



## A formal break

V.K. Sasikala's removal as general secretary may be at the cost of the party's government

Finally, the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam is without its deeply polarising figure, the interim general secretary, V.K. Sasikala. As a close friend of Jayalalithaa, she had played a major role in the party's affairs for more than 25 years, evoking both fear and loyalty among the party's second line of leaders. Her removal was the precondition set by the O. Panneerselvam faction of the party for a merger, a first step before the party could reclaim its original identity and flag and election symbol. Whether the faction led by Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami adopted this course out of political necessity or out of a genuine desire to keep Sasikala out of the party's affairs is now immaterial: the break with the Sasikala family is real. The consequences of her removal at the meeting of the general council of the party will be immediate: greater political legitimacy for the ruling faction's claim to be truly representative of the party's organisational support base and increased isolation of the Sasikala clan from the party. While there are many in the party, including ministers, who still sympathise with Sasikala, or feel a sense of gratitude towards her, the party will no longer be remote-controlled by the 'Mannargudi clan'. The newly evolved collective leadership in the party, with Mr. Panneerselvam as the coordinator and Mr. Palaniswami as the co-coordinator, and the abolition of the powerful post of general secretary, will be resistant to the influence of Sasikala and her nephew T.T.V. Dhinakaran.

However, the Sasikala group under the leadership of Mr. Dhinakaran commands the overt support of at least 18 members of the Assembly, enough to pull down the government. They have been hesitant to form themselves as a breakaway group either for fear of being disqualified for defection or in the hope that they might be able to capture the leadership of the parent party. The general council meeting could only have accentuated the differences with the Dhinakaran group. A reconciliation is close to impossible now, although Sasikala has not been expelled from the party. The changed equations within the ruling party, which no longer appears to enjoy the confidence of a majority in the House, should force Governor C. Vidyasagar Rao out of his inaction. Mr. Palaniswami should seek another vote of confidence as, even by the admission of his own camp he is well short of an absolute majority in the Assembly. The political gains from the merger of the two camps notwithstanding, Mr. Palaniswami might have risked the stability of his own government by patching up with Mr. Panneerselvam. Just as he ties up one end, things are beginning to unravel at the other.

## Cambodian slide

Political repression under Prime Minister Hun Sen has put the fragile democracy at risk

The crackdown in Cambodia is taking the form of criminalisation of the opposition and the media by Prime Minister Hun Sen ahead of the 2018 national elections. This slide into political regression is particularly troubling, as the country is still recovering from the memory of the genocide at the hands of the Khmer Rouge in the 1970s. Cambodia has enjoyed relative prosperity in recent years thanks to the boom in garment exports and tourism; it can ill-afford political unrest. Its democracy too is a work in progress, and while the long-ruling Hun Sen has never been an ideal democrat, in recent years his autocratic tendencies have become increasingly more pronounced. The detention earlier this month of Kem Sokha, leader of the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP), on charges of treason, was accompanied by circumstances that led to the closure of an independent newspaper. In July, the government promulgated a law that enables the banning of political parties with connections to criminal convicts. Mr. Hun Sen, a former commander of the Khmer Rouge, whose lengthy rule since 1985 is often compared to the tenure of other dictators, is anxious to tighten his grip on the levers of power. Recently he declared his intent to carry on for another two terms. But it was the CNRP that made significant gains in the local body elections this June, even as the ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP) retained a majority of seats.

In his campaign during that election, Mr. Hun Sen barely concealed the instincts of a ruthless dictator when he openly threatened civil war in the event of the CPP losing the elections. Earlier, under its veteran leader Sam Rainsy, who is in self-imposed exile, the CNRP had challenged Mr. Hun Sen's 2013 re-election and extracted major concessions at the end of a protracted political crisis. The allusion in the latest treason charge is to Mr. Kem Sokha's comments before an Australian audience some years ago, pointing to the level of desperation in the ruling dispensation. The current political turmoil in Cambodia reflects an ongoing shift in international influence in the decades following the genocide. The U.S. had been closely involved in the restoration of democratic stability in the country, and the Cambodian turnaround is one of the United Nations' great success stories. But recent years have seen a dramatic rise in Beijing's bilateral and regional engagement with Phnom Penh, which under Mr. Hun Sen is using the great power rivalry to evade accountability by his regime. Cambodia's cancellation of the annual joint military exercises with the U.S. this year coincided with the first such engagement with China, underscoring the extent of the changing dynamics of big power diplomacy in Southeast Asia. The 'America First' approach under President Donald Trump is not likely to alter this trend. It is left to the international community to keep a sustained focus on Cambodia, and underline how precariously placed the Cambodian recovery still is.

# Equality for what?

We must incorporate the right to equality into our political vocabulary to arrest deepening inequality



NEERA CHANDHOKE

In 1820 the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, in his magnificently crafted *Philosophy of Right*, had written with some despair of the moral squalor and of the ravages that poverty brings in its wake. The state of poverty, he argued, is not an aberration, it is a product of industrial society, of the overproduction and underconsumption which marks this social order. But it is precisely society that banishes its victims to the twilight zone of collective life. Here, removed from the advantages of solidarity that civil society offers, the poor are reduced to a heap of fragmented atoms, rabble, *poebel*. When the standard of living of a large mass of people falls below a certain subsistence level, he wrote, we see a loss of the sense of right and wrong, of honesty and of self-respect. "Against nature man can claim no right, but once society is established, poverty immediately takes the form of a wrong done to one class by another."

Hegel suggests that poverty is a social phenomenon. One, society is complicit in the creation and re-creation of poverty. Destitution, that is, is the outcome of a skewed economy. Two, poverty breeds unfortunate consequences, such as suffering, which seriously demoralises human beings. Three, the existence of large numbers of the poor pose a direct threat to the social order, simply because the poor are (justly) resentful of their exclusion from the benefits of society.

We should be seriously reflecting on Hegel's criticism of a society that refuses to correct the wrongs it



has heaped on its own people, in the light of the research findings of the economist Thomas Piketty and his colleague Lucas Chancel.

### Inequality in India

In a paper aptly titled 'Indian income inequality, 1922-2014: From British Raj to Billionaire Raj?', they conclude that income inequality in India is at the highest level since 1922, when the country's income tax law was conceived, and that the top 1% earners corner 22% of income. These research findings should send a powerful warning signal to power elites, leaders who prefer to concentrate on the politics of beef, brutal repression of dissent, and curtailment of basic human freedoms, even as the lives of thousands of Indians are mired in mind-numbing poverty.

There is more to the proposition that some persons are poor beyond belief, and others are rich beyond belief in India. P is poor, we can say, when she does not possess access to the basic resources which enable q, or s, or m to consume nutritious food, avoid ill health, attend school, take up a job, and own a home, let alone go on holiday or possess a car. This implies that p is not just poor, she is unequal to q, s, or m, since the latter three, unlike p, have access to certain advant-

ages that p does not. Poverty is the effect of inequality as well as the prime signifier of inequality. And inequality is demeaning.

### Implications for society

Arguably, inequality is not only a matter of statistics. It is a shattering reflection on the kind of society we live in. Logically, if the economic ordering of society is responsible for ill-being, it is obliged to remedy the wrongs that it has visited upon the heads of the poor. This constitutes a basic code of justice. People who have been wronged are entitled to ask for justice. If justice is not delivered, inequalities are reinforced and compounded over time.

Resultantly, people fated to occupy the lowest rungs of the social ladder are not only denied access to basic material requirements that enable them to live a decent life, they are likely to be socially overlooked, politically irrelevant except in times of elections when their votes bring parties into power, disdained, and subjected to disrespect in and through the practices of everyday life. To be unequal is to be denied the opportunity to participate in social, economic, and cultural transactions from a plane of equality.

Starkly put, the presence of massive inequality reflects sharply and pejoratively on the kind of social relations that we find in India. Because these social relationships are indisputably unequal, they cannot but be entrenched in massive discrimination and exploitation. Can we reflect on inequality without taking on exploitation and discrimination? And unless we confront these background inequalities directly, will not inequality continue to be produced and reproduced along with the production and reproduction of a lopsided social order, indeed as an integral part of this order?

### Morality of mutual respect

Let us not understate the implications of inequality, it violates a basic democratic norm: the equal standing of citizens. Persons have equal standing because each human being has certain capacities in common with other human beings, for instance, the capacity to make her own history in concert with other human beings. Of course the histories that persons make might not be the histories they chose to make, but this is not the issue at hand. What is important is that each person realises this ability.

The principle of equal standing generates at least two robust principles of democratic morality. For one, equality is a relation that obtains between persons in respect of some fundamental characteristic that they share in common. Equality is, morally speaking, a default principle. Therefore, and this is the second postulate, persons should not be discriminated against on grounds such as race, caste, gender, ethnicity, sexual preferences, disability, or class. These features of the human condition are morally irrelevant.

These two postulates of political morality yield the following implications. To treat persons equally be-

cause they possess equal standing is to treat them with respect. The idea that one should treat persons with respect not only because some of these persons possess some special skill or talent, for example skilled cricketers, gifted musicians, or literary giants, but because persons are human beings, is by now part of common sense morality. If someone were to ask, 'equality for what', we can answer that equality assures equal standing and respect, and respect is an essential prerequisite for the making of human beings who can participate in the multiple transactions of society from a position of confidence and self-respect. If they cannot do so, the government is simply not taking the well-being of its citizens seriously.

There is urgent need, in the face of government inaction and insensitivity towards people trapped in inequality as a social relation to invoke the collective conscience of Indian citizens. If the right to equality is violated, citizens should be exercised or agitated about this violation. But for this to occur, for society to feel deeply about the right on offer, we have to incorporate the right to equality into political thinking, into our values, and into political vocabularies. The project requires the harnessing of creative imagination and courage on the one hand, and careful reasoning, persuasion, and dialogue on the other. The task also demands the investment of rather high degrees of energy and time. But this is essential because a political consensus on what constitutes, or should constitute the basic rules of society, is central to our collective lives. The political is not a given, it has to be constructed, as Karl Marx had told us long ago, through determined and sustained political intervention.

Neera Chandhoke is a former Professor of Political Science at Delhi University

# We need to talk about rural distress

Farmers are under siege – a policy upgrade is essential



FEROZE VARUN GANDHI

A century ago, farmers in Bihar's Champaran district were forced to set aside 15% of their land to cultivate indigo under the *Tinkathia* system. Once planted, the farmers were still subjected to a variety of extortionist cesses, or *abwabs*. They rose in revolt but were crushed by the East India Company until the arrival of a barrister from South Africa. Yet, a century after Mahatma Gandhi fought against the exploitation of farmers, India's agrarian community still remains under siege.

At a granular level, marginal farming in India is a highly complex and decision-intensive process. Farmers have to make a variety of decisions starting with the choice of crops (annual or short term) and their time of tillage. Then there are rising prices of agricultural inputs, availability of water, soil suitability and pest management. All these factors create a narrow window of economic benefit for the marginal farmer. A wrong decision can wreak havoc.

### Debt levels

This uncertainty is reflected in rural debt levels. A Panjab University study showed that in Punjab, large farmers with holdings greater

than 10 hectares typically had a debt-to-income ratio of 0.26, while for medium farmers, 4-10 ha, and semi-medium farmers, 2-4 ha, it was 0.34 – all seemingly affordable. However, small, 1-2 ha, and marginal farmers, less than a hectare, faced a greater burden of debt, with a debt-to-income ratio of 0.94 and 1.42, respectively; over 50% of their loans are from non-banking sources.

With average landholding size decreasing from 2.3 ha in 1971 to 1.16 ha in 2011, and average input prices rising, cultivation costs have also increased. A farmer now typically earns ₹2,400 a month per hectare of paddy and about ₹2,600 a month per hectare of wheat, while farm labourers earn less than ₹5,000 a month. Real farm wages have grown at an average annual growth rate of 2.9% between 1991 and 2012, with farm wages declining between 2002 and 2007. Effectively, about 30.5 million left farming between 2004-05 and 2010-11, seeking employment in the secondary and tertiary sectors. In 2011, the Planning Commission estimated that the size of this agricultural workforce would shrink to less than 200 million by 2020.

The consequence is farmers committing suicides. Farmer suicides have also grown primarily in States with limited irrigation and variable rainfall, comprising 87.5% of all farmer suicides in 2015. Over 3,21,428 farmers committed suicide in the last 20 years.

Large farmers in Maharashtra typically have access to modern



BIHAR/IAKASH

pumps, consuming huge amounts of water and leaving hardly anything for small and marginal farmers. Fertilizer and pesticide prices have also risen, causing marginal farmers to adopt organic means. The limited availability and high cost of high-yielding seed varieties also hampers agricultural productivity. Given such constraints, farmers have limited scope for crop diversification, choosing to focus primarily on staple crops such as wheat and rice, where the government offers a price guarantee for produce and the availability of post-harvest infrastructure.

### Loan waiver politics

Institutional support has been provided in various forms since Independence. Established in 1982, the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development has sought to provide financing support for tube-well irrigation, farm mechanisation and other ancillary activities. The introduction of a nationwide agriculture loan waiver in

1990 had a deleterious impact on the provision of rural credit, providing a short-term palliative while breeding credit indiscipline among farmers and leading to a shortfall in rural credit growth.

The 2004-05 Union Budget sought to double agricultural credit, while a 2% interest subvention was provided in 2006, allowing farmers to avail of kisan credit card (KCC) loans at 7% per annum (up to ₹3 lakh). Another agricultural loan waiver was sanctioned in 2009, just before the Lok Sabha election. In 2011, the government provided a further 3% interest subvention for farmers making immediate payments on their KCC loans. More recently, the Uttar Pradesh government's farm loan waiver scheme has been replicated in Maharashtra, Punjab and Karnataka and estimated to total up to 0.5% of India's GDP. Similar demands are growing in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Haryana. Small and marginal farmers certainly deserve greater support from the government. However, India's agricultural policy has historically disincentivised the creation of a formal credit culture among farmers. When the next election is likely to bring about another farm loan waiver, why would any farmer seek to pay off his loans early? Such schemes can also prompt farmers to take on risky ventures that are beyond their capacity.

Ideally, India ought not to have rural distress. We have the second largest amount of arable land in the world. Yet, less than 35% of this

land is irrigated, with the remainder subject to fluctuations in rainfall.

### Helping the farmer

The writing is on the wall. India's small and marginal farmers will need another agricultural loan waiver. However, this cannot continue in the future. There are other ways to mitigate their plight. Greater subsidies could be extended for the purchase of agricultural equipment, fertilizers and pesticides, while the medical insurance coverage could be expanded through the Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojna. In addition, the scope of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act could be increased. Allowing marginal farmers to be paid for tilling their own fields could reduce their input costs. Such measures could also increase their net income.

Finally, we need a national conversation on rural distress. Unlike the Champaran Satyagraha, national attention has been curiously lacking. We ought to discuss the Swaminathan Commission's report in a full week's sitting of Parliament and decide which direction India's agriculture goes. With empathy for India's farmers and a truthful assessment of on-the-ground farming reality, we must make the right choices for Indian agriculture.

Feroze Varun Gandhi is a Member of Parliament representing the Sultanpur constituency for the BJP

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

### Going the Bullet way

Those who oppose the high-speed rail corridor project citing poverty and the extravagant cost of the project should realise that it is a long-term dream scheme of the nation, being funded at a meagre interest rate of 0.1%. It will create thousands of employment opportunities, directly and indirectly, in the long run ("An alliance on track", September 13). We are living in a world where technology is the need of the hour and India cannot afford to miss out on such projects. It was once argued by the Left that information technology was a bane but it was subsequently proven that India is a world leader in this area.

KSHIRASAGARA BALAJI RAO, Hyderabad

■ We have to learn lessons from the revelation that Taiwan's high-speed line

which used the same Japanese technology is experiencing heavy losses while Indonesia, which is to use Chinese technology, is facing land acquisition issues. We are witness to the Indian Railways struggle to obtain 'right of way' even for a small stretch of track. Prolonged litigation often pushes up costs. Have the Railways done their homework for the earmarked stretch? Given the speed at which large-scale projects are executed in India, the deadline of 2022 seems overambitious. The terms of the soft loan from Japan, though comparatively better than if it was availed from the World Bank, may not prove to be economical. Fare tariffs for a bullet train are bound to be prohibitive. With its very poor safety record, the Indian Railways would do well to concentrate on

strengthening the existing track system and adopting coach technology that ensures safe and comfortable travel. Here, the aim seems to be to help Japan lift its stagnant economy and maintain a balance in relations with neighbours.

V. SUBRAMANIAN, Chennai

### Rahul at Berkeley

It is unfortunate that the healthy convention of political figures not washing domestic dirty linen in public while abroad is now dead and buried. Today, politics in India is a no-holds-barred game, dirtier than ever and which most political leaders indulge in. While addressing an event at the University of California, Berkeley, Congress vice-president Rahul Gandhi played the role expected of him. Credit partly goes to the

government's blunders that seem to have infused a new life into Mr. Gandhi's otherwise flagging political career. While the BJP is up in arms over his speech and comments, one cannot but admit that the Prime Minister too has broken that convention time and again.

J. AKSHAY, Bengaluru

■ It is true that no democratic country has achieved what India has achieved by adopting 100% non-violence. Also, nobody would disagree that former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was responsible for introducing India's modern communication network. However, Mr. Gandhi could have skillfully refrained from talking about Indian politics while abroad. Students and the faculty would have been more interested in matters concerning developments in economic, academic and

scientific research in India, rather than politics.

M. SUBBIAH, Chennai

### Being a rationalist

As a nation we have been pandering to religious sentiments for too long. Right from the days of Partition, the various riots, the demolition of the Babri Masjid, the Gujarat riots and beyond, the trail of violence and loss of lives and properties caused as a result of religion is too large to document. Even the father of the nation was eliminated by religious fanatics. The 'graded inequality' among

people of the same religion imposed by the caste system – and despite legislation banning it – continues to inflict unspeakable misery on a significant section of the people to this day. It is time that we started exposing our children to rationalism so that they can evaluate its merits and choose for themselves what to believe in. 'Forget god, consider man' is good advice as humanism is the only way to take mankind toward peace and progress.

K. NATARAJAN, Madurai

MORE LETTERS ONLINE: www.hindu.com/opinion/letters/

**CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:** In a PTT story, "Bhagat Singh case back in court" (Sept. 13, 2017), there was an erroneous reference to Section 120I of the Indian Penal Code. It should have been Section 120.

'India needs a thousand more prefab factories' (Interview, Business page, Sept. 12, 2017) erroneously said that a plant in Krishnagiri had been named after former President, Abdul Kalam. There is no prefab factory named after him.

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# Towards war's end in Syria

The battlefield is criss-crossed with competing interests in the charge against the Islamic State



VIJAY PRASHAD

News comes daily of the Syrian Army's advance through one village after another towards the besieged eastern city of Deir ez-Zor. Since the summer of 2014, the Islamic State (IS) has surrounded the city and starved its people. An official of the World Food Programme told me last month that if the siege continued, there would be a certain outbreak of cholera. Syria's Army was able to break through the Ash-Shula crossroads and enter Deir ez-Zor, holding a part of the western city and relieving the regiment that had — almost single-handedly — prevented the IS takeover of the city. But even as the Syrian Army began to fortify its position, the IS hit hard with great determination to defend their citadel in Al-Shoulah. This is not an easy battle, even as the Syrian Army has been backed by Russian cruise missile strikes and by its own air force.

## A complex battlefield

Syria's battlefield is so complex and fast changing that earlier this month, about 300 IS fighters and an equal number of their family members boarded buses at the Lebanese border in western Syria to come to Deir ez-Zor. This was a deal struck by IS, the Syrian government, the Lebanese government, and Hezbollah. A tough campaign by the Lebanese armed forces and Hezbollah managed to eject the IS from the highlands above the Beqaa Valley. These 300 fighters made a deal for safe passage to Deir ez-Zor if they would hand over the bodies of Hezbollah fighters taken in 2014. The convoy of 11 buses carrying these IS troops was stopped in the Syrian desert by U.S. air strikes. Half of them turned back for the Syrian government areas, while the rest attempted to move forward to certain death or capture in the west. The tourist buses of their fighters were stuck — like sitting ducks — underneath the firepower of the U.S. Air Force.

Meanwhile, north of Deir ez-Zor, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) moved under heavy U.S. airpower to seize about 14 out of 22 of Raqqa's neighbourhoods. SDF spokesperson Mustafa Bali said that there are only



"Since the summer of 2014, the Islamic State has surrounded the city of Deir ez-Zor and starved its people." A man holds bread as he walks along a debris-filled street in Deir ez-Zor, eastern Syria. ■ REUTERS

about 1,000 IS fighters left in the city, which now has one hospital and little other resources for a population that has lived in terror for the past few years. The fight has been going slowly, as the IS has positioned car bombs and mines to slow the entry of the SDF. On Friday, the SDF captured Raqqa University. Its tanks, flying the flag of the Syrian Kurdish YPG militia group, made it clear that this was largely a Syrian Kurdish operation. This continues to rankle Syria's northern neighbour, Turkey, which has moved its troops into Syria (a Turkish military officer said that the YPG has been targeting its troops and artillery positions near the Syrian border town of Azaz).

There is a great deal of psychological warfare at work, with the battlefield shrouded in competing interests and with facts hard to discern through the smoke. Each of the main forces (the Syrian Army, the SDF, the Iranian militias, Hezbollah, the Free Syrian Army, the Turkish army and the U.S. military) claims to be at the forefront of the battle to defeat the IS. That has become the focus. The government of Bashar al-Assad is no longer the target of the major armed powers (Turkey, the U.S. and the Gulf Arabs) that had pledged to remove him from his presidency. Even the Free Syrian Army has turned its guns against the IS, as it recently did in south Daraa, where it defeated the Saifullah al-Maslul group in the villages of al-Abdali and al-Majahid. This is a dramatic turn of affairs.

The UN envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, said recently that he hopes that a new UN process for peace will open up in October. Mr. de Mistura is focused on the region around Idlib, in northern Syria, and in pockets of Damascus where the non-IS rebels have congregated for what will be a last stand. The main group here is Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), which is closely linked to al-Qaeda and has been shown to be a beneficiary of Gulf Arab funds and theological assistance. With the Syrian Army and its allies busy with the fight against the IS in Deir ez-Zor, HTS fighters have deepened their hold on Idlib in preparation for the inevitable attack by the Syrian Army. It is this attack which will have major consequences for civilian lives that Mr. de Mistura wishes to circumvent.

## Missteps towards peace

President Assad could have been coaxed to the table after these battlefield successes. He might very well have been in the mood for concessions from a position of strength. Just when Mr. de Mistura seemed prepared to hold preparatory talks with Damascus, other parts of the UN decided to increase the pressure on the Syrian government. Catherine Marchi-Uhel, head of the UN's International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism, held a press conference in early September to say that she was prepared to hold trials and prosecute members of Mr. Assad's government for war crimes. The UN re-

leased a report that suggested that the Syrian government had used chemical weapons in Khan Sheikhoun in April (Syria denied that it had used toxic gases against its people because "it does not have them in the first place"). Israel, then, conducted an air strike against what Syrian officials say was not a chemical weapons plant but a warehouse for Hezbollah's weapons that it received from Iran. The statements by Ms. Marchi-Uhel, the UN report and the Israeli attack will simply result in hardened positions from Damascus.

It is likely that as soon as the Syrian Army has taken hold of Deir ez-Zor, it will move against the HTS in Idlib. There is no possibility for these fighters to be resupplied, since their regional allies (Turkey and the Gulf Arabs) have largely abandoned them. The lead negotiator for the opposition side — Riad Hijab (a former Syrian Prime Minister) — has refused to come to the talks. His language sounds dated, with the most anachronistic demand being the removal of Mr. Assad. Failure to come to the table leaves Mr. Hijab culpable for the prolongation of a war that should end as soon as possible. The battle for Idlib will be dangerous and bloody, with a hardened and desperate HTS fighting an exhausted Syrian Arab Army and its equally stretched allies.

Vijay Prashad's latest book is 'The Death of the Nation and the Future of the Arab Revolution'

# Subnationalism not a threat

As long as it is not secessionist, or aimed at othering sections, subnationalism can be seen as a constitutive element of democracy



MATHEW IDICULLA

Along with the rhetoric of nationalism, India is also witnessing the re-emergence of subnationalism as a political idea. Interestingly, this is emerging most strongly from Karnataka, which is neither ruled by a regional party nor has shown any significant separatist or secessionist tendencies in the past. The key issue of contention is regarding a separate State flag for Karnataka. While Karnataka has had an unofficial yellow-and-red flag for almost 50 years, the government is now considering adopting an official State flag. The other issue is the protest against the imposition of Hindi, most notably on the signboards of Namma Metro stations in Bengaluru. Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has strongly come out in support of the State flag and against the use of Hindi signboards in the Metro.

Even if the narrative around Kannadiga pride is impelled by the government with an eye on the upcoming Assembly polls, the larger questions around identity it raises cannot be ignored. Given the multiple identity markers, the key challenge is to foster a shared political community that also accommodates the multiple aspirations of a diverse population. This is important as an aggressive nationalism seeks to engulf any alternative ideas of self-identification. The counter-narrative hence brings into question the place of linguistic and cultural rights in a plural society with a federal Constitution.

## Accommodating multiple identities

Historically, the nationalist movement had furthered a pluralistic idea of India. While the Indian National Congress had demanded language-based provinces during the freedom movement, the experience of religion-based Partition made the Nehru government vary of adopting linguistic States in the early years after Independence. But with the enactment of the States Reorganisation Act, 1956, linguistic States became a reality. Further, the Official Languages Act of 1963 prevented the planned transition of India's official language from English to Hindi. These key legislative moves ensured that Indian national identity is not homogeneous.

India also does not follow a classical majoritarian form of democracy. While the first-past-the-post electoral system tends to favour ethnolinguistic majorities, there are also certain group-based fundamental rights provided in the Constitution, such as in Articles 29 and 30. Part XXI of the Constitution has a set of special provisions for certain

States and sub-State regions, while the Fifth and Sixth Schedules give special institutional measures for the administration of areas with high Scheduled Tribe populations.

While India does not neatly fit within political scientist Arend Lijphart's framework of a consociational system (providing for formal power-sharing arrangements between different social groups), it possesses a flexible constitutional order that enables creative solutions to subnational aspirations. The creation of new States based on varied grounds has not been too arduous in independent India. Hence, Alfred Stepan, Juan Linz and Yogendra Yadav argue that India may be classified as a "state-nation" which respects "multiple but complementary" so-



K. MURALI NUNAR

ciocultural identities and provides constitutional mechanisms to accommodate political claims arising out of these identities. Such a constitutional order has been central to our endurance as a nation state for 70 years.

## Furthering a plural democracy

The accommodation of linguistic and cultural diversities does not merely help maintain the integrity of India's national boundaries, but also promotes positive social outcomes. In *How Solidarity Works for Welfare*, Prerna Singh has argued that subnationalism is positively linked to social development. Using multiple research methods, she demonstrates that greater the level of subnational solidarity, higher will be the State's commitment to social welfare. Kerala's success is the most striking example. She contrasts Kerala and Tamil Nadu with Uttar Pradesh, a development laggard with little subnational solidarity, to argue her point.

With hyper-nationalism on the rise, it is important to reassert the pluralistic character of the Indian nation state. While nationalism conventionally privileges one sociocultural identity over others, India's pluralistic nationalism celebrates the coexistence of multiple identities. The assertion of subnational pride in States like Karnataka counters attempts at advancing the homogenising narrative of Hindi-Hindu-Hindustan. As long as subnationalism is not secessionist, or aimed at othering sections of the population, it should not be viewed as a threat, but rather as a constitutive element of India's plural democracy.

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## SINGLE FILE

# The fight within

Conversations about women journalists on the sidelines of a protest

RISHIKESH BADADUR DESAI



After journalist and activist Gauri Lankesh's brutal murder, discussions, both online and offline, have largely been focussed on her. There is a great deal of speculation about who killed her, and why. The spotlight of many of these conversations has also tended to move to the subject of women in the media.

In these exchanges, a surprisingly large number of people have said that journalism is not a safe place for women. Some have said women should not be journalists and others have said that women, even if they choose to be in the media, must not voice strong opinions. A few have even shockingly said that no one would kill an opinionated woman if she stayed at home. What is dismaying is that these attitudes are not just held by laypeople, but by some journalists too, as I found out recently.

## At a tea shop

A few days back, after a press meet, a bunch of reporters parked their bikes near a shop that sold cigarettes, gutka, and tea, and sat down to discuss the case passionately. Opinions were varied. A reporter from a television news channel said he was surprised by the national and international interest that Lankesh's death had generated. A couple said Lankesh had been very critical of the right wing and did not mince her words after the National Democratic Alliance came to power. Some felt her activism had made her a target rather than her journalistic work. A few said she had inherited her father editor and writer P. Lankesh's courage. Some wondered if she had been 'too provocative'.

In this din, a senior journalist, who had been silent until then, told me that his office had recently hired three people, of whom two were women. "That is 66%," he said. "Who said this is a man's world?" A photographer said he had just visited his nephew in a journalism college in Bengaluru and was astonished to find a large number of girls there. "It seemed as if I had entered a girls' college," he said. A young man hoped that women from these journalism colleges were posted to district towns, so that he could see "pretty faces" everyday and "work would be more interesting". Yet another said that "jeans-clad women with hyphenated surnames" were hired these days and all they do is write "Kagakka-Gubbakka stories (fairy tales)". Women don't understand politics and they don't write about politics in a way that others can understand, he remarked. "Why don't they stick to the arts?"

These remarks were appalling, but then I imagined Lankesh sitting amongst these men. Having heard and read her for years, I wondered what she would have said to all these remarks. "Lo maga! (Oh, boy!), will you all keep quiet now?" she may have said. "I can clearly see what men have done to journalism all these years."

We live in a world where women report on terror, politics, business and much more; yet some men don't see them as their equals. It's almost as though Gauri Lankesh's death shows us a measure of her intellect and courage, and she was there in this group to prove them all wrong.



## CONCEPTUAL

### Easterlin paradox

ECONOMICS

This refers to the paradoxical relationship between the growth in the GDP of a country and the level of happiness enjoyed by its people. It is named after American economist Richard Easterlin who proposed the concept in his 1971 paper "Does Economic Growth Improve the Human Lot? Some Empirical Evidence". Easterlin argued that an increase in the GDP of a country did not always lead its citizens to become happier people as the marginal gain in happiness begins to decrease beyond a particular point. Critics, on the other hand, have contested the paradox saying that richer countries are generally happier than poorer ones.

## MORE ON THE WEB

Decoding PMJDY, an intriguing work in progress

<http://bit.ly/2h21tmP>

## FAQ

### An elusive recovery

Reasons behind growth slowdown and possible remedies

PRASHANTH PERUMAL J.

**What do the latest numbers say about the economy?** Growth in industrial output, according to the Index of Industrial Production released by the Central Statistics Office on Tuesday, has slumped to 1.2% in July as against a much higher rate of 4.5% recorded during the same month last year. July's industrial output growth is still higher than the growth rate of -0.2% witnessed in June. Retail price inflation, as measured by the Consumer Price Index, rose to a five-month high of 3.36% in August as compared to 2.36% in July. These numbers follow the slowdown reported earlier this month in the growth of gross domestic product (GDP) during the first quarter of 2017-18.

**What has caused the growth slowdown?** The implementation of the

goods and services tax (GST) has caused significant uncertainty among businesses about the tax rates and other rules to be followed under the new tax regime. This has led to a drop in business activity across the value chain, which in turn is reflected in the lacklustre industrial output numbers. In addition, the economy has been contracting for the last five consecutive quarters, starting well before the implementation of GST or the demonetisation of high-value rupee notes in November last year, before growth in the latest quarter hit a three-year low. Many have attributed this to the drought in private investment which has lasted for years now. The current slowdown is thus very likely the result of both short-term disturbances caused by GST as well as other secular influences.

**What is the likely policy**

**response?** The slump in economic growth in recent years has led to increasing pressure on the Reserve Bank of India to provide a boost to the economy by cutting interest rates aggressively. The underlying belief is that printing money can grow the economy. The rise in retail inflation in August, however, probably rules out any form of aggressive monetary stimulus by the RBI in its next policy meeting due to be held in October. Even so, at least some part of the lost growth may be recovered over the next few quarters as the economy adapts to GST and other related short-term disturbances. A sustained recovery that puts India on the high-growth trajectory for years, as recommended by former RBI Governor Raghuram Rajan, however, may be possible only after the government implements structural reforms in the labour and land market.

## FROM The Hindu ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO SEPTEMBER 14, 1967

### Chinese intruders suffer casualties

A strong Chinese patrol which infiltrated about 300 yards behind the Indian lines in Nathu La this morning [September 13] was thrown back by the Indian troops. The Chinese suffered heavy casualties. The Chinese under cover of darkness at about 3 a.m. on Wednesday managed to get behind the Indian positions. But early in the morning when three persons were detected the Indian forces launched a vigorous offensive and pushed them out. Firing continued in Nathu La area intermittently to-day after the patrol clash. The Chinese used mortar and artillery fire but little of small arms fire.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO SEPTEMBER 14, 1917

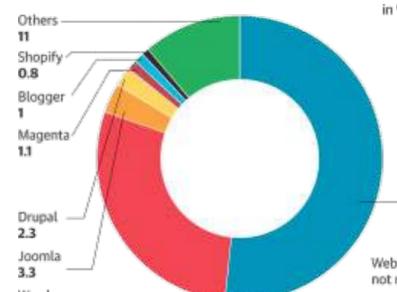
### The British have come to stay

To-day [Sept. 13] the Hon'ble Mr. N.D. Beatson Bell, Senior Member of the Bengal Executive Council, presided over the celebration of the 82nd commemoration of the Founders Day in La Martiniere College [in Calcutta]. In concluding a lengthy speech he said the British had come to India to stay. In these days the air is full of schemes of political reconstruction, some of them wise, some of them otherwise, but they all seem to be or nearly all of them false and out of drawing because they ignored the simple fact that the British have come to stay. We are sometimes told that we are birds of passage. We are not... and when I hear people talk of birds of passage, I generally think of my own children and I remember that their father, grand-father and their great grand-father have already between them put in nearly one hundred years' of work in India and I naturally smile when I hear people talk of birds of passage. I am sure many another smiles when he hears that foolish expression and when we look round on tea gardens and jute-mills, when we look round upon all railways and all steamers — and they are the freights and the traffic of the British Empire — and what British have done in India we smile when we hear ourselves talked of as birds of passage.

## DATA POINT

### Dominant CMS

Increasingly, most digital content on the Web is organised as websites using content management systems. Wordpress dominates CMSes with a 28.6% of all surveyed websites on the Internet



Source: w3techs.com; Data as on 1st August 2017