



A thought for today

The only real way to help a backward group is to give opportunities of good education

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

Mandal's Children

Maratha reservation agitation must spur political class to look beyond quotas

The assertion of Maratha power culminating in a massive rally that paralysed Mumbai, India's financial capital, is a warning sign that India's growth story is in danger of veering off course. When dominant groups like Marathas and Jats vie for reservation, originally conceived as an instrument of social justice to uplift those who suffered under the caste system, it calls for a comprehensive review of this policy. The original plan was to progressively end reservations but now more groups wish to enjoy its benefits. Legal challenges over Maratha reservation exceeding Supreme Court's 50% cap on quotas constrains the state government, but that has not stopped protesters from pressing their demands.

To mollify them chief minister Devendra Fadnavis has announced sops that extend to Marathas educational benefits like fee concessions available to OBC students. But it is unlikely that perceptions relating to denial of opportunities will recede with these new sops. Land-owning communities like Marathas and Jats have been hit hard by the slowing rural economy. That has been exacerbated by the Mandal effect, following which it has become fashionable for powerful caste groups to carve out their own quota of jobs and education regardless of merit. But there is no end to this cycle, as each sop to each caste group will result in other castes feeling aggrieved.



This hankering for reservation militates against Prime Minister Narendra Modi's exhortation to make common cause against corruption, poverty and illiteracy for the next five years. Society remains divided on caste lines and opposition to reservation is being supplanted with collective bargaining and muscle flexing for reservation. As social tensions increase, it is time to look beyond quotas for solutions that can emancipate and empower the greatest number.

Investing in school education, improving quality of education, and facilitating access to quality education gives all young people, irrespective of caste or religion, a better shot at professional success in later life. It must be noted that young Marathas have spearheaded the 58 muk morchas or silent rallies. Their worries about the future are legitimate but hitting the streets may not yield solutions to their problems. The focus must shift away from hiving up existing jobs to creating new ones and expanding the pie. A new political and social consensus is needed. But who is there to bell the cat?

Misogynist Minister

Babul Supriyo's take on Chandigarh stalking is an embarrassment for BJP

The Chandigarh stalking and attempted kidnapping case has exposed yet another BJP leader for harbouring a sexist, patriarchal mindset. This time it is Union minister Babul Supriyo who has embarrassed the party. Taking to social media to make light of the stalking incident where Vikas Barala - son of Haryana BJP chief Subhash Barala - is an accused, Supriyo first questioned why a kidnapping charge should be raised in the case. This despite the fact survivor Varnika Kundu mentioned that the perpetrators tried to abduct her. Supriyo then questioned the logic of highlighting the political credentials of the accused's father - as if he is entirely oblivious about politicians influencing police cases in this country.



But what really took the cake was Supriyo's tweet, "We all went to college and know, like reel, 'Boy chase Girl' exists in real life too". Justifying a serious case of stalking and attempted abduction by comparing it to how college romances are depicted in movies is gross and downright deplorable. It's precisely this dreadful mindset that percolates down to administration and police, loading the system against women in general and victims of sexual crimes in particular. That in turn enables more such crimes to be committed.

Supriyo ought to know that stalking is a serious offence. And the Chandigarh incident was very far from a filmy love-lorn boy chasing a girl. Had the Chandigarh police not intervened in a timely manner, there's no telling what Varnika would have had to face. At a time when the top echelon of the BJP leadership is emphasising the need to empower women, Supriyo should know better than to be utterly insensitive and callous about sex crimes. More so as a Union minister, from whom a bare minimum of social responsibility and basic courtesy is called for.

Selfie spoilsports

The taxman is going to snoop on the pictures you post on Facebook

Jug Suraiya



A worried-looking Chintoo talking to his pal, Pintoo.
Chintoo: Arre Pintoo, have you read that report in TOI that those taxwalas are spying on us by looking at the photos that we post on Facebook?

Pintoo: Why don't they look at their own pictures on Facebook if they want to do time pass?
Chintoo: Oof, oh. The taxwalas are not looking at our Facebook selfies to do time pass. They are looking at our Facebook selfies so that they can raid our houses.

Pintoo: Raid our houses? I didn't know putting selfies on Facebook has become a crime. Has anyone informed Mark Zuckerberg about this?

Chintoo: No, no, bewakoof. Putting selfies on Facebook is not a crime. But having concealed income is a crime. And that's why the taxwalas will raid our houses.

Pintoo: But how will the taxwalas know we have concealed income by looking at our selfies?

Chintoo: How? Simple. When do you take selfies? When you go on that super deluxe holiday in Switzerland. Or throw a party at a 5-star hotel for 300 friends. Or pose in front of that new Merc. Right? So how come you pay zero income tax and can yet go on that Swiss holiday, throw that party, buy that Merc? That's how the taxwalas know you have concealed income and raid your house.

Pintoo: What spoilsports! What's the point of a Swiss holiday, or a 5-star party, or a new Merc if you can't take selfies to put on Facebook. But I've got an idea. When you go on that super deluxe holiday in Switzerland. Or throw a party at a 5-star hotel for 300 friends. Or pose in front of that new Merc. Right? So how come you pay zero income tax and can yet go on that Swiss holiday, throw that party, buy that Merc? That's how the taxwalas know you have concealed income and raid your house.

Chintoo: What a genius idea!
Chintoo and Pintoo, both thinking: I know whose face I'll photoshop: his.
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Congress Gets Patel Face Saver

But BJP still sits pretty while Congress desperately searches for a new narrative and identity

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There are three kinds of Patels in Gujarat, goes an old joke repeated by Ahmed Patel's detractors in the state. Kadva Patels, Leuva Patels and Ahmed Patel. Laced with the irony and exaggeration that is the hallmark of sharp political innuendo, it was meant both as a dig at his vote catching abilities and, equally, as a backhanded compliment to his formidable soft skills as the master mover and shaker behind Sonia Gandhi's Congress throne.

It's not for nothing that Patel, the primary instrument and shaper of the Congress president's politics since at least 2001, has kept his seat in Parliament almost continuously for three decades (1977-1989 in Lok Sabha; 1993-present in Rajya Sabha). BJP's failure to prevent him from winning his fifth Rajya Sabha (RS) term, despite throwing everything it had into the contest, has certainly given Congress a face saving and temporary reprieve after a string of recent reverses.

The question is: can this victory mark the beginning of a possible Congress revival or is it simply the last gasp of the old order? Was elevating a mundane RS election that few, except the most avid political junkies, would even have noticed in the past, into a high stakes battle for prestige at the highest levels of both parties worth it?

First, in an election that reduced the pursuit of power on both sides to a ruthlessly simple victory-loss calculus, the only real winner in terms of systemic morality was the Election Commission. At a time when allegations of Rs 15 crore being the supposed going-rate for MLAs were vitating Gandhinagar's air, Congress chose to respond to Shanker-sinh Vaghela's second political rebellion in Gujarat with tactics that ironically, he himself had pioneered in his first rebellion 22 years ago (against BJP). If Congress's gambit of flying 44 of its MLAs to Bengaluru's Eagleton resort - like Vaghela's 1995 flight to Khajuraho - raised questions of strong-arm tactics, the sheer timing of IT raids against a



Uday Deb

Congress Karnataka minister raised troubling questions about the possible misuse of state power.

In the end, only EC came out with its reputation further enhanced. By rejecting legal arguments presented by a battery of senior ministers and accepting the P Chidambaram-fronted Congress delegation's argument that two of its MLAs had indeed violated election rules, EC has risen further in stature in the eyes of the average Indian. From Arvind Kejriwal after the Delhi MCD poll to Mayawati after BJP's UP sweep, opposition leaders have been making a habit of taking potshots at EC. This decision should put a stop to all that.

It also definitively ends all scurrilous speculation about EC's impartiality based on the premise that both election commissioners were appointed in the current NDA government's tenure and chief election commissioner A K Joti once served as Narendra Modi's chief secretary in Gujarat. The EC decision has once again underscored the robustness of our constitutional system of checks and balances.

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Second, in a country where Rajya Sabha contests have long been in the nature of fixed matches, BJP can't be faulted for ending the practice of underhand deals between opposing parties for contests involving key leaders. BJP's electoral ruthlessness under the Modi-Shah regime is not new. At least one mathematical analysis of the RS poll's fiendishly complex system of voter-weightage shows that Patel may still have ended up carrying the day even if the two MLAs had not been disqualified. Yet, the fact that BJP came so close to defeating Patel in what should have otherwise been a safe contest is a

portent for the future.

Third, while the result is definitely a reprieve for Congress, this may have very little impact on upcoming state assembly elections. Theoretically speaking, 2017 should be Congress's best chance to regain power in Gujarat after two decades. Even at the height of Modi's Gujarat hegemony, Congress consistently polled a vote-share around the 40% mark in every assembly poll from 2002 onwards to 2012. Since 2014 though, bereft of Modi's teflon hand in Gandhinagar, BJP's traditional Patel constituency, as symbolised by the Hardik Patel agitation, has been up in arms over reservation.

Disparate caste-based opposition movements led by Jignesh Mevani (Dalits) and Alpesh Thakore (OBCs) have flowered. Yet, while BJP has consistently been making important political course corrections on the ground, Congress in Gujarat 2017 looks almost exactly like Congress in 2002. Its top state leadership has basically remained a closed and ossified group of five leaders - Vaghela, Bharatsinh Solanki, Sidharth Patel, Arjun Modwadia and Shaktisinh Gohil. Vaghela's rebellion has only weakened the party further. It remains a divided house and the absence of a new and energetic leadership means it is still rudderless.

BJP, conversely, has been ruthless about winnability. It switched Anandibhai Patel with Vijay Rupani in the CM's chair in August 2016 and has had three state party presidents in the last 2 years alone: RC Faldu, Rupani himself and now Jitu Vaghani. It is this kind of nimble footedness that allowed the party to recover in gram panchayat elections in December 2016, where its candidate even won in Una, last in the spotlight over atrocities against Dalits.

Fourth, Rahul Gandhi's absence from action at a time when the prestige stakes were so high was glaring. Congress's old guard has got a fillip with the Patel result but its older leaders are not vote magnets. Rahul's leadership has been unable to deliver so far and the party is still desperately searching for a new narrative and identity. The Rajya Sabha result does not change this basic reality.

'I'm very aggressive on the field ... if people think I play like Viv Richards or Kapil then it's a big compliment for me'

Harmanpreet Kaur's swashbuckling 171 not out, which helped India defeat Australia by 36 runs in the World Cup semi-final, made her a household name. But well before that she broke a barrier by becoming the first Indian cricketer, male or female, to play as a professional in Australia's Big Bash League. Following her exploits in the recent World Cup held in UK, she spoke to Rohit E David on where India lost its way in the World Cup final, her idols, her journey as a cricketer and the future of women's cricket.

■ People are comparing you with Viv Richards. What do you have to say about that?

There have been people who have compared me with Kapil Dev too. I can't compare myself with anyone. They are big cricketers who have achieved a lot. But if people think I play like Viv Richards or Kapil then it's a big compliment for me.

■ Did the team receive the support it always wanted during the World Cup?

Yes of course. We were looking for the type of support we got during the World Cup for a long time. This year we won the T20 series. After the World Cup the media has been following us.

■ Is there anything you would like to improve in women's cricket?

Women cricketers need to work on their fitness and

fielding. We need some more fielding camps. When it comes to infrastructure, whatever BCCI is giving us is good. We need more telecast of our games. Most of the time, when we are playing a series the matches are not telecast.

■ How is Mithali Raj as a captain?

She is a great captain. She always helps the players whenever we need her, whether it's on or off the field. I have learnt a lot from her. With her experience, Mithali is the best captain in the world.

■ Is there anything you would like to change about yourself?

I feel I am very aggressive on the field. I want to control my emotions.

■ Can you tell us about your journey as a

cricketer?
Initially, when I started playing cricket, I faced a lot of problems. I was not getting the right amount of practice. Now, I have a good setup in Pune. I am getting quality training which is helping me in my game. Also, I was not part of a good academy when I started out. Luckily my school supported me with my game.

■ How do you handle drawbacks?
They are part of life. Sometimes your graph will go down and another day it will come up. I simply show some patience. I speak to my family and my father, so that they can help me out with my game.

■ Did you always want to become a cricketer?
Yes of course. I got the opportunity to play other sports as well, but cricket was the one thing I excelled at.

■ The team was so near to the World Cup yet it couldn't put it across England. Why did the team come under pressure?
I think these things happen in cricket. It is part of the game. After losing two or three early wickets, everyone came under pressure. I feel the last batters were not able to handle the pressure. This happened because most players didn't get a chance to play in a big final.



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Intense Dialogue Between Krishna And Arjuna

Pranav Khullar

Krishna's exhortation to Arjuna in his moment of moral dilemma on the battlefield at Kurukshetra is perhaps the turning point in Vyasa's Mahabharata. What did Krishna's call mean - was it merely a call to arms to fight a righteous war, as seen contextually, or was it a call to action and clarity, when viewed metaphorically? Either way, the situation triggers an intense dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna, on the nature of reality and mind, and the meaning of karma.

In the Kurukshetra of the mind, Arjuna becomes Everyman, the confused seeker-soul, caught between his sensitivities and the need to do the right action, at the right time. Krishna shows him a way out of the labyrinthine confusion of the mind, unfolding before him, higher dimensions of Self, which would clear Arjuna's mind.

Who is Krishna? Vyasa presents him as the personification of the Self, a

theme which Ramanuja would later pick up in his exposition of the Bhagwad Gita that flows from his Vishishtadvaita analysis of Vedanta. According to this, the manifest universe and individual souls are as real as God, a 'real' manifestation of Brahman, though completely dependent on it, since it originates from Brahman, as an effect. Arjuna's moment of crisis, his seeking, and his total surrender to Krishna, and the vision of Krishna's Vishwaroopa (cosmic) form, is viewed as the fullest proof of this perspective, in that the search for the Self must originate in contemplation of the Supreme Being, and culminate in the love for this personal god, where jnana, knowledge, is actually bhakti, adoration of God.

Arjuna, as an ideal seeker, moves from confusion and scepticism to attempting to understand the mystery

of the nature of things, putting his faith completely in Krishna. Arjuna may have had self-doubt, but at no point does he doubt Krishna, even as Krishna unravels his real persona and the greater scheme of things to his friend.

Arjuna is seen as being worthy of the glimpse into greater dimensions of knowledge - but this knowledge, as Ramanuja states, is actually bhakti, love and adoration and vision of God.

Vishishtadvaita extends this argument to say that complete surrender is a prerequisite to all kinds of forms of seeking, for otherwise, karmic duty runs the risk of selfish motivations, and the path of jnana could itself be trapped in intellectual abstractions. So Krishna in the Gita is God-Brahman, revealing himself to a disciple capable of great enquiry, which tradition sees as an attribute of surrender to the Divine



the speaking tree

Sacred space

The Body

There is no death for the body, only an exchange of atoms. Their changing places and taking different forms is what we call 'death.' In reality, nothing is born and nothing is dead.

U G Krishnamurti

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