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BOOK REVIEW

HINDU 17.5.11 BOOK REVIEW

Dynamics of business & polity

K. SUBRAMANIAN

There is a deeper and more abiding bondage between business and polity often ignored by the advocates of “free market”

BUSINESS AND POLITY - Dynamics of Changing Relationship:
D. N. Ghosh; Sage Publications India Pvt. Ltd., B-1/I-1, Mohan
Cooperative Industrial Area, Mathura Road, New Delhi-110044.
Rs.795.

A born banker who has held senior positions in government and financial institutions, Ghosh is a writer known for his incisive and in-depth analysis. In this book, he tries to capture the trends and relations between business and polity over (hold your breath!) two and a half millennia. There is no attempt to strait-jacket the connections, which are set in a non-Marxian, institutional mode.

The relationship between the two spheres has always been shrouded in mystery or peppered with stories about lobbies, scandals, and pork barrels. But there is a deeper and more abiding bondage between them that is often ignored by the advocates of “free market.”

Right balance

The bonds between the two have varied over time and over millennia. If scholars dig deep, as Ghosh has done, it would suggest patterns: patterns which marked various civilisations; patterns which helped business and the polity to flourish and reach higher levels; and patterns which led to decay.

Business creates wealth and the state needs wealth — for maintenance of control (law and order!); for the welfare of the people; for waging wars with neighbours; and for expansion.

There has to be a right balance. Even as the state appropriates revenues from trade, it should create conditions necessary for wealth creation. Where societies succeeded in striking the balance, they enjoyed years of growth, glory and prosperity. The test is distributive justice and avoidance of excesses like inequalities, exploitation, and exclusion.

The Roman Empire had its centuries of glory; but crumbled under the weight of oligarchic excesses. It lacked the ability to regenerate itself. The rise of the Arabs described as 'The Arab Miracle' was non-religious, with Islam providing a new ideology of equality. China had its dynasties ruling for centuries and revealed an ability to raise resources, to transform agriculture and industry with technologies time and again. Unlike the Romans, the Chinese had the secret to regenerate and rise from the ashes.

It was with the rise of European states like Portugal, Spain, the Netherlands and, later, the United Kingdom, that the pattern became more complicated with the entry of foreign trade and colonial ambitions. Wars and weaponry to wage them altered the pattern beyond recognition. It saw the rise of a new generation of financiers in Florence, London, and Amsterdam. As Ghosh explains, "When the focus sharpened on the need for attaining economic power, the ruling regimes started looking for ways to create an environment in

which the trading community would be enabled to generate a continuously rising surplus.” They were ever ready to fund the campaigns of Popes, Emperors and Archdukes.

On the rise of Pax Britannica, Ghosh argues that the empire was not an “act of absentmindedness,” but was built brick by brick in constant collaboration with business.

He offers an unusual insight into the origin of the opium wars. With the drying up of Mexican silver, Britain had to pay for its import of tea. There was no demand for European goods in China to generate the needed revenues and the British were in a fix. It led to their pushing the sale of opium in China. When the Chinese resisted, they went to war to open up their market. Ghosh sums up thus: “England's economic successes were not achieved simply because of its industrial revolution or its superior position in the world of free trade, but by the government's continued capacity to set the terms of exchange, politically and economically.”

Gold standard was one of the pillars of British hegemony in global trade. When that pillar began to collapse after World War I, the U.K. and the European countries mounted a valiant effort to hold on to it or wreck it. The treatment of the collapse of the gold standard is masterly, testifying to Ghosh's grasp over the underlying factors.

The “snapping of the gold thread” was inevitable with the sunset of the empire. This would automatically “change the U.S. from a passive observer of the slow collapse of the classical order to an active leader to reconstitute it.”

Rise of multinationals

In a brief and somewhat hurried treatment of the U.S.'s role, Ghosh captures the rise of American multinationals, especially the financial conglomerates. The U.S. agenda is no doubt carried out by the

government in cahoots with the corporations. They exploit all the international agencies like the WTO and the World Bank to set standards and promote codes of conduct to foster U.S. interests. These are embedded in themes like globalisation, and the Washington consensus.

The lesson Ghosh draws from his study of the U.S. hegemony is grim: The U.S. is no longer in a position to offer 'public good' to global economy as it used to, mainly "through its failure to manage the global financial centre as a stable and responsible distributor of global liquidity."

It is difficult to do justice to many of the themes touched upon in the book. There are cameos and flashes of historical insight. The work is a scholarly addition to our understanding of economic history.

Review: Pakistan: A Hard Country



^[1]*Pakistan: A Hard Country*

Anatol Lieven

Allen Lane

Rs 599

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Even before the country's creation in 1947, some were predicting the collapse and breakup of Pakistan. The Indian Muslim leader Maulana Azad thought the partition of the subcontinent would be reversed in a matter of months. More recently, in the chaos and bloodshed that have come to Pakistan since 2001, commentators have suggested it's a failed State. In the last few weeks — since Osama bin Laden was found living down the road from Islamabad — it's been portrayed as a rogue nation.

Anatol Lieven will have none of this. His Pakistan is a durable and varied country held together by complex ties of kinship, tradition and a powerful professional army. He sees it as far from failure, even if parts of the administration are dysfunctional. As a journalist-turned-professor, Lieven is able to range vividly across different levels of Pakistani society and show the huge differences between, for example, the business community in a city like Karachi and the vengeful tribes living on the Afghan border. His conversations with people in these remote areas are fascinating for their nuggets of insight. He also quotes

frequently from the deductions of British colonial officials, whose aphorisms are threaded through his book like verses from a sacred text.

In the same vein, he rejects the stereotype of Pakistan as a land of religious fanatics. Interviewing a frontier chief whose walls “are festooned with the heads of mountain goats and photographs of ancestors bristling with guns, swords and facial hair,” he learns that failures by the police make rough justice popular. In a region where honour is vital, the chief prefers to execute a rapist and slit the nose and ears of his accomplice; if not, the legal system might leave them “free to roam the streets raping more girls and laughing at us”. Islam as practised in Pakistan is often mystical and ‘non-Koranic’, and ‘justice’ arises from local traditions of revenge.

Pakistan: A Hard Country is an important corrective to a monolithic view of Pakistan. Lieven is right when he says support for the Taliban is superficial, or that “water shortages today pose a growing and possibly even existential threat” to the nation. His take is fresh and deeply informed. But it’s rooted in an older, static view of social customs. For example, 100 years ago in undivided India the veiling of women or reverence for a chief were as common as they are in Pakistan today. These practices have largely disappeared in modern India because there has been a calculated attempt at social progress and reform. Such behaviour is rooted not in the spirit of Pakistan’s people, but in a lack of economic independence and mobility.

In the weeks since the killing of bin Laden, the Pakistani media have been awash with intrigue and justifications for the excesses of al-Qaeda. In the words of the writer Nadeem F Paracha: “What was once the lunatic fringe has now become the country’s new mainstream.” When Lieven visited Broomfield Hall, “the school of the local elite” in Multan in 2009, he found conspiracy theories were the stuff of life. In the view of almost all the students, “It has been proved that the Jews were responsible for 9/11; that a Jewish conspiracy exists to dominate the

world; that the US has occupied Afghanistan in order to invade Pakistan, Iran and Central Asia, and so on.”

Pakistan is today engaged in a psychological civil war. For the last 20 years, it has sent trained killers across India’s border to destabilise Kashmir. It has supported the Taliban on and off — while posing as an ally of the US and receiving large sums of money for military services from western taxpayers. This dual strategy has proved extremely unpopular with most Pakistanis, who feel an undefined sympathy with their fellow Muslims who are being hounded by foreign forces. Public figures such as the cricketer-turned-unelected politician Imran Khan have stirred up an aggressive patriotism, obsessing about insults to national honour while choosing not to talk about the immediate threat in their midst, for fear of getting on the wrong side of the terrorists. As the newspaper *Dawn* revealed recently, US drone attacks have killed less than 2,000 people — many of them militants — while attacks by Islamist terrorists inside Pakistan have killed an estimated 34,000 citizens since 2004.

Lieven sees the variety of armed groups that are attempting to overthrow the Pakistani State as contradictory. Some are working in the spirit of tribal rebellion, showing “manliness and fearlessness” like their predecessors 150 years ago. Others are driven by local injustices, or are borrowing from precepts exported by the al-Qaeda. Any solution, he believes, drawing on his detailed historical and anthropological knowledge, depends on a negotiated settlement with the Pathan population of the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, who form “the backbone of the Taleban (sic) and their allies.”

Patrick French is the author of India: A Portrait

CORRUPTION

TRIBUNE 16.5.11 CORRUPTION

DANGERS OF ALL-POWERFUL LOKPAL

Nikhil Dey and Ruchi Gupta

FOR many who quite rightly guessed that the Lokpal Bill drafted by the government would be a non-starter, the alternative merited automatic support. However, little was known about the contents of the two Bills except that the alternative being proposed by “India Against Corruption” had the prefix of being a “people’s” Lokpal. The consequences are too important to leave the issue to the expertise of the drafting committee. The people must comprehend, and play their part in ensuring that there will be an Act that will empower them to fight corruption — not make them surrender their hopes to yet another anti-corruption organisation. How people-centric is the Jan Lokpal Bill?

While the Jan Lokpal Pill is going through rapid revisions — 12 so far — the basic framework and some principles have remained constant. Broadly, the Bill can be divided into four sections: the mandate and scope of the Lokpal; composition and selection of the Lokpal; powers of the Lokpal; and functioning of the Lokpal. The composition and selection of the Lokpal is substantively one of the least contentious sections – concerning largely with procedural matters and subjective preferences, rather than ideological or legal viewpoints. A discussion of the other three sections is necessary.

Jurisdiction over all public servants

The Jan Lokpal is being conceived of as an institution with far-reaching powers. It will exercise jurisdiction over all “public servants”, including the entire executive, the legislature and the judiciary (Section 2.11), and will be tasked for the investigation and prosecution of all actions punishable under anti-corruption provisions in various laws. It is also mandated to act on allegation of misconduct by a government servant, grievances of citizens, complaints from whistleblowers, and complaints against its own staff (Section 8.1).

This ambitious agenda, suffers from many problems. An essential feature of democratic governance is the separation of powers to preclude the exercise of excessive authority by any one institution. The well-intentioned objective of administrative, financial and functional independence (Section 14.3D) raises fundamental questions about its own accountability. The “people” are confined to being complainants and applicants.

In addition the centralised structure of the Lokpal is ill-suited for sorting out governance deficit and the inclusion of citizens charters and grievance redress in its ambit is likely to swamp the Lokpal. Effective grievance redress needs to be built upon participative collective processes that empower citizens. Instead the proposed system of a two-step appellate process centralises power in the Lokpal, each escalation leaving the individual citizen at the mercy of an increasingly powerful and inaccessible authority.

Judiciary too under Lokpal?

The inclusion of the judiciary within the purview of the Lokpal also needs discussion. The Bill proposes only to investigate complaints relating to judges that would fall under the Prevention of Corruption Act. However, judicial accountability extends beyond quid pro quo corruption of individual judges – and issues of transparency, judicial appointments and judicial standards will be left unaddressed. Many eminent judges have suggested that the important issue of judicial

accountability should be tackled simultaneously through a separate statute that will also protect the constitutionally mandated independence of the judiciary.

The Jan Lokpal has been vested with sweeping powers, which are susceptible to misuse. The Lokpal can suo-motu initiate investigation (Section 14.6), tap phones and intercept other communication (Section 13C), has powers of search and seizure (Section 9) and initiate prosecution (Section 8.2b) without sanction (Section 8.6 and Section 8.7). According to Supreme Court judgments, the government can tap phones only if there is “occurrence of any public emergency” or “interest of public safety” and the power to tap phones goes beyond the Lokpal’s mandate to tackle corruption.

Other powers trespass the executive and judicial domain such as the power to order the cancellation of a licence, lease or contract (Section 8.2.d), blacklist firms (Section 8.2.e), order the removal of public servants (other than ministers, MPs and judges) on the completion of investigation (Section 18.8), mandate changes in the citizen charters (Section 21.5), investigate judicial orders if mala fide alleged (Section 17.2) and ensure compliance of its orders through the contempt of court powers (Section 13.4). The only oversight is the Constitutional default of judicial review. However, with the entire judiciary envisioned to be within the purview of the Lokpal, this may not be an effective enough safeguard.

The Lokpal or Lokayukta will respond to what are likely to be lakhs of complaints and applications through powerful local-level machinery of vigilance and investigation officers whose only accountability is to their superiors. It is difficult to imagine why these officers of the Lokpal will not be as susceptible to corruption as the public servants they would investigate. The janata at the grassroots faces the imminent danger of being saddled with an even more unaccountable centre of arbitrary power.

Public anger revives Lokpal

The Jan Lokpal will subsume the CVC (Section 24) and the anti-corruption investigative wing of the CBI (Section 25.3). It also has complete discretion to determine the number and categories of its officers (Section 23.2) at “special conditions or special pay” which “may be different and more than ordinary pay scales” as prescribed by Lokpal (Section 23.3 and 23.7).

This provision attempts to carve out a separate and special regime under the Lokpal, and it is unclear why standards and norms applicable for other government employees shouldn't apply to those of the Lokpal. Elsewhere the Bill mandates that all records and information held by the Lokpal shall be public, even during investigation (Section 18.9).

While the commitment to transparency is admirable, this provision may violate the fundamental right to individual privacy since it is inevitable that the Lokpal will be privy to some information about the accused that will either be irrelevant to the investigation or false (e.g., malicious testimonies).

The Lokpal has the power to levy fines and penalties all of which will be deposited in its “Lokpal fund”, as will 10 per cent of public monies recovered for disposal as per its discretion (Section 5.5). This provision creates a perverse incentive for the Lokpal to levy fines and usurps parliamentary prerogative of oversight over public money.

The strong popular support for the Jan Lokpal Bill comes from a sense of anger and frustration with the spate of scams, particularly “grand corruption” where ordinary citizens have helplessly watched money being illegally accumulated by people who seem to be beyond the law. There is a need to create, as this Bill does, a body that is well selected, empowered and supported, to fight corruption at the very top.

Perhaps innovative provisions could have been included for the Lokpal to enlist the support of the many public spirited citizens who even the RTI Act has spawned. However, by setting an agenda that mandates the Jan Lokpal to respond to all matters of mis-governance that spans the length and depth of the arms of the state, there is the obvious danger of losing focus. More frightening is the prospect that the Lokpal would create a huge bureaucracy that could become another source of corruption that it might not be able to monitor or control.

The joint committee has begun by promising to consult people with an open mind. To realise the ideal of participatory democracy, the committee will have to encourage widespread debate and own responsibility to initiate diverse public consultations where each principle of the Bill is critically discussed before its inclusion. That process could perhaps promote a culture of putting people at the centre of anti-corruption efforts. Corruption is finally about imbalanced and arbitrary power relationships. The people need to be active participants in framing a law that in turn empowers them to fight corruption and the arbitrary use of power. That would ensure the “Jan” prevails.

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EDUCATION

HINDU 21.5.11 EDUCATION

Why RTE remains a moral dream

Krishna Kumar

The law provides a five-year window to its implementation but the dream it legislated looks as elusive now as it did when the countdown started.

Like the majority of India's children, the Right to Education (RTE) Act has completed its first year facing malnourishment, neglect and routine criticism. A year after it was notified as law, the right to elementary education remains a dream. The law provides a 5-year window to its implementation but the dream it legislates looks as elusive now as it did when this countdown started. While one important clause is facing a writ in the highest court, other provisions are struggling to receive official attention in State capitals. Any assessment of the progress of RTE in its first year must begin by underlining the federal nature of governance which assigns school education squarely to the State. Few people recognise that India's federal character offers to the Ministry of HRD at the Centre the role of little more than a moral authority. No wonder the main news on RTE at the end of its first year is that the Ministry is trying hard to persuade State governments to own the new law and

accept the responsibility of implementing it. The attempt has met with rather limited success. Let us examine why.

A key feature of RTE is that it emphasises quality as an integral aspect of the child's right to be educated. Part V of the RTE Act lays down fairly specific terms under which the quality of elementary education is to be ensured. These include a comfortable teacher-student ratio, curriculum reform and improvement in evaluation methods. The success of these measures depends on teachers, and that is where the system is facing its worst obstacle. The current policy discourse prefers to use the word 'challenge' in place of 'obstacle.' This sweet advice of management gurus is not quite relevant to the problem at hand because it has been created as a matter of policy in many States. At the top is Madhya Pradesh which has radically lowered the status of teachers with the help of a two-decade long policy delusion. Bihar, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh present similar, though less intractable, cases. The States in the north-east come next where a vast number of teachers have been appointed over the years without any attention to basic qualifications or training. West Bengal constitutes a case of its own kind, symbolising isolation from national trends and norms. If we leave aside these dire instances, many among the remaining States also present a grim picture. Instead of improving teachers' working conditions and training, many States have opted for cosmetic solutions. Orissa has taken the lead in this respect by imposing a dress code requiring teachers to wear a pink sari and a black blouse. Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh may not face an acute shortage of teachers but the issues pertaining to the quality of training are just as relevant for them as they are to the northern States.

Teacher training comprises what one might call the single biggest mess the system of education has to sort out. When the National Council of Teacher Education (NCTE) was given statutory status as a licensing authority, it was seen as a powerful mechanism to bring

order into a chaotic sector. Over the years, the NCTE has, by itself, become a part of the problem. Thousands of private outfits of dubious institutional integrity and quality have come up. The RTE requires each State to name an academic authority which will determine and improve curriculum, evaluation and training. Most States have notified their State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT) as the mandated academic authority. Some, like Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab and West Bengal have named their Boards of Secondary Education. Apparently, these States have no institutional resources to look after the implementation of RTE. But even the ones which have assigned this task to the SCERT need to assess the academic capacity of this institution. Barring Kerala, no State has treated its SCERT with respect; one only hopes that the political change in Kerala will not hurt the remarkable status its SCERT has achieved. All others will need both guidance and money to nurture their SCERTs.

The climate of governance, which set in during the 1990s, makes outsourcing preferable to institution-building. State officials, who have the responsibility to implement the RTE do not know where to look for the knowledge and creative energy required to address the pedagogic concerns articulated in it. Terms such as child-centred teaching and continuous evaluation are alien to a system accustomed to eliminating a majority of children by declaring them 'fail' sooner or later. A ban on corporal punishment is similarly baffling to both officials and teachers who are used to inducing fear as a way to get children to work hard.

A peculiar development of the last two decades has further compounded the situation. This factor has to do with the culture of trivia that has become the norm of schooling of the poor. Superficial training has led many teachers to perceive their job as that of baby-sitters. A pattern of poorly conceived, shallow activities, aimed at keeping children occupied without learning anything substantial, has

evolved into a full-fledged routine. Children come to school, get a free meal, and it matters to no one that they make tangible progress from day to day. The cult of 'joyful learning' has driven many among the poor to look for whatever private provision exists in their habitation. These private outfits impose a harsh regime of home work and physical punishment to show good examination results. The paucity of good teachers is just as acute in the low-fee private sector as it is in schools run by the government and local bodies. According to current estimates, the country will need well over a million teachers over the next four years in order to meet the RTE norms. Who will train that many teachers? And who will orient the existing cadre of teachers towards the child-centric vision of RTE? One might have imagined that universities will play a major role in this national enterprise, but there is no sign of such an initiative being taken. Even the newly set up central universities have ignored teacher education. Distance education is perceived as the only viable solution to this conundrum. But even for this option, there seems to be little realistic assessment of the costs involved in creating the kind of infrastructure the SCERTs will require in order to liaison with providers of distance education. The situation is apparently so desperate that even the National Open School is likely to join the list of providers of distance training. There is a great risk that a vast number of nominally trained teachers will be allowed to enter schools. The only barrier they might face is the newly introduced eligibility test which will qualify a person to seek appointment as a teacher. How that barrier works as a mechanism for ensuring quality is yet to be seen.

RTE is also facing a major court case, filed by a group of top-end public schools. They are upset with the clause which makes it mandatory for every fee-charging school to allot one-fourth of its seats to children of the poor. Our metropolitan public schools cannot bear the idea of mixing children of the poor with rich kids. Many have started an afternoon shift for the poor; others want to test the

poor kids before enrolling them. RTE's radical vision prohibits such screening procedures. The cutting edge of the legal case RTE is facing arises out of the rule that the government will subsidise the reserved seats for the poor only to the extent of the per capita amount it spends in its own schools. If RTE survives this court case, it will have the potential to alter the exclusive and moribund character of the elite public schools. However, a lot of creative energy will need to go into equipping teachers serving in these schools to deal with a mixed population of children. The Loreto School of Kolkata provides a model in this respect, and one hopes that elite schools throughout the country will want to learn from it. They also need to overcome their conceptual blinkers in order to recognise that mixed classrooms provide a pedagogically superior opportunity to bring the best out of all children.

(The author is Professor of Education at Delhi University.)

POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT

Decline of communism

It can't stage a comeback with old approach

Kuldip Nayar

INDIA'S biggest story after the latest state elections is the decimation of communism. Most believe it is a good riddance of an ideology that has outlived its utility. In fact, it got buried under the debris when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1990, after losing the Cold War.

Yet, West Bengal and Kerala, more so the first, were the only two states which defiantly stuck to the Stalin philosophy and even put up his life-size photo at the politburo. The rout in West Bengal was humiliating, the party securing only 63 seats in the 294-member House. Kerala had a better showing winning 68 out of 140 seats, primarily due to outgoing Chief Minister V.S. Achuthanandan's clean image, without the humbug of ideology.

However, the advance of capitalism or consumerism without any challenge has not made the world better. While Russia has settled down to a Western pattern, the communists in India are riding a high horse. The jaded ideology is still sacrosanct for them. They do not see that their agenda has been appropriated by the Maoists, who have also used the gun and coercion to spread. China's version of communism is a free economy under the strict discipline of the party and the army. The classical type of communism does not sell any more. The middle class

has

to be associated with it in one way or the other.

In any case, West Bengal's Left Front government was not the setup which could have retrieved the ideology because the leaders were arrogant, the ministers nonchalant and the cadres law unto themselves. The Communist Party of India (Marxists), which either misgoverned or non-governed the state for 34 years, had a cockeyed idea of ideology that by flaunting the red flag or mouthing slogans they could win popular support. Little did the CPM realise that there was disconnect between it and the people. The party's debacle in the Lok Sabha elections should have made it read the writing on the wall.

In Kerala, something worse is emerging. Communalism is replacing the remnants of communist ideology. Hindus and Christians have voted for the Congress, and Muslims for the victorious United Democratic Front. Muslims won 20 seats out of the 24 they contested. For the first time, the state is in the throes of religious fervour, although the BJP's Hindutva forces have been defeated roundly.

I do not think that the communists can stage a comeback with the same old Leninist-Stalinist approach. They have to return to the grassroots and expand their base. The Left has to keep in mind that any ideology without morality will not go very far in India, inspired by Mahatma Gandhi.

Mamata Banerjee of the Trinamool Congress, now West Bengal's Chief Minister — she won 226 seats — realised the moral aspect. A maverick as she is, she can wreck a system but may find it hard to overhaul. The administrators, the police and other government agencies have to be rejuvenated with passion and dedication to serve the people, not to be at the beck and call of others like commissars in the Left government. Switching over loyalty is the bane of civil service. But it can be awakened to the ethical considerations inherent in public behaviour. At present, they have become generally dim.

How to revive the dividing line between right and wrong, moral and immoral that has got erased is the challenge. This is not only for Mamata but also for Jayalalithaa who has smashed the family-cum-government apparatus in Tamil Nadu. By securing 203 seats in the 234-member House, she has proved that her victory is not negative but positive.

But she has begun on a wrong note. She appears to be making up with the ruling Congress. When the case of “unaccounted assets” is pending against her, the stance of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), which is under New Delhi, is crucial. How will she cope with that? A telephone call from Congress president Sonia Gandhi within 24 hours of Jayalalithaa’s winning elections says it all. Yet she must keep in mind that the people in Tamil Nadu have trounced the Congress and reduced its tally from 34 to five. Her election plank to eliminate corruption should be on top of the agenda.

In fact, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) would not have been routed if it had not to face the fallout of the 2G spectrum scam. The problem that the Manmohan Singh government faces is that the DMK has 19 seats in the Lok Sabha. However, Jayalalithaa’s 11 will make up the deficit to some extent. At some stage, either the Congress will dump the DMK or the latter would withdraw its support.

The Congress victory in Assam was expected. Once state Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi brought the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) leadership to Guwahati for talks, it was clear that his eyes were fixed on the state assembly election. The ULFA still has an emotional appeal in Assam. The Congress won at the polls last time with the help of Bangladeshis who had been registered as voters. The Chief Minister left them high and dry this time. And his victory pushed into the background the grave charges of corruption against his government. Before long, both forces will catch up.

It would be, however, heartening if something tangible agreement emerges from the talks to reconcile the aspirations of the ULFA with

Assam's identity within the Constitution of India. The Congress should learn a lesson: political problems need political solutions and not military ones. The large presence of the armed forces in the Northeast, operating under the outmoded Armed Forces (Unlawful Activities) Act, has alienated the people, not calmed them down.

In due course, when the election dust settles down, all the three major parties — the Congress, the BJP and the communists — will realise that they are losing ground. Regional parties are beginning to occupy the space which an all-India party should be commanding. This means a coalition government at the Centre for a long time to come. There is nothing wrong with it if the federal structure is respected and a consensus of opinion sought. But the manner in which the major parties growl at one another holds little hope. They have defamed the system so much that their own credibility is zero.

One thing that the nation must keep in mind is that morality has been squeezed out of Indian politics. The polity has to go through a series of coalitions at the Centre and even in the states. There will be shocking bargains and business-dictated combinations. People would be mute spectators. They will have to wait for a third alternative before they reach the sunny ground.

Blind to anger and discontent

Hiranmay Karlekar

In keeping with its Stalinist ethos, the CPI(M) concentrated all power in its hands. The resultant authoritarianism brought about its fall in West Bengal.

The Communist Party of India (Marxist)'s rout in the recent West Bengal Assembly election has been attributed to several factors — its vaulting arrogance; forcible acquisition of prime farmland at peppercorn rates for setting up industrial units, housing complexes, resorts and malls; the use of the most savage means by the administration and party cadre to stamp out protests by peasants; attempts to squelch political opposition through sustained violence and intimidation; the ruin of West Bengal's education system by appointing party loyalists alone as teachers in schools, colleges, universities and institutions of professional learning; and, its attempt to maintain its political domination through an elaborate system of patronage in the grant of Government contracts and recruitment to Government jobs.

A basic question, however, remains unanswered. What explains the CPI(M) leaders' arrogance and failure to sense the growing alienation of the people despite their having extensive front organisations among farmers, industrial workers, teachers, students and professional bodies? For an answer, one must look at the cardinal principle of their party's organisation — 'democratic centralism', elaborated by Lenin. In his *Letter to a Comrade on Our Organisational Task*, he wrote in 1902,

“We have arrived at an extremely important principle of all party organisation and activity. In regard to ideological and practical *direction*, the movement and the revolutionary struggle of *the proletariat need the greatest possible centralisation*, but in regard to *keeping the centre informed* concerning the movement and the party as a whole, in regard to responsibility before the party, we need the *greatest possible decentralisation*... The movement must be led by the smallest possible number of the most homogeneous groups of trained and experienced revolutionaries. But the largest possible number of the most varied and heterogeneous groups drawn from the most diverse layers of the proletariat (and of other classes) should take part in the movement. And, in regard to each such group, the centre must always have before it not only exact data on its activities but also the fullest possible knowledge of its composition.”

Thus, the principle of democratic centralism provides for direction coming from the centre comprising a small homogeneous group of trained revolutionaries, information travelling to the centre from a wide, varied and heterogeneous base of the movement, and the centre keeping a sharp eye on all groups comprising the base. After having sent the information upward, the groups at the base had to abide by whatever directions the centre issued. Besides the centre, aware of all the details of each group, could detect signs of the slightest dissidence and crush it.

Hence, democratic centralism made for an autocratic organisation. Not surprisingly, sharp criticism greeted Lenin when he first elaborated it. In an article entitled ‘*Centralism or Bonapartism?*’, Plekhanov accused him of “confusing dictatorship of the proletariat with the dictatorship over the proletariat” and of practising “Bonapartism, if not absolute monarchy in the old pre-revolutionary style”. Vera Zasulich wrote that Louis XIV’s idea of the state was Lenin’s idea of the party. In an incisive pamphlet, *Our Political Tasks*, Trotsky attacked Lenin’s method as “dull caricature of the tragic intransigence of Jacobinism” and predicted a situation in which “the party is replaced by the organisation

of the party, the organisation by the central committee, and finally the central committee by the dictator”. Later, Plekhanov wrote in *The Journal of a Social Democrat*, that the Bolshevik conception prevailing, “everything in the last resort would revolve round one man who *ex-providentia* will unite all the powers in himself”.

Plekhanov’s words proved prophetic with the rise of Stalin’s personality cult and the imposition of his nightmarish dictatorship on the Soviet Union. Lenin, of course, did not want any such thing to happen. In the first volume of his three-volume classic, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, EH Carr wrote, “No one insisted more powerfully than Lenin himself that without masses no serious political action was possible. But the party was never conceived by Lenin as a mass organisation. Much of its strength was due to the fact that it was more concerned to exclude than to include: Quality rather than quantity was its aim. The function of the party was to lead the workers.”

This view, in turn, flowed from Lenin’s belief, mainly elaborated in *What Is to be Done?* (1903), that the working class by itself could not rise above “trade union consciousness” and political consciousness had to be imparted to it from outside by professional revolutionaries from the bourgeois and the petty bourgeois who had risen above their class affiliation. He had a point. Intellectuals were aware of historical and societal forces at work, could understand ideological issues and plan and strategise, which most industrial workers could not. Besides without an organisation which was secretive, even conspiratorial, emphasising discipline above almost everything else, Communists could not have survived the repressive Government of the Tsars with its all-pervasive secret service.

Such a party structure, however, not only continued after the successful Bolshevik Revolution but transferred its dictatorial ethos to the Soviet Government as well. To some extent, this was initially due to the need for firm action to consolidate the revolution threatened by violent

internal opposition from parties like the Social Revolutionaries, and external threats from the White Russian armies which launched several offensives against the fledgling Soviet state. The Government had also to restore order, revive the economy, and feed the cities. As relevantly, Stalin perpetuated the massive concentration of power in his hands to liquidate his opponents like Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev, Radek, Borodin and, later, the top leadership of the Red Army, and enforce his collectivisation drive which destroyed Soviet agriculture. It was only after Stalin's death in 1953 and the liquidation of the hated KGB chief, Laverenti Beria, that Nikita Khrushchev could begin a slow process of dismantling his ghastly terror apparatus.

The Cold War, internal opposition, and the fear of the East European countries breaking away from the Soviet Union's orbit because of discontent within, slowed down the process. But even after the Soviet and a few other communist parties repudiated Stalinism, the CPI(M) continued to laud it. The resultant authoritarian ethos stanching the flow of information upward, while the flattery of time-servers and favour-seekers who crowded the party's corridors, drowned warnings of waning support. By the time the party woke up, its fortunes had sunk beyond redemption.

Delhi disconnect

Shekhar Gupta

The rise of regional parties and leaders is no longer news. Last week's results have brought in two phenomenally strong single-state leaders, Mamata Banerjee and J. Jayalalithaa. A third has risen too, Jaganmohan Reddy in Andhra Pradesh, though that has passed under the radar a bit, thanks to the overwhelming noise of the bigger upheavals elsewhere. So, what's the news, if the rise and rise of regional leaders is an old story?

This election provides further evidence that the days of the very centralised, high command-led parties are now over. The Congress has been paying for a decade now for this inability, and unless it makes a correction now, it will face a disaster in 2014. Today it has much fewer regional leaders capable of winning their states for it than even the BJP. New evidence that this distant, Delhi-centric management of national politics no longer works also comes from the plight of the CPM. Its leadership has shown itself to be as far removed from reality, and as alienated from its state-level leaders and issues, as the Congress. And the results are with us.

The Left's pulling out of support to the UPA, presenting a cynical, unprincipled and opportunistic third front "alternative" under Mayawati, left its voters in West Bengal and Kerala totally confused. But the bigger damage was strategic: it helped the Congress and the Trinamool discover each other as natural allies in West Bengal. That one blunder

led to the Left's total loss of clout in the 2009 Parliament elections, and now power in its most important state.

This argument is not so much about strategic errors as about the growing impossibility of managing national politics through centralised decision-making structures. This is a fundamental shift in our politics. Delhi-based leaders of the CPM, for example, could argue that their decision to pull out support to the UPA was principled and dictated by ideology. But anybody who travelled in West Bengal in this election, as this columnist did, rarely heard the two words that were used to justify that decision: America, and Imperialism. In fact, the only time I heard that was when Dipak Sarkar, the CPM's suave tyrant of Jungle Mahal, suggested that the uprising in Lalgurh may have been an imperialist conspiracy. So the high command was driven by issues that were of no concern to the voters in the one state that mattered to it the most. As a consequence, it also exposed its government in the state to the combined assault of the Trinamool and the Congress.

The Congress is celebrating its victories in Kerala and Assam and its successful joint venture in Bengal. But looking ahead to 2014, it should now be a deeply worried party. In the last Lok Sabha election, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh gave it 41 MPs, one-fifth of its tally of 206. Tamil Nadu now looks hopeless, unless it can change partners. But more significant is the near-certain destruction of its base in Andhra Pradesh, the one large state it could call its pocket borough and without sweeping which it cannot come to power. The victory of rebel Jaganmohan Reddy by more than five lakh votes is the real takeaway from this election for the Congress, way more significant than retaining power in Assam and the return of Kerala.

A quarter century's political history tells you now that it is, for some reason, Andhra Pradesh where the Congress makes its most suicidal strategic blunders. And in each case, these stem from its high

command's inability to show even basic courtesies and political respect to the local leadership in a state it needs to be so grateful to for ensuring its hold on Delhi. If the earlier insults to its Andhra leaders led to the rise of N.T. Rama Rao, enabling him to build a campaign of Telugu self-respect, the insensitive and unwise, if not contemptuous, way in which it treated Jagan after his father's death is now a case of history repeating itself. His demand of immediate succession as chief minister was juvenile. But he, and his mother, had to be handled with greater care and respect. His father was the Congress party's only stalwart capable of delivering a large state (Sheila Dikshit and Bhupinder Singh Hooda being the remaining two, but together, their states have just over one-third of the seats of Andhra). Yet, the high command and its core decision-makers had no time for Jagan's insolence. The party, of course, is greater than any individual, but it is many individuals, spread all over the country, that make a party and bring it votes, not a dozen — or less — people in New Delhi, far removed from realities of ground-level politics. In fact, while most of the Congress leadership has refrained from commenting on Andhra, Digvijaya Singh demonstrated rare political maturity and wisdom in underlining this as a most worrying development, one that should make "our party put its house in order" in Andhra.

The BJP has some of these problems too. It allowed the egos and ambitions of some members of the high command to destroy Vasundhara Raje's prospects of re-election in 2008. Now it has made a correction and put her back in charge in Jaipur, and she has already made an impact. Probably because its high command itself has so many divisions and rivalries, it is not able to squash its regional leaders as the Congress and the CPM do. That is why the BJP has Narendra Modi, Raman Singh, Shivraj Singh Chauhan who have all won their second terms and are still capable of delivering their states to the party. Or even Prem Kumar Dhumal and B.S. Yeddyurappa who both look unassailable in their states. Add to this the rise of Naveen Patnaik, Nitish Kumar,

Jayalalithaa, Mamata Banerjee. If the Congress looks at the likely national political map in 2014 honestly, it will be staring at a real problem. Can it fix it? A good beginning would be to give no more than one Rajya Sabha term for each individual. At least that will force the high command dadas to go back and smell the earth, connect with people, instead of making a living sitting back, pulling strings and cutting their own regional leaders, and ultimately their party, to size.

In a class apart

Sitaram Yechury

The ‘celebrations’ over the defeat of the Left in the recent assembly elections was rudely jolted by the substantial hike in the price of petrol. This, ironically, underscores the need for a strong Left in India, not only as the moral conscience-keeper of the nation but also as the crusader to protect the aam aadmi from such growing imposition of economic burdens.

In a democracy, elections always throw up a winner and a loser. Hence, the great hype over the defeat of the Left in West Bengal only highlights the significance of the unprecedented 34 years of continuously heading the state government, having won a record seven consecutive elections.

In Kerala, where incumbents have been replaced successively in every election during the last four decades, the victory of the Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) has been by the slenderest of margins in recent history. This can, at best, be described as pyrrhic because of the inherent instability that a coalition of ten parties can cause to a majority of two. With no anti-incumbency, the CPI(M)-led Left Democratic Front (LDF) in Kerala has garnered more than 45% of the popular vote, just under less than 1% of what the UDF got. In absolute terms the difference between the two fronts across the state was just 1.55 lakh votes.

In Bengal, given the oddities of the ‘first past the post’ system, the Left Front with a vote-share of nearly 41% has recorded its lowest tally of seats. In fact, in these elections, more than 11 lakh additional people actually came out to vote for the Left than in 2009. Compared to 1 crore 98 lakh votes the Left received in the 2006 assembly elections where it won 235 of the 294 seats, this time it polled nearly 1 crore 96 lakh votes and yet ended up with 61 seats.

One of the reasons for this anomaly is the fact that in 2006, the opposition was divided. This permitted such gains for the Left. In 2011, the index of opposition unity was very strong, where despite an equal amount of votes, the number of seats got drastically reduced. Further, according to Election Commission estimates, between 2009 and 2011 nearly 48 lakh additional voters were enrolled in the state with 37 lakh new young voters. Of these increased number of voters, all of whom were born after the Left Front government came into existence in Bengal, over ten lakh voted for the Left Front, while over 34 lakh voted for the combined Opposition. This explains these results.

With a 41% vote share, the Left Front in Bengal commands a larger support base than what the governments in many states like Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra or even Bihar under the new posterboy Nitish Kumar currently command.

Leaving aside the congenital detractors of the Left, there is a genuine concern among very well-meaning people about the Left’s future. Such concern is understandable. In electoral terms, it is a fact that compared to the first elections that the CPI(M) faced after its formation in 1967, its current position is worrisome. In 1967, the CPI(M) had 19 members in the Lok Sabha as against 16 today. In the state assemblies in Kerala and West Bengal, it had 52 and 43 MLAs respectively — as against 45 and 40 respectively today.

But the Left’s influence on the evolution of modern India has neither been confined nor can it be measured by its electoral presence alone.

Three visions contended in the nationalist discourse during the freedom struggle: the Congress vision of a secular democratic India; the Left vision that extended beyond this to convert political independence of the country into its economic independence, ie socialism; these together combated the twin expression of the third vision of Hindu and Muslim fundamentalisms that feed on each other. The Left played a very important role in the evolution of the modern India we know today, through the moulding of people's consciousness, beyond its electoral presence.

Second, the various militant peasant struggles launched across the country against feudal oppression by the communists brought onto the central agenda the question of abolition of zamindari and other forms of landlordism. This, as a consequence, drew the vast mass of rural India into India's democratic mainstream.

Third, the struggle for the linguistic reorganisation of states in independent India, pioneered and led by the communists, for Vishala Andhra, Samyukta Maharashtra and Aikya Kerala drew up the contours of the political map of modern India.

Further, in modern times, the implementation of land reforms in Kerala and West Bengal and the deepening of democracy to the grassroots through decentralisation of power preceded by a decade the panchayati raj amendment to the Constitution. This succeeded in bringing into our democratic mainstream hitherto dispossessed and marginalised people.

In today's conditions, with the neo-liberal reforms creating two Indias that continue to be detached from each other and mega-corruption that robs India as a country and as a people of its true potential, it is the Left that steadfastly and consistently has kept a straight bat. The Left has traversed a long way and during the course of the journey there have been mistakes. It is important to recognise, correct and ensure that these are not repeated. This continues to be the Left's motto. This is an intense

battle, a class battle that in Bengal has already claimed three lives of our comrades in the past 48 hours.

It is a long and arduous journey ahead for the creation of a better India that would help all of us realise our true worth as a civilisation and a people. This is a journey that cannot be completed without the Left.

(Sitaram Yechury is CPI(M) Politburo member and Rajya Sabha MP)

TERRORISM

No sense of self-respect

Surya Prakash

The various contradictory statements made by Pakistan's political leaders and military Generals after Osama bin Laden's killing are laughable.

The American commando operation in Abbottabad which eliminated Osama bin Laden appears to have caused far greater turmoil in the political and military establishment of Pakistan than in Al Qaeda, the dreaded terrorist organisation that he headed. That is why it took quite a while for Pakistani leaders to gather their wits and to say something to assuage the feelings of their countrymen, after the US President, Mr Barack Obama, informed the world that Osama bin Laden had been killed.

However, eventually, when some members of the Pakistani establishment grudgingly opened their mouths, they only ended up tying themselves in knots. None of them could offer a credible explanation for the presence of Osama bin Laden in a well-fortified building close to the national capital. Nor could they explain why the US Administration did not take the Pakistani Government into confidence and why their armed forces were utterly paralysed when a foreign country undertook a secret mission deep inside Pakistan.

Obviously, the Pakistani establishment was in utter confusion because the question before it was not whether it should speak the truth, but what

version of falsehood it should put before its citizenry and the rest of the world. The killing of Osama bin Laden in a house in the heart of Pakistan by America has raised two sentiments among the people of that country.

The first of this relates to their religious identity. Unlike India, which is a democratic state, Pakistan is an Islamic state which accords little or no space to religious minorities. The population is overwhelmingly Muslim (97 per cent) and the post-1947 generations have been brought up on a staple diet of hatred for Hindus and India (which is dubbed a ‘Hindu nation’) and hatred for America and other Western countries which are dubbed as Christian nations. The democratic and secular traditions prevalent in India and in the West are neither acknowledged nor respected.

Having grown up in this environment, Pakistani youth look up to individuals like Osama bin Laden who claim to be fighting on their behalf and against “satanic nations” like America and “the land of *kafirs*” like India. They remain extremely vulnerable to politics and slogans that claim that “Islam is in danger”. They are, therefore, aghast to hear that their religious icon is no more.

Scared of the reaction of this constituency, both the political and military establishment found it convenient to claim that they knew nothing about the operation. By taking this position, they felt that they could escape the charge of having collaborated with the “enemy of Islam”.

But the civilian and military leadership soon realised that there was a second emotion — a nationalist emotion — that was as strong, if not stronger than the religious sentiment. Pakistanis were horrified to learn that American commandos had struck deep inside their country without their Army or Air Force offering any kind of challenge. This was very humiliating for every Pakistani.

Therefore, on second thoughts, the political and military establishment felt that they could cut their losses if they claimed that the Abbottabad operation was part of the on-going teamwork between Pakistan and America. In such a scenario, the people would be relieved to know that Pakistan's sovereignty had not been violated. There can be no other explanation for the surfeit of contradictions in the statements made by Pakistani leaders after they recovered from the May Day shock.

It may sound laughable but even as the American establishment repeatedly told the world that it did not inform Pakistan about the operation until it was over, Lieutenant-General Ahmed Shuja Pasha, the chief of Pakistan's ISI, claimed that Pakistan had a role in the operation. This, despite the assertion of Mr Leon Panetta, the chief of the CIA, that the Americans felt that "any effort to work with the Pakistanis could jeopardise the mission. They (Pakistanis) might alert the targets".

While immediately after Osama bin Laden's killing the top leadership of Pakistan remained tongue-tied, the Pakistani Foreign Secretary, Mr Salman Bashir, made bold to speak up. He claimed that it was, in fact, the Pakistani establishment which had informed the US way back in 2009 about the compound in Abbottabad where Osama bin Laden was in hiding. "The compound was pointed out by the ISI to the US Intelligence" and since the US had much more sophisticated technology and equipment "to detect, evaluate and assess leads", they eventually got to Osama bin Laden. Have you ever heard of a more bizarre explanation for a country bartering away its self-respect and sovereignty?

But Mr Bashir's claims that the Pakistanis had indeed tipped off the Americans about Osama bin Laden's hideout was demolished by the Pakistani President, Mr Asif Ali Zardari, who declared that Islamabad was not aware that the *amir* of Al Qaeda was holed up in Abbottabad. He blamed the American media for disseminating such "baseless speculation", forgetting what his own Foreign Secretary and ISI chief had said on this issue.

What was funnier was that the President's statement stood in contrast to the official reaction of his own Government and Prime Minister. The official statement said the CIA had "exploited" the intelligence leads given by ISI. The Prime Minister, Mr Yousuf Raza Gilani told the National Assembly that the ISI had passed on "crucial leads".

It was next the turn of Mr Wajid S Hasan, Pakistan's envoy to the UK, to contradict his Prime Minister and his Foreign Secretary. He asserted in a television interview that Osama bin Laden was never in Pakistan. "This time, he entered Abbottabad... he was under observation and killed." In other words, Mr Hasan does not believe his Government when it claims that the CIA was tipped off about Osama bin Laden's whereabouts in 2009. Equally intriguing was the claim of the Interior Minister, Mr Rehman Malik, that he became aware of the American operation 15 minutes after it began, contradicting Government claims that they knew nothing about the raid.

That is why one is inclined to empathise with Mr Imran Khan, the leader of Tehreek-e-Insaaf, when he says the people just do not know what is the truth because the Pakistani Government is constantly lying about everything. The rulers are "lying to the nation on a number of issues, including drone attacks, the release of Raymond Davis, the alleged presence of CIA operators in Pakistan," he said.

So it appears the chickens are finally coming home to roost. A nation built on hatred and deceit is now coming face-to-face with its own reality and no Pakistani likes what he is seeing in the mirror.