

14 THE EDITORIAL PAGE

WORDLY WISE

WHEN YOU ARE DEALING WITH HUMANITY AS A FAMILY THERE'S NO QUESTION OF INTERMARRIAGE. IT'S ONE HUMAN BEING MARRYING ANOTHER. —MALCOM X

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

A healthy partnership

Strengthening of public health services must go along with leveraging of private sector resources



AMITABH KANT

I READ WITH great interest the article by Sujatha Rao ('A strange hybrid', IE, August 11) in which she has pointed to the so-called shortcomings in Niti Aayog's draft proposal offering space in select district hospitals to private players through a transparent, competitive Private-Public Partnership (PPP) framework for the treatment of non-communicable diseases (NCDs). Engaging with alternative points of view is an essential part of a robust policy-making and when it is articulated by Rao, a former Union Health Secretary, it merits detailed consideration.

While she points out the potential cost and equity implications of partnering with "profit maximising" private providers, it is inconceivable that she is unaware of the failings of our publicly provided health services. The recent Gorakhpur tragedy is just another reminder of the tragic consequences ultimately borne by our citizens. After decades of effort at strengthening our health system, we are still grappling with the rampant absenteeism of doctors — ranging from 28 per cent to 68 per cent in different states. Community Health Centres report a 65 per cent vacancy rate of specialists since governments are simply unable to attract and retain talent. Even where we are able to get them to attend to their jobs, it has been shown by Jishnu Das and his colleagues in their study, the effort put in by qualified doctors in government facilities is far worse than their private counterparts. Our tertiary facilities are disproportionately overloaded. The NSSO's 71st round registered a decline in the share of in-patient services provided by government-owned facilities in 12 out of 20 major states in rural areas and in 17 out of 21 states in urban areas.

All this while, almost as if by default, the private sector continues to grow at 15 per cent per annum, accounting for 58 per cent of rural and 68 per cent of urban in-patient care with 80-90 per cent of health facilities and a five-fold higher doctor density. In reality, we have abandoned the patient to negotiate this maze, where her bargaining power vis-à-vis the provider is the lowest. Little wonder then that 37 million people face impoverishment on account of health-

related expenditure.

While this happens, the increase in government expenditure to 2-2.5 per cent of GDP for the expansion of public health services fails to fructify, and has hovered in the range of 0.9-1.3 per cent from 1990 till date. The Niti Aayog is also for enhanced government expenditure on health. In fact, the Aayog, in its draft Three Year Action Agenda, has urged the government to treble its health budget by 2019-20.

Non-communicable diseases account for 60 per cent of the premature mortality in India and cardiovascular diseases, pulmonary diseases, cancer, as well as hypertension, diabetes and stroke are among the leading killers, accounting for four of the top five causes of death, according to the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation. Yet the allocation in the Union budget to meet the growing need for NCD care is barely 3 per cent of the total allocation of Rs 20,000 crore under the National Health Mission (NHM). Take cancer as an example: India has 750 radiotherapy units against a requirement of 1,300. Even amongst the existing units, many are ill-equipped. In the prestigious AIIMS at New Delhi, we have 1.33 lakh cancer patients seeking care, of which only 36,000 get admitted with the number of beds available for chemotherapy being a mere 36. In my view, the urgency with which the supply shortage requires to be plugged precludes an either/or approach. It requires the strengthening public sector while also leveraging private resources and capacities.

Supply gaps cannot be addressed in the short term. Long-term measures are being put in place through several initiatives, including restructuring the Medical Council of India. However, the intent of this exercise is to experiment with an innovative PPP model to develop capabilities at the district level. The aim is to ensure that district hospitals provide basic services for the diagnosis and treatment of NCDs at affordable rates or free of cost for those patients for whom the government chooses to cover such costs through insurance or through budgetary grants. This will help decongest tertiary level health facilities, help in the geographic dispersal of skills

required for NCD care and provide quality care to people closer home at a lower cost.

PPP models suffer from a lack of evaluation. However, the lack of evidence must not be read as failures. In fact, several PPP initiatives including in the areas of emergency transport services, mobile medical units, provision of free diagnostics service initiative, have been successful as well popular.

Another apprehension is the long-run impact on healthcare costs, since private providers do have incentives to over provide high-cost interventions. Prima facie, this is a compelling argument. But if we situate this in the current context where a majority of patients already go to private facilities, the direction of the cost implication is not exactly clear. We hope that such experimentation would provide data and evidence that would inform the future policy direction.

Global evidence may not be sufficient to determine whether the private or public sector is more efficient in service delivery for health. In the interim, how many lives do we sacrifice to satisfy ideologically-driven pursuits? The Aayog is determined to push for the transformation of our health sector and this PPP framework is only a small part of a larger strategy. We are trying to work with all stakeholders to focus on health outcomes with rankings to measure incremental annual improvements, fostering a competitive spirit amongst states. A similar index has been developed to measure the performance of district hospitals. Financial incentives have been linked to both these indices. We are partnering with states to provide technical support in order to bring about transformational change in their health systems over the next three years.

The strengthening of public sector services must go hand-in-hand with leveraging the resources of all players in the Indian health system. Constructive suggestions are always welcome, but arguments that seek to shoot down innovative efforts, without providing an alternate strategy are frozen in outdated ideology and are self-defeating.

The writer is CEO of Niti Aayog

BELLWETHER IN CRISIS

Sikka's exit from Infosys points to unresolved issues of corporate governance. Industry needs to address them urgently

CONFLICT BETWEEN MANagements and promoters or founders, in India or elsewhere, is not new. And it can be a bruising affair. But what is extraordinary about the abrupt decision by Vishal Sikka, MD and CEO of Infosys Technologies, to quit, is not just that he had the backing of the storied firm's board but that his move has been triggered not by boardroom battles but by skirmishes involving one of the influential founders of the company, N.R. Narayana Murthy. Sikka has said that the "continuous drum beat of distractions and negativity" over the last several months was weighing down the company's and his own ability to carry out positive changes and to stay focused on value creation. The first non-founder CEO of Infosys has said that addressing the noise was by itself damaging and that he would prefer, instead, to allow the company to move on. The charges, aired mainly by N.R. Narayana Murthy, related to overseas acquisitions, spending, executive pay-outs, severance pay and deteriorating standards of corporate governance. It is unfortunate that Sikka had to leave against such a backdrop — Infosys was, for long, perceived as not just a bellwether company for the IT industry but also as an exemplar of corporate governance standards. And it couldn't have come at a more challenging time, given that India's IT industry is attempting to make a break from the past so as not to be rendered obsolete. Infosys may find that transition more difficult now.

For someone like Murthy, seen as a role model by young entrepreneurs, it must surely hurt to know that the board of the company he helped promote has pinned the blame for Sikka's exit on him, while also alleging that his campaign against the board undermined the company's efforts to transform itself. The board claims that it had engaged in a dialogue to resolve his concerns. One of the issues which have been raised is whether he ought to have a disproportionate influence on the management of the company. From a moral equity standpoint, he certainly has a role, but leadership is also about letting go and allowing a new set of professionals and managers to take control and flourish while giving them time and space to make the transition.

It is commendable that the Infy board chose to back the professional CEO in this battle. But questions are bound to be raised about whether the board could have been more assertive earlier. What should worry investors, policy-makers and the government is that conflicts like these in some of India's most respected firms run not just the risk of value destruction but in some ways are a mirror image of the underlying reality in many listed firms in India. The fracas in Infosys should serve as a reality check.

JUSTICE FOR HADIYA

By prioritising shadowy fears of terror and 'love jihad' over an individual's rights, court goes against its own grain

THE SUPREME COURT has ordered an investigation by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) into a possible "conspiracy" which involves Hindu women in Kerala being converted to Islam. That an anti-terrorism investigative agency has been tasked with ascertaining the veracity of religious conversions is problematic enough. That this order comes in a case where the Kerala High Court has questioned a 24-year-old adult woman's autonomy and freedom to choose the course of her life is doubly disquieting. In May this year, the Kerala High Court annulled the marriage between Shafiq Jehan and Hadiya, who was known as Akhila before she chose to convert to Islam. In doing so, it argued that a woman's "marriage being the most important decision in her life, [it] can also be taken only with the active involvement of her parents" — a judgement that enforces the widespread patriarchal understanding of women being the forever wards and property of their parents. Hadiya's father had argued that his daughter had come under the influence of radical Islamists, while she has told the court that she converted to Islam of her own volition. More disturbingly, while declaring the marriage as a "sham", the high court suggested that Jehan had links with the Islamic State extremists on the basis of the WhatsApp groups he had been a part of — a police investigation had not found any criminal element in Hadiya's conversion or marriage.

When Jehan moved the SC, he was asking it to adjudicate on the wisdom of the HC judgement. The court, instead, chose to bring in the NIA to probe whether there is a larger, dubious pattern in conversions of Hindu women to Islam. Why was it moved to do so remains unclear, and invites suspicions of judicial overreach. And what of Hadiya? Has she had a chance to argue her case? Since the May order of the high court, she has been under house arrest in her parents' home, forbidden to meet her husband or anyone else. Neither has the SC intervened to free her of this illegal incarceration, nor has it bothered to listened to her account of the case.

There have been countless cases in this country's history when the courts have stood up for the freedom of the individual against the diktat of the community, family or state. By choosing to prioritise shadowy fears of "love jihad" over a flesh-and-blood individual's rights, the court has gone against its own grain. It runs the risk of feeding into a communal narrative, which is growing in strength. It has set a dangerous precedent that can surely be used to curb the agency and autonomy of Indian women. The Kerala HC, in its order, had said that "we are not satisfied that it is safe to let Akhila [be] free to decide what she wants in her life." The Supreme Court must reinstate the freedom of this Indian citizen.

REMAKING THE BOARD

BCCI is resisting reform, but the case for an overhaul is strong

WHY WORK LIKE a salaried professional when you can run bills running into crores in an honorary position? The Committee of Administrators, in its status report on the implementation of the Lodha committee recommendations, has shown that the BCCI is a rather indulgent paymaster. The Indian cricket board steadfastly refuses to turn professional despite valiant attempts by the Supreme Court. In the last two years, the board has bled Rs 4.62 crore on the travel expenses of office-bearers, Rs 3.23 crore on just a couple of them. And it is not only the officials but their assistants too who have enjoyed the generous daily allowances and travel expenses. With the board bearing the cost of air travel, hotel, airport transfers, food and the local commute, why are officials paid \$700 as daily allowance? To put that figure in perspective, the Indian cricketer gets only \$125 as DA.

There are questions of accountability here. It's time to get in the professionals who get paid to do the job. All talk of serving for the love of the sport sounds false. It's a pattern that keeps repeating. When questions arose against the panel consisting of Sourav Ganguly, Sachin Tendulkar and V.V.S. Laxman who selected the Indian coach, they tried to evade accountability by saying they were doing their best in an honorary position.

The CoA has spoken about the need to delineate functions in a way that a professional management of full-time employees takes care of the everyday functioning of the board, and office-bearers who are rotated out. It makes no sense for an official to decide everything from broadcast deals to looking after players' needs. It's time to bring in a leaner system within the board, so that resources are used more judiciously.



AAKASH JOSHI

THE LEAST PROBLEMATIC aspect of Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's statement implying that Muslim residents offering *namaz* in public are comparable to police stations in the state becoming associated with the majority religion is that it is a simple logical fallacy.

The "false equivalence" between ordinary citizens exercising their freedom of religion and the co-opting of police stations for *janmashthami* celebrations is, however, symptomatic of a deeper malaise. At its core, it goes towards confirming the fears — often unstated — that the ideological underpinnings of Adityanath and the BJP will erode the values of India's constitutional morality.

For most Indians, the *thana* is the site of their most basic — and often most important — interactions with the state. It is the primary port of call for those seeking justice, whether victims of petty crime or community-based violence. While a section of the population, among the middle classes and elites, has been able to minimise its interaction with the state, having seceded into private networks of privilege, security and gated enclaves, the police station and the *tehsil* office remain essential to the lives of the poor majority. And in a state like UP, where the government has functioned through political patronage, they become all the more important. It is in the impartiality and efficiency of this primary unit that governments, and even the state itself, are judged on that most ephemeral and essential of electoral is-

A THANA COLOURED SAFFRON

UPCM's encouragement of religious displays in police stations is troubling

sues — law and order.

Given their importance, the UP CM's attempt to draw a parallel between ordinary public spaces and police stations can have one of two explanations. First, that he feels his government is genuinely incapable of enforcing the propriety that officers and offices of the law should hold: "Agar mai sadak par Eid ke din namaz padhne pe rok nahi laga sakta to mujhe koi adhikar nahi ki mai thanon mein jamshatami ke parv ko rokun." Adityanath said at an event in Lucknow. It is highly improbable that any chief minister, let alone a "strong" one like Yogi, will make statements conveying helplessness.

The second, and more obvious, explanation is this: The CM's statement is a thinly veiled message to minorities. The police station is no longer, even symbolically, a secular entity. The display of religious identity and belief in an ordinary public space by Muslims will be met by a majoritarian government, uniform and all. That the Constitution of India accords minorities religious and educational rights precisely because they may be under threat, real or perceived, from the majority seems to have no bearing on the UP CM's philosophy of governance. By overtly backing the communalisation of the *thana*, Adityanath has hinted that he sees the last UP assembly election result as more than just a change in government.

For many, the declaration of Adityanath as CM was the culmination of a campaign designed to exclude minorities: The BJP did

not field a single Muslim candidate in UP and the PM himself drew binaries between *shamshans* and *kabristans*. Despite, or even because of the campaign, the party won a magnificent majority and elevated arguably its most prominently controversial Hindutva leader (of "love jihad" fame) to the helm of India's most populous state. In ways both subtle and blunt, it was clear that the Hindus of UP were being asked to vote on lines that were saffron-hued.

That they did so overwhelmingly certainly has a bearing on the statements we hear from the CM. The unit of governance no longer appears to be the citizen and its purpose no longer to protect her/his fundamental rights. The individual is increasingly just an extension of their religion, and the character and attitude of the institutions of the state towards them may well be determined by that ascriptive identity.

A democratic polity, however, is not just about electoral victories and defeats. It is governed by a set of larger principles, more enduring than a five-year cycle. For India, those principles are enshrined in its Constitution. As the temporary occupant of a constitutional office, the UP CM owes at least symbolic fidelity to its values. In doing so, he may find more than just the ability to make logically consistent arguments. He could, in fact, ensure that "sabka saath sabka vikas" becomes more than just a tragic punchline.

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AUGUST 19, 1977, FORTY YEARS AGO

BONUS RESTORED

THE GOVERNMENT DECIDED to restore the 8.33 per cent minimum bonus. This will apply to the accounting year beginning on any day in 1976. An ordinance will be issued for the purpose. The question of bonus for 1977-78 will be decided in the light of the new integrated national policy on wages, incomes and prices that the government is formulating. The government also decided to issue a new series of national development bonds to help the people participate in investment for development. The government appealed to workers that they should invest "a fair proportion" of the cash they got through the CDS instalment and bonus in the new series of

national development bonds.

CABINET ARGUMENTS

THE BATTLE FOR bonus was a long one — not for the trade unions and workers alone. There were sharp differences in the Cabinet on the issue. When the proposal for restoring the minimum bonus irrespective of the establishment's profit and loss, was first mooted, the prime minister and the finance minister strongly opposed it. They were against any minimum bonus at all in the present economic situation. They argued this would increase inflationary pressure. But the Union labour, railway and industry ministers were strongly in favour of the 8.33 per cent

minimum bonus. It took all their persuasive power to make the prime minister and the finance minister come round to their view.

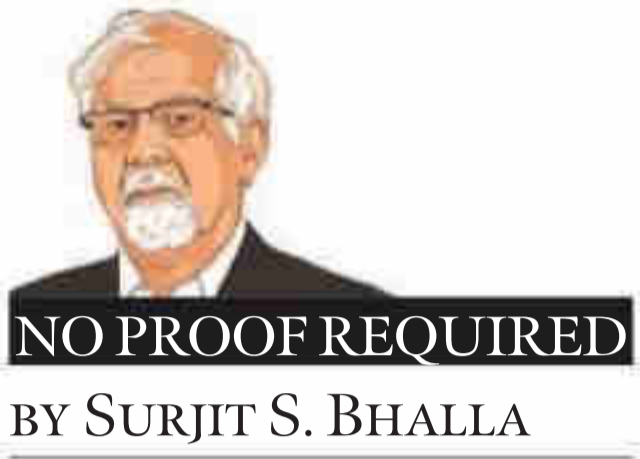
CASE OF OBSCENITY

MANEKA GANDHI, ASSISTANT editor, and Khushwant Singh, consulting editor of *Surya India*, an English magazine in New Delhi, appeared before the judicial magistrate, Alipore, in connection with a case of obscene publication. The case was filed by Nanda Kishore Agarwal, a member of the Cine Film Reforms Association, Calcutta, for allegedly publishing in the March 1977 issue of the magazine an article with some photographs to be obscene.

15 THE IDEAS PAGE

Madness in monetary policy

In India we have a monetary authority that admits to not understanding inflation — but persists in damaging an already weak economy because it does not understand it



IT IS MORE than four years since my column, *Tell me I am mad*, (IE, June 22, 2013) was published. I had written that I found “the economic debate in India, as conducted by the RBI, professionals, and the media, extremely unenlightening. The economy has literally collapsed yet we are not looking for causes and cures.” I left it to the reader to judge whether I was mad, or the policymakers.

I repeat the challenge today. This is in the interests of a healthy debate on economic policy — we have a healthy argument on political and social policy. None of us are very deferential (nor we should be) when it comes to criticising politicians, or those making policy on such diverse subjects as the films we should not see, the beef we should not eat, the cesses we should pay, etc. No one is exempt from criticism — not the PM, not the FM, not the Chief Economic Adviser, no one. Good.

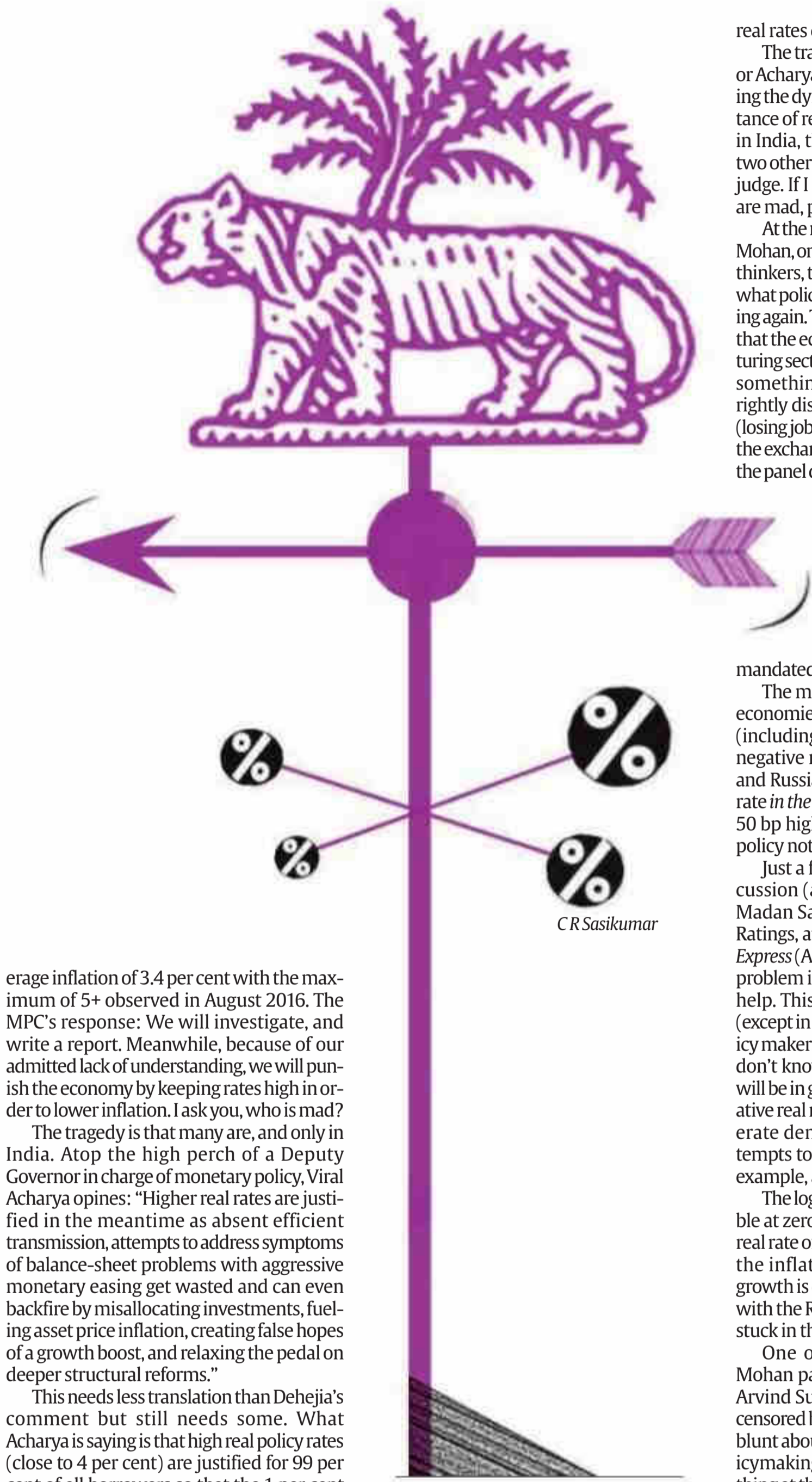
But the moment we criticise the RBI for its monetary policies, we are asked, requested, to “cut it some slack”. Writing in *Mint*, eminent economist Vivek Dehejia asks for restraint, given that the RBI/MPC is only doing its job, and, in his opinion, doing it well. (By implication, the others we criticise, all of them, are either not doing their job, or doing it badly). Dehejia states: “What the critics seem to be missing is that an inflation-targeting monetary policy regime, and inflation forecasting in particular, of necessity, occurs in an environment of uncertainty and long and variable lags of the impact of policy on economic outcomes, all of which conspire to make monetary policy under such a regime an exercise in minimising error, not in achieving a hypothetical optimal outcome.” (August 14).

I know it sounds confusing, and in my opinion, was meant to be. What Dehejia would really like to say is that the MPC (embarrassingly) does not have a clue as to what is going on with inflation. Which is a tragedy of large proportions because their mistaken policy of keeping interest rates high is costing the economy dear, very dear.

I wish Dehejia had been more honest. At a function in Hyderabad four years ago, former governor of the RBI, D. Subbarao said, “Most importantly we also chase monsoon like millions of farmers across the country. So, the monsoon outlook, the monsoon performance is going to be the important factor in determining the RBI policy in the next three months.”

Subbarao was honest in expressing his inability to understand the dynamics of inflation. Unfortunately, honesty about data, or inflation forecasting, or interpretation of data is not something we can “accuse” the present MPC/RBI of. Lack of an honest debate on inflation and monetary policy, is hurting India’s growth, and hurting it badly.

Quite honestly, I am tired of cutting slack for individuals when they are so, so, wrong. Proved wrong not by ideology but continuously, by their own forecasts. The entire sustained decline in inflation from 5+ levels has been missed by the RBI. Last 12 months av-



erage inflation of 3.4 per cent with the maximum of 5+ observed in August 2016. The MPC’s response: We will investigate, and write a report. Meanwhile, because of our admitted lack of understanding, we will punish the economy by keeping rates high in order to lower inflation. I ask you, who is mad?

The tragedy is that many are, and only in India. Atop the high perch of a Deputy Governor in charge of monetary policy, Viral Acharya opines: “Higher real rates are justified in the meantime as absent efficient transmission, attempts to address symptoms of balance-sheet problems with aggressive monetary easing get wasted and can even backfire by misallocating investments, fueling asset price inflation, creating false hopes of a growth boost, and relaxing the pedal on deeper structural reforms.”

This needs less translation than Dehejia’s comment but still needs some. What Acharya is saying is that high real policy rates (close to 4 per cent) are justified for 99 per cent of all borrowers so that the 1 per cent heavily indebted (balance sheet borrowers) cannot benefit from lower rates! Which they cannot — by definition. So why punish the 99 per cent?

How different is Acharya from Subbarao in his assessment of inflation and prescription of policy? And remember, Subbarao was facing a high inflation economy, and the MPC is facing a low, deflation-prone economy — so low that the MPC is honest to admit that they don’t know why it is low, and how did we get there, but are more than willing to prescribe monetary policy that is just plain wrong. (This criticism obviously does not apply to the one MPC member, Ravindra Dholakia, who has consistently warned about the dangers of low inflation and high

The median real policy rate in emerging economies is 0.8 per cent; many economies (including Bangladesh and Vietnam) have negative real policy rates. Excluding Brazil and Russia, India has the highest real policy rate in the world, and the Russian rate is only 50 bp higher. Did bad (or mad?) monetary policy not deserve even a mention?

real rates costing jobs).

The tragedy, or madness, is that the MPC, or Acharya, are not alone in not understanding the dynamics of inflation and the importance of real interest rates. In India, but only in India, they have company. Let me relate two other pieces of evidence, and you be the judge. If I am mad, say so; equally, if others are mad, please say so.

At the release of an edited book by Rakesh Mohan, one of India’s leading economists and thinkers, there ensued a panel discussion on what policies were needed to get India growing again. The eminent panel fully recognised that the economy, particularly the manufacturing sector; was in a complete funk, and that something needed to be done. The panel rightly discussed the nature of the problem (losing jobs to Bangladesh, etc.) and discussed the exchange rate policy at some length. (But the panel did not dare note that the strong rupee may have been caused by the irresponsible MPC). They also discussed the importance of sun-spots affecting jobs; what was rather surprising is that the discussion did not involve one mention of the abnormally high RBI mandated policy rates of interest.

The median real policy rate in emerging economies (including Bangladesh and Vietnam) have negative real policy rates. Excluding Brazil and Russia, India has the highest real policy rate in the world, and the Russian rate is only 50 bp higher. Did bad (or mad?) monetary policy not deserve even a mention?

Just a few days later after this panel discussion (and perhaps emboldened by it), Madan Sabnavis, Chief Economist at Care Ratings, authored an article in the *Financial Express* (August 5) which argued: When the problem is of demand, rate cuts don’t really help. This kind of argument is unheard of (except in India). What the (non-Indian) policy makers do recognise, and say, is that they don’t know how effective monetary policy will be in generating demand at zero, or negative real rates. But they have to try and generate demand through various other attempts to bring borrowing rates down (for example, asset purchases).

The logic, and uncertainty, that is applicable at zero or real rates is not applicable at a real rate of 4 per cent. Not appropriate when the inflation is well below target, when growth is considerably below potential, and with the RBI’s capacity utilisation estimates stuck in the low 70’s for over two years.

One of the members of the Rakesh Mohan panel was Chief Economic Adviser Arvind Subramanian who apparently was censored by the Ministry of Finance for being blunt about facts pertaining to the RBI’s policymaking. He felt constrained to say anything at the panel (on interest rates), but has opened up with a detailed analysis about what ails the RBI, and the economy.

One final question about madness: Why is it that monetary policy-makers at the RBI can delve into something outside their domain, fiscal policy, and get cheered for doing so; but when fiscal policy-makers comment on monetary policy, they are restrained from talking? The RBI is right in talking about fiscal policy; and Subramanian is equally right in criticising monetary policy. Let truth win.

The writer is contributing editor, The Indian Express, and senior India analyst at Observatory Group, a New York-based macro policy advisory group. Views are personal

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

“The US is trying to help India defeat Pakistan’s rightful stance on the Kashmir dispute and divert the eyes of the world from the atrocities being committed by the Indian security forces.” —DAWN

Past and Prejudice

Pakistan has rejected rationalists like Sir Syed Ahmed Khan and its blasphemy law makes British rule seem better



KHALED AHMED

I MUST CONFESS my admiration for the Indian politician Shashi Tharoor. It has a lot to do with my “inebriation with the spoken word”. The occasion was the May 2015 Oxford Union debate, “Britain owes Reparations to Her Former Colonies” which I saw on video. After Tharoor was done with his speech, there was no doubt who had won the day. He has followed up with a book, *An Era of Darkness*, which I find convincing and informative in equal measure. It is a clever dig at Nobel Laureate V.S. Naipaul who wrote not so glowingly about India in *An Area of Darkness* (the book was initially banned in India). But Naipaul went on to even the scales by writing *Among the Believers*, which caused much consternation in Pakistan. This writer, who had given the book a positive review, was sent messages that barely concealed their threats.

Imperialism can be judged positively if you undertake a comparative analysis of occupying nations. But colonisation has never been without extractions. Tharoor won the debate not only because of his brilliant style but also because his facts were convincing. In his book, he is careful to take account of the “good” that India’s enslavement did to a rather decadent India under Muslim rule. But it is the thesis of “divide and rule”, generally accepted by those who passionately desired to keep India united after the British left the country, that binds Indians today and informs Indian nationalism. Tharoor sums up the catechism clearly: “The creation and perpetuation of Hindu-Muslim antagonism was the most significant accomplishment of British imperial policy. The project of *divide et impera* would reach its culmination in the horrors of Partition that eventually accompanied the collapse of British authority in 1947.”

Pakistan has a similar exceptionalism that opposes the Indian interpretation of the Partition. This view holds that the British Raj sided with India — the last Viceroy Mountbatten and his wife were too close to Nehru — by tilting the formation of the state boundaries in its favour and depriving the new state of Pakistan of Kashmir. People like me in Pakistan — who had to contend with Muslim rationalists like Syed Ahmed Khan being rejected in favour of hard Islam after the Objectives Resolution of 1949 — can’t take the textbook explanations of what happened with an easy conscience. An important book I read in 2002 was *Prejudice and Pride*:

School histories of the freedom struggle in India and Pakistan by Krishna Kumar who remains for me the most perceptive living Indian. He says: “A human child is ‘socialised’ by his parents through a certain process of conditioning to elicit from him a behaviour of obedience. Similarly a state too undertakes conditioning to produce obedient citizens. It uses history to create a uniform mind (national identity) and puts a carefully cultured version of it in the school textbooks.”

I can speak more confidently about what happened after the British Raj in Pakistan than I can about India, post-1947. Our national poet and philosopher Allama Muhammad Iqbal — who was knighted by the Raj and didn’t give up his knighthood like Rabindranath Tagore after the Jallianwala Bagh massacre — was supposed to be our guide on ideology. In his lectures he had “reconstructed” Islam by modifying certain ancient edicts, a modernising revision which the post-1947 state of Pakistan rejected. What stares us in the face now is what Pakistan rejected of Iqbal. In his defiance, we haven’t stoned women for adultery, haven’t cut hands for stealing and feel bad about letting down our ideology. But even Iran, where women were once stoned for adultery, has had to give up this practice.

The Penal Code of the Raj was ruined by introducing into it a matter that haunts the state today. The blasphemy law demonises the state and the law that bans banks from charging interest hurts the economy — Syed Ahmed Khan and Iqbal had argued that charging interest does not violate the scripture. Khushwant Singh who lived in Lahore till 1947 wrote that Hindus and Muslims never mixed socially and that wasn’t because of “divide and rule” of the Raj. But the Raj has started looking better as Christians leave Pakistan to avoid being brutalised by the Blasphemy Law.

India has veered right and the tensions that emanate from its damaged pluralism are mitigated by the country’s economy: India has a growth rate that makes it attractive to the world, which then overlooks Hindutva. It might seem that the world finds India attractive because it is not ruled by Muslims. But that is not the reason. Turkey’s growth rate has absolved President Recep Tayyip Erdogan as he rolls back Kemalism — which I find strangely comparable to the British Raj. Turkey started late but will catch up with India where Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen is being subjected to censorship. Of course, India can’t be compared to what is happening to the Islamic world. But it can start looking worse than the British Raj for people like journalist Saeed Naqvi. He has spelt out his reasons in his recent book, *Being the Other*.

The writer is consulting editor, Newsweek Pakistan

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

UNFAIR TO ANSARI

THIS REFERS TO the article, ‘Prisoner of binary’ (IE, August 18). The writer very cleverly side-steps the real issue of intolerance masquerading as “deshbhakti”. He paints the debate in the simple binary of “cultural nationalism” (as espoused by the RSS) and Western-indoctrinated-liberalism (apparently our former VP Hamid Ansari is guilty of this). The RSS chooses to define Indians as “one people”. India has never been the country of “one people” yet it is a nation — herein lies its beauty. The RSS project goes against this uniqueness of the country. The writer forgets that Hamid Ansari’s father Abdul Aziz Ansari rejected Jinnah’s offer of a lucrative posting in Pakistan and stayed back in India. Hamid Ansari was instrumental in isolating Pakistan in the UN after the Babri Masjid destruction and the same Hamid Ansari was in the forefront of protests against the forced exodus of Kashmiri Pandits from the valley.

Indrapratin Roy, via e-mail

BREEDING HOSTILITY

THIS REFERS TO the news report, ‘Spirit of secularism is under attack’ (IE, August 17). There is no doubt that the idea of nation as envisioned by the country’s founding is under threat from forces that are fiercely hostile to composite national culture. The present dispensation is reluctant to rein in those who harass minorities and Dalits.

Samiul Qadri, Bikaner

PUBLIC UTILITIES

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, ‘Going off track’ (IE, August 18). The metro rail is a

LETTER OF THE WEEK

LOOK WITHIN

THIS REFERS TO the article, ‘My India has changed’ (IE, August 15). The Congress Party’s account of tolerance has been less than exemplary. But that’s no cause for exonerating the BJP. It’s clear that the RSS is driving the BJP’s agenda of Hindutva. The silence of the PM over much of the happenings is disturbing. Donald Trump’s silence on violence by white supremacists in the US evoke criticism from major think tanks in the US. What’s holding back the so-called intelligentsia that is helping the PM to implement policies. Why was the PM silent on the UP government’s diktat to madrasas? With half its term over, it should be introspection time for the government.

Ashok Goswami, Mumbai

public utility, not a business. This is why E. Sreedharan said, “Private players look for a return of around 12-15 per cent, while no metro project has yielded an investment return of more than 3 per cent.” This also holds true for other public utilities like road, power and water resources. It is very unlikely that the PPP model will deliver in these sectors. The country’s experience with PPP also suggests the same.

Suchak D. Patel, Ahmedabad

The triumph and tragedy

Celebratory lights of the first I-Day were extinguished by darkness of Partition



SEVENTY YEARS AGO on August 15, 1947, I mingled with jubilant crowds in the streets of Delhi. The Union Jack was lowered, the Indian tricolour fluttered in the air. I was a 16-year-old girl in a unique moment in our history.

It is impossible to convey the sense of pride I felt to the present generation who did not have to endure the humiliation of living in a subject nation. I felt the elation of a long-cherished dream come true. Mounted police were trying to keep a semblance of order. A stranger saved me from being trampled by a horse. The whole scene around me was hazy with the dust kicked up by the gathering. It is engraved in my memory like an Impressionist painting.

Growing up in enslaved India, I witnessed our journey towards freedom. I saw the exhilaration of the Quit India movement of 1942 and the misery caused by the Bengal famine of 1943. In the winter of 1945 the saga of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and his Indian National Army took the country by storm during the Red Fort trial of three officers — a Hindu, a Muslim, a Sikh.

enabled me to be in Delhi at the moment of Independence. I was born in Dhaka and grew up in Calcutta. After my school-leaving exam, I had come to spend a holiday in Delhi with the family of my paternal uncle Nirad C. Chaudhuri. Uncle Nirad was an admirer of the British Empire. As August 15 approached, I felt apprehensive I would not be allowed to take part in the Independence festivities. However, Uncle Nirad said that if I wished to join the “mafficking” I was free to do so.

I was overjoyed. At midnight on August 14-15, I went to our neighbour’s flat and listened to Nehru’s moving “tryst with destiny” speech. Early next morning I went out with my two cousins, Dhruva and Kirti, to take part in the popular celebrations. Late into the night, utterly exhausted, we trudged back towards home. The roads were by now deserted but all the houses were lit up with lamps as if it was Diwali. Kirti broke the silence of the night by reciting Tagore’s famous poem *Shah Jahan*: “Gone are you today, O Emperor, your empire has vanished like a dream, your throne lies in ruins.” The poem goes on to say that the mem-

ories of the mighty soldiers whose footsteps shook the earth now mingled with the dust on the streets of Delhi. We related this poem to the fall of the once invincible British raj.

No sooner had the celebratory lights of Independence Day been extinguished that Delhi was plunged into the darkness of unprecedented communal violence. Smoke billowed from devastated neighbourhoods.

One morning in late August, my two cousins and I got into trouble as we were cycling towards All India Radio. My cousin Kirti said, “Didi, mind your sari, people are staring at you.” But it was not a case of my sari billowing in the wind. We were soon stopped by the military police. They told us a curfew had been imposed and instructed us to get out of the violence-torn locality immediately. I had never cycled so fast in my life. After many detours, we eventually found our way home with the help of a tongawallah.

The train journey back to Calcutta in September 1947 was a nightmare. The Delhi railway station was strewn with dead bodies. After our train started to move I saw human

beings being thrown out of the train by miscreants. The goons confronted the three of us as well — my mother and I and a family friend. Had Bengal not been partitioned and the eastern wing of Pakistan created there? So we deserved to be punished. Suddenly a young Punjabi girl — a refugee from Lahore, where she had lost her family in the riots — stood up to defend us. Taken aback by her spirited protest, the goons left in search of other victims. Once the train steamed into Kanpur station, military police surrounded the train and arrested the murderers.

As the train sped through the night towards newly partitioned Bengal, I felt conflicting emotions. The pride and joy I felt with the coming of freedom seemed drowned by deep sorrow as I reflected on the mindless violence wrought by Partition. Seventy years on, we need to draw lessons from both the triumph of freedom and the tragedy of Partition.

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