



A thought for today

Democracy must be something more than two wolves and a sheep voting on what to have for dinner

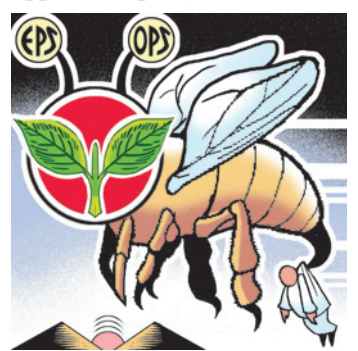
JAMES BOVARD, US author

Desperate Measures

Disqualification of 18 AIADMK MLAs is a stalling bid that fails the test of democracy

Political uncertainty plaguing Tamil Nadu since the death of chief minister Jayalalitha last December deepened yesterday, with assembly Speaker P Dhanapal disqualifying 18 AIADMK legislators owing allegiance to 'sacked' party leader TTV Dhinakaran. The action, taken under the anti-defection law, has sparked a debate on its constitutional and legal validity as the MLAs have only revolted against chief minister Edappadi K Palaniswami, but not violated a party whip.

A recent, similar case of disqualification of 11 BJP legislators in the Yeddyurappa government in Karnataka was upheld by the high court, but turned down by the Supreme Court. The Dhinakaran group has decided to challenge the disqualification in court. Principal opposition party DMK, which had been watching the internal strife



in the ruling party and waiting for the government to fall, was caught unawares by the development. With the disqualification the 116-strong AIADMK (excluding the Speaker) technically commands a majority in the House, the strength of which has been reduced to 215.

Whether the disqualification is declared valid or not the tottering EPS government has got an extended lease of life, with apparent blessings from BJP at the Centre. Two issues that have come into focus at this juncture are the procrastination of DMK and political manipulations of the party in power. DMK had failed to ask the Speaker for a no-confidence motion against the government when there was the possibility of bringing some clarity to the political situation. As for AIADMK, it knows that the disqualification of MLAs may not stand scrutiny in a court of law, but any stay on the Speaker's order will in effect bar a floor test, ensuring continuance of the government for now.

Political flux always has a detrimental effect on governance, as has been witnessed in the state over the past few months. Neither AIADMK leaders nor the forces at the Centre appear to have any regard for the state facing a governance crisis. The disqualification of the MLAs is an assault on democracy. The only way the state can get back to the path of progress is by ensuring political stability. And this has to be done the democratic way. Those in Chennai or in Delhi playing political games will in effect incur the wrath of the people of Tamil Nadu.

State Can't Cop Out

Professionalism in the police force is choked by political controls and poor service conditions

For an agency so critical to public safety and crime fighting, the inability to staff police forces with adequate personnel stands out sharply in the latest data compiled by Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPR&D). Nearly 21% of sanctioned posts are lying vacant, which translates to one cop for every 663 people against a sanctioned police population ratio of 1:518. Contrast this with the allocation of 56,944 police personnel to 20,828 VIPs and we have a situation where the state takes exemplary care of a bloated list of "important" citizens but is not so favourably disposed to ordinary people.



With just 150 cops per lakh population, India's emerging power status is at odds with its position at the near bottom of this statistical table with some of the poorest nations for company. India's general conviction rate of 47% in 2015 and a conviction rate of just 21.7% in crimes against women reveal that most cases brought to trial end in acquittal, a grim reflection of the police force's incompetence. But the blame lies with state governments. The case has been made for greater administrative and functional autonomy to the IPS hierarchy so that police officers, from top to bottom, are not constrained by political imperatives and fear of disciplinary action.

The failure to staff police force adequately has created a corps of overworked and extremely stressed police. In a 2014 BPR&D study, 68% of surveyed SHOs reported that their subordinates worked more than 11 hours daily and 73% were summoned to work on off-days too. Institutional realities like custodial torture, non-registration of FIRs, low conviction rate and corruption are a direct consequence of the apathy to police reforms. The individual failures add up to a big picture that portrays the police in a sorry light.

Saga of selecting a sari

How about the gold one with the red border, you look stunning in it

Bikram Vohra



One of the ways in which wives con husbands into accompanying them to events and functions is by not reminding them till the last minute. Husband comes home after a rotten day at work looking forward to an easy evening to discover a trouser being ironed or a kurta all set for him to put on and there on the bed are sixteen saris flung about like debris from a Florida

hurricane not to mention the saris on hangers in the cupboard lined up like soldiers on parade and those in the suitcase meant for the right season. Since we men have no such dilemma having to wrestle with three vaguely similar suits this dilemma leaves us baffled. At this point the wife wails, I have nothing to wear, nothing to wear being a mandatory mantra which any self-respecting woman will abide by.

As civilisation moves onwards 'man' kind will one day have the courage to say something flip and clever like oh, in that case we can't have you going as Lady Godiva, let's just stay home and watch the telly. But since we are very far from that point, men fall into the trap. They volunteer their services in the hope that it will rush things and they can leave for this function and maybe get back in time for the last hour of the cricket match. Wear the gold one with the red border, you look stunning in it. With a curl of the lip and a toss of the hair, you'll be told that the Munduls will be there and Mrs Mundul has seen this sari, don't be ridiculous.

Never one to give up, the husband will say, OK fine, though why anyone would look at your sari when ARR Rahman is live on stage beats me but wear this one, the coppery looking one. Wife says but I do not have a matching blouse, matching blouses being about the level of a DEFCON red situation or an 8.8 on the Richter scale. This one matches, says you only to be told that this is scorched sienna but the sari is flaming sunset, they do not go together. Since men know the four basic colours and perhaps pushed to the wall could unscramble VIBGYOR but are not likely to be experts on the exotic of female colours.

Finally, four saris will be selected for the semi-finals and you will not learn to shut your mouth and instead say, ummmm, good choice and that sari will go down in straight sets. In the curious politics of sari selection your wife will finally wear the first sari she chose but only after this one hour war of attrition. Go figure.

How Piketty Got It Wrong

If you take the case of Dalits in India, liberty and equality can march in opposite directions

Chandra Bhan Prasad



A study by acclaimed French economist Thomas Piketty and his team, titled 'Indian income inequality, 1922-2014: From British Raj to Billionaire Raj?' claims inequality in India is at its highest since 1922. This has made development economists and policy makers anxious about whether India is on an appropriate growth trajectory.

Let's consider the state of affairs through the looking glass of those at the bottom of the inequality pile. In village Lakhmir Gadhi, Bulandshahar, five tractors are parked outside Thakur Hamendra Pal Singh's capacious house. A big zamindar in pre-Independence times, the family imported a tractor in 1947. Less than a mile north of the Thakur house lies a large mango orchard with 200 trees.

Close to the Thakur house live 45 Dalit families, who once worked for the Thakur clan only. In terms of house sizes, land ownership and other assets, Dalits are still far behind, too unequal to merit any comparison with the upper caste families. Most Dalit families live in tiny houses, landholdings are smaller.

None owns a tractor, nobody owns a mango tree, leave alone mango orchards. Wealth, income, asset based inequality between Thakurs and Dalits remains huge. What however has transpired during the past 70 years, in particular following the 1991 reforms, is beyond the critical capabilities of thinkers like Piketty who are born in caste-neutral societies.

Dalit women around Lakhmir Gadhi village don't visit Thakur homes, leave alone work for them. Dalit men trek to nearby Khurja town each morning to find work in the pottery industry. Dalit children crowd school buildings. "They are free now," says Thakur Hamendra. Freedom apart, Dalits in the vicinity have acquired new food sources. Millets are history. "We eat the same wheat, same pulses, same rice that Thakurs eat," says Narendra Kumar, a Dalit with a PDS shop. "We too wear dresses that Thakurs do."



Some 500km east of Bulandshahar, in Naya Gaon Panchayat in UP's Sitapur district, there are identical tales. Thakur Suresh Singh has a house, built in 1802, that is large enough to house a dozen Dalit families.

The 50 Thakur households own most of the farm land. Any wealth based inequality count between Thakurs and Dalits would be capacious indeed. But as in Lakhmir Gadh village, Dalits in Naya Gaon have crafted a different trajectory.

Men take local trains to Lucknow and Sitapur daily. Women step out only to work in their farmlands. Children go to schools. The fact that the Thakur hamlet, once home to over 400 bullocks, has none today is because the Dalits who tended to them and tilled their land have alternative employment. "They no longer need us. There is no difference in what we wear and eat as them," rues Thakur Suresh Singh.

Three hundred km east, in a village in Azamgarh district, there's an identical narrative. "Thakur women began sobbing

"Thakur women began sobbing before us," recalls Delhi based academic Shubha Parmar. "Because the Dalit women no longer work for us, we have to sweat it out," a Thakur woman told her.

A seminal study led by Vevesh Kapur of the University of Pennsylvania, published in 2008, found a massive positive change in the lives of UP Dalits. For the study field work, we covered 19,087 Dalit households in Bilariaganj block of Azamgarh (east UP) and in Khurja block, Bulandshahar (west UP). We found that only 0.1% Dalit households in Bilariaganj, and 0.2% household

in Khurja block worked as halwahis, a job where families would be tied up with landlords on an unending basis. Also, in both the blocks, over 99% Dalit families had stopped eating millets. In other words, Dalits in both the blocks had acquired food source equality.

In a society like India, income, asset, wealth based index of inequality means very little. The traditional indices ignore crucial social indicators such as caste regulated humiliations and indignity. Even worse, the income based indices of inequality may in fact be undermining the freedom argument.

For instance, inequality gap between a landlord and his workers may be far narrower than inequality gap between a billionaire and his workers. Howsoever unequal workers under a capitalist boss may be, they are freer than their counterparts in the countryside working for landlords.

Worse even more, reverse this inequality logic to craft an equality index for Dalits. A Dalit hamlet, let's say of 100 families, work for the village landlords. Given their occupations, wage payment pattern, and incomes, the entire Dalit hamlet may be more equal than unequal in living conditions, shared agonies, distress levels and unfreedom. At this point let's say five Dalits from the hamlet escape their landlords, and land jobs in the cement factory nearby. Suddenly, income of the five Dalit households shoots up, but inequality has also been created, a split has taken place in the Dalit hamlet. Because five households are richer and freer than the rest 95.

A rising Gujarat based Dalit leader argues, almost on these lines, that the rise of enterprises amongst Dalits can result in rise of inequality among Dalits. For centuries Dalits have faced discrimination on grounds of social status, food sources, clothing, occupations and lifestyles - for example, not being allowed to grow pointed moustaches. To Dalits, thus, freedom from social subjugation and caste dominance is more important than income, wealth based equality. In fact, freedom from caste order may pave the road to income based inequality.

The writer is a commentator on Dalit issues

A killing most foul: Can 'pseudo-secularists' be murdered because you dislike and disagree with them?

GR GOPINATH



In a moment of senseless madness, a life was snuffed out. A lithe, vibrant, sylph-like woman cut down by a hail of bullets from unknown assailants. Gauri Lankesh was irrepressible and irreverent. She challenged right wing bigots and zealots, often fighting for the cause of the poor and marginalised. Not a card carrying communist, but a fire breathing socialist and journalist-activist. That was her public persona. In private she was caring, humane and loving.

To all appearance the murder was carried out by unknown, faceless, nameless contract killers. As Gopal Hosur, former state intelligence chief of Karnataka, said in a recent interview, it could have been ordered by ideological opponents, or by someone connected to her private life or to professional or business matters.

Since Gauri was a well known journalist of a tabloid and a rebel in the cross hairs of various sections of society, whose murder followed a pattern of earlier murders of intellectuals and rationalists, one of whom was MM Kalburgi, a respected academic and vice-chancellor of Kannada University in Hampi, the latest murder has caught the nation's attention. And therefore the onus is squarely on the state government to catch the true killers.

Bertrand Russell said: "I would never



The political, social and intellectual leadership across the spectrum of Left and Right must rise above narrow parochial boundaries before the toxins of hate, mistrust and bigotry destroy the nation

die for my beliefs because I could be wrong." By the same token you cannot kill someone for their beliefs, because you could be wrong. Even if you were

right, can you kill or assault someone for their ideology or the ideas they hold, if it is in variance to yours? If that is justified then by the same logic, you too could be murdered.

Kings and dictators killed those who differed with them or displayed any streak of independence. But we all aspire to live in a democratic, egalitarian and free society and must resolve our differences through dialogue.

Gauri held extreme views. True, her language was often aggressive. It could have been tempered, more civil and sensitive. But so is the language of Muslim and Hindu hardliners and many leaders on either side of the social and political divide. Does that give one a licence to kill them?

The leaders of the Hindu community from across various denominations must come out openly and loudly and strongly condemn the killing, while speaking out against the poison of intolerance. Similarly the Muslim leadership - both the clerics and leaders from various spheres should come forth and denounce the killings by Islamic terror outfits. A few have condemned, but many have been silent or equivocal. They have to take a clear stand, so that no one is in the slightest doubt whether they are on the side of a humane, pluralistic society that is open and free or they wish to stand alongside bigots and fanatics ready to kill those who have a different view of the world.

The Gauri Lankesh murder has shaken the entire nation to its roots because not

only legions of anonymous social media trolls - and many with identity - celebrated it, even some members of political parties justified it. With rumours, innuendo and fake news gripping the nation, the general public is getting swayed by social media and buffeted by the political dog fight between the ruling party at the Centre and the ruling party in the state, and between the Right and Left.

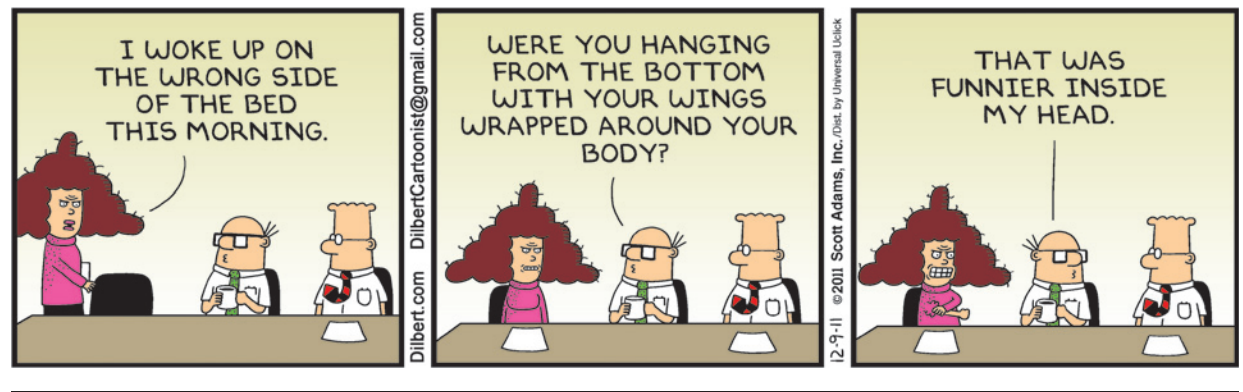
Cases such as Gauri and related murders span two states and may need an overarching oversight and coordinated effort by an agency like CBI and other central agencies. But it's a tragedy of our times that while the state intelligence and police are seen to be beholden to state government, the central investigating agencies are suspected of being handmaidens of the ruling party, and both are reluctant to trust each other. Restoring faith in institutional credibility, which has taken a beating of late, is the only answer.

The political, social and intellectual leadership across the spectrum of Left and Right must rise above narrow parochial boundaries to build an inclusive, open and free society before the toxins of hate, mistrust and bigotry spread and destroy the nation.

It is well to remember what our former beloved Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee said - "Kitaab ka jawab kitaab se hota hai." Books and articles must be answered by books and articles, not bullets.

The writer is a retired Indian army Captain and founder of Air Deccan

dilbert



Come Back, The Only Way Out Is In

Thich Nhat Hanh

As teachers, our mission is not just to transmit knowledge, but to help create a worthy, beautiful human race, in order to take care of our precious planet. We know that children - the students of today - have a lot of suffering in them. There is a loneliness, a kind of vacuum in the child, and the child tries to fill up this emptiness with video games, movies, television, food, and perhaps, drugs. There is an enormous amount of suffering in young people, and this makes the work of teaching a lot more difficult.

We ourselves, as teachers, have difficulties, too. If we as teachers, along with our colleagues, are not happy, how can we expect children to be happy? The first step is to come back to yourself - the way out is in. Come back to yourself to be able to take care of yourself: learn how to generate a feeling of happiness; learn how to handle a painful feeling or emotion; listen to your own suffering, so that understanding and compassion can be born.

Mindfulness is a kind of energy that helps us to be fully present in the here and the now, aware of what is going on in our body, our feelings, mind, and in the world, so that we can get in touch with the wonders of life that nourish and heal us. With mindfulness, concentration and insight, you can generate a feeling of joy and happiness, whenever you want. With the energy of mindfulness, you can also handle a painful feeling or emotion. If you're joyful, happy and aware, you light up the lamp of happiness and joy in others, because, in each of us, there is a seed of mindfulness, of awareness. As a teacher, you can perform that miracle in just a few seconds, and you can make the students in your class happy.



you see the suffering in the other person you don't blame or accuse them anymore. Instead you want to help him. Coupled with mindful listening, is the practice of loving speech. We try to tell the other person the truth about the suffering in us and in him, using gentle speech to help the other person open his heart. The way we speak, helps the other person recognise the suffering in him, and in you.

Retreats led by teachers in the tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh will be held, Oct 13-15 in Dehradun and Nov 6-8 in Gurgaon. Contact ahimsa.trust@gmail.com Tel: 8447734129.