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## WHO

### Tejaswi Yadav, a son rises in Bihar

When Chief Minister Nitish Kumar of the JD(U) pledged his support to NDA presidential candidate Ram Nath Kovind, former Bihar Governor, most senior leaders in the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), which has a grand alliance with the JD(U), protested, but not Tejaswi Yadav.

The former Chief Minister Lalu Prasad's son and Deputy Chief Minister quickly intervened to stop any possible rift – the RJD is backing the UPA candidate Meira Kumar.

There is "Himalayan unity" among grand alliance partners in Bihar, he said, adding, "The decision will have no impact on it." In the RJD, Mr. Tejaswi is the one who regularly takes on Opposition leaders and sometimes ruling alliance partners too.

#### Why is he important?

Born on November 9, 1989, a year before his father became Chief Minister, Mr. Tejaswi is the younger son of Rabri Devi and Lalu Prasad – both were Chief Ministers from 1990 to 2005.

He started his career as a cricketer

but later inherited politics from his family and in 2015 became a first-time MLA from Raghapur in Vaishali district. Days later, he took the oath as Deputy Chief Minister when he was only 26.

Among all his siblings, Mr. Tejaswi is regarded as the heir apparent to Lalu Prasad. His elder brother Tej Pratap Yadav is Health Minister and among his seven sisters, the older Misa Bharti is a Rajya Sabha member.

#### What is his politics?

Tejaswi Yadav has led the RJD into new-age politics, where social media plays an important role in putting the party's thoughts across. Earlier, his father was oft-quoted as saying *yeh IT-YT kya hota hai?* (what's this IT-YT?) but today even Mr. Lalu Prasad tweets every day. It all happened with the political initiation of Mr. Tejaswi, who then pushed hard for the party's makeover with the right mix of young and experienced. Today, he holds complete command over his party and takes major decisions in consultation with his father.

For his sheer political understanding

and ability to take everyone along, Mr. Tejaswi is seen as the chief minister-in-waiting.

#### What is his report card?

As the Deputy Chief Minister, he shares the stage with Mr. Nitish Kumar at every government function or meeting. Like Mr. Nitish Kumar, he too does his homework well before attending these functions or meetings. He is articulate and known for getting things done. For instance, for repairing roads – many of Bihar's roads are in a terrible state – he introduced a simple way of getting



the work done by announcing a WhatsApp number (9470001346). "People can now directly WhatsApp the condition of roads to bring more quality and efficiency," he said. He uses social media to be in touch with his department officials and people as well.

#### Does Bihar take him seriously?

On the WhatsApp number he announced, instead of the condition of the roads, Mr. Tejaswi got 44,000 marriage proposals.

"Thank God, I'm still single," he quipped, "otherwise such messages would have landed me in deep trouble." His mother, though, recently caused him great embarrassment when she said she needed girls who do not go to shopping malls or cinema halls as marriage prospects for her sons. However, later, she explained she did not mean it literally.

Mr. Tejaswi has stayed away from controversy and brushed off the recent expose

on dubious land deals and allegations by BJP leader Sushil Modi that all of his assets were not mentioned in his election affidavit. "Everything is public... let the probe begin and we'll answer the investigating agencies," he said.

#### How was his cricket innings?

As a student of the Delhi Public School, R.K. Puram, Delhi, Mr. Tejaswi took a keen interest in cricket and became captain of the school team.

Though he couldn't pass his Class X Board exam, he was included in the Delhi Daredevils IPL team in 2008 and remained with them for five consecutive seasons. But luck proved elusive and he did not get a chance to play.

Later, he was included in the Jharkhand Ranji team, and there too he failed to make a mark and could never be selected. That was the end of his cricketing career. Politics came naturally to him and Bihar watchers say he is scoring exceptionally well on its bumpy pitch.

AMARNATH TEWARY

## WHAT

### The lowdown on the border standoff with China



**WHAT IS IT** Along a mountainous disputed region of the tri-junction between India, China and Bhutan, two small units of the Indian Army and the People's Liberation Army are in a standoff since June 16, when a Chinese group entered the Doklam area to construct a road. A Royal Bhutan Army patrol attempted to dissuade them, the Indian Army too later got involved in the scene, and the Chinese probably destroyed a few temporary

bunkers of the Indian Army. On June 17, Army sources said, the two sides got into an acrimonious, physical jostling.

China has been vocal in its protests, accusing India of transgressing its territory, and of unnecessary rhetoric. Reminding India of its defeat in the 1962 war, a PLA spokesperson said earlier this week: "Such rhetoric is extremely irresponsible. We hope (the) particular person in the Indian Army could learn from historical lessons and stop such clamouring for war." He was referring to Army chief General Bipin Rawat's recent comments about India being ready for a two-front war while tackling internal insurgencies. "The (PLA) personnel have been operating on Chinese territory. We have made very clear to the Indian side that they should correct their wrongdoing and withdraw their personnel from Chinese territory," the Chinese spokesperson said. The Chinese spokesperson let it slip that China tested a lightweight battle tank in Tibet near the Indian border. On the contrary, the Indian government was silent until this Friday, when

the Ministry of External Affairs issued a detailed statement: "India is deeply concerned at the recent Chinese actions and has conveyed to the Chinese government that such construction would represent a significant change of status quo with serious security implications for India." General Rawat rushed to Sikkim on Thursday to review the situation.

#### HOW DID IT COME ABOUT

Thanks to the region's colonial history, India and China today share mostly disputed boundaries in challenging mountains. Along the Ladakh border, India sticks mostly to a boundary drawn by British civil servant W.H. Johnson in 1865, which showed Aksai Chin as part of Jammu and Kashmir. China disputes this claim and in the 1950s built a road connecting Xinjiang and Tibet which ran through Aksai Chin. In the northeast of India, New Delhi sticks to the McMahon Line, which was agreed to by representatives of the British empire and Tibet at a con-

ference in Simla in 1914, where though Chinese representatives were present they didn't agree to the final detailed maps. China claims that Tibet is not a sovereign nation and thus its approval has no legal standing. Beijing claims the entire Arunachal Pradesh as part of Tibet. The Middle Sector along Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand is almost settled, with both sides not differing much. India is keen to have a comprehensive solution to the dispute, while China has, of late, been talking about "early harvest" of solving the least controversial boundaries. There have been various suggestions, most common being India giving up its claims over Aksai Chin, while China stops claiming Arunachal as South Tibet.

#### WHY DOES IT MATTER?

The two countries have among the world's biggest militaries and are nuclear armed. In many senses, they also represent the frontlines of a new global order emerging, where India seems to be moving closer to the Amer-

ican camp, which views China as the new global rival. Whenever two economies rise quickly next to each other, wars have been inevitable. That has been the history of the modern world – Europe is a great example. Avoiding a largescale military conflict between the two sides is critical to the world, and to millions of their citizens who are still struggling in poverty.

#### WHAT NEXT?

There is diplomatic contact, but it has not been escalated to the political level. The immediate standoff could be avoided at the diplomatic level, or through the intervention at the level of the Foreign Minister or the National Security Adviser, as has happened in the past. However, the standoff is a warning to both sides that unless they step up their engagement to move quickly towards a time-bound resolution of boundary disputes, the two could be inching towards a confrontation.

JOSY JOSEPH

## WHY

### is Darjeeling stir killing tea and tourism?



#### What runs the hills' economy?

Tea and tourism are the twin pillars of the economy of the Darjeeling region. It also has some horticulture, floriculture, spice and cinchona cultivation, but the main income and employment generators are tea and tourism. These two are now under attack as the hills are caught in a fresh spiral of violence.

#### What is the status of the tea industry?

Let us take tea first. The 87 operating tea gardens in Darjeeling indirectly employ over a lakh people and directly around 60,000 people, 60% of whom are women. As per existing laws, the estates also provide housing and medical facilities to about four lakh people – families of the workers. However, the output of the exotic crop has been on a decline, nearly halving over the last few decades. Most worrisome is the fact that the industry for many reasons is not only losing crop but also revenue.

#### Why has it been hit hard?

The current agitation does not help

matters, as it comes during peak production season. The two leaves and a bud, plucked during the summer months between April and July, yield some of the best Darjeeling teas, fragrant with their unique muscatel flavour. These are also the teas that fetch the best prices in domestic and international markets, giving the industry 40% of its annual revenue.

The industry's initial optimism on the agitation being a short-lived one has been dashed. Not only is productivity being affected due to the closure but the movement of inputs to the gardens and output of the made teas are also jeopardised.

The industry has already sent out SOS appeals, saying that this may lead to closure of many gardens even after return to normalcy.

#### What about tourism?

Despite having a palette as rich as the Sundarbans and the Darjeeling Hills, West Bengal was never a top tourist destination. The steps taken by the present

government to augment and enhance the state's tourism potential have yielded results and now the State is among India's top 10 tourist destinations.

As per latest official statistics of the Union Tourism Ministry, in 2016 West Bengal attracted 74.5 million domestic tourists, slipping to the eighth position from fifth in 2015. It attracted 1.5 million foreign tourists during 2016. A significant portion of them headed to the eastern Himalayas to get a view of the Kanchenjunga range as also to soak in the ambience of this former summer capital of the British Empire. Many of them rushed to scamper back to the safety of the plains as the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha agitation fanned across the hill district.

Aware that Darjeeling is literally the crown-jewel of the State's tourism assets, the government has taken several steps to spruce up the existing accommodation while adding new ones at Darjeeling and its neighbouring subdivisions like Kalimpong and Kurseong. It has also rolled out a home-stay policy

and many people have invested to make their homes a pleasant tourist accommodation. All these are aimed at boosting the employment generation in a State where the scope of generating employment through large industries is limited. These now lie in waste.

#### What does the future hold?

Very little, unless the current agitation is resolved. The 18.5 lakh population of the district has a fairly high literacy rate of around 79.6%, according to the 2011 census figures. The tea industry is already losing able hands to a population which is migrating from the district, leaving the women and the infirm to their fate on the tea estates. The tourism industry is run by plains as well as hills people providing employment to the local youth. Little changes for the political leaders in such agitations but much is at stake for the locals, and the Queen of Hill Stations as Darjeeling was once lovingly referred to.

INDRANI DUTTA

## WHEN

### 28 June 2017

**Rallying call:** Carrying placards saying 'Not in My Name', 'No place for Islamophobia' and 'Shed hate not blood', scores of people gathered at Jantar Mantar in Delhi on Wednesday, and in at least 16 cities across India, including Mumbai, to protest against rising mob violence and cow vigilantism. The immediate trigger for the spontaneous protest march was the killing of 15-year-old Junaid Khan by a mob on a train while he was returning home to his Khandawali village in Faridabad for Id celebrations. The incident happened at Ballabgarh station in Haryana. People from all walks of life responded to the protest march call, which was started by film-maker Saba Dewan through a Facebook post. On Thursday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said killing in the name of 'gau bhakti' was not acceptable, the same day a mob in Jharkhand beat a man to death on the suspicion that he was carrying meat in his vehicle. •AP



## WHERE

### In Telangana, a unique irrigation project



If anything is at stake for the Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) government in the youngest State of the country for the next elections due in 2019, it is the execution of the Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Project (KLIP).

#### Why is it important?

Claimed to be the costliest irrigation project to be taken up by any State till date with an estimated cost of ₹80,500 crore, the project holds the key to the TRS government's promise of providing irrigation facility to one crore acres of

land under all projects/tanks. The government has already spent ₹10,000 crore on the project, including land acquisition, and has allocated ₹7,000 crore in the current budget, besides tying up a ₹7,400 crore loan from a consortium of banks. Notwithstanding its share of controversies, particularly related to land acquisition for the Mallannasagar reservoir, one of the key components of the project for storage of 50 tmc ft water, the project is making swift progress.

"We are working towards completing the barrages and pump houses at Medigadda, Annaram and Sundilla by December-end next year, with Chief Minister K. Chandrababhan Rao himself monitoring the progress of works live through video streaming from the work spots with the help of high resolution cameras installed there," a senior irrigation engineer, overseeing execution of the project, said.

#### What's the project?

The Kaleshwaram project is an off-shoot



of the original Pranahitha-Chevela Lift Irrigation Scheme taken up by the Congress government in 2007 when Andhra Pradesh was not divided. After the formation of Telangana in 2014, the TRS government redesigned the project on the ground that the original plan had too many environmental obstacles and had very low water storage provision –

only about 16.5 tmc ft. After conducting a highly advanced Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) survey for a couple of months, the government separated the original component serving the Adilabad area as the Pranahitha project and renamed the rest as Kaleshwaram by redesigning the head works, storage capacity and the canal system based on the data of availability of water at different locations along the course of the Godavari and its tributaries.

The Kaleshwaram project has provision for the storage of about 148 tmc ft with plans of utilising 180 tmc ft by lifting at least 2 tmc ft water every day for 90 flood days.

"The project is designed to irrigate 7,38,851 hectares (over 18.47 lakh acres) uplands in the erstwhile districts of Karimnagar, Nizamabad, Warangal, Medak, Nalgonda and Ranga Reddy," the senior engineer said.

As a lot is at stake for the government, it is pursuing various clearances and permissions simultaneously with the Union Ministry of Environment and

Forest and the Central Water Commission. Recently, the Ministry of Environment has given its nod for utilising 3,168 hectares (7,920 acres) of forestland, including 302 hectares in Maharashtra. The project requires a total of 32,000 hectares. Following severe opposition from a section of farmers against land acquisition for the Mallannasagar reservoir, the State amended the 2013 Land Acquisition Act to speed up the process.

#### What's unique?

According to engineers, KLIP has many unique features, including the longest tunnel to carry water in Asia, running up to 81 km, between the Yellampally barrage and the Mallannasagar reservoir. "The tunnel work is nearing completion and the lining work is also in progress," another engineer involved in the project said, adding that the project would also utilise the highest capacity pumps, up to 139 MW, in the country to lift water.

B. CHANDRASHEKHAR

# A jungle of angers

We need to use our justifiable anger as a fuel for action without letting it degrade into physical violence



## PASSING BITE

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The other day I heard a friend's 27-year-old son lovingly exhort him: "Dad, you really need to let your anger out. I see you always repressing the anger you feel towards me and that's not healthy! You need to get it out!" Ah, I thought to myself, modern times are indeed strange. Thinking about it later, however, I realised the son was completely right.

My friend is not a man who's divested himself of his anger (I don't think people like that exist) but he is, in his own way, quite Gandhian, and I've seen him channel his anger and irritation into logical argument, civilly delivered sarcasm or, at worst, glowering silence. As a parent, I myself have had to address my anger and outbursts when I

realised my two kids – then about 12 and 8 – were picking up my temper as a good way to deal with things. After some hard, counter-intuitive work, I derived no small satisfaction when my older one, by then 14, growled at me one day: "Can't even fight with you properly anymore, because you don't even shout back now!"

### A suspended emotion

It's not that I've divested myself of my anger (see above), or that me and offspring haven't had some full-on shouting matches since then, it's just that the instances have become far more rare. Perhaps it's just that the hair-trigger has been disabled and it takes a lot for things to reach shouting levels. Perhaps we are all just a touch older and it takes more out of me when I resort to a full-blown, nuclear launch of temper.

Both my late parents had tempers but their angers had very different handwritings, if you will. My father's was a Krakatoa that would erupt maybe once every two years but it would (momentarily) cover the whole planet with its cloud, whereas my mother's was a constantly bubbling volcano, with regular



small eruptions and some properly big ones. Then there were other adults, the coldly sadistic Maths or Hindi teachers (it was always the Maths or Hindi teachers in my case), the slimy housemaster who would smile at you – "hainh-hainh beta, carry aan, it's alright..." – but later stab you in the back with detention or punishment drill, demonstrating the true depths of his hatred towards you. Later in life, there were the shouters and the hissing ones who would hose your being in low voices and vicious vocabulary, the ones who would go psy-

cho-silent before exploding physically upon someone, and so on. As you grew into adulthood you learnt both to be fearful of anger that came in all shapes and sizes and from surprisingly different directions but also how to use it to your advantage by creating fear in others.

As with other things, anger/temper can be mapped in concentric circles. First there is the ring of the family and close people. You know the type of person, always calm and polite, who no one would suspect of having a foul tem-

per – "Who? Her? No way! She's so contained, even when she argues!" – no one, that is, except close family who bear the brunt of their fury. Then there is the anger you show to the immediate world outside, the people who work with you or for you, the people with whom you come into regular contact. Then there is what one could call 'public' temper or anger, which is less discriminating, the rage you see between drivers, the violence that breaks out when someone insults or tries to molest someone in your group, the shouting you hear in restaurants or airline check-in counters, or indeed in the confined spaces of airplanes and trains. Then the widest ring could perhaps be labelled 'global' anger, under which category would come things stretching from mob violence to wars between nations.

### To fight against the lynchings

The thing is, anger has always been looked at as a bad thing, a flaw, a shortcoming, a *dosha*. Whether it is anger management therapy or *krodha*, one of the major *avagunas*, there is always a negative connotation attached to the emotion-reaction. But hearing my

friend's son lecture his father on how he needed to cleanse himself of pent-up anger, one had to think. It's true that there is probably too much 'public' anger going around the world right now, a level of emotional global warming that we've never seen before, not even perhaps during the great wars and civilisation struggles of the past, a series of short-circuits tripping each other off in an endless and ever-widening loop. But then maybe, even in this mass wildfire of big and small rage, there is space for valid anger or angers – like the precisely placed boundary fires that help burn out the spreading blaze in forests. Perhaps the only way to fight for the right of 15-year-olds not to be lynched on trains, for people not to get killed for what they are eating, or for our environment not to be degraded to serve corporate interests, is to show some plain, unadulterated anger, even if it feels at the moment that the anger comes from far too few of us. The crucial thing, of course, is to use the justifiable anger as a fuel for action without letting it degrade into physical violence, because that is one of the main wildfires we are trying to counter.

# One nation, one school board?

To increase employability of graduates, we need uniformity in school education



## ON THE OTHER HAND

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It is admission season, and, once again, cries for quotas and reservations fill the air as students – at every level from playschool upwards all the way to PhD programmes – scramble to get a place in the more sought-after courses and institutions in India's ferociously competitive education system.

The demand-supply gap is staggering, despite the fact that in absolute numbers, India continues to have the largest number of children out of school in any country in the world. The twin issues of accessibility and affordability combine into a deadly double whammy for parents struggling to educate their children. For the poor, access to affordable (free or subsidised) government education is limited due to the absence of anything like the requisite physical and soft infrastructure.

For those who can afford to pay, the challenge of finding a seat for their wards in one of the sought-after schools leads to ridiculous scenes of hysterical parents protesting in the streets and plethora of court cases every year.

### The 30% target

At the higher education level, the situation gets even worse. The Centre has targeted to achieve a 30% enrolment level in higher education by 2020. If one in every three eligible students who have completed high school actually wants to join college in three years from now, we need to create 40 million university seats.

Despite the spectacular growth in private sector education – the education sector had gross revenues of ₹7,80,000 crore as of last fiscal and is growing at a clip of 20% per year according to research by India Ratings – we are still millions of seats short of the target.

So, quotas. Everybody wants one, and with everybody now figuring out which political button to push to get



what they want, the pie is getting awfully hard to slice and dice further. Apart from the constitutionally mandated affirmative action reservations for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, we have all kinds of other quotas at the State level, from straight-forward caste-based quotas to shares for the economically backward, the socially disadvantaged, the physically challenged, the religiously persecuted and so on and so forth.

### State-based quota

Last week, we saw an interesting new wrinkle added to the whole quota debate. In Tamil Nadu, the State government decreed that as much as 85% of engineering and medical college seats in the State will be reserved for students who had completed the qualifying exam – the XII standard or equivalent certificate – under the State's own board of secondary education. The move followed a dismal showing by State-board students in the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test for admission to engineering/medical degree programmes.

Simultaneously, in Delhi – where Delhi University college seats, particularly the top-rated ones, are arguably the world's most difficult to get into, with cut-offs in some colleges approaching a ridiculous 100% – the Aam Aadmi Party government passed a resolution in the State Assembly demanding that Delhi University reserve 80% of its seats for students from Delhi.

Of course, DU, being a Central university, can thumb its nose at the AAP

government, but the genie has been unleashed from the bottle. Sooner rather than later, the demand for this latest take on a quota will get political and somebody will cave in somewhere, setting off a chain reaction of court cases and stays.

The simple solution, of course, is to create adequate seats so that everybody who wants a degree can get one. Like all simple solutions, this is not as simple as it appears.

The higher education sector is currently facing a simultaneous but different crisis – hundreds of engineering seats are going a-begging, as word gets around that the graduates of these colleges are proving to be unemployable in the job market. Hence, employers apply stricter filters to decide on who gets a job offer and who doesn't. So, we need both quantity and quality, something that even the private sector seems unable to deliver at the moment.

### Looking for Filters

So, some filters will have to be applied in sieving out candidates, which is why these quota and reservation demands pop up in the first place. The trouble is that our education system, whether at the school or college level, has never been able to convince stakeholders that it performs its human resource development function of equipping a candidate with the appropriate skills and knowledge uniformly enough, so that potential employers/admissions officers do not need to apply additional filters.

They simply do not buy the argument that anyone with a high school degree is good enough to become a doctor or engineer or manager or lawyer, which is why we have an alphabet soup of other filtration exams like NEET, JEE, CAT, CLAT and so on.

Using the eminent domain powers of the state to ramrod quotas is simply not going to work in such a situation. The only workable solution is to ensure uniformity in the quality of education, at least at the school level to start with.

This means, for instance, going for a nationwide CBSE system, instead of State boards of varying quality. The UP government had even proposed this. Perhaps, like many of its other good ideas like Aadhaar, DBT and MGNREGA, the Modi government can pick it up and execute it.

# Around the world in eight books

A reading list in defence of the 'global novel'



## WORD COUNTS

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If by chance you are still looking for a summer reading list, Adam Kirsch's brilliant, and short, inquiry, *The Global Novel: Writing the World in the 21st Century*, may provide one. Many of these are beloved texts that have been around for years, but his particular line of analysis to defend "the global novel" brings them together in a pattern that makes a reread a relook: Orhan Pamuk's *Snow*, Haruki Murakami's *1Q84*, Roberto Bolano's *2666*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*, Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*, Michel Houellebecq's *The Possibility of an Island*, and Elena Ferrante's Neapolitan novels.

### Goethe's summons

The collection itself suggests the definition of 'world literature' that Kirsch, a literary critic, is alluding to when he begins by introducing the first known use of the phrase, by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe in the early 19th century: "National literature is now a rather unmeaning term; the epoch of world literature is at hand and everyone must strive to hasten its approach."

It took its time, but the epoch is evidently upon us, made all the more easier with the Internet, with a hugely successful novel anywhere in the world making a splash everywhere else – and with the ubiquity of e-readers, with most books now just a click away from download. Kirsch, of course, raises the larger question of whether Goethe was talking simply of this sharing of reading matter across languages and cultures, or whether he hoped "for something more – a truly cosmopolitan literature, in which national origin would have ceased to matter at all".

Goethe may well have had a more global consciousness in mind, but the point about "national origin" and how much it matters has been a cause of much anxiety among critics, though in



a rather different way than the cosmopolitan literature ideal. It thickened the air in India, for instance, in the years after Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* won global acclaim and the Booker Prize in the early 1980s, and hit fever pitch each time an Indian writer got a big advance – especially Vikram Seth for *A Suitable Boy* and Arundhati Roy for *The God of Small Things* in the 1990s. These and other books were unnecessarily sought to be diminished on the unfounded and pointless charge of being written for a readership elsewhere, in the West – and by implication for somehow being inauthentic, or untrue to their subject matter.

### Foreignness of novel

Set aside the other debate on writing in English being privileged over that in other Indian languages – but at a global level, it is still difficult to explain how one literary novel hits a chord in such diverse territories, while another equally (if not more) sparkling novel does not. Is it because a particular sort of novel plays down the particulars of its non-Western context?

Or, as Kirsch sums it up as he counts down the various charges levelled: "This is one of the commonest charges against world literature: By making foreignness into a literary commodity, it prevents the possibility of any true encounter with difference. In this way, it

duplicates the original sin of translation itself, which brings the distant close only by erasing the very language that marks it as distant to begin with." Taken further, there is the fear of literature being "ethnically branded", so that once a particular sort of writing from a country is successful globally, publishers will seek only more of that – and perhaps, in turn, readers in the writer's home country too will condition their reading preferences accordingly. The critiques are endless, and Kirsch takes them on in the only meaningful way – by reading these "global novels".

### Stripped for export?

Take Murakami, around whom speculation settles as a yearly ritual in the days leading to the announcement of the Nobel Prize, but whose writing is sometimes criticised back home in Japan for Japanese prose that is, as Kirsch puts it, "stripped for export". It is not that simple. Comparing Murakami's magnum opus *1Q84* to Pamuk's *Snow*, Kirsch notes that while the plot and the characters of the latter are necessarily particular to Turkey, "the urban isolates of *1Q84* could almost as easily be living in New York or London" as in Tokyo. This, he concludes, is not a distortion inflicted by Murakami's vaulting ambition to be something to everyone, but is perhaps a reflection of the common threads in our lives and curiosities worldwide.

He calls Adichie's and Hamid's novels "migrant literature", different from the immigrant literature of writers such as Jhumpa Lahiri, whereby "America is a stage of life rather than a final destination" in the characters' lives. As a contrast, there are the novels of Ferrante, whose success as a global writer is intriguing. Her novels are very strongly located in Naples, she uses local dialects in the original Italian, and she refuses to reveal her identity, thereby denying her overseas publishers the big marketing essential, the book tour.

In their particularity, her novels speak to common human emotions, of course, but they also, Kirsch helps us understand, suggest we must "see fates in an international perspective", just as the other books listed here do. His tour is an invitation to read some of these books, and work out our individual appraisals of the appeal, and importance, of the global novel.

# Beyond the politics: when 'things' proliferate

When historians look back, ours may be the age known for embracing materialism without anxieties, without guilt



## SERENDIPITIES

KEERTHIK SASIDHARAN  
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In a hundred years from now, when either our own future selves (if some of us arise from our cryogenic frozen sleeps) or those of our bemused descendants look back at times past, and more particularly, at our present, how will they interpret it? Will this moment – despite our political passions and protests – be a mere afterthought, a roadkill in their rear-view mirror as they race into the future?

Our self-importance may convince us that we live in important times, but it is likely that the very events that vividly occupy our present – like award *vaapsi*, kiss of love, beef lynchings and #notinmyname – will have none of the emotional resonance we ascribe to them today. In parts, this attenuation is inevit-

able, a function of time decay – the farther away we get from an event, the less it means to us – that afflicts all human memories. To fight this inevitable erosion of memory, we insist on documentation and historical records. And the further back we recede, the more dearly held facts become stories, and, even further back, stories become foundational mythologies. But more fundamentally, these protests of our present may end up being read in an altogether different light, yielding very different conclusions and different questions.

### The present, as seen in future

These protests in the name of freedom – to eat what they wish, to love whom they choose, to be governed without corruption – might seem to be efforts by an emergent middle class which intuitively two conflicting things. One, they recognise the inability of conventional democratic politics to speak up for their evolution from members of a farming society two generations ago into a mem-

ber class, a spur strong enough for many of them to abandon the quiet comforts of an urban life to make political interventions that demand sacrifices. The result is that a protest without a demonstrated commitment to bear even more pain in the future merely betrays what it really is: an act of expurgation, a form of catharsis, an exercise in simulated radicalism. Perhaps one story that will puzzle our future historian will be about why the middle class was unable to transmute disparate sources of public angst into a progressive ethos.

More unfortunately, our future historian might look back at our present and read it as a great age of political revivalism among the Hindu middle class. This may seem as no more different than the years after the riots and free love of 1960s when America saw a consolidation of a 'silent' Christian majority led



by the Goldwater-Nixon-Reagan trio (à la the Advani-Vajpayee-Modi trio in our times). But such readings are perilous for they overfit meagre data into a particular model of political consolidation that needn't work anywhere else. That

said, a more expansive sort of interpreter will probably see a more historically familiar play unfold.

### A slow-moving revolution?

To this reader, the democratisation of the Indian polity and the social emancipation since 1947 will come across as a slow-moving revolution, which also birthed an inevitable and slow-moving counter-revolution. Similar to Europe in 19th and early 20th century and to Egypt during the Arab Spring, post-liberalisation India will come across as an interplay of an equilibrating set of countervailing pressures that struggle for short-lived phases of superiorities.

Another kind of historian, perhaps one with a greater sensitivity to individual lives amidst the churn of events, will see our present as an era when postcolonial mentalities yielded something new and as yet unnamed. To this historian, our age might seem as a period when some Indians – after many assorted efforts to imagine themselves as a member of Eurocentric modernity – began to recognise the need for a form of critical authenticity. Such quests to birth something new inevit-

ably might lead to more divisions, perhaps violence, and demand new kinds of language to think of ourselves as a collective. Ultimately, when it emerges – much like 'freedom' did in 1947 – it may arrive in the form of a mishapen beauty that conceals as much as it reveals.

More fundamentally, an interpreter of Indian history might recognise that the real story of our age is not necessarily the story of its politics but something too visible to be seen: ours has become an age where 'things' proliferate. From teapoons, shoelaces, computers, phones and so on, the things that make up the material world we live in are now produced with increasingly finer gradations that only a class of aesthetes can distinguish.

The result of this explosion of 'things' is that our economic arrangements, our ideas of self-worth, our taxation regimes, our private envies and public institutions – all scramble to keep pace with an increasing diversity of choices and objects. Ours may be the age known for embracing materialism without anxieties and, more strikingly, without guilt.