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## If Modi Believes Palestine-Israel Problem Is Tractable Why Not India-Pakistan?

Sandeep Pandey

Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh chief Mohan Bhagwat has claimed that their organisation can raise a combatant force in three days whereas it'll take the Indian Army about six to seven months to prepare for a war. What can be better than this? The country will save on its defence expenditure. The disciplined patriotic volunteers of RSS will serve to defend the country with great commitment. The RSS should be given the task of making volunteers available for this cause. Now it is their government so Mohan Bhagwat should make a formal proposal.

We hear about the dedicated volunteers of RSS ever ready to sacrifice for the nation. However, before they can be asked to defend the country we must verify their credentials of bravery. Now there is no proof from the freedom struggle, as RSS chose not to participate in it. Sole prominent person associated with RSS V.D. Savarkar who went to jail because of patriotic zeal was released when he tendered an

apology to the British. Another person inspired by RSS ideology was Nathuram Godse who assassinated Mahatma Gandhi, till date the most popular Indian and with whom India's identity is associated globally. In 1992, when the political wing of RSS, the Bhartiya Janata Party was in power in Uttar Pradesh its volunteers demolished the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya which they had failed to do during Samajwadi Party's rule three years earlier. People inspired by the RSS ideology were behind five incidents of bomb blasts in the country in which Lieutenant Colonel Srikant Purohit and retired Major Ramesh Upadhyay were also involved which shows RSS has already infiltrated the Army. Now when the BJP is in power at the centre various vigilante groups motivated by the RSS thinking attack and sometimes kill isolated people who are suspected to have participated in cow slaughter, of having consumed beef, are accused of indulging in Love Jihad, or simply believe in an ideology which is

critical of Hindutva. The common victims are mostly Muslims and dalits while some intellectuals have also been targeted. People inspired by RSS ideology see bravery in these acts and sometimes they think they are serving the cause of nationalism when committing these crimes. When one of the accused in the case of murder by mass lynching of Mohammed Akhlaq in Dadri died his body was wrapped in tricolour. Now, these incidents do not inspire enough confidence that the security of the country could be handed over to the RSS.

On the other hand, there was an occasion when Pakistani terrorists held the country hostage for three days in Mumbai in November 2008 but RSS workers were conspicuous by their absence. If all the RSS volunteers along with the Shiva Sena workers, who demonstrate ample aggression otherwise against people from north Indian states and non-Marathi speaking individuals, ready to take on anybody anytime, had come out in large numbers to storm the Taj Hotel the entire episode would have been over on the first day itself. However, RSS-Shiva Sena lost their only chance to exhibit real valour. Considering that RSS headquarter is in Maharashtra, when the enemy invaded their home, it is inexplicable why the RSS workers were mere spectators? The Army which Mohan Bhagwat says will require six to seven months actually wound up the operation in three days including capturing one of the terrorists alive.

The politics of RSS produces unnecessary tension and violence which is harmful to us. Since Narendra Modi has become Prime Minister our relationship with

Pakistan has deteriorated. There are more infringements from across the border. We were made to believe that India carried out some kind of decisive 'surgical strike' but our soldiers continue to be killed in attacks by militants or Pakistani security forces even after that. All we can do in response is kill some Pakistani soldiers or terrorists. Who benefits from these skirmishes except for the countries which sell arms to both India and Pakistan? India's relationship with China is also not very friendly. But at the Chinese border both sides take care that no soldier or civilian is killed on either side. It almost seems to be an unspoken, unwritten understanding.

It would have been better if instead of exhibition of aggression by the RSS-BJP combine India would have achieved a similar understanding with Pakistan. What the Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti is saying about the need to talk to Pakistan is very common sense. If the Modi government would not make it a prestige issue and talk to Pakistani government it would save valuable lives of soldiers and civilians on both sides. When Narendra Modi wanted he landed in Pakistan enroute from Afghanistan. That didn't appear to be any adversarial relationship between him and Nawaz Sharif. He participated in a private event of Nawaz Sharif's family and even gifted a shawl to his mother. Now if Narendra Modi desires to have a friendly relationship with Nawaz Sharif why should not our soldiers be given a similar opportunity? It would be better to exchange gifts rather than fire across the border. And it entirely depends on the leadership of the two countries as to what kind of relationship they want

to have. If such a choice exists why not prefer friendship over enmity?

Narendra Modi has taken a commendable stand in favour of Free Palestine during his recent visit to West Asia. He has clearly sent out a message to Israel that India may be the largest buyer of Israeli arms but it doesn't mean it'll give up its commitment towards the idea of a free Palestine. He highlighted the need for a peaceful resolution to the Palestine-Israel conflict. India-Pakistan conflict is of a very similar nature as that of Palestine-Israel. Incidentally both problems have a history of same duration and are the creation of the British. If Narendra Modi thinks that resolution of Palestine-Israel tangle is possible through dialogue why is it not possible to adopt a similar approach in the case of India-Pakistan imbroglio?

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# Economics of Politics

**Kuldip Nayar**

It's understandable that this year's budget should have an eye on rural India which constitutes some 70 percent of voters. Finance Minister Arun Jaitley had no compunction in mixing politics with economics. In the past whenever the budget was mixed with electioneering, political parties would protest against such a practice.

Over the years, economics has got mixed with politics. And, unfortunately, there is no getting away from this. The emphasis is on bettering the lot of those living in villages, the rural poor. The drubbing of BJP in Rajasthan by-polls shows that the voters are not convinced with the intent of the ruling party, in all the three by-elections, including one for the assembly, the Congress has won. Whether the party would continue to get the same results is yet to be seen, but the climate is pro-Congress.

A sort of pattern has come to emerging. Where the Congress is in power, the BJP has won and it is the other way round in the BJP-ruled states. The voters have no choice except choosing between the two parties. The third front has sought to be created but it is confined to some states alone. The front does not seem to go across the country.

In fact, the third front is reduced to the Trinamool Congress in West Bengal, the Janata United of Nitish Kumar in Bihar and the Rashtriya Janta Dal of Lalu Prasad, however limited in sway in the state. The Congress which is spread all over the country has only one opponent:

the Bhartiya Janata Party.

This is a strange phenomenon in a secular India because the credentials of BJP are too well known. A soft Hindutva has come to engulf the country. This looks odd in India where the constitution uses the word 'secular' in its preamble. One may blame Mohammad Ali Jinnah, founder of Pakistan, for dividing the country into two nations, but the resistance from the people was minimal.

Not long ago when I discussed the subject with Lord Mountbatten, the last Viceroy of India, he blamed Jinnah for the partition. He said that the then Prime Minister Clement Richard Atlee was keen on having some sort of unity between India and Pakistan. Lord Mountbatten told me so when I met him after many years.

He said he had invited Mahatma Gandhi first to have a look at the partition formula. The Mahatma walked out of Mountbatten's room when he heard the word partition. Jinnah welcomed the partition, when Mountbatten asked him if he would have some connection with India, he categorically said no, adding "I don't trust them." That ended the dream of united India which Atlee wanted.

To envisage a budget for united India is a difficult proposition. No party, except the Congress, has its presence in all the states. And the Congress itself is losing its hold state after state. The BJP is slowly filling the vacuum, but on communal lines. Its pronounced tilt towards Hindutva means that the budget would have 80

percent of benefits for Hindus.

In the circumstances, the 'Modicare' which assures health insurance to 50 crore individuals with coverage of up to Rs. 5 lakh per family per year appears to be a masterstroke. Describing the scheme as "the world's largest state-funded healthcare programme" the Finance Minister also announced one medical college in every parliamentary constituency. It would mean the country would have approximately 180 medical colleges and as many hospitals available to them.

To make it a successful proposition, the Centre is expected to involve state-run hospitals in a big way for smooth takeoff of the scheme. This is the third major insurance programme of the NDA government after Prime Minister's Fasal Bima Yojna for farmers and the Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojna. The crop insurance scheme launched by the government a couple of years ago has turned out to be a success with business growing to around Rs 25,000 crore.

The tragedy is that Muslims have withdrawn instead of confronting Hindutva with all its force. When I asked a top Muslim leader the reason for such a move, he said: "We want safety of our lives and properties. We are not interested in fighting the Hindutva forces." Thus, the BJP is capturing the imagination of Hindu population.

This means that if the Prime Minister Narendra Modi could win the next general election. It would

be his personal victory and not that of the BJP. He has cast his spell over the Hindu voters, particularly in rural India. Some respite is on the horizon. The assembly election in Gujarat, Modi's stronghold, has shown lessening of BJP's strength because the Congress has increased its tally in the state, although with the help of a few like-minded parties.

This must have come as a big jolt to the BJP, particularly Prime Minister Modi and party president Amit Shah. They had taken Gujarat for granted. The Congress is jubilant because it has bearded the lion in its own den. Whether the party can keep the winning trend in the future is difficult to say, but the Maha Front which Nitish Kumar is trying to build with all non-BJP parties may challenge Modi at the centre.

One drawback, however, is that Nitish Kumar is siding with the BJP to save his government in the state after fissures appearing in Rashtriya Janata Dal of Lalu Yadav and his own party. Of course, Lalu is still popular and draws support from even unexpected quarters. He has been imprisoned and lodged in Ranchi jail after he was found guilty in the fodder scam. Yet, he seems to command support from the voters. And Nitish is conscious of it.

Prime Minister Modi doesn't seem too concerned about a fraction of his support going away because he stills commands influence over the voters. But the real picture would emerge only after the results of state elections this year. Whether Modi goes for an early poll next year is in the realm of conjecture. At present any guess would be a shot in the dark.

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# How to Provide Universal Access to Health and Education in India?

**Dr. Malika B. Mistry**

## Introduction

Health and education are the human rights of an individual. An egalitarian society would aim at providing universal access to health and education to all its members. In fact an analysis of the historical experience of developed countries reveals that the provision of access to health and education enabled these countries to achieve faster economic growth. In the current literature on economic development of developing countries, a great deal of emphasis is laid on human development, the important components of which are education and health. However, even after seven decades of Independence, Indian state has not been able to provide universal access to health and education to its people, which is a shame. It reflects poorly on the Indian government and the political parties which have ruled and are ruling this country.

The objectives of this paper are : (1) To examine whether universal access to health and education can be made available to Indian people; (2) To undertake some case-studies of successful stories of access to health and education; and finally, (3) To make recommendations based on our study which will have policy implications to promote universal access to health and education in India.

## Universal Access to Health: An Experiment in Maharashtra

Community based monitoring

and planning (CBMP) of health services in Maharashtra represents an innovative participatory approach to improving accountability and health care delivery.

The implementation of CBMP includes awareness raising and preparatory activities, capacity building and training of participants, formation and functioning of monitoring and planning committees, community based assessment of health services, organisation of public hearing, which is attended by a large number of community members and diverse stake holders. One core strategy of CBMP is the public hearing which is attended by a large number of community members. In these hearings, people are invited to report their experience of health services in the presence of health officials and panelists from various fields. Around 450 such public hearings have been organised in Maharashtra.

India is a democratic country. CBMP contributes to deepening of democracy by (a) creating fora for direct democracy; (b) expanding representative democracy and ensuring participation of community based actors in local health planning; (c) reclaiming representative democracy; (d) promoting external accountability processes which trigger internal accountability mechanisms.

How did CBMP provide access to health care in the villages of Maharashtra? We list below some

achievements of this experiment:

1) After a public hearing at Saswad Rural Hospital in Pune, the following action was taken.

- A medical officer working at the hospital who was practicing illegally and denying proper treatment to patients was transferred.
- The physical condition of the hospital improved.
- Staff behaviour significantly changed.
- Representatives from the PWD were included in the monitoring committee to ensure their accountability.

2) In Nasrapur PHC, the following changes were effected.

- The serious problem of water supply was solved by installing four water tanks, resulting into direct benefits to patients, cleaner premises and a fully functional laboratory.
- A display board was installed for easy location of the health facility.
- A sanitary worker was appointed to regularly clean the premises.
- A workshop on the role of adolescents for the development of village health was conducted in which school youth participated.

3) Some more positive effects of CBMP are as follows :

- Several sub-health centers were reopened and started functioning.

- The medical officers not staying on the premises came back and started staying on the premises.
- Frequency of ANMs' visits to villages and even to remote hamlets, improved.
- A PHC in a tribal village Moroshi in Thane district was closed to political pressure. Because of CBMP, the PHC was reopened and started functioning.
- CBMP committee could protect women health workers from sexual harassment by male health workers.
- The scope of services was expanded. At the Malshiras village PHC, the treatment for diabetes and hypertension was started.

Shukla and Sinha (2011) who documented the CBMP in Maharashtra conclude as follows:

'It is more likely that effective social accountability of public services can be achieved when the interventions are participatory, evidence-based and sustained, involving multiple actors and able to build broad stakeholder coalitions. There is probably no social context today where democracy is not a significant aspiration of ordinary people; yet how to radically expand democracy and make it real in the context of public services and other spheres of life is a key challenge.' (2011:29)

In the High Level Expert Group Report on Universal Health Coverage for India (2011), the experts have given many recommendations to ensure universal access to health to Indian people. Under the heading,

'Community Participation and Citizen Engagement', they have made the following recommendations, which seem to be very similar to those of CBMP:

1. Transform existing Village Level Health Committees (or Health and Sanitation Committees) into participatory Health Councils.
2. Organise regular Health Assemblies.
3. Enhance the role of elected representatives as well as Panchayat Raj institutions (in rural areas) and local bodies (in urban areas).
4. Institute a formal grievance redressal mechanism at the block level.

#### **Universal Access to Education: The Case-Study of Finland**

Anu Partnen (2011) in the article "What Americans Keep Ignoring about Finland's School Success" documented the universal access to education that Finns enjoy in Finland. Finland's national education system has been receiving praise because in the Finnish students were receiving some of the highest scores in the PISA Survey of the OECD in the world. Their scores were neck to neck with those of super achievers in South Korea and Singapore.

What is so special about these schools? Finnish schools assign less homework and engage children in more creative play. Because of this many foreign delegations come to Finland to visit schools and talk with the nation's education experts.

There are no private schools in Finland. Only a small number of independent schools exist. They too

are publicly funded. None is allowed to charge tuition fees. Also there are no private universities. This means that every person practically in Finland attends public school right from K.G. to Ph.D.

In Finland, there are no standardised tests. The only exception is National Matriculation Exam which every one takes at the end of the upper-secondary school, which is equivalent to American high school.

What about the teachers? In Finland, all teachers and administrators are given good salary, prestige and responsibility. For a teacher, master's degree is a must. The teacher training programmes are conducted in best of the colleges.

Finns believe in cooperation and not in competition. There are no best schools or teachers in Finland. The goal of education programme in Finland is equity and not excellence. Finland believes and implements the idea that every child should have exactly the same opportunity to learn irrespective of family background, income or geographic location.. Education is not seen as a means to produce star performers but as an instrument to even out social inequality. Schools must be healthy and safe for children. It gives free school meals, easy access to health care, psychological counseling and individualised student guidance to all its students. Thus Finland has been producing academic excellence by following the policy of equity.

According to some experts, education policy is more important to the success of a country's school system than the nation's size or ethnic make-up. Why did Finland

resort to the policy of equity in the access to education? Because it realised that it cannot rely on manufacturing or its scant natural resources to be competitive in the world. So it decided to invest in knowledge based economy. To achieve this, a country has to prepare not just some of its population well but all of its population well. To have some of the best schools in the world does not help if there are many children left behind.

The Finnish school system ensures that all children have access to good public education irrespective of where they go to school or what sort of families they come from.

What is the lesson for India? If Finland can provide universal access to education, India too can provide this. For this a strong political will is necessary. And voters need to demand this.

### Recommendations

On the basis of the above, here are some recommendations to provide universal access to health and education:

1. In case of health, all the recommendations made by the High Level Expert Group Report on Universal Health Coverage for India should be implemented.
2. The percentage of GDP expenditure on health must be increased to at least 3 (as many experts all over the world have suggested.)
3. In case of education, all the Kothari Commission's recommendations should be fully put into practice.
4. The percentage of GDP

expenditure on education must be increased to at least 6 (as many experts all over the world have suggested.)

5. The mushrooming of international schools and English medium schools must be discouraged.
6. The accountability and transparency must be fixed on teachers and management of the schools. When government is spending so much money on the schools and the teachers salaries, the value of money needs to be extracted. In fact the government schools, as the Kendriya Vidyalayas should become centers of excellence.
7. The above is possible provided there is a strong political will. For this voters have to become active. The discourse of politics has to change. It should have health and education which are very basic needs of humans, become the central focus of politics and politicians. For this political discourse has to change from negative and communal politics to positive and developmental politics.

### Conclusion

It is high time that India provides universal access to health and education to all its citizens. It is possible provided there is a strong political will. Health and education, which are very basic needs of humans, must become the central focus of politics and politicians. For this voters have to become active. The political discourse has to change from negative and communal politics to positive and developmental politics. If this can be done, India can achieve even higher economic

growth rate and high level of economic development and truly become a shining example for all the developing nations in the world.

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## 'Thou need not pay', or, The Indian Republic and Chai-Pani

Dr. Paresh R. Vaidya

This author was born barely four months before the Constituent Assembly adopted the Constitution in November 1949. Hence I realise that my age is also almost exactly the same as that of the Republic India. Due to this or any other reason, I have been a keen observer of the people of this country and their lives and internalised joys and sorrows of India as a nation. The first few years of a child's life are without comprehension ability and hence one could not have gathered the true impressions. But then a general impression gathered from the literature of the period and discussions in the family or school fills this small gap. In national matters my memory begins with the curtain raiser exhibition organised for the first Five Year Plan. By today's wisdom, I feel that it was indeed thoughtful of the administration to put up a large exhibition in a remote town (Bhuj) on the western border. The way this exhibition enthused the rural and semi-urban visitors about the programmes India intended to have left a deep impression in my mind about the administration. In the first decade of independence, the administration was indeed filled with a nationalistic fervor and had shown innovativeness in many ways.

Some time later, the currency changed in 1957, when we were in the primary school. Ana and old paise made way for the so-called Naya Paisa. We at school were supposed to suddenly forget that an anna was 4 paise and learn that it was 6 naye paise. It took some

time before anas left the stage. Soon after, the pound (ser) made way for the kilogram. The sound of the band at the police parade on 15th August & 26th January renewed our devotion for Mother India twice a year. The flag was then hoisted not by a politician but by the collector of the district (in the case of Kutch, a 'C' State, it was the Chief Commissioner.) Returning home we used to fill our compound and walls with pictures of national heroes and the Tiranga with a desire in the heart to measure up to them, at least to some extent.

Nowhere in this landscape of golden sunrise filled with patriotism and hope was seen a dark cloud of greed or corruption. That began a little later and blossomed further when expediency came to be considered as success during the early 1970s. My first exposure to corruption occurred when I set out to begin my adult life. I was 19 years and was going to Bombay (now Mumbai) for pre-service training from Ahmedabad, where I was studying. It was a rainy evening in August, and there were not many in the reserved coach of the night train starting from Ahmedabad. I boarded and occupied a seat. One is supposed to pay a reservation charge when the TTE comes, which was 50 paise for the seat. I gave him a rupee note. He pocketed the note and gave a receipt for 50 paise and walked away. I understood that he meant to keep the change, but as a lad of 19 years I just could not pick up the courage to protest. It hurt me

all night. There were two reasons for that. Firstly, the source of my money was my father, who was earning Rs 255/- per month and was managing a large family including paying for the higher education of we siblings. Therefore, half a rupee was quite a lot to donate to a sly railway employee. The other reason was that it was the Gandhi centenary year and I happened to spend that year in his city, Ahmedabad, for studies. The influence was fresh and I could not excuse myself for not even protesting the chai-pani which the TTE extricated from me. Gandhiji's dictum that the willful sufferer of injustice is equally responsible for the injustice began crushing my conscience. This was a strange feeling and I almost vowed that this will be the last time that I would pay like this.

It may look incredible, but I can say with satisfaction that after 40 years and considerable length of active life, I have been able to live up to this pledge to a great extent. I can remember only one occasion when someone paid a proxy bribe for me. I had sold my flat and the lawyer hired by my purchaser gave a five rupee note to the chaprasi in a sub-registrar's office. I am yet to reason out why this deviation occurred. Otherwise, I have gone through several delicate as well as dangerous situations and escaped without yielding. It is not to prove a bravado that I write this, but only to indicate that it is possible to resist a corrupt person if there is will. Do not also assume that I escaped corruption because I may be living a life of a Sanyasi. Far from it. I have lived in this megapolis and changed residences ten times. I have transferred my ration cards at least 4 times. I purchased a flat, sold it, purchased another one. I

have travelled by train also several times. I have seen India from Kutch to Calcutta and from Kanyakumari to Delhi or Lucknow. Six times I have gone out of the country. We have an electricity, gas and telephone connections at home. Each one of the above is a potential 'corruption' hazard, some of them a sure case. But by the grace of God and by my strong aversion to paying bribes, I could hold through. Kautilya has suggested four tricks for achieving one's goal—Saam, Daam, Dand & Bhed. Obviously the second weapon (money) was not available to me. The rest I did use inter alia. Different situations demand different approaches, but one thing required almost every time is a message that you are not the one to pay. On rare occasions even a clear but polite statement that 'I do not pay' makes things easy. Some habitual 'takers' know it without your saying so. It is a different thing that some may prepare their action in advance to test your nerve. You must face it.

I admit that my job became easy sometimes because of my being a government servant and at other times because of my so-called social status. Being in a place like Mumbai is also an advantage because the next higher authority is accessible for complaining against those creating obstacles. This favourable factor is not available to those in mofussil areas. I remember an occasion when I received an assessment order from the Income Tax department but the envelope did not contain the cheque for the refund. My friend in a similar situation went to the IT office, paid Rs. 2/- (that was the going rate during the the early 1980s!) and got the cheque. On the other hand, for me, once my file was missing, at another time it was 'lunch time', and so on. I refused to take the clue. When the

refunds piled up for 4 years, I wrote to the IT Commissioner quoting the episode of the then famous TV serial Rajani on IT officers, mentioning that they deserved the offensive episode. The next week the ITO called me and gave me the cheque. However he had the gumption to request me to tip the peon standing at the door. I said, "I do not pay as a principle." He had no defence (I mean offence) available. I walked out with a cheque of Rs. 3200/- in a way a Delhiite may never even dream of! The lesson is simple: resist if you can. Observing non-violence in the face of violence may be difficult and the likes of Gandhi can only do that, but it is not so with bribe. One-sided violence is possible but there cannot be a gratification (bribe) without a giver. Sadly, there are some who pay voluntarily; especially the trader class has this habit. I often feel that if the punishment for those giving bribes is made much more stringent than for those taking bribes, the culture of paying for cornering someone else's quota will soon disappear. A debate whether corruption has come from top to down or vice-versa is only an academic exercise and escapism.

Let us realise that corruption deprives many of the benefits reserved for them by government policies. This is a negation of their democratic right in a way. Unfortunately those who miss out on this are the poor, who can not spare money for paying government staff or politicians. In other words, those are the very people for whom policies are framed. The romantic vision of Gandhiji and Nehru about the free India does not touch those who get their rations only if the ration card is 'purchased' from a petty inspector. (The irony is that constitutionally this inspector

represents the President of India.) If at all we want poor people to rejoice at these silver and golden jubilees of independence and the sovereignty of this country, we must banish corruption. Otherwise how can we fault those who are nostalgic about the British days, where welfare schemes were less, but worked impartially. The social environment was such that those who did not fit into a welfare scheme were not only afraid but also ashamed to claim the benefits. That shame has gone once the benefits went 'on sale'. A buyer is never ashamed. Unfortunately the management mantra now is success, and the successful have no inhibition about this 'convenience payment'. If a generation takes this as a way of life, the evil will no more disturb anyone in the coming generations. Such a loss of sensitivity should be of grave concern for the nation. Doomed will be those whose empowerment we have been talking of since the last 70 years.

Like any crusade or good work, one must be ready to pay a price

to resist this evil; at least on some occasions. Price can be time or effort; ironically sometimes money itself is the price for not paying money! But the cause of combating corruption is certainly a better avenue to spend, than some other social occasions. If we can donate blood for our jawans, why not some 'effort' or 'time' to rejuvenate our republic. Having said that, I must also admit that it is not easy to hold fort. Looking back the past four decades, I relive various situations when the family peace and comfort were compromised. Details can be omitted but someone may say the mental agony or physical discomfort were not worth the money in question. I always had adequate personal money to buy those comforts. But it certainly was worth giving the message to those crooked and greedy souls that there can be occasions when their pressures would not work and they should expect that more often. If they are rid of that feeling of invincibility, or reconcile to hearing 'no' in some form, the poor people who are unable to afford will be benefited. That single motive has

kept me going against odds. At this late age, I hope I am not forced to give up my personal principle of not paying a bribe—it will not only be my defeat but that of the republic which failed to support me to support her.

But I must not end on a pessimistic note. The last 10 years of my 40 years of adult life have been better than the first 10 years because of two factors. One is technology. Arrival of computers has taken away the discretionary power of many officers who otherwise harassed people. Telephones with audio and video recording also have contributed to instilling fear in the minds of the unscrupulous. And it has reduced fear in the minds of the new generation who are about to begin their foray in life. This hopefully will result in a tectonic change in the manner of interaction that takes place between a citizen and a government functionary. Let us wish good luck to those who do not want to pay.

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## Failures of Democracy: India shining, Bharat suffering?

**Preeti Mahurkar**

The miserable performance of India in every area of social sector i.e. poverty and inequality eradication, healthcare, education or gender justice even after 7 decades of democracy shows that something has gone awfully wrong in the path of development in India. Moreover, the rosy picture of India's achievements on the economic front does not give a balanced account of the multitude of failures and shortcomings to

deliver the promise of democracy to its citizens, that is being lost amongst the hype and euphoria of celebrating India's growth by the media, governments and privileged section of society. It is alarming since ignoring these failures or brushing them off as the by-products of rapid growth has already cost us heavily as the crucial years of nation's development have been lost in the game of communal politics,

corruption and public ignorance.

Another failure is the neglect to bring these issues out on the public platform, in public understanding to be discussed, debated and rectified. It has given rise to an apathetic society with democratic failure to address the serious issues that are critical to the national and social fabric of our country.

This brings us to another major paradox that exists in our media and society, the culture of trivia, sensationalism, negativism, TRP and reality shows that overtake crucial issues like poverty, inequality, lack of national vision, corruption, communalism, misplaced concerns and priorities of our power holders. On one hand, we have Bollywood, elites, the rich and powerful and their interesting lives, and on the other hand there are those unprivileged ones who lead boring, insignificant existence and hardly anyone is interested in knowing their plight and woes. Though there are some highly motivated, uncompromising, idealistic media professionals who play fair and take great pains to keep the spirit and ethics of unbiased journalism alive, the majority ignores the facts and is dictated by TRP and sensationalism. The poor and their plight have no place in our media space or even in our collective awareness space.

The media, barring some exceptions, serves the politicians, the rich and the powerful, and caters to the privileged sections. This is obvious in the coverage of headlines, analyses and programs displayed on the channels today. This is perhaps due to the 'political and elite capture' as known in the world. It may be because media today is an expensive field and needs massive financial backup and advertisements to run the show. Most of the channels and papers are owned by the rich and powerful that use money and power to influence the elected and the electorate. It has become a dangerous game as the power of media can be a game changer and the power brokers know how to make use of it to their benefit. No wonder so many crucial news stories and analyses go unnoticed

while insignificant, trivial issues are blown out of proportion to divert the nation's attention.

An example of this is the recent job losses and slow down in growth rate which are the most explosive and crucial challenges our country is facing today. These unfortunately, could not find place in some so called nation's highest TRP channels while insignificant, communal issues or scandals occupied the prime time debates. The fact remains that India that is shown in our media today, by and large, is the India of the affluent and privileged. We are a nation of pretending and sensational reality shows that is ashamed to acknowledge its own reality. We are a nation where a large section is more interested in watching celebrity scandals, pretentious family soaps while the real cries and plights of our lower sections are ignored. We, as a society, are ashamed to acknowledge this suffering Bharat as the other hidden part of the shining India.

The champagne glass economic structure of India as it is called by some experts is an interesting yet somewhat disgusting observation for its peculiarities and weirdness. The top ultra-rich elite has an exciting, happening, shining India that is full of wealth, fun, luxury and opportunities. They live too high in their ultra luxurious mansions and high-rises, travel in private jets and yachts, and are largely disconnected from ground realities. This section is diverse though, where some are hardworking, full of ethics and compassion, socially aware and responsible. They do whatever they can for society and the country. On the other end of the spectrum, we have a society full of Marie Antoinettes' who in their ivory towers do not care for

the lowly, crawling, starving poor and slums don't exist for them. They have invested heavily abroad and are least interested in what is happening in India except for the gossip on Bollywood or page 3 sections. This India is well connected and has a big clout too and sometimes manipulates things in their favour using the power of wealth.

Then there is another section that is not so rich yet a little richer than the rest. This India has created a virtual universe of its own and lives in a bubble with social media, WhatsApp groups, TV soaps, foreign trips, kitty parties and gossip sessions occupying all its time and energy. This section is also out of the public system as it has access to quality education, health and enjoys other services provided by the private sector. Though there is a section that is socially aware, responsible and eager to see changes in the society and quietly works towards that yet, a large section of this India has no time or inclination to learn about or empathise how the other India survives. It is largely protected from political and market fluctuations as it is given enough subsidies, freebies and sops to be occupied and interested in the great India rising and shining saga.

Not that they are at fault and should not enjoy their privileges for they have worked hard for it. The problem is that the ignorance and lack of awareness of this section cost our democracy heavily as they are used as pawns in the highly politicised game of votes. This India is manipulated by various parties using minority or majority cards, party ideologies; resulting in a highly diverse and fragmented society that has divided and polarized the nation. The real issues like poverty,

inequality, unhygienic condition, corruption, pathetic public services and overall public sector failures are sidetracked as trivial matters while high political dramas and tactics occupy nation's attention and precious time. This India is blissfully ignorant and insulated from outside realities. It does not bother that at the other end of the spectrum, there is a suffering Bharat—the bottom 40 % as they are called by the World Bank—that has no access to quality education, basic health and other facilities and that is kept trapped in a vicious cycle that goes on for generations. They have no lobby, are not organised as they are busy surviving and suffer quietly.

As seen during demonetisation, this India living in its happy bubble was not really affected as it had access to credit cards, e-cash, e-stores etc. and was blissfully ignorant and insulated from the outside fires and fumes. They had minimum inconvenience, so there were hardly any complaints, their jobs were secured and homes well stocked. Since they have their own virtual universe of Facebook and social media, their opinions are taken as the common sentiments of the whole Nation. However, those who lived at the bottom rung of the pyramid were severely affected as millions of daily wagers lost their jobs and livelihoods and were thrown back into poverty. They had no money to eat and suffered quietly. They were not counted, as they did not have the energy or time to protest or demonstrate.

Without raising any hue and cry, they are quietly busy surviving, waiting for promised better days to come and take things at face value. They took the blow of demonetisation as a promise for

better days ahead even as it damaged their lives.

They are used to it you see.

They have been ruled and exploited by outer and inner invaders, kings, zamindars, gora and brown sahibs and netas for too long to stand up for their rights. Their passive resilience has become a weakness that is being routinely taken advantage of by those in power. Their ignorance and unawareness of their own rights and power make them easy game for crooked politicians to manipulate and maneuver them for their selfish motives. Every election, every party tries to get their vote by misleading them, bribing in cash or kind or showing big dreams only to abandon them later.

They are being used as pawns by political parties, most of whom have no real empathy or compassion for their suffering or propose any substantial long-term reforms. They make their issues a game of passing the buck or gaining political mileage. But then it is nothing new as it is an old game, played in turn by all successive parties; some win, some lose but the real India pays the price!

The point is not about political parties manipulating the priorities and resources of the nation as per their whims and fancies, which has been done for years by all successive parties in power. The point here is that in a nation where the majority of the electorate is ignorant and easily manipulated by false promises, money power, emotional or communal issues, the role and responsibility of its socially aware and educated citizenry to question and confront the misplaced motives and priorities through social accountability and participation

becomes important. These are the some of the most effective democratic tools that can bring the desired change in the country, but are ignored or rendered useless.

Unfortunately, in a large democracy like India, where the citizens are the primary stakeholder and have the power to elect or reject, there is no move or effort to exercise that power and change the system. Those who are educated and aware, choose to look the other way or get caught in the never-ending petty party politics or communal fundamentalism while those who are ignorant and unaware have no clue or support to stand for themselves and end up being used by various parties for their personal agendas. Regrettably, the potent power of voters is wasted and fails to bring any substantial change in the system. Instead, it becomes an impotent society that is ruled and manipulated by a few smart minds in power or religious miscreants.

In any democracy, the power of its educated, intellectual and socially aware citizens' contribution is invaluable as they form the critical mass that can create a phase transition as seen time and again in various parts of the world. It happened in our country during British rule when some aware, compassionate and educated minds united and created a revolution to turn India's destiny around.

The extent to which the electorate is informed and aware of its rights and roles in national issues, policies and priorities determines the role the government would play in a nation. An ignorant electorate will only play into the hands of power brokers and will be repeatedly taken for a ride. This is seen today during election

time, when votes are bought with cash or kind from gullible, naive rural and urban poor vote banks. Free dinners, drinks, gifts and false promises are used as carrots to bring them to polling booths. This results in highly flawed electoral outcomes as a large section of educated and aware citizens don't feel the need to participate in the process for the sheer lack of motivation, lack of a deserving candidate or out of hopelessness about the state of things in the country. This renders the power of democracy useless.

Every party uses great, elaborated mandates and promises to come in power and every five years India is taken on a hope ride only to come back on earth later to find little or no significant changes. High-level corruption and swindling of large amounts of nation's wealth and resources and stashing away of black money in other countries continues as usual. The leaked lists of culprits and names given by global agencies are never put out in the public domain and brushed under the carpet, no real long term actions are taken against the powerful ones.

And if that's not enough, we find our country increasingly broken and divided over caste and communal politics, which are used to divert attention from real burning issues and problems we are facing today. Parliament is alarmingly becoming the place for playing blame games and passing the buck for missed opportunities and actions, inadequate development, vote bank politics and cover up of scams and corruption. Political parties, instead of playing a constructive role in nation building by debating and finding solutions for prevalent critical issues like massive unemployment, inequality, communalism, poor infrastructure or

services, are increasingly indulging in games of accusation, mudslinging, name calling and eroding the sanctity of parliament. All the crucial issues are hijacked by the politicians, gullible and naive voters play into the hands of few smart people in power; the media along with the nation too gets distracted and instead of questioning and asking for accountability, gets caught in political dramas and the show goes on . . .

Sadly, this is not a cynical take but a reality check on the state of our nation today. No matter how much we choose to ignore or brush it under the carpet to project a happy shining and growing India, we will have to face and address these issues sooner or later if we need real reforms and transformation.

The role of media and citizens, therefore, is of the utmost importance and is going to be catalytic in the future of India. We need to be awake, alert and proactive. After all, governments and bureaucracy are just parts of the system but we, the people of India, are the system! In a true democracy that is of the people, by the people and for the people, we all are the primary stakeholders and must play our roles in nation building. We need to make sure that the objectives of vibrant democracy and inclusive & sustainable development are met successfully and most importantly. We need to contemplate why has it not happened until now? What is missing? What lessons should we learn? As a nation, what are our strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats?

It is time we took stock of things in our country as our ignorance and negligence have already cost

us several crucial years of nation building, that has been lost in petty politics, massive corruption and communalism.

What's most obvious and worth contemplating is that the loss of missed opportunities and resources was definitely not borne by politicians as they had their fill in terms of money and power; it was the citizens and the country that has had to pay the price!

It is high time we woke up, rejected the politics of divide and rule and moved beyond silly trivial communalism and fundamentalist issues that have already created so much damage in our country and focus on the real issues for a change! We cannot afford to lose any more time as these crucial issues of poverty, education, health, unemployment, infrastructure and communalism etc. demand urgent action and we need all the resources to counter and overcome them as soon as possible.

The first step towards that would be to accept and acknowledge those unconscious, old destructive patterns and paradigms that created these issues and replace them with new, vibrant systems and frameworks that would put India on the path of peace, progress and prosperity (inclusive and sustainable development). That is what we need today first and for most, to counter and overcome all ills that exist in our society today.

Let us all come together to identify those misguided beliefs and destructive patterns that are pulling India down and making it unable to reach its full potential.

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# The Fukushima Nuclear Meltdown Continues Unabated

Helen Caldicott

*Background to this article :*

*On March 11, 2011, a massive earthquake followed by a tsunami devastated the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Plant in Japan. It initiated a complex series of events, ultimately resulting in the meltdown of the nuclear fuel in three of the four reactors of the plant, resulting in massive release of radioactivity into the environment. The accident also damaged the reactor buildings, as well as the cooling systems of the spent fuel pools located at the top of these reactor buildings.*

*The Fukushima accident is at least as big, if not bigger, than the Chernobyl nuclear accident. Chernobyl stopped releasing radiation into the atmosphere after about 2 weeks; while, we are now nearly seven years into the Fukushima accident and it is still releasing radioactive material into the atmosphere. The radiation from this plant continues to impact not just Japan, but the whole world.*

*Till before Fukushima happened, in the intervening 25 years after the Chernobyl accident, the global nuclear industry and its apologists were arguing that lessons had been learnt from Chernobyl, the necessary design modifications had been made in nuclear reactors, and no major nuclear accident will occur in the future. Now after Fukushima, they are arguing that this was a one-in-a-million chance occurrence, and there is no need to worry. On the whole, the essence of the argument of these nuclear cheerleaders is that the other nuclear reactors worldwide are safe. This is the claim of India's nuclear establishment too, that our nuclear reactors are very very safe.*

*The fact of the matter is, nuclear energy is inherently unsafe. No amount of safety devices can completely eliminate the possibility of a nuclear accident. Unless all nuclear reactors operating around the world are shut down, sooner or later, another catastrophic nuclear accident is bound to happen in one of these reactors. And when that happens, its consequences are going to affect entire humanity for the rest of time. This is what has happened with Chernobyl—it not only led to the downfall of the Soviet Union (as Mikhail Gorbachev writes in his memoirs), the radiation leakage from it is going to cause the deaths of lakhs of people, especially across the Northern Hemisphere, from cancer and other diseases for thousands of years. And this is what is happening with Fukushima too—here its consequences are even worse, as the following article points out.*

*The multi-trillion dollar nuclear industry knows that if the full scale of the tragedy at Fukushima becomes known to the people of the world, it could lead to such an outcry that it could well sound the death-knell for the industry. And so from the beginning of the accident, the global nuclear industry and its accomplices—the governments of pro-nuclear countries from the USA to India—in collusion with the global media, have tried to downplay its potential impact. This is the reason why news about the continuing tragedy at Fukushima is simply not appearing in the media.*

*Dr Helen Caldicott has devoted the last forty two years to an international campaign to educate the public about the medical hazards of the nuclear age and the necessary*

*changes in human behavior to stop environmental destruction. In the article below, she explains recent robot photos taken of Fukushima's Daiichi nuclear reactors: radiation levels have not peaked, but have continued to spill toxic waste into the Pacific Ocean—but it's only now the damage has been photographed.*

Recent reporting of a huge radiation measurement at Unit 2 in the Fukushima Daichi reactor complex by robots does not signify that there is a peak in radiation in the reactor building.

All that it indicates is that, for the first time, the Japanese have been able to measure the intense radiation given off by the molten fuel, as each previous attempt has led to failure because the radiation is so intense the robotic parts were functionally destroyed.

The radiation measurement was 530 sieverts, or 53,000 rems (Roentgen Equivalent for Man). The dose at which half an exposed population would die is 250 to 500 rems, so this is a massive measurement. It is quite likely had the robot been able to penetrate deeper into the inner cavern containing the molten corium, the measurement would have been much greater.

These facts illustrate why it will be almost impossible to “decommission” units 1, 2 and 3 as no human could ever be exposed to such extreme radiation. This fact means that Fukushima Daichi will remain a diabolical blot upon Japan and the world for the rest of time, sitting as it does on active earthquake zones.

What the photos taken by the robot did reveal was that some of the structural supports of Unit

2 have been damaged. It is also true that all four buildings were structurally damaged by the original earthquake some five years ago and by the subsequent hydrogen explosions so, should there be an earthquake greater than seven on the Richter scale, it is very possible that one or more of these structures could collapse, leading to a massive release of radiation as the building fell on the molten core beneath. But units 1, 2 and 3 also contain cooling pools with very radioactive fuel rods—numbering 392 in Unit 1, 615 in Unit 2, and 566 in Unit 3; if an earthquake were to breach a pool, the gamma rays would be so intense that the site would have to be permanently evacuated. The fuel from Unit 4 and its cooling pool has been removed.

But there is more to fear.

The reactor complex was built adjacent to a mountain range and millions of gallons of water emanate from the mountains daily beneath the reactor complex, causing some of the earth below the reactor buildings to partially liquefy. As the water flows beneath the damaged reactors, it immerses the three molten cores and becomes extremely radioactive as it continues its journey into the adjacent Pacific Ocean.

Every day since the accident began, 300 to 400 tons of water has poured into the Pacific where numerous isotopes—including cesium 137, 134, strontium 90, tritium, plutonium, americium and up to 100 more—enter the ocean and bio-concentrate by orders of magnitude at each step of the food chain—algae, crustaceans, little fish, big fish then us.

Fish swim thousands of miles and tuna, salmon and other species found on the American west coast now contain some of these radioactive elements, which are tasteless, odourless and invisible. Entering the human body by ingestion they

concentrate in various organs, irradiating adjacent cells for many years. The cancer cycle is initiated by a single mutation in a single regulatory gene in a single cell and the incubation time for cancer is any time from 2 to 90 years. And no cancer defines its origin.

We could be catching radioactive fish in Australia or the fish that are imported could contain radioactive isotopes, but unless they are consistently tested we will never know.

As well as the mountain water reaching the Pacific Ocean, since the accident, TEPCO has daily pumped over 300 tons of sea water into the damaged reactors to keep them cool. It becomes intensely radioactive and is pumped out again and stored in over 1,200 huge storage tanks scattered over the Daichi site. These tanks could not withstand a large earthquake and could rupture releasing their contents into the ocean.

But even if that does not happen, TEPCO is rapidly running out of storage space and is trying to convince the local fishermen that it would be okay to empty the tanks into the sea. The Bremsstrahlung radiation like x-rays given off by these tanks is quite high—measuring 10 milirems—presenting a danger to the workers. There are over 4,000 workers on site each day, many recruited by the Yakuza (the Japanese Mafia) and include men who are homeless, drug addicts and those who are mentally unstable.

There's another problem. Because the molten cores are continuously generating hydrogen, which is explosive, TEPCO has been pumping nitrogen into the reactors to dilute the hydrogen dangers.

Vast areas of Japan are now contaminated, including some areas of Tokyo, which are so radioactive that roadside soil measuring 7,000 becquerels (bc) per kilo would

qualify to be buried in a radioactive waste facility in the U.S..

As previously explained, these radioactive elements concentrate in the food chain. The Fukushima Prefecture has always been a food bowl for Japan and, although much of the rice, vegetables and fruit now grown here is radioactive, there is a big push to sell this food both in the Japanese market and overseas. Taiwan has banned the sale of Japanese food, but Australia and the U.S. have not.

Prime Minister Abe recently passed a law that any reporter who told the truth about the situation could be gaoled for ten years. In addition, doctors who tell their patients their disease could be radiation related will not be paid, so there is an immense cover-up in Japan as well as the global media.

The Prefectural Oversight Committee for Fukushima Health is only looking at thyroid cancer among the population and by June 2016, 172 people who were under the age of 18 at the time of the accident have developed, or have suspected, thyroid cancer; the normal incidence in this population is 1 to 2 per million.

However, other cancers and leukemia that are caused by radiation are not being routinely documented, nor are congenital malformations, which were, and are, still rife among the exposed Chernobyl population.

Bottom line, these reactors will never be cleaned up nor decommissioned because such a task is not humanly possible. Hence, they will continue to pour water into the Pacific for the rest of time and threaten Japan and the northern hemisphere with massive releases of radiation should there be another large earthquake.

*(This article has been republished here from Greenmedinfo.com.)*

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