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No room for misogyny here

Gender cannot be a factor in securing hotel accommodation

There is hardly a hotel anywhere in the world which does not tell the customer that rights of admission are reserved. But, even so, the policy followed by a Hyderabad hotel which states that locals, single ladies and unmarried couples are not allowed is a bit of stretch, not to mention misogynistic.

This came to light when a single woman traveller was denied a pre-booked room by the hotel. The hotel seemed to think that turning the woman out on to the street was the better option than giving her a room. And in a nasty twist to the whole tale, it would appear that this policy was driven by the police asking the administration to not provide rooms to single women as the area was unsafe. This is astounding given that it is the duty of the police to make sure that all areas are safe and that women are not restricted on this count.

This, however, is not the first time that hotels have discriminated on what can only be called moral grounds. Such discriminatory policies are never openly stated but are practised nevertheless. The bias against single women extends far beyond hotels. In many attacks on women, the response of both the police and society is to question why she was out alone at night the suggestion being that women should always be accompanied by a man or not go out at night. Single women also face unnecessary harassment and discrimination when trying to find accommodation, the assumption being that a single woman will encourage male visitors to come as though this were a crime.

Women across the world are opting to stay single, travel independently and carve out their own space both in the personal and public sphere. This is a choice not a deviation. In India, still a largely patriarchal society, a single woman beyond a certain age is considered someone left on the shelf, an object of contempt or pity. This goes against an aspirational generation of Indians who want to engage with the world on their own terms. The single woman traveller is a big segment of the hospitality industry. For that reason, if nothing else, hotels should do away with these discriminatory policies. And the police should do its job instead of making things worse for women than they already are.

Iraq could emerge as a model modern Arab state

Baghdad must adhere to its democratic, non-sectarian ways to inspire West Asia

The Iraqi city of Mosul this week celebrates its first Eid free of the oppressive rule of the Islamic State (IS) in three years. IS announced its existence from ramparts of the 600-year-old Grand al Nusri mosque in Mosul. In keeping with the IS' nihilistic tendencies, its retreating fighters blew up the famous leaning minaret of the mosque. Kurdish troops have begun a similar process of driving out IS from its present capital of Raqqa, across the border in Syria. IS is now a shadow of its former self, and few doubt, including the self-styled caliphate's leadership, that the endgame is well under progress.

These developments would hopefully lead West Asia and, in particular, the Arab world to contemplate what lessons they can draw from IS' short but brutal life. The Iraqi government should remember that IS fighters were initially welcomed with open arms by the Sunni inhabitants of Mosul because of their anger at the corrupt, pro-Shia regime of the then prime minister Nouri al-Maliki. The present ruler has shown himself to be less sectarian in his policies, but addressing the sensibilities of Iraq's Sunni Arab and Kurdish minorities will determine whether IS will not reappear in a new avatar. Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi is an expert on transportation and connectivity, both political and economic, should be what the policies of a post-IS Iraq should be about.

Christian Europe underwent nearly a century of slaughter before it accepted the concepts of modern secularism. The Arab Islamic world need not follow that path. But the past dichotomy of secular dictators and religious monarchies has shown itself to be a failure. Of all the countries coming out of the present round of violence and political instability, Iraq is probably the only one that could emerge as the model for a new modern Arab state – democratic, republican, federal and non-sectarian – that West Asia needs for its future.

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GOPALKRISHNA GANDHI



The state of fear and fearlessness

The Emergency is the poison that tells us that its antidote – courage – exists right in our grasp

These last days of June, 'back' in 1975, were a torment.

Indira Gandhi, an unbelievably powerful woman of 58, had got President Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed to declare a state of national Emergency on June 25 night that year, on the ground of 'internal disturbance'. Within hours of the proclamation, she had put almost every single Opposition leader of weight in jail, cut the electric power lines to major newspapers, gagged the press from making any comment, and let loose in India's air invisible but asphyxiating fumes of fear, abject fear.

Stalwart Opposition leaders like Jayaprakash Narayan, Morarji Desai, Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Lal Krishna Advani were joined in jail by some Congressmen who dared to dissent, like Chandrashekhar and Mohan Dharia. Indira Gandhi turned overnight from India's prime minister to India's dictator with, standing by her, her son and alter ego, Sanjay Gandhi. Thousands across the country, politicians and non-politicians, were jailed under the open-ended provisions of 'preventive detention'. And thousands, hundreds of thousands more, were left in holy dread of similar preventive arrests.

Preventive of what? What was the 'internal disturbance'?

For two years preceding, Indira Gandhi's Congress had its back to the wall in Gujarat and Bihar where youth were demanding an ouster of the state government and a comprehensive change in the character of politics, with the iconic Jayaprakash leading the students' movement in Bihar. At the core of the protest was a clear sense that Indira Gandhi was becoming an autocrat, who encouraged sycophancy like that of the Congress president who said 'India is Indira'.

Power was slipping away from her and, intolerable to her, the same power – informal but indisputable – was swarming to Jayaprakash. His movement against corruption, mis-governance and authoritarianism touched so vital a chord, first in Bihar and then beyond, with the people of India that he came to enjoy countrywide the sentiment Gandhi had publicly expressed for him: Adoration. 'Andhere mein ek prakash' went the opening cry, followed by a full throated 'Jayaprakash! Jayaprakash!'

When leading a procession against the Bihar government lathi charged down on him in Patna on November 4, 1974, breaking two of his ribs and an elbow, JP fell vowing 'I will teach this government a lesson'. The Congress lost the June 1975 elections in Gujarat, with a united Opposition government replac-



Indira Gandhi turned overnight from India's prime minister to India's dictator

ing the heartily disliked Congress' 'Chimant-bhai regime'. A nationwide railway strike threatened to clog the country's arteries. Then came the denouement: The Allahabad High Court unseated Indira Gandhi on an election petition charging electoral malpractice and the SC upheld the high court ruling.

The 21-month-long night of the national Emergency that followed saw, among other horrors, the Constitution's draconian 42nd Amendment which made any amendment by Parliament immune from judicial review.

The Emergency is hateful, is hated and will always be.

And yet, today, 42 years on, may one harbour a contrarian view about it? We are not under an Emergency, and so why not?

The national Emergency of 1975-1977 is the poison that tells us that its antidote exists, right in our grasp – courage. And that knowledge is a gift that it has given us.

Thanks to the misuse of the Constitution's emergency powers, the country was awakened to removing those powers by the 44th Amendment Act. "Recent experience has shown", the bill's sage objects explained, "that the fundamental rights, including those of life and liberty, granted to citizens by the Constitution are capable of being taken away by a transient majority. It is, therefore, necessary to provide adequate safeguards against the recurrence of such a contingency in the future and to ensure to the people themselves an effective voice in determining the form of government under which they are to live."

"In the future", it says far-sightedly. That "future" where "the people themselves" must guard their civil and democratic rights from being "taken away by a transient majority", in a democratic republic is the present moment. It is now.

A state of Emergency is, at its core, a state of fear. That 'state' does not have to be proclaimed. It can just come to be.

Gopal Krishna Gandhi is distinguished professor of history and politics, Ashoka University. The views expressed by the author are personal.

UPHILL TASK



Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, Lucknow

SUBHANKAR CHAKRABORTY/HT

Will Adityanath be able to fulfil BJP's poll promises?

Overcoming Uttar Pradesh's financial constraints will be a challenge and also a test of his administrative skills

SUNITA ARON



Recently Mulayam Singh Yadav was asked to comment on the performance of the Yogi Adityanath government in Uttar Pradesh. He declined saying he preferred to wait for six months. That's because Yadav belongs to the generation that neither celebrated nor condemned the performance of a government before it completed six months in office.

The BJP had made tall poll promises in UP, the execution of which will require leadership skills as the CM heads a raw team. Recently in an informal chat, he shared his ambitious plans and projects in various sectors, especially health and education.

The CM's blueprint, likely to be announced on the 100th day, might lay out the direction his government embarks on, besides the populist measures like the anti-Romeo squads, triple talaq and cow slaughter that have already been announced.

Law and order is the Adityanath government's Achilles heel. Caste conflicts have intensified, and two major communities feeling marginalised are the Muslims and Dalits, which forms 40% of the state's population.

The BJP has tried to assuage the sentiments of lower castes by nominating a Dalit

as President of India, but the Dalits are not amused as some claim that Kanshi Ram rejected a similar offer on the plea that he did not need a post that silences him.

Of all the BJP governments, Kalyan Singh's first stint in early 1990's is remembered as the party's best rule. Singh had taken four concrete steps to display his resolve – first, action was taken against two criminals, Raghuraj Pratap Singh and Mukhtar Ansari; second, the revival of the Chunar cement factory, coupled with revival plans for UPTRON and Scooters India; third, copying was made a cognisable offence; and fourth, goons were paraded in market places.

In West UP the traders, including the Muslims, hailed Singh's action against criminals in every district. However, he lost this goodwill in his second term when he shook hands with some criminals to save his government.

Many saw some glimpses of the Singh regime in Yogi's government when he brought in many first timers as ministers.

Though the CM is optimistic about the radical changes that the people will notice soon, he will have to prioritise given UP's financial constraints – constraints that will multiply after farm loans are waived.

The challenge will be to implement the promises made in the party's manifesto. Yogi Adityanath comes out as a young mahant ready to prove his administrative skills.

The coming years will tell if he remains a mahant or becomes a manager, and a successful one at it. As they say, a leader capable of managing UP well can run India too.

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Amar Akbar Anthony is a symbol of a tolerant India

The 1970s Hindi film is a cultural marker of a time when there were no gangs looking for people to lynch



SIDHARTH BHATIA

Amar Akbar Anthony, that great entertainer from the 1970s, has completed 40 years. The movie is a staple on television and despite its period feel, has travelled well over the decades – a few minutes spent watching it are sure to produce a laugh or two.

There is nostalgia for the songs but we also remember a different India. In a very unique way, Amar Akbar Anthony, more than many other films of the time, is a cultural marker of that India – an India without terrorism and when no gangs roamed about looking for people to lynch.

India had just come out of an Emergency, but even at the height of state power and coercion, no one dictated what one could eat. Indeed, the central message of AAA is the very Indian quality of tolerance, for our fellow citizens which ever religion or faith they may belong to. In his own style of inspired silliness, and without preaching to anybody, Mammoan Desai wrote an ode to secularism. The phrase Amar Akbar Anthony is now shorthand for unity in diversity, even in these fraught times.

The story of AAA is fairly well known. Three brothers are left behind in a park by their father and when he doesn't return, are adopted by three families of different faiths. One grows up to be a cop, another a singer and the third the owner of a country liquor bar. Their mother has gone blind and their father, originally a driver, is now a successful smuggler. Throughout the film, they come face to face with the others without knowing their relationship. The audience is in on the secret and enjoys the dialogues, which are full of innuendo and references to bhais and baaps, but it is not till the end that the characters realise they are one big family.

Early on in the story, the three brothers donate blood which flows directly into their

MORE OFTEN THAN NOT, THE MUSLIM CHARACTER IN HINDI FILMS TODAY IS ASSOCIATED WITH TERRORISM SOMETIMES DIRECTLY (SARFAROSH), SOMETIMES SLYLY (A WEDNESDAY).

mother's bloodstream. Much later, she recovers her eyesight when two sparks of light travel from lamps (diyas) near an idol of Saibaba of Shirdi. Not to be missed is the remarkable coincidence of a qawwali being sung to Saibaba by her son Akbar.

There were murmurs of protests at the time about a Muslim singing to an idol, but nothing came of it. Similarly, some Catholics had objected to the portrayal of Anthony, played by Amitabh Bachchan, as a bootlegger and drinker but after the intervention of some priests, that controversy too died down. The drunk Christian was a familiar stereotype of films of the time. Muslims were usually shown as kind-hearted Rahim chachas or dissolute and romantic nawabs and their beloveds who exclaimed 'hai Allah' after every other line. But they were all uniformly gentle.

The genre of 'Muslim socials' – or Islamicate themes, as academics would have it – were hugely popular in the 1950s and '60s. In the 1970s, we had the loyal Sher Khan in Zanjeer and the blind Imaam Saheb in Sholay. The benign Muslim remained with us till much later, after which he gradually faded into the sunset.

In the post-1990s phase, filmmakers discovered newer audiences, in India and among the large Indian diaspora all over the world. These audiences had a different view of India, which was driven by nostalgia not for Indian diversity but for Indian tradition in the garb of modernity.

The 90s saw monumental economic and social changes – the rath yatra, the fall of the Babri Masjid and the horrific riots in Bombay and elsewhere created new narratives; the Muslim was now no longer seen in the same light as earlier. More often than not, the Muslim character in Hindi films today is associated with terrorism sometimes directly (Sarfaroosh), sometimes slyly (A Wednesday).

Equally, there are Muslim victims of terrorism and brave officials who fight it. The modern Muslim or indeed a normal Muslim is missing in action.

There is much to criticise in the hokey stereotyping of the past – and Amar Akbar Anthony is as hokey as they come – but one can't fault the messaging.

Every now and then one reads of a possible remake of Amar Akbar Anthony. Given the record of remakes, one shudders at what the outcome will be, but perhaps, just to evoke a different India and its core values, a reprise of Amar Akbar Anthony may not be such a bad idea. It will at the very least tell the young Indians that India was not always like it is today.

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IMAGINATION CAN BE GIVEN WINGS TO MAKE US REACH OUR TARGETS

PP Wangchuk

The quality of our ability to imagine is a wonderful trait that enables us to 'do whatever we want'. In fact, imagination makes us dream and aspire for all the good things of life that may not pass our way otherwise.

All great men in history were men of imagination. Imagination helped them do proper planning and carry out the steps needed to access their needs.

Imagination acts as a sort of catalyst to make you realise your dreams. Albert Ein-

stein had said, "Imagination is the preview of life's coming attractions." He had also said that he was like an artist to draw freely upon his imagination. He was convinced that imagination was more important than knowledge because "knowledge is limited, imagination encircles the world."

We imagine many things, and for those brief moments, the things happening in our lives are as real as seeing a movie. Even Pablo Picasso had said: "Everything you can imagine is real." Therefore, we should not be satisfied in living within the limitations of

our means. We should use our faculty of imagination to live the way we want. Maybe, one day, your dreams that began with an imagination are realised.

After school education, I had nothing but wild imagination that one day I will end up being a writer. Reading books and meeting authors gave wings to my imagination. That gave way to hopes, and hopes turned into reality.

(Inner Voice comprises contributions from our readers. The views expressed are personal)

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