



A thought for today

Just remember, once you're over the hill you begin to pick up speed

ARTHUR SCHOPENHAUER

Seize The Day

Why Tokyo is offering Delhi a leg up

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said in Gandhinagar on Thursday that India can become the factory of the world, and pledged Japanese help in doing so. This meshes well with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Make in India' programme which has been languishing so far, and Japan is indeed offering the maximum help of any country to actualise the Indian dream of jobs, technological transformation and modernity. But what is Japan's stake in doing this?

Tokyo is buffeted by many factors today, including a rising China that aggressively pushes territorial claims on it, as it does on India as well. In addition China has empowered a North Korea currently shooting missiles over Japan and threatening to 'sink' it, besides conducting powerful nuclear tests. Japan had for long relied on its security relationship with the US, but the latter is currently in a phase of turning inward, besides loudly demanding that allies take responsibility for their own security. These trends have led Tokyo to realise it must exercise more initiative in its neighbourhood as well as in shaping the strategic environment in Asia, Africa and the Indo-Pacific region; and Abe is a strong proponent of this.

Japan's strategic goals can, therefore, partly be realised by assisting in the rise of India, a benign power that would be a bulwark against a unipolar Asia dominated by China, besides being a place to invest its surplus funds. It's now up to New Delhi to seize the day, leveraging rapid rise of Chinese factory wages which facilitates a transfer of industry to India. But in order to utilise the leg up that Tokyo is offering it New Delhi has to bite the bullet of genuine reform, shedding its traditional mindset of government control and micro-management punctuated by expansive populist gestures.



Happily Unhitched

SC smoothens divorce by mutual consent

When SC struck down triple talaq, it won praise for affirming equality and women's rights. It is no longer possible for a Muslim man to cast away a marriage in an instant. Hearteningly, reform in family law hasn't stopped there. Now SC has given family courts the freedom to waive the six-month cooling period in cases of divorce by mutual consent, under the Hindu Marriage Act.

It might seem odd to applaud the court putting the brakes on divorce in one case, and making it simpler in another. Except, the battle is not to make divorce harder but fairer. A couple should not be forced to stay locked in marital harness. The terms of parting, though, should be just, taking into account the investment of each party in the marriage and their situation thereafter, fairly dividing matrimonial assets, which is not the case in India yet.

Across religious communities, divorce and maintenance can be made more just. Irretrievable breakdown of marriage should be recognised as grounds for divorce too – so that you can part without having to come up with claims of spousal wrongdoing, cruelty, adultery or mental breakdown. The Delhi high court is also hearing a PIL on another flaw in our laws, whereby a spouse can plead for 'restitution of conjugal rights', forcing the estranged partner into cohabitation. This clause violates privacy and autonomy, and should have no place in modern family law.



Japanese Connection

This is a boon for India, offering it the means for a manufacturing revolution

Manoj Joshi

Crises, at two ends of Asia, have acted as accelerators in the India-Japan entente. They do not quite bear comparison. A few hundred men with earth moving machines confronting each other in Doklam do not make your hair stand on end, the way a missile – designed to carry nuclear warheads – does while flying overhead. But, as both India and Japan confront threats that are taking on a new and more dangerous edge, they are discovering the value of closer collaboration.

In Doklam, China, which was content to patrol till the Jampheri ridge till recently, suddenly sought to consolidate itself in a region deemed crucial for India's defence posture. Significantly, the only foreign country that supported India categorically on this was Japan.

In Northeast Asia, the situation is much grimmer. Japan has the explicit support of the US. Yet, both the US and China appear paralysed as Kim Jong-un tests ever mightier bombs and missiles and makes no secret of the fact that any move to act against him could lead to massive destruction in Japan and South Korea.

One reason why Japan supported India was to emphasise the principle that countries with disputes should not seek to alter the status quo by force or threat of use of force. Tokyo has faced this in Senkaku/Diayou islands. Till 2008, the Chinese said little or nothing about the issue. Now, they swamp the waters around them with fishing fleets escorted by coast guard vessels. In 2013 they suddenly declared an ADIZ there demanding that all aircraft passing through the air space seek their permission.

New Delhi and Tokyo have been watching as China is altering the status quo in South China Sea by constructing islands with military bases on low tide elevations and claiming territoriality against the ruling of a UNCLOS arbitral tribunal. Both India and Japan are users of the sea lanes that pass through the area.

The regional order in East Asia seems to have reached an inflection point. The US which maintained it – providing credible security guarantees to Japan, South Korea and Taiwan – seems distracted, as much by the rise of China as the questioning of those commitments back home. This didn't happen overnight. The Obama administration allowed China to establish itself in South China Sea with just token protest.

Uncomfortably, Japan is reaching the point where it has begun to wonder whether it must face the twin challenges of China and North Korea all by itself. This is the logic which is driving Japan closer to India.

Although, or perhaps because, it is the dominant player, the US says Senkaku/Diayou islands are covered by the US-Japan defence treaty but it does not take sides in the actual dispute between Japan and China. It challenges China through freedom of navigation patrols in South China Sea, but, again, says it is neutral on the claims. The US supported India in the 1962 war, but has maintained a studied neutrality on the border issue including the Doklam crisis, where they called on both sides to resolve the matter through dialogue.

Japan's challenge is greater. It already has a poisonous relationship with the much bigger and powerful China. Now, it has to confront a new factor – a threatening nuclear neighbour, with which, too, it has a historical animosity. At the best of times, it is hazardous to depend on another country for your security, and Japan is having to confront that with the Trump administration's wayward style.

So, it is seeking coalitions and India fits in well with its strategy since New Delhi, too, is wary of China's ways. For India, the Japanese connection is a boon. The highly developed country offers New Delhi a means of completing its manufacturing revolution and providing high-tech solutions to its defence problems. Japanese finance can help provide fuel to New Delhi's regional policy which is otherwise running on an empty tank.

The two nations are seeking to construct a strategic partnership for realpolitik reasons. They are otherwise quite different from each other and lack even a link language. But the relationship will have to develop economic, financial, industrial and cultural sinews to make it truly meaningful.

Cleanliness Isn't Next To Godliness

From temples to upscale neighbourhoods, Indians show extraordinary tolerance to filth

Pavan K Varma



In his autobiography, My Experiments with Truth, Mahatma Gandhi wrote that when he visited the famous Kashi Vishvanath temple in Varanasi, he was "deeply pained". He described how the approach to one of the most holy sites in Hinduism was through a narrow and filthy lane, swarming with flies, the gutters overflowing, and rotten and stinking flowers were piled up within the precincts of the temple. That was in 1928.

I visited the Vishvanath temple some days ago, and I can vouch that, in terms of our tolerance to filth, nothing has changed. The 'galis', narrow alleyways, are as dirty. There was garbage piled everywhere. A short spell of rain had caused flooding, and filth and excreta floated around. A dead dog lay to the side of one alleyway, even as busy shopkeepers, tea stalls and paan-wallahs carried on their trade as though nothing was wrong.

Only recently, I also visited the Jagannath temple at Puri. This too is one of the most important 'tirthas' or places of pilgrimage for Hindus. Plastic and filth and empty containers of prasad were strewn all around. Huge swarms of flies hovered over the food being cooked for devotees. Cockroaches could be seen on the ornate garlands on sale for offering at the sanctum sanctorum.

What explains our extraordinary tolerance to filth? At an individual level we are consumed with 'purity', and till recently, a person from a 'lower' caste could cause ritual pollution. But, strangely, our temples, which should be the highest embodiment of this obsession with personal purity, are, often, the dirtiest demonstrations of our obliviousness to public cleanliness.

Families will keep their own homes spick and span and throw out garbage on the street because that is the public domain, somebody else's concern. A pious Hindu will take a dip in the Ganga totally unaffected by the garbage on and around the bathing



there is so overwhelming. Indra Gandhi had said long ago that poverty pollutes, and that still holds good. But, the privileged, while resenting the slum next to them, will not forego the human facilities it provides, or do anything collectively (except curse the government) to ensure cleaner living conditions for the support staff that they cannot do without.

On 11th September this month, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, while speaking to students about Swami Vivekananda on the 125th anniversary of his address at Chicago, lambasted our ugly cohabitation with uncleanness. The unusual metaphor he used could not be more blunt: "50 baar soch lijiye kya hamein Vande Mataram kehne ka haq hai? Paan kha kar Bharat maa par pickhaki marein aur Vande Mataram bolein?" Think a fifty times. If we eat paan and spit at Bharat maa, do we have the right to say Vande Mataram?

The message was powerful because it linked patriotism to cleanliness, and did so while remembering Swami Vivekananda's clarion call that service of the people is akin to service of God – Jan Seva is Prabhu Seva. The intention was to tell his young audience that patriotism must translate to greater public welfare and a heightened social sensitivity to collective good.

Transcending the sterile politics around the chanting of Vande Mataram, the PM asked instead why improving cleanliness was not an issue when universities hold their elections. He also linked patriotism to social equity by asserting that those who work to keep India clean – and often die cleaning toxic sewers – have the first right to say Vande Mataram.

Gandhiji believed that cleanliness is next to godliness. A clean body, he said, cannot reside in an unclean city. PM Modi has also said: "Pehle Shauchalaya, Phir Devalaya." First toilets, then temples. The message is the same. But are Indians willing to understand that an unhygienic nation can never become a superpower?

The writer is an author and member of JD(U). Views are personal

ghat, and the polluted state of the river itself. His concern is the religious ritual, and the rewards it could yield, for individual benefit. Anything outside this personal zone of priority remains perpetually out of focus.

There is a pervasive feeling among the privileged that the poor are inherently dirty. Perhaps, it is true that for the impoverished to be cleaner is more difficult, given their living conditions and lack of resources. But, the truth is that middle class or affluent colonies produce more uncollected garbage that is less biodegradable, than do slums. Moreover, even when the privileged can voluntarily do more to keep the public domain cleaner, and have the resources to do so, they don't.

Markets in upscale residential areas are unacceptably dirty. The shops are luxurious, and air-conditioned, but the pavement outside and the environs are filthy. It is not uncommon to see the affluent step out from their air-conditioned cars, close their noses to the stench, and

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rush into the 'oasis' of the glitzy shops. Their moksha lies in individual gratification, not public welfare.

There is another uncomfortable truth that better-off Indians are unwilling to accept. Every conclave of the privileged is bound to create a satellite slum. It is from the slum that the labour they need – cooks, maids, drivers and other ancillary help – comes.

The slums are dirty, no doubt, because they have almost no municipal facilities, and the density of population

Does your child need the jab? It is important for parents to make informed choices about vaccination

Anand Krishnan



With doctors prescribing unnecessary vaccines to children and making hefty profits on this making news, it has been alleged that the Indian Academy of Pediatrics is being influenced by the vaccine industry to promote vaccines in an unethical manner.

Doctors and professional bodies have instead raised concerns that such 'untrue' stories make communities lose confidence in immunisation programmes, threatening the outbreak of vaccine preventable diseases. A better understanding of decisions regarding use of vaccines is required at community, media and policymakers' levels so that blame, if any, is laid at the right quarters.

Recommendations for vaccine use can be in the following categories: government includes it in its national programme and provides it free of cost; government recommends it but does not provide it; government does not recommend it but doctors are free to make their decisions; and finally the recommendation that the vaccine is not to be given. In the last case, usually licences are not given for sale in the country.

Every decision in life is in effect a cost-benefit decision. So we compare the cost of being immunised to its benefit. Cost of vaccine includes not just the cost of the dose but also the cost of delivering the vaccine, including the costs of the cold chain and injections. Benefit is seen



A more reprehensible practice is vaccine manufacturers acting through schools

in terms of disease averted. Major considerations here are risk and severity of the disease being prevented and the effectiveness of the vaccine in preventing it. The fact that benefits occur in an unseen, distant future complicates this equation. While communities usually have some idea of the severity of the disease, the perception of risk is quite variable and is often shown as higher than real to promote vaccine use.

Vaccines provided free by government are those whose benefits outweigh the costs in a societal perspective. But government does not provide all vaccines that are cost-beneficial as it may not have

sufficient funds. Another approach is for governments to offer the vaccine to people with high risk, like under-five children or pregnant women or the elderly. This also reduces the cost to government.

At the individual level people have different abilities to pay and make their own cost-benefit estimations. There is no reason why parents who are willing to spend a large amount of money to prevent illness in their child should not be allowed to do so even if it is not cost-beneficial in the societal perspective. For example Hepatitis A is a relatively uncommon illness and the cost of vaccine is on the higher side. But parents have a right to immunise their children against this disease. Many diseases fall in this category and these are at the centre of controversy today.

The correct way here is for parents to weigh the costs and benefits, and make a decision. But doctors are making these choices – and not really educating the parents to take an informed decision. A more reprehensible practice is vaccine manufacturers acting through schools and making vaccines mandatory for students. This is clearly unethical and wrong.

My neighbours and friends often ask me whether they should follow the advice of their pediatrician and vaccinate their children with these optional vaccines. While I explain the risk and benefit concept to them and ask them to take a call, they invariably ask me to decide which I am loathe to do. Unfortunately many Indian parents do not want to invest time in learning. In such cases it is

not fair to put the blame only on doctors. New vaccines require lots of investment. Manufacturers try to get their vaccines into national programmes as these translate into large sales. Often they cross the thin line of integrity and use predatory practices of marketing.

How does the Indian government decide which vaccines to include in its immunisation programme? Ideally this should be based on evidence both about vaccine effectiveness and India's disease burden. Unfortunately for most diseases we do not have either robust disease burden evidence from India or data on vaccine effectiveness, and community based trials of vaccines are rare. In the absence of real evidence, government has to depend on 'experts' for guidance and all experts being human, are liable to be influenced.

Undue industry interference is true for almost all sectors from telecom to tobacco. So what can be done to promote evidence-based decisions by individuals and authorities on use of vaccines? First and foremost put in place robust surveillance mechanisms as these are essential to evaluate the vaccines. Plus the capacity and regulatory environment for conducting vaccine trials need to be strengthened. Finally, disseminate information on important vaccine preventable diseases to the public in a way that facilitates decision making. It is the responsibility of medical and public health associations to educate parents and policymakers.

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dilbert



Agents Of Change For Global Cooperation

Nayaswamis Jyotish & Devi

Many people are deeply concerned about the overuse of natural resources, increasing global warming, and the vastly uneven distribution of wealth. The root causes are greed and competition, attitudes that won't change until there is an expansion of consciousness. That is why Paramhansa Yogananda came, in part, to help correct these attitudes by emphasising high thinking, simple living, and the search for God.

New consciousness
A new consciousness of unity is needed. A hallmark of Kali Yuga was that life seemed to be little more than a brutal struggle for survival. But this old paradigm is slowly breaking down. With the advent of Dwapara Yuga, people are beginning to realise that all life is connected and that survival of the fittest is a misconception. Our role is to become

agents of change towards greater global cooperation, especially at work, where competition is still highly rewarded.

Learn to see God through others. The deepest sense of connection comes from learning to see God or guru not only in everything, but through everything.

If we see God in the faces of others, we will naturally feel a deep sense of connectedness with everyone. Even to hold a fraction of that consciousness radically changes the nature of our relationships.

Energy flow
Create a magnetic upward flow of energy. An important principle is to create a positive flow of energy up the spine to the spiritual eye. This upward flow of energy through the chakras creates a magnetic field that connects us with others. A downward flow, on the other hand, increases our separation

and disunity.

If we find ourselves slipping into a negative or complaining attitude, we should work first on controlling the flow of energy rather than on trying to convince the mind to be more positive. First feel the energy in the heart and

make it positive. A little moment of appreciation works wonders! Then direct the heart's feeling upward to the spiritual eye. We will find that our thoughts turn positive as soon as the life-force begins to flow upward.

This upward direction of energy will also make us magnetic, and positive magnetism will attract positive people. Become channels of divine friendship. Once you can produce a positive flow, consciously let it stream out to those around you. Become a wellspring of kindness and support. When we make the welfare of people our

main priority, we generate the positive magnetism that causes the right things to happen, and in the best possible way.

Harmonious flow
The deep sense of connectedness to God and other people that we gain in meditation is a large part of what produces an attitude of unity. Yogananda said that meditation should be active service and that service should be active meditation.

Bring joy into your work. If we can approach our work with a deep inward consciousness, our outer and inner life will begin to meld together into a beautiful, harmonious flow. The particular area of our work is not nearly so important as the quality of consciousness with which we work. Make it fun, joyful, cooperative, and holy.

Nayaswamis Jyotish and Devi will speak on 'The Role of Yoga in Modern Times' at Yogananda Fest at Ananda Gurgaon, today. Give a missed call at 955226936 or visit www.anandadelinc.org

