



THE INDIAN EXPRESS, SATURDAY, OCTOBER 3, 2020

THE EDITORIAL PAGE

The Indian **EXPRESS**

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

OUTLAW

Barricading the village of a grieving family shows how insecure the UP government is, and how compromised its police

WHAT MAKES A powerful government so insecure that it must build a wall of policemen to barricade from public view — and cut off access to — a village in which a traumatised Dalit family grieves the death of a 19-year-old daughter brutalised by upper caste men? That question is answered in the heavy-handedness of the Uttar Pradesh government of Yogi Adityanath as it clumsily tries to brush, under countless carpets, its callousness and ineptitude. The crime in Hathras was heinous. But what has followed in its wake, the hurried cremation by the police in the dark, the denial of the family's right to perform the last rites, followed by boorish police action to prevent anyone, including Opposition leaders of the Congress and TMC, from reaching the young woman's family, has added up to a sordid spectacle that should deeply embarrass the Yogi Adityanath regime in UP. Reassuringly, the court has stepped in to restore a semblance of civility, uphold the law. Taking suo motu cognisance of incidents that have "shocked our conscience", and calling it a matter of "immense public importance and public interest", the Allahabad High Court has promised to look into allegations of "violation of the basic human and fundamental rights not only of the deceased victim but also of her family members".

It remains to be seen if the court's rightful outrage, and mounting public indignation, are successful in making a dent in a wider culture of impunity that appears to be deepening in UP. The police's grave mis-steps in Hathras have been preceded by a series of warning signals. The number of encounters grows in the state — 115 at last count — even as there is no action against any policeman for the extra judicial killings. They receive political sanction, in fact, from the ruling party. Two police officials have been charged in the Vilas Dubey case — featuring the gangster in whose rise and death the police evidently played a dubious role. Three police officials stand charged in the CBI in the Unnao rape case of 2017. The lines between those whose responsibility it is to uphold the law and those who break it have been blurring dangerously in UP. Here, the police routinely invites allegations of conducting itself as an arm of the ruling party, not the state. And of standing with the powerful and targeting the vulnerable who most need protection of the law — those who belong to a lower caste or class, a minority religion, or take a dissenting political position.

The Hathras case is a test for the UP Police, and also for the Yogi Adityanath government that it reports to. All of the government's determined efforts to project and promote UP as a well governed state will amount to naught if it is unable to send out a simple message — that it is fully committed to upholding the law and bringing to book those who think they can brutalise a woman and get away with it.

LISTEN TO THE COURT

Labour reform must place concerns of labour at centre, more so during a period of acute distress

IN THE WEEKS after the imposition of the national lockdown, and in the midst of the migrant labour crisis unfolding across the country, several state governments had issued notifications intending to provide industry with a plethora of exemptions and relaxations from the existing labour laws. While the measures were ostensibly designed to reduce the compliance and regulatory burden on firms during a period of acute financial stress, in most cases the relaxations proposed by the states ended up stripping workers of the basic forms of protection afforded to them. They had the effect of chipping away at their bargaining power, and doing away with redressal mechanisms, at a time of greater vulnerability and deepening insecurity. While most states have withdrawn their proposals since, in a welcome move, the Supreme Court has stepped in. On Thursday, it quashed one such notification by the Gujarat government that granted employers temporary "relaxations" from provisions of the Factories Act, 1948, calling it "an affront to the workers' right to life and right against forced labour".

The notification, issued on April 17, by the Gujarat Labour and Employment Department under Section 5 of the Factories Act, increased the daily working hours from nine to 12, while also requiring employers to pay overtime wages at a rate proportionate to the ordinary rate of wages, instead of what was mandated under Section 59. The notification was subsequently extended on July 20. The state government sought to justify the changes on grounds that COVID-19 was a "public emergency", and that it had caused "extreme financial exigencies". However, doing so, more so in a period of extreme precarity, was tantamount to placing the financial burden stemming from the pandemic on the shoulders of labour. As the Court noted, "the notifications, in denying humane working conditions and overtime wages provided by law, are an affront to the workers' right to life and right against forced labour".

Both the controversial notifications in the states, and the pushing through of three labour bills in Parliament last week, have raised an important concern. At a time of acute distress which has exposed the absence of even the most basic of social security nets, and underlined the inadequacy of public health care systems, and with the economy unlikely to recover in the near term, it is vital that the concerns of labour must be placed at the front and centre of any reform that takes its name.

IPL'S FAIRY TALE

'Doing a Tewatia' sneaks into cricketing lingo — a reminder of what makes the IPL so entertaining

RAJSTHAN ROYAL ALL-ROUNDER Rahul Tewatia's heroics last Sunday were the stuff of Indian Premier League dreams made of. An unknown cricketer fashioning the unlikely of heists in the most dramatic of circumstances. It was IPL's pure Bollywood moment, when the mookie hero, beaten to pulp, drags himself from the ditch and demolishes the goons. In the space of eight deliveries and 15 minutes, Tewatia became a household name. For this one night alone, he will be remembered for a long time. 'Doing a Tewatia' has already sneaked into the IPL lingo.

Only time will tell whether the talented all-rounder will be around for a long time or fade away, but he is the latest example of the league's capacity to create fairytales. Only IPL could offer such moments of instant and dizzying fame. For by the time a cricketer makes his international debut, there might already be a wealth of data and YouTube footage. The audience, to an extent, is well informed of its subject. But less so for somebody like Tewatia, whose numbers in domestic cricket aren't remarkable.

The IPL is the universe where the rags-to-riches script becomes a reality. It's the reason Kamran Khan, the slinging left-arm seamer of Rajasthan Royals, is remembered still. Khan has not played any competitive cricket in seven years, but in two fiery overs in Cape Town, he held the IPL world in thrall. Or hard-hitting Kings XI Punjab batsman Paul Valthary, who raised a century in barely 50 balls and then vanished even quicker. Or Manvinder Bisla, whose 89 from 48 balls won Kolkata Knight Riders their maiden IPL silverware in 2012. IPL has given cricketers the moment of fame that they might not have otherwise got — it's the filminess of IPL that makes it most entertaining.



MENAKA GURUSWAMY

ON SEPTEMBER 14, 2020, a 19-year-old Dalit woman goes to work in the fields, close to her home, in the Hathras district of western Uttar Pradesh. Let us call this young woman — India. She lived with her family across the street from their upper caste Thakur neighbours in this bustling town, that is 200 kilometres from Delhi.

As Newsland reports, India's mother found her daughter's body in the path of the fields owned by the Thakur neighbours. She is quoted as saying, "My daughter was lying naked with her tongue protruding from her mouth. Her eyes were bulging out and she was bleeding from her mouth, her neck and there was blood near her eyes. I also noticed bleeding from her vagina. I quickly covered her with the pallu of my saree and started screaming."

The law is clear on how the state must respond. At this point, a First Information Report (FIR) must be immediately lodged, and if the victim needs hospitalisation then the requirements of a medico-legal case such as this, the preservation of clothing, the recording of injuries, can be done at the hospital. A statement as to the events, under Section 164 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, of the survivor in the presence of a magistrate, must be ensured by the police. It is expected that the police arrange for the magistrate to be taken to the hospital. Finally, if the survivor of the rape should pass away, then the body must be handed over to her family, after post-mortem analysis. Now let us examine what happened to India and her family.

Post the assault, India was taken to the Champa police station, and from there to the hospital while her brother stayed back to register an FIR. At the hospital, despite the trauma on September 21 and 22, she clearly named her upper caste neighbours and their friends as her assailants. Eventually, belatedly — over two weeks after the assault — India was transferred to Safdarjung Medical Hospital in Delhi, where she died. A magistrate came to the hospital

The gangrape

Hathras is part of a larger story. It's not just a woman who was brutalised — spine of Indian state is broken

On October 1, the Additional Director General of Police, Prashant Kumar, apparently relying on the FSL, said that India's cause of death was injury to the spinal cord, no sperm was found and no rape occurred. The officer would do well to note Section 166 A of the Penal Code that makes it a punishable offence for the police not to register a rape.

That the body was cremated in a hurry makes it easier for him to spin this story. Reports indicate that the FSL samples were taken days after the events, making it impossible for bodily fluids like sperm to be found. However, the amendments to our rape law mandate that only penetration is required to establish rape or gang rape, and not presence of sperm.

in Aligarh to record her statement but it is unclear whether they preserved sufficient evidence for a case such as this.

What followed subsequently, tells you even more about the state of Uttar Pradesh police and those they answer to: by chain of direct command, to the Home Minister of the state — that portfolio is held by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. After her death in Delhi, India's body was whisked away, and despite the fierce protests of her family, was cremated around 2:30 am/3:00 am by the police. The journalist Tanushree Pandey in her first-person account, captures the police telling India's family that mistakes have been made (galitiya hui hai) but it is time to "move on", and family members locked themselves in their home in fear while police proceeded to cremate India. The police then tried to prevent the press from taking any pictures or recording their actions.

Meanwhile, on October 1, the Additional Director General of Police, Prashant Kumar, apparently relying on the FSL, said that India's cause of death was injury to the spinal cord, no sperm was found and no rape occurred. The officer would do well to note Section 166 A of the Penal Code that makes it a punishable offence for the police not to register a rape.

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and death. A decade ago, they had declared that the right to life and dignity includes the right of a deceased to have her body treated with respect, subject to her tradition, culture and religion practised. The next date of hearing before the High Court is October 12, meaning that India's family must withstand the pressure being mounted on them to change their story.

The historical reality of our country is that events like the gangrape of India have been routine. In pre-constitutional feudal India, there was socially sanctioned control of the upper castes on the labour, bodies and aspirations of lower castes, especially Dalits. Our Constitution, recognising the systemic degradation of lower caste persons, mandated prohibition on caste and sex based discrimination. It also made reparations by providing for reservation in educational institutions, political constituencies and public employment for members of Scheduled Castes and Tribes.

But India's case shows that no constitution has any meaning if those tasked with enforcing it have aligned themselves to an unconstitutional caste-based code of loyalty. As Cynthia Stephen, a Dalit activist and writer, asks, "Why on earth was her body torn from the family and burnt in the dark somewhere like it's a piece of trash? In Bangalore our garbage trucks take the solid waste outside the city and incinerate it in an open field. This is something like that, no dignity even in death."

India's violation is part of a larger story of our country. It is not just India's spine that was broken — it is the spine of the Indian state and the police that is fractured. It is not just India that was brutalised, it is each and every woman who is raped and silenced that screams out loud in the disregard of India's body even in death. It is our collective dignity and decency that is erased forever. Shame on all of us.

The writer is a Senior Advocate at the Supreme Court of India

A MOMENT OF SHAME

In Pakistan, protest over a rape turned into an anti-government movement



KHALED AHMED

AN INDIAN I greatly admire, Kamla Bhasin, whose indelible was the sick South Asian manhood is on record, will be happy to know that one of the two men who raped a woman on a Lahore highway in the second week of September has been apprehended. As never before, women from across all social levels hit the streets and protested, effectively putting the government of Prime Minister Imran Khan under challenge. Significantly, they were protesting against the Capital City Police Officer (CCPO) of Lahore, one Umar Sheikh, who had come on TV representing the wronged woman for "coming out so late in the night".

What happened was difficult to take. The woman — probably in some kind of crisis that no one has bothered to investigate — had put her three children in a car and tried to drive out of Lahore when she was waylaid by rapists after her car ran out of fuel. The first reaction came from CCPO Sheikh, "victim-shaming" the woman. One website, *Naya Daur*, reported: "The Intelligence Bureau in an official report on Umar Sheikh had described him as a womaniser who was financially and morally corrupt." The IB report further stated: "Posted as District Police Officer Sargodha (2006-2007) he remained involved in corrupt practices."

Sheikh had insulted his boss, the provincial Inspector General of Police, Dosab Dastgir, and was not punished, thus

compelling the IG to resign his post knowing that Sheikh was "specially chosen" by PM Khan. When the women's protest across the country became too insistent, Khan's ruling party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, got split over the event and some leaders denounced Sheikh and asked for his removal "after apology". Soon, the protest proved too much even for the misogynists of Pakistan. Sheikh was forced to apologise. He did so, in a most insincere manner, intensifying the women's protest which was now not only anti-rape but also anti-government.

Pakistan's chief justice Gulsar Ahmed denounced the rape and questioned Imran Khan's appointment of a disreputable officer to the post of CCPO. The Lahore High Court was even more outspoken about the malpractice of appointing "trouble-shooting" officers with bad reputations.

At the popular level where Pakistani clergy rules, people tend to equate rape with sexual intercourse requiring four eye-witnesses if you want to convict the rapist. A raped woman can actually get into trouble with the law if she reports the matter to the police. In the present case, the woman has reportedly refused to become a party to the case for fear of being dishonoured in the court of law. No wonder, Pakistan has become a laughable hunting-ground for the "empowered" Muslim male. In the first 60 days of 2020, as many as 73 incidents of

rape were reported in Lahore, including five gang-rape cases — 10 cases of gang-rape were registered in the whole of 2019.

In 2002, Mukhtar Mai in Punjab was called to a council of elders to apologise to a kangaroo court for her brother's alleged sexual assault of a woman from a landlord's family. On the orders of the council, she was dragged to a nearby hut where she was raped in retaliation by four men while 10 people watched. The case went up to the Supreme Court but Mai was not given justice "because she was not a virgin".

From June 2013 to February 2015, 4,960 cases of rape were registered in Pakistan, with 6,632 arrests. How many rapists were punished? Only 219, and that too with a lot of mitigation. Post the current incident, Imran Khan has come on TV to say that he would like to have a law that castrates the rapist; but the women protesting on the streets of Pakistan want him to punish the police officer who believes in the indictment of the raped woman "because she was driving late at night".

The Pakistani male, even when joining the protest, doesn't really believe that rape is endemic in Pakistan. It is his inborn "faith" that women are "inferior" from the day Allah created Eve and then punished Adam for Eve's disobedience in Paradise.

The writer is consulting editor, Newsweek Pakistan

OCTOBER 3, 1980, FORTY YEARS AGO

BATTLE RAGES ON

IRAQI AND IRANIAN troops were reportedly locked in savage hand-to-hand combat for Iran's oil port of Khorramshahr and an Iraqi air attack was said to have heavily damaged it. A 3-billion Persian Gulf petrochemical complex under construction to the east, Iraq said its shock troops were battling shock troops of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards in a fresh assault to capture Khorramshahr. "Savage battles are raging from house to house, street to street to complete the liberation of the city," the government-controlled Baghdad newspaper *Al-Gharbiya* said in a report broadcast by Iraq's state radio. Meanwhile, Iran claimed it dispatched paratroopers to wave of jet attacks

to rescue Khorramshahr. Iranian President Abolhasan Bani Sadr said in a message to his armed forces that the Iranians had also chased the Iraqis out of the border city of Susanger and forced them to retreat towards the Iran-Iraq border.

BOMBAY SATYAGRAHA THE SATYAGRAHA by Maharashtra's opposition parties turned out to be a massive affair with thousands of people defying the prohibitory order and courting arrest in Bombay today. The mass satyagraha was the first of the two major acts in the state. The other being a Maharashtra bandh on October 15. Both steps

are to protest against the price rise, atrocities on the weaker sections of society and the deteriorating law and order situation in the state.

T&K SPEAKER

AFTER UPRAJESH KENNES lasting for two hours, the Kashmir Legislative Assembly, which met for its autumn session today, admitted a no-confidence motion against the Speaker. Earlier, the House was adjourned to a later date. The Speaker had been asked to resign by the opposition groups in the assembly. When the House resumed, Sheikh Abdullah said he had asked the Speaker to respect the wishes of the majority of the House.



New Delhi





Pathways to diversity

As a biodiversity convention key member, India's pandemic recovery must be greened

The UN Summit on Biodiversity convened on September 30 in the midst of a global crisis caused by the novel coronavirus. It is therefore to have spilled over to humans from an animal reservoir. In New York, member-nations of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) took note of the link between biodiversity loss and the spread of animal pathogens, calling for an end to destructive industrial and commercial practices. There is consensus that conservation targets set a decade ago in Aichi, Japan, to be achieved by 2020, have spectacularly failed. Evidence is presented by the latest UN Global Biodiversity Outlook 5 report: none of the 20 targets has been fully met. Many countries have chosen to ignore the connection between biodiversity and well-being, and depleted ecological capital in pursuit of financial prosperity. Among the Aichi targets that fell by the wayside are those on reform or phasing out of subsidies that erode biodiversity, steps for resource use within safe ecological limits, preventing industrial fisheries from destroying threatened species and vulnerable ecosystems, and an end to pollution, including growing plastic waste. A bright spot is the partial progress made on protecting surface and subsurface water, island, coastal and marine areas. But the losses appear even more stark from WWF's Living Planet Index, which points to precipitous declines in vertebrate populations, a key indicator, by 68% over 1970 levels. Faced with fast-eroding ecosystem health, the 196 CBD member-countries must chart a greener course, aligning it with the Paris Agreement, which has a significant impact on the health of flora and fauna.

At Wednesday's summit, India's message was one of pride in an ancient conservation tradition, as one of the few megadiverse countries, and one that recognised the value of nature as much as the destructive impact of unregulated resources exploitation. National laws of the 1970s and 1980s have indeed shielded islands of biodiversity, particularly in about 5% of the country's land designated as protected areas, but they are today seen as irritants to speedy extraction of natural resources. In this unseemly hurry, due process is sought to be dispensed with, as envisaged by the new EIA norms proposed by the NDA government. There is little concern for indigenous communities that have fostered biodiversity, and no effort to make them strong partners in improving the health of forests and buffer zones. Now that CBD members are set to draw up fresh conservation targets to be finalised next year, India too has the opportunity to plan a trajectory of green growth after COVID-19, around clean energy, ecological agriculture, a freeze on expansion of mining and dam building, resource recovery from waste, and regeneration of arid lands. It should join the coalition of the enlightened.

Brawling in Cleveland

Trump and Biden missed a chance to showcase policies in their first debate

When it was time for U.S. President Donald Trump and his Democratic challenger for the 2020 election, former Vice-President Joe Biden, to go toe-to-toe in their first ever presidential debate, there was no expectation that the much anticipated event would showcase bipartisan bonhomie or statesman-like conduct. Yet, the low bar of civility on display, undergirded by hostility and a lack of mutual respect, made the event at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio, a disturbing spectacle. Almost throughout the 90-minute extravaganza of cognitive dissonance, the two candidates interrupted each other, name-called, and generally made obvious their disdain for the other. A low point for Mr. Trump was when he wiffily sidestepped a passionate defence by Mr. Biden of his late son, Beau, to segue into a vector of proven lies about Mr. Biden's other son, Hunter, and his business dealings in Russia and the Ukraine. Similarly, Mr. Biden hardly covered himself in glory when he said to Mr. Trump, "Will you shut up, man?", or referred to him as a clown, a liar and a racist. While many might empathise with Mr. Biden's sentiments in this context, given Mr. Trump's record on issues of race, his personal finances and taxes, and his penchant for indulging in acerbic bombast, some Democrats might have hoped that Mr. Biden would hold himself to a higher standard.

One thing that the verbal brawl made clear is that the two leaders will likely offer radically different policy visions, in a sense making the choice between them a straightforward one on November 3, Election Day. Mr. Trump dug his heels in on choosing a right-leaning candidate for the vacant seat in the U.S. Supreme Court after the passing of liberal stalwart Ruth Bader Ginsburg. He refused to label a known white supremacist gang as racist. He stood his ground on his intention to dismember the Affordable Care Act passed by former President Barack Obama — when Mr. Biden was his deputy — by killing off the individual mandate. On every policy of serious consequence to the American middle class, whether in the realms of health care and the COVID-19 response, immigration, job creation, clean energy or women's reproductive rights, Mr. Trump defended the very same approach he has followed for the past three and a half years. Yet his bungling, ambiguous pandemic response speaks for itself, as does his disastrous record on saving jobs in his wake, and his uncompromisingly harsh talk on immigration. Mr. Biden's policy agenda might be an echo of the Obama years, reflecting traditional, mainstream Democratic Party values that some Americans have grown to resent. Yet, if he can convince the American people, not of any grand liberal vision but simply that he will better Mr. Trump's low performance bar, this election might be Mr. Biden's to lose.

Flagging cess non-transfer, its economic impact

The C&AG's observations in its financial audit report relate to the denial of States' share in the divisible taxes pool



M. GOVINDA RAO

The Financial Audit Report of the Government of India by the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) for 2018-19 (https://bit.ly/2GwWt85 and https://bit.ly/2JlU1S5) placed in Parliament on September 23 has raised significant issues of a lack of transparency and propriety. The Opposition-led States have criticised the Centre on the short transfer of Goods and Services Tax (GST) compensation cess revenues to the GST Compensation Fund.

The C&AG report stated that the Government of India did not transfer ₹6,466 crore of compensation cess revenue in 2018-19 and ₹40,806 crore in 2019-20. Thus, a total of ₹47,272 crore was retained in the Consolidated Fund of India (CFI). The report also alluded to the non-appropriation of a portion of Integrated Goods and Services Tax (IGST) among the States and retaining it in the CFI.

Boasts claim by States

At a time when there is a raging controversy over the Union government's refusal to compensate States for the shortfall in the collection of GST as per the agreement, and, instead, giving States two options to borrow, the C&AG report has only added more fuel to the fire for the States' claim. These States contend that when there were surplus collections, the Union government appropriated them when there was a shortage, it simply distances itself, instead

Levy of cesses
The C&AG's observations on a non-transfer of cesses, however, has a much larger macroeconomic significance. There are as many as 35 cesses levied by the government of India. These are earmarked taxes and the proceeds should be used for the purposes for which they are levied. A number of reserve funds or development boards have been created for these specified purposes and the collections from the cesses are supposed to be transferred to these funds placed in public accounts for defraying expenditures on the specified purposes. They are not to be used for anything other than the specified purposes. The transactions in public accounts are supposed to be done by the government as a trustee or a banker, and are not subject to vote by Parliament.

The C&AG has pointed out that in 2018-19, the collections from 35 cesses amounted to nearly ₹22.5 lakh crore of which only ₹1.64 lakh crore was transferred to various reserve funds and boards designated for the purpose in Public Accounts. Thus, the short transfer to the Public Account during the year amounted to ₹20.86 lakh crore payment.

Besides, ₹47,272 crore short transfers to the GST Compensation Cess Fund, there was a short transfer of ₹24,399 crore in the transfer of the road cess to the Central Road and Infrastructure Fund. In addition, the government collected ₹14,399 crore from the cess on crude oil which, as required, was not transferred to the Oil Industry Development Board (as designated for the purpose) but retained in the CFI. By short



transfer of the realised amount of cess to the respective funds and boards in Public Account, the government understated revenue and fiscal deficits for the year; and it works out to more than 1.2% of GDP.

Thus, in addition to off budget borrowings to cover fertiliser and food subsidy, financing irrigation projects from the Long Term Irrigation Fund (LTIF) created by the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), and financing of railway projects through borrowings from the Indian Railway Finance Corporation (IRFC), short transfer of cess revenue to public accounts is a means to obfuscate the Budget to show lower revenue and fiscal deficits.

Process becomes opaque
Should the government of India raise revenues through so many cesses? Cesses are levied on goods and services and ensure a minimum allocation to important and priority programmes, this method of financing could be used in India even after a number of cesses and surcharges were abolished when the GST was implemented, where as many as 35 cesses levied by the Finance and other Ministries.

of the Government of India. The ostensible reasoning for levying these cesses is the belief that ring fencing of revenue for specified purposes may enable greater tax compliance as people can link the benefits with the taxes paid.

However, when there are as many as 35 earmarked cesses, it is difficult to see all of them as priority areas requiring protection of funding. There is also a possibility of limiting the funding of important and priority areas to the amount of cess collected even when they require much larger amounts. Too many cesses also complicate the tax system and add to administrative and compliance costs. In addition, the operation of these funds too needs to be monitored and audited.

Governmental arrangements

A major reason for the proliferation of cesses in India is to be found in the inter-governmental fiscal arrangements. Article 270 of the Constitution requires the Union government to distribute the proceeds from all Central taxes listed in the Union List based on the recommendation of the Finance Commission. However, Article 271 excludes the distribution of the revenue from any surcharge or cess levied by the Union government for any specified purpose.

As the Finance Commissions are appointed once in five years, the Union government can raise additional revenue from taxes mainly through the levy of cesses and surcharges to avoid sharing the same with the States. This has been practised for long and

pite the adverse comments of many Finance Commissions, the Union government has found the financing of revenue for specified purposes may enable greater tax compliance as people can link the benefits with the taxes paid.

This is one of the ways to partially negate the recommendation of the Finance Commission, particularly when the Centre sees the recommendations as generous to the States. After the Fourteenth Finance Commission recommendation that the share of the States in the divisible pool be pegged at 42%, almost all discretionary increases in taxes were done by levying cesses and surcharges. The large increases in additional cesses during petroleum products this year will entirely accrue to the Centre. The States' share in the gross Central tax is 35% in 2015-16, the first year of the Fourteenth Finance Commission's recommendation, but decreased to 32% in 2019-20, and in the current year, it could be less than 30% as a large volume of revenue from petroleum products is sought to be raised through additional excise duties.

As shown by V.V. Reddy and G.R. Reddy (in their book, *Cess and Surcharges*), the cesses and surcharges constituted just 1% of the Central tax revenue in 2000-01, but in 2015-16, it was 35%. It could be as much as 30% in 2020-21.

The issues raised by the C&AG relate merely to short transfer of funds, but the implications are much larger. They relate to obfuscation of the Budget and the share of the States in the divisible pool of taxes.

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After the Ohio debate chaos, the essential politics

Despite the parley's dynamics, Donald Trump and Joe Biden did give some indicators of where their key votes lie



SHRIKAM LAKSHMIN

Tuesday's chaotic presidential debate, and the first, between Donald Trump and Joe Biden, was unusual in that it was not focused on a substantive discussion of policies, but overwhelmingly focused on the speakers and their dynamics. So much so that debate moderator Chris Wallace, who, prior to the debate had declared his desire to be invisible, also became a talking point.

Therefore any analysis of the debate (and its aftermath) must, rather than focusing on specific policy positions, examine other signs to get a fuller sense of the priorities at this stage of the campaign.

Suburban focus

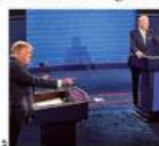
It is clear that both candidates are reaching out to suburban voters but their conception of the suburbs are different. Additionally, Mr. Trump catered to his base — evidenced by his reluctance to condemn outright, white supremacy. His calling into question the legitimacy of the election because of mail-in voting also stood out in the debate. On the other side, Mr. Biden's response to the charge that he was controlled by the "radical left" and his reference to his working-class Scranton, Pennsylvania, roots are indicative of the votes he is specifically targeting at this stage in the campaign: those in the middle class (some of whom have likely not de-

clined how to vote) and working class white voters, who have over the years shifted to the Republican party.

Since Tuesday, Mr. Trump has found distance between himself and some key Republicans on Capitol Hill for his failure, during the debate, to condemn the "Proud Boys" — an all-male group of "western chauvinists". Instead, the President instructed the group "stand back and stand by" before immediately saying that somebody had to do something about "Antifa and the left".

Several Senators including Trump supporter Lindsey Graham and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell distanced themselves from Mr. Trump's comments during the debate, as did Susan Collins of Maine who faces a tight electoral college and also criticised Mr. Trump. With all House seats and over a third of Senate seats being contested in November, Republicans on Capitol Hill fear alienating moderates (i.e., those who are outside of Mr. Trump's loyal vote base) and losing support among white minorities. Mr. Trump walked back his "Proud Boys" statement on Wednesday.

Trump's voter fraud narrative
The President, who trails behind Mr. Biden in the national polls, signalled, as he has been doing for some time now, that in the event of a tight contest, he would allege voter fraud over mail-in ballots. Americans are expected to vote by mail in unprecedented numbers due to the pandemic and there is no evidence that mail-in voting is associated with a significant level of voter fraud in the U.S. Mr. Trump urged his supporters to watch polls at polling booths on



Election Day. Critics have said this is tantamount to voter intimidation.

Other talking points

The President has also tried to get Mr. Biden to alienate moderates and undecided voters, who are particularly important in battleground States. He did this on Tuesday by repeatedly accusing Mr. Biden of being controlled by the "radical left" in the context of health-care policy and the Green New Deal (progressive Democrats' framework for climate action and the economy).

Presumably, Mr. Trump's strategy was to discourage moderates from voting for Mr. Biden, who is a centrist. Mr. Biden denied he was "dominated" by the left flank of the party and that the party platform was approved by him and that he had defeated progressive candidate Bernie Sanders "by a whole hell of a lot". Mr. Trump's response was that Mr. Biden had "just lost the left".

Several progressive leaders have since closed ranks with Mr. Biden. For instance, on Wednesday, Mr. Sanders told ABC that he was campaigning for Mr. Biden and that his and Mr. Biden's health-care plans were indeed different, as per a report in *The Wash-*

ington Post. With regard to suburban voters, especially women, Mr. Trump's narrative is that Democrats' reluctance for law and order would impact suburbs. His administration has also rolled back some Obama-era fair housing policies.

During a debate segment on crime, Mr. Trump said that if Mr. Biden got to run the country, "suburban areas will be gone". Mr. Biden's response was that he was raised in a suburb and that it was not the 1950s, so dog whistles and racism do not work and that suburbs were "by and large integrated".

(While suburbs are more integrated than in previous decades, most Americans do not live in substantially integrated or neighbourhoods, as per PolitiFact).

Mr. Biden has highlighted his working class city of Scranton as a "radical left" in the context of his characterisation of Mr. Trump's background: Scranton vs. Park Avenue. On Tuesday, he said Mr. Trump and his friends looked down upon Irish Catholics like him "who grew up in Scranton" and on people who did not have to move to the suburbs to live in (dis)agreement. Abstracting from whether or not this is a fair characterisation of Mr. Trump, this is the populist theme Mr. Biden has been pushing (it is true that Mr. Biden's family did fall upon hard times when he was young).

On a post-debate campaign tour of Ohio and Pennsylvania by train (Mr. Trump flipped both States from Democrat to Republican in 2016), Mr. Biden reached out to white working class voters. In Alliance, Ohio, he drew parallels between the economic hardships faced by those whose factories

closed to his own father's experience of having to leave Scranton when coal mines started shutting down.

Judicial nomination

Also important was the discussion about Mr. Trump's nomination of Judge Amy Coney Barrett to the Supreme Court; the Senate confirmation hearings of the judge are scheduled to begin on October 2. Democrats and Republicans will use the hearing to show-case issues to voters.

Given how polarised the country is and how stable candidate vote shares are, there is a view that the controversy around the timing of the nomination itself will not impact Mr. Trump's chances significantly.

Ilaiah C. Karamatzis analyses this in a paper for Brookings. Mr. Biden has maintained this national level through this year of "unimaginable drama" — the pandemic, racial tensions, shutdowns and conventions — led by 5.4 points in February and has a 6.6 point lead now. While these numbers are indicative of stable vote shares, they do not mean that Mr. Biden will necessarily win the presidency. First, polls undercounted support for Mr. Trump in 2016. Second, those are national and not State polls.

Winning the popular vote is one thing, winning the elections is another. As in 2016, the outcome might come down to a handful of votes in a few key battleground States altering the Electoral College arithmetic enough to make the popular vote. The candidates are clearly aware of this.

—
www.balaramkrishna.com

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.

Almost forgotten

May 27, 1964 is a day that sent shivers through every Indian then, desperate to imagine the future course of the nation; it was the day India's first Prime Minister and a towering personality, Jawaharlal Nehru, breathed his last. It was, in short, a Himalayan task to fill the void created. Lal Bahadur Shastri happily shouldered the mingling of every cry and proved a strong man, with his qualities of firm conviction, honesty, simplicity and sincerity (Editorial page, "The Prime Minister India almost forgot", October 2).

Seeing the country through difficult times — internally, on the food front, and externally, in a war with Pakistan — he emerged as the nation's little strong man. Agriculture was given its due and the farming community had new vigor and life. Unfortunately, his sudden passing in Tashkent remains a mystery.

Shastri was the Chinese during World War II. I would have been happier had he also mentioned the services of a scientist of Indian origin who became a citizen of Soviet Union, Dr. Kalachandra Sathya Ramayya, to the Soviet Union. A luminary in the field of tribology (it was also called rheology, or the chemistry of motion), he was educated in the U.S., at Chicago and Cornell. In the 1950s, responding to a call by the USSR to build its petrochemical industry, he was offered a top spot at the Petrochemical Institute in Moscow. He was also associated with the Central Scientific Research

Automobile and Automotive Engines Institute. He developed a kerosene fuel for battle tanks which proved a big factor in the Soviet battle against the Germans in World War II.

Tamil national question
In his interview, "Tamil Nadu must honour their past commitments to India and the world" (C-World page, September 29), Sri Lanka's Tamil National Alliance (TNA) spokesman and Jaffna MP M.A. Sumanthiran correctly identifies that to resolve the problems faced by TNA's constituents, broad-based support from the

other communities including the majority Sinhala Buddhists is essential. However, it is the very political behaviour of the TNA during the Wickremesinghe government (2005 to 2015) that undermined any support that could have been earned from other communities to further the TNA agenda. I feel Mr. Sumanthiran has not yet captured the sentiments of the communities of Sri Lanka other than his own constituents in Jaffna district. In summary, the TNA's servile, incompetent, and dishonest approach turned off the majority community — even those who had been sympathetic to their cause —

from actively campaigning to resolving the grievances of the TNA's constituents. A significant section of the NE Tamil too saw through its game. In my view, the plurality support enjoyed by the governing party and its allies has opened an avenue for the people of the North and the East to work hand in hand with the sitting government for the first time since 1965. Whether the government would make full use of this rare opportunity and how TNA would react to such endeavours remain to be seen.

—
Anand Kumar Chakraborty, Chennai, October 1, 2020

The Statesman
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Judicial Underreach

Three and a half decades ago Chief Justice of India VV Chandrachud foresaw a greater threat to the independence of the Judiciary from within than without. On Thursday a Bench of the Supreme Court headed by Justice I. Nageswara Rao dismissed a plea by six retired bureaucrats seeking the appointment of an independent inquiry commission under the Commission of Inquiry Act, 1952, into the Union government's alleged "gross mismanagement" of the Covid-19 pandemic in India. Credibility in the functioning of the justice delivery system and reasonable satisfaction of the affected parties are relevant considerations to ensure public confidence in the impartiality of the judiciary. Of late, the Supreme Court has increasingly come under public gaze for not living up to its role as guardian of our constitutional rights. In the instant case the petitioners - KP Fabian, MG Devasahayam, Meena Gupta, Somasundar Durra, Amit Bhaduri and Madhu Bhaduri - had filed their petition due to anxiety and concern over the respondent's mismanagement of the pandemic and the deleterious impact it had on the fundamental rights of citizens. Dismissing their petition, Justice Nageswara Rao noted that the situation had not been anticipated six months earlier and that "latitude had to be given to the government" for the lack of preparedness. Appearing for the petitioners, advocate Prashant Bhushan argued that the respondent had failed to consult the National Task Force appointed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 18 March comprising experts in the fields of epidemiology and public health prior to imposition of nationwide lockdown and its subsequent extensions. The respondent ignored the advice of these experts and went ahead with the lockdown "that has spawned a humanitarian and economic crisis of Biblical proportions while failing to contain the spread of Covid-19." The importance of the inquiry resided in the fact that the respondent had stalled an inquiry by the Parliamentary Accounts Committee into responses to the pandemic. The petitioners' plea stated that the inquiry was essential as multiple lapses had taken place such as the failure to undertake timely and effective measures for containing the transmission and spread of the disease within India despite being notified by WHO in January and failure to adhere to statutory obligations under the Disaster Management Act, 2005, including drawing up a National Plan under Section 11 or issuing guidelines for providing minimum standards of relief to the affected population under Section 12. Despite advisory and warning issued by the Home Ministry and experts, a gathering of 100,000 people was organised in Ahmedabad on 24 February 24. There had been a steep decline in the GDP as well as loss of jobs during the course of the lockdown. Imposition of the lockdown at four hours' notice had a devastating impact on jobs, livelihood and the overall economy. The commission of inquiry to be headed by a retired judge of the Supreme Court along with experts in the fields of epidemiology, medical sciences, public health and social sciences sought by the petitioners would have identified lapses as well as provided valuable lessons for dealing with future pandemics of this nature. The Supreme Court in its wisdom rejected the plea.

Virus Irony

The irony of President Donald Trump and his wife Melania testing positive for coronavirus will not be lost on those who have watched aghast as the occupant of the world's most powerful office has played ducks and drakes with a health crisis over the past eight months. Mr and Mrs Trump will quarantine themselves according to an announcement by the White House, which says they were tested after a close aide, Hope Hicks, was found to be infected. But there is another strand to this irony. The President's illness comes in the wake of a study by Cornell University that described him as the biggest spreader of misinformation on the disease. After evaluating 38 million articles in English-language, traditional media between January and May, the Cornell Alliance for Science concluded "that the president of the United States was likely the largest driver of the Covid-19 misinformation 'infodemic'." The study which covered news reports from the United States, Britain, India, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand and other nations, showed that over half a million articles reproduced or amplified misinformation about the epidemic. Topics included various conspiracy theories, suggestions that the virus was a bioweapon unleashed by China, that it was caused by 5G networks and that it was linked to billionaire Bill Gates. But miracle cures were the most common topic, featuring in nearly 300,000 articles; surveys found that commentary by President Trump caused the sharpest spikes in such fake reports. His comment on the use of disinfectants inside the body caused one spike, while his endorsement of hydroxychloroquine caused another. A co-author of the survey noted: "One of the more interesting aspects of the data collection process was discovering the staggering amount of misinformation coverage directly linked to the public comments of a small number of individuals." Ms Hicks tested positive after travelling with Mr Trump to Cleveland for the first of his debates with Democratic contender Joe Biden and then to Minnesota for a campaign rally. While contact tracing has been completed to ascertain who else she may have infected, it will doubtless prove a daunting task as far as Mr Trump is concerned not the least because he has been less than cautious in public, often seen without a mask. The second debate is scheduled for 15 October in Miami, but it is uncertain if the President will be out of quarantine by then. What is certain though is that his affliction will sharpen criticism of his administration's response to the virus and put further strain on his re-election bid.

Himalayan chinks

The bottomline of the entire charade in eastern Ladakh is that China apparently is very well aware of the contested regions, perhaps also that it is laying a siege on territories claimed by India as its own but is plainly intolerant or disdainful of Indian sensibilities. Through the Nehru years, China got used to the policy mode of appeasement as opposed to strategic confrontation. But effective conflict management sometimes requires force in lieu of compromise



For millennia, the Himalayas have not only been our protector but also a region touched by three of the major linguistic, racial, and cultural-dividing lines of Asia. The valleys of this great mountain range have been inhabited by people speaking Indo-Aryan and Tibeto-Burman languages, by populations of Caucasian racial features meeting and coalescing with Mongoloid ethnic groups, not to speak of Hinduism and Buddhism coexisting and interacting in overlapping spheres. Of the vast 'Himalaya Sphere' - that broadly extends northwards to swatches of China, southwards to Myanmar, Bangladesh, and India, and westwards to Afghanistan and a part of the region historically known as Asia Minor - the western part said to have birthed the 'quintessential' Indian civilisation is matched by its eastern part, that is known to embody 'quintessential' Chinese civilisation. It is a pity that the two Asian giants that share a long history of intellectual, cultural, and religious exchanges dating back two thousand years are now bitter rivals contesting over barren territories.

Ladakh, circumscribed by Tibet in the east, Kashmir and Baltistan in the west, Xinjiang in the north, and Lahoul, Spiti, Kulu, Bushahr and Chamba in the south, was an independent kingdom for many centuries until it was invaded by the Dogras in the 19th century. When the Dogras wrested Kashmir, the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir took Ladakh and neighbouring Baltistan under his wing. Following the Indo-Pakistan war of 1947, the Baltistan region fell on the Pakistan side of the ceasefire line, and the rest of Ladakh became part of the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir. A little further away, the north-western frontier of China, otherwise known as Xinjiang, has been important from the geostrategic point of view besides being a region in which four civilisations - the Han Chinese, Tibetan, Mongolian, and Islamic - have met since the sixteenth century though Xinjiang's Chinese association dates back to more than 2,000 years. The range has stayed impaired or under control of majestic China discontinuously

for a little under five centuries until the Qing rulers usurped this region into the Chinese empire. What all these facts try to allude are the overlapping factors that combine nations and defy boundaries. In time of peace, such cultural and anthropological resources can be an asset. But when testing nations live side by side, strategic imperatives get the better of abstract commonalities. Now that the situation in LAC is simmering for months on end, it is clear that India paid little attention to safeguarding the territory of the trans-Himalayan frontier possibly because it trained its entire focus on the valley of Kashmir. Since a sizeable portion of Ladakh territory (Baltistan, Raskam, Aksai Chin) had been under the occupation of Pakistan and China since 1947, the strategic retrospection on the subject is that had India taken pre-emptive measures after independence to safeguard the Gilgit and Baltistan to a full-fledged province.

Nehru seriously miscalculated. In his eagerness to play for India a global role in a new post-colonial world with China by his side, he compromised India's national and security imperatives. The Chinese incursion was in the words of P N Mullik, a betrayal of trust ("My Years with Nehru: The Chinese Betrayal", 1971) that showed how trust between nation states should never be one-sided, but reciprocal, or else love becomes unreciprocated. It is ironical that after the post-1957 period of emergence of renewed attention on reviving the natural security qualities of India's Himalayan frontiers, since the post-1957 period, happened more out of the imperative to protect British colonial dominance within the Indian sub-continent than to accomplish the security of the citizens of colonial India. Both personal ambition and colonial greed put a gloss on the security priorities of the Indian state.

China's hostile stance to India and its history of hostilities

provides an essential link with Pakistan and opens the Indian Ocean region to China. And Aksai Chin has opened the gates of Central Asia, Pakistan and Afghanistan to China and thereby connected Tibet with Xinjiang. Aksai Chin not only provides China with a link between Gilgit-Baltistan (formerly known as the North Areas) and Tibet through the Shiyok valley, but also routes of entry into Ladakh. Thus, India's biggest failure and strategic threat has been the occupation of Gilgit-Baltistan by Pakistan and Aksai Chin by China. And Pakistan's exploitation of Gilgit-Baltistan to threaten the Zojila Pass and the national highway between Srinagar and Leh is well documented particularly since the Kargil war in 1999 when this area was used as a route for infiltration into Ladakh and Kargil. Pakistan, meanwhile, is mulling an upgrade of Gilgit-Baltistan to a full-fledged province.

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China's hostile stance to India and its history of hostilities

- some of which are ongoing - with a host of other nations including the US is already beginning to be counter-productive. The Sino-Soviet border clashes in 1969 inspired Mao's strategic decision to break the deadlock in China's relationship with the United States. These policies resulted in the signing of the historic Shanghai Communiqué in 1972 and the normalisation of Sino-US relations seven years later. Japan and South Korea have had large-scale wars with China in the past, while India, Vietnam, and Russia have had serious border clashes with China. Some such as the Philippines, Vietnam have contested Beijing's territorial claims in the South China Sea, while a few others, such as Myanmar, Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Indonesia, at one time or another have had to fend off communist insurgencies backed by Beijing. Now China is encircled by a communist ring-fall that might well bandwagon against it.

The bottomline of the entire charade in eastern Ladakh is that China apparently is very well aware of the contested regions, perhaps also that it is laying a siege on territories claimed by India as its own but is plainly intolerant or disdainful of Indian sensibilities. It is bent on showing force and wants India to blink first. The Chinese disavowal of the McMahon Line and claims on large sections of Indian territory in Ladakh as well as Arunachal Pradesh festering since the early 1950s have been allowed to metastasise far too long. Through the Nehru years, China got used to the policy mode of appeasement as opposed to strategic confrontation. But as the Chinese say, a good neighbour is a good neighbour who is not a neighbour.

The unilateral Indian decision to garrison the Siachen region in the late 1980s and the use of air and ground forces during the Kargil incursion in 1999 are two cases in point. It is time we revived the natural security qualities of India's Himalayan frontier armed with a combination of circumspect militarism and unblinking diplomacy.

A MEMBER OF THE
ANN
ASIAN VOICES
ASIA NEWS NETWORK

Firm first steps

Three years after the Supreme Court issued an order to the government to regulate the sale and distribution of acid, the country finally has new laws to that effect. But the government needs to do more to end acid attacks in the country.

On Monday, President Bidya Devi Bhandari authenticated three ordinances - Acid and Other Fatal Chemicals (Regulation) Ordinance 2020, Ordinance to Revise some provisions in Criminal Codes and Criminal Procedure, and Nepal Police and Provincial Police (Operation, Coordination and Supervision) Act.

These are huge strides in regulating acid attacks as the new laws regulating the sale of acid and other fatal chemicals require sellers to maintain a database of buyers, including a copy of their identity documents, and stop the sale of acid in recycled bottles.

It would be wise of the government to take one more step and ban the sale of acid in the retail market altogether as research has shown that strict regulations on acid purchases have a positive correlation with fewer acid attacks. Acid should no longer be available over the counter.

The new revisions in the Criminal Code have also increased the penalty for acid attacks, but they will do little to deter such attacks unless the government fails to deploy a mechanism to strictly monitor its implementation.

Additionally, these provisions need a careful review as acid attack survivors live in fear of future attacks once the perpetrators are released.

Acid attacks are a horrendous crime that devastates the lives of survivors. The physical and psychological trauma of acid attack lasts for a lifetime. Medical treatment is expensive and involves tedious surgeries and follow-ups.

Besides, survivors also need proper counselling to overcome their trauma.

THE KATHMANDU POST

ma. The state, as a guardian, must ensure that the survivors have free and full medical support, either in government or private hospitals. After all their horrific experiences, the survivors who are seriously maimed or disabled should not be left struggling to receive medical attention.

This is not something the government can shy away from, and authorities should immediately work out a compensation scheme for acid attack survivors, together with a useful rehabilitation programme, and provide them with employment support.

In the past few years, Nepal has witnessed an increase in the number of acid attacks, and a majority of the victims are women. Activists who work to rehabilitate acid attack survivors say most of these attacks are over domestic disputes and rejected relationship proposals and sexual advances; and that a majority of such crimes are committed by men. Acid attacks are, thus, a complex problem and symptom of a much larger gender problem in our society. Just introducing harsh laws to prevent these crimes is not enough; we must not prevent future attacks.

We need to raise grassroots-level awareness of acid violence and the gender inequality that underpins it, in our society. The government must engage with the communities at the local level and develop targeted policies and advocacy strategies to lead a social change.

According to the 2019 Human Development Report, Nepal ranks 115th out of 162 countries with a Gender Inequality Index value of 0.476. This is an enormous gap to fill when it comes to levelling the playing field for women.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Need certainty of punishment

SIR, This refers to the editorial "UP shamed" (1 October). Despite the laws having been rewritten after the horrific Nirbhaya rape case, nothing seems to have changed when it comes to protecting women, especially low-caste women, from the hideously beastly rapists. The medieval barbarity with which the Hathras rape was committed betrays the deep-seated malady of society driven by patriarchal prejudices against women. But what should be a social issue is turning out to be high-voltage politics. The issue needs to be addressed beyond the blitzkrieg of politicking to ensure that henceforth no underprivileged or vulnerable woman becomes the victim of man's lust.

Urbanization and social mobility have not affected



the cloistered psyche of male-dominated society since 1995 when a judge observed on Bhanwari Devi's accusation that a caste man could not have defiled himself by raping a lower caste woman. Even the rank and file of the judiciary and police administrations are not free from prejudices against women. They submit reports of upper caste men. The police which had acted with great alacrity to capture a gangster suddenly developed cold

feet when it came to apprehending rapists from the upper caste. The UP administration's act of condoning a series of horrific rapes across the state is not just 'tacit acceptance of the worst', as you have observed, but knowing the rank and file of the judiciary and police administrations are not free from prejudices against women. They submit reports of upper caste men. The police which had acted with great alacrity to capture a gangster suddenly developed cold

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QUESTIONABLE

SIR, Miss Mamata Banerjee's decision to give one time financial assistance of Rs 50,000 each to 36,000 panchayat committees will cost the state exchequer Rs 180 crore, and its purpose is questionable. At a time when the state is reeling from the twin disasters of Amphan and the corona pandemic, many Amphan-affected families are still without shelters and go to bed under the sky. Migrant workers are retreating from the state finding no job or scope of earnings here, and school children are leaving schools to join the child labour force to assist helpless parents. The colossal expenditure from tax payers' money should be viewed in this perspective. Question has already arisen whether such financial patronage by the state government to a religious festivity is advisable in a secular country. The move may brighten the state's poll prospects in 2021, but definitely at the cost of development.

Yours, etc., Dilip Kumar Sengupta, Kolkata, 1 October.

se vehicles under the purview of the Motor Vehicles Act. Not only will they be regulated, this effort may contribute revenue to the State government.

Yours, etc., Krishna Rao, Chinsurah, 1 October.

The
Hindustan Times
ESTABLISHED IN 1924

[OUR TAKE]

For Dalits, a critical juncture

Hathras will shape Dalit discourse. Whether it affects their political choices is to be seen

The Hathras episode has the potential to deeply impact Dalit politics. This is reflected not just in what appears to be a spontaneous upsurge against the Uttar Pradesh government for its handling of the case by Opposition parties, Dalit formations and civil society groups. It is also reflected in the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)'s efforts to send the right signals, albeit belatedly, by promising action and intensifying its outreach among Dalit communities. No political party in India which has expansive electoral ambitions can be seen as anti-Dalit and the recent moves to either ally the apprehensions of the community (in the case of the BJP) or get them to agitate (in the case of the Opposition) are intended to win over their support.

Dalit politics in India has always had multiple strands. There is the more militant tradition which sees caste conflict as a fundamental reality of society — and seeks to overthrow the upper-caste order, including through violence. This strand, never very strong, has got even weaker in recent decades. The second is represented by the more mainstream Dalit political party formations — which includes Mayawati's Bahujan Samaj Party in UP or Ram Vilas Paswan's Lok Janshakti Party, among others. The third is the strand represented by mainstream political formations such as the Congress or regional parties which have enjoyed Dalit support. The BJP is the most prominent recent example of this strand, where a significant number of Dalit sub-castes has veered towards the party in recent years.

While it is too early to come to any conclusions, Hathras is becoming a key symbol of the atrocities against Dalits. In terms of discourse, it has the potential to evoke the same emotional sentiment as Rohith Vemula's suicide or the Una flogging. This should worry the BJP. But it is not yet clear whether this sharpening of the discourse will have electoral implications. Hathras, for instance, is a reserved parliamentary constituency which has voted for the BJP in all but one election since 1991 (a regional party won in 2009). In a reserved constituency, of course, the electoral power of non-Dalit groups is crucial. But the point is that there isn't always a neat link between the discourse on Dalit issues and the voting patterns of Dalit communities, which are to do with a complex set of local, regional and national factors. How Hathras will change the discourse and political choices will be a key factor in the future of Dalit politics.

[FAULT-LINE]



[ANOTHER DAY]

Namita Bhandare

Being a Dalit woman in modern India

Two nine-year-olds were fighting over something inconsequential in district Patna, Bihar. As the fight showed no sign of flagging, the elders of one of the boys, dominant caste as it turned out, decided to get involved. The Dalit boy, after all, had to be shown his place.

The men from the dominant caste caught hold of the Dalit boy's mother. They stripped her and paraded her through the village. The woman's mother and daughter

tried to intervene and were thrashed. Finally, the village sarpanch stepped in and a bystander offered the woman a shawl. An FIR was filed, but the accused got bail.

This story was narrated by the woman's husband at a conference organised in New Delhi by the All India Dalit Mahila Adhikar Manch a few years ago.

But the reality of living as a Dalit woman in India hasn't changed. Tucked inside the newspapers — if at all — it filters through

stories of everyday, routine indignities. Somewhere a sarpanch is denied a chair on the podium during a Republic Day function. A bride's palanquin takes the long route home so as to not pollute the roads that dominant castes tread on. Shopkeepers fling purchases made by Dalit customers. Temples and common water sources are barred. Just another day in the life of a Dalit.

The outrage over Hathras is justified and necessary. But there is nothing new about the systemic oppression of Dalit women aided by State-backed institutions. The police who won't file FIRs, lawyers who urge rape survivors to compromise, a legal system that exhausts the patience of the most stoic victim, and a media that finds no merit in these stories.

To say, "don't make this about caste" is ignorance and privilege. Of course, it is not caste. Of course, there is a power dynamic. Would there have been mere outrage and not a raging lynch mob if four Dalit men had attacked a Thakur woman in a similar fashion? Would the police have

locked an upper caste family inside their home and denied them access to their daughter's cremation?

Caste is modern India's dirtiest little secret. It has a grip so insidious that parents will kill their own daughters for falling in love with men from the "wrong" caste; a grip so normalised that in 2014, India's biggest caste survey found one in four Indians freely admitted to practising some form of untouchability.

Of all the ghastly visuals that emerged from Hathras, the one that broke my heart was the one where the sister-in-law of the 19-year-old Dalit girl is running behind the district magistrate's official white car as he leaves the village in a plume of dust.

An Indian citizen, guaranteed equality by the Constitution, is chasing India's new rulers like a supplicant in a feudal autocracy, begging for the most basic human right — dignity in death. Or at least an answer. Of course, the car does not stop.

Namita Bhandare writes on gender. The views expressed are personal



OPINION

[THIRD EYE]

Barkha Dutt



Hathras: Making a mockery of the idea of justice

The institutional response to sexual violence is critical. On this, the UP police have covered themselves in shame. At every turn, they robbed the family of its agency to make key decisions

There is so much noise over the horror of what has happened in Hathras, Uttar Pradesh (UP), that it is difficult to believe that a week ago, the family of the 19-year-old Dalit victim was running from town to town, hospital to hospital, police station to police station, ignored, overlooked, forgotten to.

I first met her family when they arrived in Delhi to seek medical help at Safdarjung hospital. Her father and brother were hapless and broken. "Take me home," the woman had said to her brother Sandeep, younger by just a year. Those were her last words. By the morning, she was dead.

Sandeep, employed at a pathology laboratory and thus, a frontline worker in these coronavirus pandemic times, had brought me, some from rage, some from sorrow. But what really stays with me is his response to my question on how they coped over the last fortnight. "My sister was raped on September 14," he said softly, "but it's only after her death that anyone has bothered to give us attention. Till now, for politicians and for the media, we were invisible."

The Hathras rape — and despite the sudden counter-claim by the UP police, I will call it exactly that because it was in the dying testimony of the victim — has represented the failure of every institution in India. Whether it is the police, the bureaucracy, the politicians — we have all failed.

As I spoke to Sandeep, there was a sudden

swarm of politicians eager to get onto the camera, jostling for their five minutes of fame. These were the same people who had not bothered to give this family — the father is a daily wageer and the mother works at home — an iota of their attention all these days.

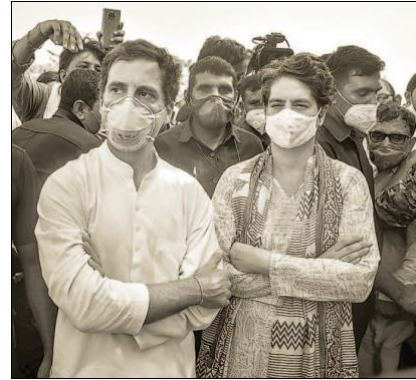
From being on the margins of public attention, Hathras is now in danger of being reduced to a noisy, unending spectacle.

The egregious behaviour of the UP police has been the most brazen. The undercover cremation of this young woman, forcibly executed by the police by keeping her parents out, was just the first illustration of callous unprofessionalism. Lawyers and senior Indian Police Service (IPS) officers say that for a senior police officer to give a statement that "no rape took place" and make a forensics report public goes against all tenets of a rape investigation.

For a moment, think of this young woman strapped to a hospital bed, strangled with her own dupatta, her limbs paralysed, her tongue cut, fighting valiantly to live. The gang rape charge was her testimony in her dying hours. She named the four men who she said did this to her. Her brother told me they found her lying "in a pool of blood" in a room.

If indeed, there are gaps, a complete investigation, done quietly and with dignity, could have established that. Now, it will be very difficult for anyone to believe anything the state

TO THOSE WHO THINK SEXUAL VIOLENCE IS NOT COMPOUNDED BY CLASS AND CASTE, HERE IS A FACT: 10 DALIT WOMEN ARE RAPED EVERY DAY, MAKING UP 11% OF THE REPORTED CASES



Blocking Opposition politicians such as Rahul and Priyanka Gandhi from making a trip to Hathras and shoving them around on the expressway is just wrong. It's for the family, not the police, to turn the Gandhis away, should it so wish

police says about this case.

Meanwhile, rape has become the predictable political pawns.

In the competitive fire-pointing between states, no one actually cares even a tiny bit about women, about Dalits or, indeed, about justice. The government's own data points underscore the inanity of this whataboutery. National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) statistics released just a few days ago tell us that 87 rapes are reported every day in India and that crimes against women are up by 7.3%. Remember, this is only counting the women who actually decide to speak out. For anyone who thinks that sexual violence is not compounded by class and caste, here is a fact: 10 Dalit women are raped every day, making up 11% of the reported cases.

UP tops the list of crimes against women and the girl child. Rajasthan tops the list of states with the most number of rapes; 18% of all rape cases in UP are that of Dalit women, compared to 3% in Rajasthan. A third of all rapes of Dalit women have been reported from Rajasthan and UP. So, everyone should spare

us the political slugfest because it is just a convenient and noisy excuse to not do anything to make India safer for women.

The institutional response to sexual violence is critical. On this score, the UP police has covered itself in shame. At every turn, they have robbed the family of its agency to make key decisions.

I am not a big fan of politicians turning tragedy into opportunity, but I believe that which politician a victim's family wants to meet to entirely their decision. Blocking Opposition politicians such as Rahul and Priyanka Gandhi from making a trip to Hathras and shoving them around on the expressway is just wrong. It's for the family, not the police, to turn the Gandhis away, should it so wish.

So far, we are making a mockery of the idea of justice. Soon, this headline will fade and we will all move on. Till the next horror strikes us. And it will.

Barkha Dutt is an award-winning journalist and author. The views expressed are personal

The internal drivers of China's Ladakh offensive

The India-China standoff in Ladakh persists even after multiple rounds of commander-level talks and two ministerial meetings between the defence and foreign ministers of the two countries. This amounts to India living with the Chinese encroachments since May. That there was no reference to reverting to the *status quo ante* in the joint statement after the foreign ministers met in Moscow suits China well.

China's military obduracy in the Himalayas reflects its assertion as an emerging Asian hegemon and expansionist power. Many of its neighbours have experienced the effects of this. However, the Ladakh situation is not just about China asserting its dominance.

The Aksai Chin region has a strong strategic value for China. In the late 1950s, when it first transgressed into Aksai Chin, the then Chinese premier, Zhou Enlai made a proposal to accept India's hold over Arunachal Pradesh (then called North East Frontier Agency) in return for Chinese control over Aksai Chin. This region of Ladakh was critical to China to shield its turbulent periphery of Tibet and Xinjiang.

China also, subsequently, deepened its links with Pakistan, which handed over parts of Indian territory under its occupation to China. This partnership has only grown, with Beijing now having invested billions of dollars to consolidate its strategic outreach. China's offi-

cially blessed commentators often highlight the significance of Aksai Chin, and the centrality of Pakistan in the region.

It was in this backdrop that India's stated intent to reach an agreement with the Chinese. Union home minister Amit Shah's statement in Parliament, in September 2019, after changing the status of Ladakh and Jammu and Kashmir to Union Territories, may be recalled: "Kashmir is an integral part of India. When I talk about Jammu and Kashmir, Pakistan-occupied Kashmir and Aksai Chin are included in it. We will give our lives for this region. China strongly questioned this statement and has refused to endorse the new status of Jammu and Kashmir."

The fate of mutually-agreed non-escalation between India and China will depend on the Chinese side. China will try to sustain the standoff by all means possible. Diplomatically, Beijing is keenly awaiting the outcome of the United States (US) presidential election. Joe Biden's victory will open a window of opportunity to soften US hostility.

China is also preparing to further pacify the Japanese approach towards it under Prime Minister (PM) Yoshihide Suga. Japan has heavy economic stakes in keeping the peace with China and Suga, unlike his predecessor

Shinzo Abe, may also like to steer clear of the deepening US-China rivalry.

This may sound speculative at the moment, but geopolitics often shifts radically. China's success with the US and Japan will be bad news for India. An internationally-emboldened China could be far more aggressive towards India. In China's perception, India is asserting itself against Chinese moves in the Himalayas only because it is backed by the US and its allies. India has to carefully monitor and adequately respond to such developments. PM Narendra Modi's conversation with PM Suga, in this context, is a welcome initiative.

The theories that the Ladakh moves are primarily led by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) which is not comfortable with President Xi Jinping and the Chinese political establishment, are untenable. Xi is the chief of China's military command and the massive movement of troops in Ladakh by PLA could not have taken place without his endorsement. Xi, at the Seventh Central Symposium on Tibet (August 18-22), also made a strong policy move on Tibet, asking for developing a "new socialist Tibet", where its Buddhism must conform to the "Chinese context".

Xi's approach, would be done by taking the Tibetans away from the Dalai Lama, changing their Lamaistic religious and social practices, and integrating them closely and ethnically with mainstream China.

This approach aims to control Tibet in three principal ways. One, to cut off its external linkages and deflect international pressure on Tibet; two, change its demographic composition; and three, institutionalise mass surveillance. This will be on the lines of similar

repressive moves in Xinjiang.

The massive military movements and deployments of China forces in Ladakh and the projection of a so-called Indian military threat will help in this repression. The stand-off is thus in China's internal political interests of stability in Tibet. One wonders if China is doing this out of enhanced confidence that it can control Tibet or a lurking sense of vulnerability in the context of a post-Dalai Lama Tibet.

Xi is also using the Ladakh standoff in his internal political campaign of silencing critics who are cautioning him against hostility towards India and other neighbours, while the principal challenge is to confront the US. The official media has also projected the Ladakh conflict as an answer to India for the so-called setback in Doklam. It has been woven into China's resurgent territorial nationalism. The local media plays up the idea that India is too weak to stand against China's might. There does not appear to be any easy way out of this Chinese domestic political dimension of the Ladakh stand-off. There is a reactive internal political dimension to the military situation in India as well. It is seen as a defence for the changed status of Jammu and Kashmir and is also linked to India's resurgent nationalism, where any plea for moderation on the border with China will come in for criticism.

One wonders if the internal political dimensions can be decoupled from the Ladakh standoff through a summit meeting between Modi and Xi. Or, will there be hostilities in the Himalayas again?

SD Muni is professor emeritus, JNU, member, Executive Council, IDSA and former ambassador and special envoy, Government of India. The views expressed are personal

[EDITOR'S PICK]

HT's editors offer a book recommendation every Saturday, which provides history, context, and helps understand recent news events

CHINA'S RISE FROM AN INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

The India-China stalemate at the Line of Actual Control in eastern Ladakh persists. Multiple rounds of diplomatic and military talks have not resulted in a breakthrough. This week, we recommend Ananth Krishnan's *India's China Challenge: A Journey through China's Rise and What It Means for India*. Krishnan, an excellent journalist with *The Hindu*, spent close to a decade in China, getting immersed in covering not just diplomacy but Chinese intellectual and political life, businesses, and social trends. While there have been many western accounts of the rise of China, it is rare to have a view of China from a knowledgeable Indian perspective. Krishnan fills that gap with strong reportage and deep analysis. But the strength of the book is that while dealing with the India-China question, it delves into China itself — China's rise, its readers to characters, both powerful figures and ordinary citizens, and drivers of change. A timely and authoritative book, it will be a key addition to the literature on China in India.

Book: India's China Challenge: A Journey through China's Rise and What It Means for India
Name: Ananth Krishnan
Year: 2020

THE SPEAKING TREE

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 3, 2020 SPIRITUAL PROMOTIONAL FEATURE



Take An E-break

Given that most of us live, eat and sleep with our phones within arm's distance, how much of actual life are we missing due to being unconsciously distracted by the mere presence of the device, even when we are not looking at it? And looking at it, of course, actually interacting with it, is even worse...

— Sadhvi Bhagwati Saraswati

The best six doctors anywhere
And no one can deny it
Are sunshine, water, rest, and air
Exercise and diet.
These six will gladly you attend
If only you are willing
Your mind they'll ease
Your will they'll mend
And change you not a shilling.
— Nursery rhyme

We listen too much to the telephone
and we listen too little to nature.
The wind is one of my sounds....

As a matter of fact, one of the
greatest sounds of them all is utter
complete silence.

— André Kostelanetz

The only social networking I did this
weekend was with my family. I
actually let the battery on my laptop
completely die.

— Betsy C. Gannon

If you read a lot of books, you're
considered well-read. But if you
watch a lot of TV, you're not
considered well-viewed.

— Lily Tomlin



Dominio Effect

This is the story of a kind act which
had a domino effect, going from
patient to dentist to sweater
(jantini), I gave quote cards to
patients waiting their turn in the
dentist office waiting area. When I
was called in to see the dentist, I
placed a 'Wear A Mask' and 'Keep
Social Distance' sign on the dentist's

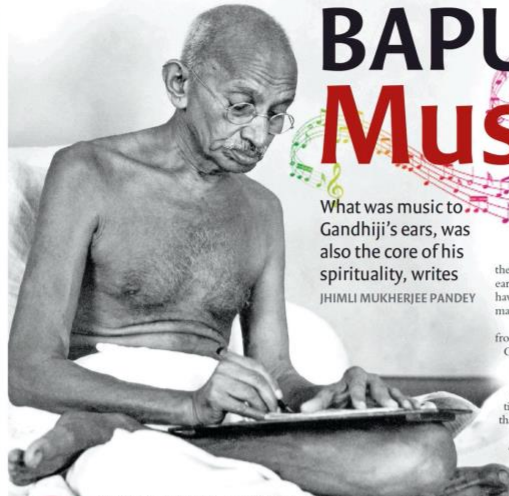


table along with some quote cards.
He checked my teeth and said: "Let
broken loose teeth fall down, nothing
can be done about it." He refused to
take a fee from me. I put a little
extra on his table. He was giving me
more change back, while cutting
down his fees. I politely refused to
take it and requested that he give it
to some needy people. Immediately
he gave much more than my change
to the lady who was sweeping the
office floor. I was satisfied that
I paid the fee and a little extra as
an act of kindness. He got
satisfaction by charging a lesser fee
and paying forward the rest. I am
grateful to the dentist.

— Rajni, kindspring.org

THIS WEEK

October 2-9: Sukkot
October 5: Vithubava
Sankashatana Chaturthi,
World Teachers' Day,
World Habitat Day
October 7: Rohini Vrat
October 9: Adhika Kalashtami



BAPU & Music

What was music to
Gandhi's ears, was
also the core of his
spirituality, writes
JHIMLI MUKHERJEE PANDEY

the Tagore song would ring in his ears all the time, he is known to have told followers at the Sabarmati Ashram.

From one ashram to another, from Tagore's Vidyā Bhawan to Gandhi's Sabarmati, the two philosophers permeated each other's thoughts, one with music, and the other with actions to match the philosophy of that music.

Music was entrenched in the daily routine of Sabarmati Ashram and Gandhi would encourage ashramites to sing bhajans before starting the day — devotional music drawn from different provinces were sung. Narayan Rao Khare, a disciple of Paluskar, who was close to Gandhi, became the chief musician at Sabarmati.

Gandhi drew inspiration from devotional songs and believed that congregational singing of these would help instil discipline and help build appreciation for regional diversity. Naturally, spiritual evolution would follow.

He introduced devotional music in Congress meetings gradually, and strongly believed that the lyrics and tunes would combine to uplift politicians so that differences are buried and minds are opened to manifest the greater good of humanity.

In the years leading to India's Partition, and then during the riots of 1947-48, Gandhi is known to have immersed himself in music, desperately seeking solace and guidance during the darkest days of the country. He was aware of the all-round criticism and tried to hide his pain and helplessness in the strains of devotional music. Bhajans soon became a part of all his prayer meetings. He is known to have requested M S Subbulakshmi to send him recordings for such meetings.

Gandhi searched for truth all his life and in this quest, he was often lonely, as lonely as the lathi-wielding, half-naked figure that immediately comes to mind as soon as his name is called out. Was music a personification of that truth?



Sleep Like Vishnu

YOG GURU SURAKSHIT GOSWAMI



Flying on a bed all the time is considered being lazy, then is Bhagvan Vishnu — who is often depicted relaxing on his Seshnaga shayya, bed — full of laziness and lethargy? If lying down is indicative of *tamo guna*, then Vishnu must always be under its influence. But it doesn't work like that.

Sri Vishnu's iconography is symbolic of the fact that the body may be in any position, but when we are firmly ensconced in Atman, then *gunas* of prakriti cannot affect us. This state is known as *Gautama Pratikriya* ensures the presence of three *gunas*: *sat*, *rajas* and *tamas* in us. All three are responsible for separate functions in the body and make us work accordingly.

When *sat guna* is in ascendance, then we are able to concentrate better during dhyana, offer prayers, do *sewa* and satyagrah and feel the peace within. Increase in *rajas guna* leads to action and a flurry of activity. *Rajas guna* is all about movement and pace. *Tamo guna* leads to lethargy, laziness and drowsiness. We fall asleep because nature makes it possible for us through *tamo guna*. If a person is rooted in body consciousness alone, then these three *gunas* take over body and mind functions and manipulate us. But, one who is an *atman*, realised being, is unaffected by the *gunas*. Such a person is able to rise above *gunas* and starts managing them in the way he wants them to work. At night, when the Self-realised person goes to sleep, he is not affected by the *tamo guna*; he is ready to go into *samadhi*.

We can begin by practising yoga nidra before we go to sleep. When you go to sleep while experiencing your *atman*, that's not sleeping; it's going into the state of *samadhi*. That is why it is said that the yogi never sleeps; while sleeping, a true yogi is actually in *samadhi*.

GOOD QUALITIES

Everyday we see our different reactions to things around us. If we see something we like, we want it immediately; or see something we don't like, we reject it. We are sure of what we want to do. But the cultivation of good qualities, prayer and the rest, even though we know and say that it is good and necessary, we don't give it the same importance. We must, therefore, change our mental make up and our values or we will never progress but remain slaves to our little selves.

— Swami Gnanananda Saraswati, Vishnu Mohan Foundation

DEEPAK M RANADE writes on neuroplasticity and the Third Eye, and wonders if we can transcend the biomechanical syntax

Rewiring Neural Networks

He has a very short fuse. "That person is too casual in his attitude." "She has a jovial disposition." These are characteristics by which we tend to categorise people. These are typical, predictable behavioural patterns.

Behaviour can be broken down into stereotypes. Such behaviours follow a specific 'fixed action' pattern. They are entirely stimulus based, and are executed in a robotic, mechanical manner. An example is the egg-rolling behaviour observed in some birds. When the bird spots an egg-like object in the vicinity of its nest, the bird begins to roll it towards the nest. Even when the egg is removed, the bird will continue to behave the same way until it reaches the nest, without seeming to realise 'that the egg is no longer there. It's programmed, embedded software that ensures a definite behavioural response to a particular stimulus. Is our response and behaviour a biomechanical compulsion, involuntary, unfolding at the subconscious level?

Are we controlled by unique neural templates that mediate unique responses? Are we slaves of a programme? Do our responses necessarily get defined and limited by genetically embedded software? This instinctive response cripples the intellect and makes the subject surrender to a pre-fixed, predetermined pattern of behaviour.



Typical unique behavioural pattern is the substrate of personality. Personality is a characteristic way of thinking, feeling, and behaving. Personality includes moods, attitudes, and opinions and is most clearly expressed in interactions with people and situations. It includes behavioural characteristics, both inherent and acquired, that distinguish one person from another.

Can we change these patterns of behaviour or are we helplessly trapped in a neuro-hormonal matrix? Can we break these patterns of predictability and press the reset button? Can this hard disk be reformatted and is it possible to rewrite the Read Only Memory (ROM)?

The human brain is certainly evolved to rise above the biomechanical syntax and protocol. It is blessed and fortified with a phenomenon called neuroplasticity.

Neuroplasticity is the alteration and modification of neural pathways, networks and synapses. This enables the brain to effect synaptic pruning that deletes the neural connections no longer useful, and strengthens the necessary ones. It's a rewiring of the neuronal circuits. Perhaps it involves establishing connection with a seat of higher intelligence. Transcending the network-mediated biomechanical responses would involve reprogramming the perception of the observer. A paradigm shift in the response effected by a fundamental shift in perception. Instinct is overridden by a dispassionate, conscious deliberation. This transcendence is referred to as opening of the Third Eye in oriental mysticism.

The third eye, also known as the inner eye, is a mystical, esoteric concept referring to a speculative invisible eye, which enhances perception beyond ordinary sight. It provides a third person appraisal of the observed and the observer. The inner eye is a witness of the subject and object. A non-dual sublime intelligence that pierces the illusion of duality. A perceptive shift that dissolves personal consciousness into the eternal impersonal consciousness.

The author is a neurosurgeon in Pune

STRONG AND SOFT

G STRIPATHI

Change in the ground state energy due to pairing of electrons is small but induces dramatic effects — superconductivity. A disordered state becomes an ordered one. It took 45 years for physicists to uncover this. Disorder becomes order just by a small, unconventional change. Unconventional cause is an attractive electron-electron interaction, which is not a tradition. We know from science that like charges repel. Here there is a departure. It is an attraction. Ground state energy is changed by one millionth of a percentage, yet the effect is dramatic and the change, though small, is not a perturbation. It is science, and a miraculous one.

Is there anything in life that mimics this? Is there any small change that avoids easy handling but gives a great effect? A person who cares little about himself and more for society can bring drastic change. Hence, Gandhi could bring about a dramatic change in our lives in the form of freedom by an unconventional weapon of non-violence.

Body is matter and soul is spirit. By material science we activate the body, pump energy and make it fit for worldly actions. Is the mind material or spiritual? If it only thinks of bodily aspects, then it is material. If it is tuned for Self-realisation, it becomes spiritual.

Gandhi took care of the austerity of spiritual life. That is why he was extraordinary. His influence is profound in every aspect of life. He was caring, at the same time, stubborn and stuck to his principles. His decisiveness was rock-strong, yet he was as soft as a petal. Most importantly, Gandhi adhered to truthfulness and non-violence.

One can be truthful if one has control over lust, anger and greed. Gandhi

developed absolute control over the three disorders of life. So he personifies order of human mind, thought and action. He did not become a saint or go to a jungle to achieve these; he was with people, working for their liberation. His usage of the word 'experiments' in the title of his autobiography, *My Experiments With Truth*, confirms his adherence to the scientific way.

Gandhi had abundant self-confidence. He challenged State power with it. One can have self-confidence only when one realises what Self is. Self-realisation comes in the domain of spirituality. Gandhi represents that kind of

GANDHI REPRESENTS THAT KIND OF PRACTICAL SPIRITUALITY WHICH IS SCIENTIFIC AS WELL AS POLITICAL IN NATURE. IT WAS A RARE AMALGAMATION. IT IS NOT POLITICAL SCIENCE BUT SCIENTIFIC POLITICS

practical spirituality which is scientific as well as political in nature. It was a rare amalgamation. It is not political science but scientific politics enhanced by personal spirituality. Gandhi is the father of spiritual-scientific politics. He is an everlasting excitement that is persistent, like a supernova. It never shows decay. Just as supernova has been estimated to persist for hundred thousand years, a scientific modelling of Gandhi's life would definitely confirm that excitation of his life would also last long enough.

The writer teaches physics at Bhanupur University



A thought for today

Where you see wrong or inequality or injustice, speak out, because this is your country. This is your democracy

THURGOOD MARSHALL, US judge

Dalit Nirbhaya

The state's apathy just keeps getting worse

The Hathras district administration and police must answer for the manner in which they have failed the 19-year-old Dalit victim and her family in life and death. Precious forensic evidence that could have bolstered the gangrape charge was not collected on time. Even the right to a dignified cremation was denied to the victim. Police hurried to the scene only in the light of cover of night, without allowing the family to properly mourn their dear one or conduct customary last rites.

Now an entire district is under Section 144 CrPc to quell protests and prevent politicians from meeting the family. A police cordon ran around the village to keep the family out of the media. A viral video of Hathras district magistrate Praveen Kumar talking down to the Dalit family warning of harm to their credibility is in fact a body blow to the government's credibility. It lends credence to the family's claims of threats from the administration.

The victim's mother purportedly found her brutalised body without clothes on. A professional police force would have proceeded to verify rape. But analysis of samples happened 11 days after hospitalisation and no semen was detected. Government's own guidelines rule out the likelihood of finding such evidence after 72-96 hours of rape. This helps the police and accused build cases by undermining the gangrape charge despite the victim's dying declaration. With rank incompetence and apathy to answer for, officials are taking cover under threat to public order. Throttling dissent in this manner isn't going to help. BJP must remember that the Nirbhaya case punctured UPA-2 and Sheila Dikshit. No civilised society can tolerate in silence and without protest the brutalisation inflicted on the 19-year-old, the botched investigation or the indignities heaped upon the hapless Dalit family. The Adityanath government must correct policing failures for people's as well as its own sake.

The Home Disadvantage

When women's work and time get no respect

If women do a lot more unpaid work than men but society does not value their unpaid work, this structural inequality perpetuates an asymmetric power relationship, both materially and in the mind. Violence against women is just one of the several toxic side-effects of the resulting misogyny. Abusing 'the security of the home' can be socially sanctioned continuum from insults to rape, in this mind.

In this context a recent NSO report is very telling, as it shows that in India the average woman spends 19.5% of her time in unpaid domestic work or caregiving as compared to an average man's 2.5%. This is based on data collected in 2019 and does not factor in the seismic changes wrought by the pandemic. The closing of schools, anganwadis and other childcare centres has of course increased 'the motherhood penalty' across classes and across countries. A UK think tank for instance has found that the lockdown there saw many working mothers able to do only an hour of uninterrupted paid work for every three hours logged in by men.

All the talk about bringing up boys differently, socialising them in egalitarian thinking and behaviours, can be poppycock when what they see closest up is that both work and respect are deeply segregated by gender. Building a healthier society needs more women doing paid work and unpaid work with equal responsibilities. We also need an augmented version of GDP which accounts for unpaid work in measuring economic progress.

Outrage Is Not Enough

To get better policing India also has to address shocking shortages of personnel, infrastructure

Kanti Rajani



No modern society can be without an efficient police force. Recent events have dramatised the challenges of policing in India. The police has not come across well in the Hathras rape case, in the arrest of Muslim activists in the Delhi riots, in the Babri Masjid conspiracy case and in the investigation into Sushant Singh Rajput's death. The police is at fault, but not everything is its fault.

Probably the single biggest problem facing the police is shortage of personnel. According to a report issued by Common Cause in 2019, the Indian police force is at only 77% of its sanctioned strength. The shortages are greater in the senior ranks rather than among constables. As a result, only two states - West Bengal and Bihar - have the recommended ratio of 4 constables per officer. The situation in Uttar Pradesh is the worst of any state in the Union. The UP police is at roughly 50% of its sanctioned strength, both at the officer and constable level. The number of police to the population at large in India is one of the lowest in the world.

Numbers are not everything. The incidence of crime is not necessarily related to police numbers. How a crime is handled is related to police numbers. When the numbers are inadequate, police personnel are stretched and strained, producing shoddy policing. Police personnel work impossibly long hours, averaging 14 hours per day. According to the Common Cause survey reveals that many officers and constables work even longer hours. In Punjab and Odisha, they average 17 and 18 hours per day, respectively. And only Maharashtra gave most police personnel one day a week off. Half of all personnel get no day off at all. Compounding the numbers and terrible work conditions is the lack of training. Only 6.4% of police personnel received in-service training in 2019-20. The officers are more likely to be trained than the constables. Haryana and Tamil Nadu scored highest on in-service training, where about 20% received some training. Gujarat scored the lowest, with less than 1% having received any in-service training in those years. The average expenditure on training as a percentage of the police budget was 0.25% in West Bengal in the period 2012-13 to 2016-17.

If this was not bad enough, the Common Cause report shows that infrastructure available to the police is shocking. The report tells us that 70 police stations do not have wireless devices, 24 stations have no telephones, and 21 stations have neither wireless nor telephones. On every category of communications infrastructure including CCTNS, which connects data banks between police stations, UP performs among the worst of the states.

The Indian police suffers all kinds of other problems. The lack of diversity of personnel can mean that it is not terribly sensitive in dealing with disadvantaged and minority communities as well as women. Attitudes towards people from other states are not positive either; the police frequently assume that migrants are more prone to criminality. Indian police are also surprisingly tolerant towards mob justice in the case of rape, car accidents, cow slaughter and kidnapping. Three-quarters of police personnel think it is acceptable to use violence against criminals and four-fifths think it is alright to use violence to extract confessions. One out of five think that killing dangerous criminals is better than letting them live.

Public dismay over the Indian police's handling of cases, big and small, is understandable. However, simply pointing fingers at the men and women in uniform is unfair. The police is a victim of the state's policy. The media and the public constantly interfering in their duties. In addition, their numbers, work conditions, training and infrastructure are huge hurdles in delivering justice and order. We have to address the fundamentals if we want better policing.

Dipankar Gupta



Bourgeois capitalism is attacked for a variety of reasons, but it is during this historical epoch that public-spirited rules came into prominence from sport, to science, to fashion, to politics. However, today, we are determinedly moving away from being rule bound to spectacle bound.

Over the past hundred years, and more, these public-spirited rules shaped our thinking. In science, knowledge has now to be demonstrated by objective rules and not handed down by the church or the tyrant, even the guru. In politics, authority is vested in the rule of citizenship that limits the powers of the state. In sport there is the referee, the audience and the spectators, who are equal participants, under transparent rules.

In fashion, came Coco Chanel. Chanel's great contribution to fashion was to make clothes comfortable and elegant for a person functioning in the rule-bound public sphere. With Chanel, haute couture (literally, high tailoring) no longer meant ostentatious splendour of the few, but rather, they started to signify cut and style that emphasised modesty as elegance for the working person.

As Chanel said: "Modesty, which elegance." Out went feathers, plumes, swathes of brocade and jewel studded costumes, and in came the famous 'little black dress'. Till then gowns were so heavy and corsets so tight, that women must have wished they could put their internal organs away somewhere. Chanel instead designed clothes that let you ride a bike, jump into a car, work all day in office and be ready for evening cocktails without rushing to the change room. A public, middle class person can now also be elegant.

It is then not the clothes you wear that matter, but what you become when you are in them. As Coco Chanel said, "the best colour in the world is the one that looks good on you." That is what you, "dress impeccably, they



adoring Indian middle classes. But today, Europe is changing and India fits in nicely with the trends developing there. In Paris, Milan, Beijing as well, Chanel style fashion is increasingly being overwhelmed by the likes of Gucci and Louis Vuitton. They are the ones now shaking the pagoda tree.

The emphasis is no longer on understatement, but on overstatement. Gone is the accent on modesty; it is now on spectacle and splendour. Unlike Chanel, Gucci and Louis Vuitton are not as much into clothes and perfumes. The shiny red apple now is leather goods and buckles with brand names that poke you in the eye. Accessories are the new haute couture.

Accessories are more spectacle friendly than clothing. Today's fashion consumer is thinking differently. Saving up for a Gucci belt, even if it is worn over faded jeans, seems a worthwhile demonstration of having arrived. Catherine Deneuve is not the star model any more, but Li Pili and Kanye West.

Gucci and Louis Vuitton do not depend heavily on stores, as Chanel does, but on net savvy purchasers who no longer need to walk in and buy with others. They are consuming, and boots in front of their smart screens in isolation. The old style 'fashioner' who observed and communicated, is now history. Instead, it is now the 'show' that counts.

This is obviously working like a charm. In 2018, Chanel's profits climbed 16%, but Gucci and Louis Vuitton recorded increases of 33% and 19%, respectively. The spectacle has displaced modest elegance in hours, minutes and plastic cards. So while Chanel lives on, the centre of gravity has shifted to Gucci, Louis Vuitton, and other such fashion houses.

This is not unlike cricket. Test matches are still on, but 20-20 is where the big bucks are. This trend has not gone unrepresented in politics either. Even in the 2019 election, the world of the bourgeois democracy is increasingly being dwarfed by spectacle and theatre. Gucci, Louis Vuitton, and other such watched the recent Trump-Biden debate.

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other car borne people. Indian fashion, accordingly takes a hefty dose of inspiration from what traditional royalty wore, and that class did not walk, and did not ride, and did not wear such things. Chanel's little black dress, or even the Chanel designed pink suit (that Jackie Kennedy loved), would seem utterly ordinary and utterly modest for the bling

Betting on consolidation: Shringla leads a power packed Indian delegation to Myanmar

Rajiv Bhatia



Confirmation by diplomatic sources that a power packed Indian delegation comprising foreign secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla and his staff (COAS) MM Naravane, will visit Myanmar for high-level discussions on Monday, is imbued with significance. Almost every Indian foreign secretary visits Myanmar at least once in his/her tenure. So does the COAS. But it is the first occasion when the two dignitaries form a composite delegation, tasked to engage the leadership advancing this vital relationship at a critical time.

The delegation's composition reflects New Delhi's nuanced understanding of where power lies in Myanmar. This is only the second time that the foreign secretary visits a neighbouring country in the Covid era (he visited Bangladesh earlier).

The visit, which is bound to attract extensive diplomatic attention, was preceded by Foreign Office consultations, held on Thursday on a virtual platform. It will be followed by a ministerial meeting of the Joint Trade Committee on 20 October. Taken together, these developments should impart a strong momentum to bilateral relations. It is a 'time-tested' partnership, blessed by U Sae Han, Myanmar's permanent secretary for foreign affairs, reflecting a shared assessment.

The present context enhances the

visit's significance. On 8 November, Myanmar will go through its parliamentary elections. Indications are that the National League for Democracy government, led by State Counsellor Aung San Mye Thaw, could return to power, probably with a reduced majority. If so, it would continue to govern, sharing power with the Myanmar army in accordance with the Constitution.

Holding elections is a challenge in these Covid times, with Myanmar

having recorded the fourth highest case load within ASEAN. The Rohingya question continues to fester, straining Myanmar's relations with Bangladesh. Finally, China's expanding economic footprint in Myanmar and the continuing impasse on India-China border complete the relevant backdrop. It is given that all the five key pillars of India-Myanmar relationship will be discussed in depth. First, cooperation on political and diplomatic levels exists in ample measure. Since 2014, seven visits at the head of state/ government level took place, resulting in numerous agreements and deepening of mutual understanding.

Second, security and defence cooperation registered progress. Signifying a major breakthrough, 22 Indian insurgents were handed over by Myanmar authorities in May. Through the triad of dialogue on strategic issues, expansion of training areas and supply of defence equipment needed by the Myanmar military, India has consistently strengthened defence ties. General Naravane is likely to interact with Commander-in-Chief Min Aung Hlaing to review progress and plan the next steps.

Third, development cooperation valued at \$1.4 billion (through grants) is substantive. Capacity building has been accorded priority, with several new institutions set up for agricultural education, information technology and industrial training that have benefited Myanmar youth immensely. Over 100 projects have been completed as part of the border development programme in

western Myanmar.

Fourth, economic cooperation has been strong, but it still stays at a sub-optimal level. Bilateral trade stood at \$1.7 billion in 2018-19. Efforts are underway to increase it to \$2 billion in 2019-20. India has been a major partner in trade exhibitions held in Myanmar. India's total investment amounting to \$800 million needs to be increased. Investment in energy cooperation, valued at \$1.2 billion, deserves a further push. Two of the major connectivity projects, however, have been a matter of concern and will need high-level attention.

Finally, people-to-people exchanges occupy a special place, considering the invaluable connect of Buddhism and the presence of a nearly two million strong Indian community in Myanmar. India's assistance in restoration of the Ananda Temple in Bagan and two temples in Both Gava built by Burmese rulers - King Bayinnaung and King Mawlaik - has been widely appreciated in Myanmar. So is India's timely help of medicines and equipment to fight the corona pandemic.

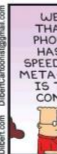
As the Shringla-Naravane team discusses key facets of a strategic partnership in Naypyitaw, think tanks in both nations need to contribute more, with fresh ideas and thinking. While the region's geopolitics changes, India's Neighbourhood First and Act East policy and Myanmar's deep-seated instinct for a balanced and independent foreign policy must ensure that the two countries journey together as 'companion souls'.

The author is a former ambassador to Myanmar and is a distinguished fellow, Gateway House.

dilbert



WHAT ARE YOU GUYS TALKING ABOUT? IT SOUNDS INTERESTING.



WE WERE SAYING THAT OUR SMARTPHONE TECHNOLOGY HAS CAUSED US TO SPEED-UP OUR META-ORGANISM THAT IS THE SUM OF OUR CONNECTED PARTS.



IN MY DEFENSE, FROM ACROSS THE ROOM IT LOOKED INTERESTING.

Sacredspace
A Good Human
At every level of society the key to a happier and more successful world is the growth of compassion. We do not need to become religious, nor do we need to believe in an ideology. All that is necessary is for each of us to develop our good human qualities.

The XIV Dalai Lama

Indic Poetry Was Born Of Pure Compassion

Reneka Narayanan

The unchecked violence raging in our country seems just cause to introspect on the first known poetic verse in Indian literature.

I refer to the work of the first poet, Sage Valmiki, of Srimal Ramayana fame. Vedas and Vedangas that came before the Ramayana, though usually set in the forest, are not considered poetic verse in Indian literature.

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way down to the river bed. Marvelling at its perfect clarity, they began to make their way back to Valmiki's ashram. The way back, Valmiki's eye caught a pair of brachia birds - demisele cranes, called koom in Hindi - with long white necks and striking plumage. They were dancing a graceful low-dive, beautiful to behold. The verses were enchanted. Suddenly an arrow whizzed in, wounding the male bird, then the female bird fluttered around him, sounding pitiful cries.

The startled sages discovered that a hunter had crept into the scene and was triumphantly advancing on the dead crane.

Images of Valmiki's state of mind just then. The day had begun on a great, big high with Narada's visit. Inspired and excited that there was actually someone like Rama, the hero he had imagined, and

hoped to find some day, Valmiki was in an exalted state. The purity of the river Tamasa and his refreshing plunge into her waters was like a metaphor for the purity that the hunter could achieve when cleansed of negativity. In this state of mind-body-spirit happiness, Valmiki saw and felt the beauty of creation and the Creator in the love

dance of the cranes. The abrupt end of this woodland idyll was a rude shock to the sage. His heart burst its bounds with a great rush of karunya, compassion.

"Why did you kill that bird?" he asked the hunter angrily. "I am a hunter. It is my legitimate occupation to hunt," said the hunter. "This Valmiki, after all, is a hunter himself," said.

"Ma nishada pratishthan teema gaurasavati sama. Yai krunchamhi bhunadekam

avathi kamamhitam." It means, "O hunter! May you never be respected for killing that unsuspecting crane when it was happily dancing with its mate." In Sanskrit, this came as a rhythmic sequence of 32 syllables, which, re-examined, proved to have a deeper metaphysical meaning, praising Vishnu.

Shaken by his own words, Valmiki hurried home. And whom did he find waiting at his ashram? He asked the sage himself, in his swan chariot, Brahma had missed the presence of Goddess Saraswati, looking for her in all directions. Brahma discovered that she had flown by Valmiki's ashram to bless

that first shloka started him off. "This Valmiki, after all, is a hunter himself," said. "Ma nishada pratishthan teema gaurasavati sama. Yai krunchamhi bhunadekam

was compassion. Isn't that something profound, to steer our moral compass by if we claim to love the Ramayana?