The separatist group, so quick to call for Valley-wide protests and hartals when one Kashmiri is killed by the security forces, could not be moved to outrage over the murder of seven. The message it sent out was that the spilling of Kashmiri blood—civilian Kashmiri blood, at that—was okay if the militants did the spilling. Hizbul Mujahedin claimed responsibility for the attack.

If Malik remembers his Gandhi reading, then he may recall Chauri Chaura. This was the village in Gorakhpur district where, on 5 Feb, 1922, protesters participating in the Non-Cooperation Movement, set ablaze a police station, killing 23 men inside. The Mahatma could have dismissed this as an isolated spasm in an otherwise nonviolent movement. Instead, he condemned the incident, and



Army personnel at the funeral of Lieutenant Ummer Fayyaz in Kulgam

pressed the Indian National Congress to call off the movement, which it did on Feb 12.

If it is too much to expect the Hurriyat to call off its separatist agitation in response to the murder in Kulgam, the leadership could—should—have condemned the killings vociferously. The announcement of a Valley-wide expression of mourning would not have been untoward. But the Hurriyat did no such thing.

Nor was it able to muster any outrage last week, when another Kashmiri, Ummer

Fayaz, was abducted from his cousin's wedding in Shopian, and assassinated—again, police say, by Hizbul Mujahedin. The fact that Fayaz was a lieutenant in the Indian Army seems to have made him unworthy of the Hurriyat's sympathy.

Condemnation of these killings would not have weakened the Hurriyat; it might have gained credibility for its claim to represent all Kashmiris. Not only these omissions undermine the Hurriyat's claim to the moral high ground in the Valley, its silence emboldens groups like the Hizbul Mujahedin to pursue their own agenda. One manifestation of this was the threat by Hizb commander Zakir Rashid Bhat to behead Hurriyat leaders, for describing their movement as a political struggle, rather than a religious war for an Islamic state.

On this occasion, Bhat was expelled from the group, but Malik and his fellow leaders of the Hurriyat will likely watch their backs, and their tongues, from now on.

The Hurriyat leadership often compares the condition of Kashmir to that of Palestine. Having spent time in both, I can attest that there are few similarities. But the leadership of the Kashmiri separatists do have one thing in common with their Palestinian counterparts: in the words of an Israeli statesman, "they never miss an opportunity to miss an opportunity."

Already this month, they've missed two.

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UNIVERSAL RATING



A clerk counts notes in China. India's chief economic advisor has pointed to inconsistent standards of rating agencies particularly while dealing with India and China

India is in cruise mode, don't try to pull it down

The BBB- credit measure doesn't reflect the economy's improved fundamentals and India's ability to repay its debt



Chief economic adviser Arvind Subramanian recently reiterated the inconsistent standards of credit rating agencies, particularly while dealing with India and China. For example, S&P maintained India's status quo at BBB- (moderate credit risk) since 2007 while it has upgraded China from A+ to AA- (high credit quality) in 2010; even though our macroeconomic fundamentals has improved.

Since 2007, the economy has shown improvement in the most relevant macro indicators. The foreign direct investment inflows have almost doubled from \$22.8 billion in 2007 to \$55.56 billion in 2016. The most important factor, the debt to GDP ratio, is improving gradually, falling from 74% in 2007 to 68.5% in 2016. India's debt ratio is lower compared to countries such as Japan, Singapore, US and Spain. Therefore, not upgrading India's rating is not justified when the economy is growing at more than 7%.

However, there are concerns that the economies of China and India are not comparable. First, the significant fall in CAD was due to falling oil prices from \$106 per barrel in July 2014 to \$26 in January 2016. Lower oil prices not only helped reduce CAD but also

helped improve fiscal balance by 1% of GDP through lower petroleum-related subsidies and higher excise duties. The fiscal consolidation also got a push from spectrum auction in March 2015, which generated approximately ₹1.10 lakh crore for the government.

Recently, the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Committee has emphasised on attaining 60% Debt/GDP ratio by 2023, contrary to the demand of CRAs for lower threshold level, which has given the rating agencies the leverage not to upgrade India's ratings. The revised GDP estimates with 2011-12 base-year and CPI based inflation is under scanner. Further, the ratio of foreign exchange reserves to total debt has decreased from 115.6 in 2007 to 74.2 in 2016 where as external debt to GDP ratio also increased from 17.5% to 23.7%. China's general government debt to GDP ratio has been increasing every year but it still stands very low at 46.2 as of 2016. China's foreign exchange reserves, mostly due its trade surplus, amounts to 240% of total external debt in comparison to India's 73% in 2015. China had mostly fiscal surplus in last two decades whereas India always had large fiscal deficit. India's total receipts are still not sufficient to meet non-interest payment requirements.

The current ratings of BBB- does not truly reflect the stability of Indian economy, improved macro fundamentals, and its ability and willingness to repay its debt.

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The views expressed are personal

Why sexual violence is losing its shock value

A protectionist mindset validates a sexual hierarchy in which men are dominant and women submissive



Just days after Jyoti Singh's killers were sentenced to death by the Supreme Court, on May 11, a similar case of gang rape and murder was reported from Rohtak in Haryana. Within the same week, another 10-year-old from the same area was found repeatedly raped by her stepfather and is now five months pregnant. On May 14 (ironically on Mothers' Day), a young girl from Sikkim living in a hostel in Delhi, was forced late night into a car and gangraped by several men and on the very same day another young girl who was kidnapped while going to her school to collect her certificates, was rescued from a farm house in Meerut where she was being held forcibly and gangraped repeatedly.

What is happening here, you ask. To what do we owe this spate in sexual crimes against women and even little girls some as young as two months old?

One needs to understand here how fundamental sexuality is to the basic concept of gender in Indian society. And in a semi feudal and genderised society like ours, sexuality remains central everywhere (from homes, schools and cinema screens to Parliament) to define males and females. Under this rubric, submissiveness and non assertion are female qualities while domineering and forceful behaviour is deemed proof of male power.

The relative silence over the Rohtak gang rape and murder of a young Dalit girl allegedly by a rejected suitor, surprises one after the nationwide protests that followed the Jyoti Singh case and finally led to amendments in our rape laws.

Indians are fast developing callousness on the subject of rampant sexual violence against women. Predictably the Haryana police having constituted a special investigative team is 'looking into the matter', the

DESPITE ALL THE PUBLICITY OVER STRINGENT NEW ANTI-RAPE LAWS AND "KADI SE KADI SAZA" PRONOUNCEMENTS FROM THE SYSTEM, IT IS OBVIOUS THAT NOT MUCH HAS CHANGED ON THE GROUND FOR WOMEN

NCW has sent a two member team to meet the victim's family and the Haryana government has announced a fat compensation for the victim's family, but it is obvious that despite all the publicity over stringent new anti rape laws and "kadi se kadi saza" pronouncements from the System, not much has changed on the ground for women.

"Women continue to be raped daily", writes Justice Leila Seth, one of India's finest judicial minds and member of the celebrated Verma commission that rewrote India's rape laws, but adds that the normal approach, remains protectionist. Protectionism says women need protection as matter of right as a citizen, but because they are weaker and more subordinate than men. Despite the major legal amendments the Verma committee report helped usher in, even today this protectionist mindset among most members of the executive, the judiciary and the public continues to reinforce and validate a sexualised hierarchy in which eroticised dominance (as in Bahubali) defines masculinity and submission eroticised (as in Bajirao Mastani) defines femininity. The State created largely from the male point of view combines coercion with authority. It counsels and supports moral policing women and khap panchayats that say whenever they step out of their homes, girls must be accompanied by a male chaperone.

Some other details reveal the kind of world Indian men and women really inhabit socially and politically. Despite the recommendation of the Verma committee, the legislature chose to leave marital rape out of the list as a punishable crime. And more recently when the courts took up the triple talaq matter, the related issues of halala and polygamy had been neatly excised. It is obvious to women that at this point the State will not contradict the socially constructed and legally validated terms of men's entitlement and access to women, never mind how they affect the lives of millions of Indian women.

Real equality of sexes under the law can only be realised first by accepting that gender inequality is a shrewd socio-political construct of a society which determines that most victims of sexual crimes will be women and men the perpetrators. Equality, it is obvious, requires genuine change and a new relation between life and law for Indian women before they can safely seek redressal in the new anti rape laws.

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The views expressed are personal

innervoice
THINK POSITIVE TO BECOME SUCCESSFUL AND STAY HAPPY



Mithun Dey

Everything around us appears to be centred on the negative aspects of life. We often feel tired, overworked, and tense all the time. Consequently, negative ideas can move silently into our mind. Positive thinking brings happiness and success in life.

How can one overcome negative thoughts and replace them with more positive outlook towards life? To be a positive thinker, we have to learn how to study our

thoughts. Self-blame is a common negative thinking pattern which can spoil our mental happiness. When your inner monologue starts suggesting you will never complete your assignments on time, find a way to take a more positive view of the situation. For instance, if you are putting in a great effort to complete paper-work, try to find ways to rearrange your schedule to make spare time for your work rather than giving in to hopelessness. When a research project seems too hard to complete, looking for

assistance from a classmate might help. Being a positive thinker is not about disrespecting the reality. It is more about taking a practical approach to your own life. Instead of feeling gloomy, positive thinking allows you to tackle life's challenges by looking for constructive ways to come up with creative resolutions to problems.

(Innervoice comprises contributions from our readers.)

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