

CONTENTS

BOOK REVIEW

The great divide 4-8

CIVIL SERVICE

Direct OPS recruitment to begin from 2011 10-11

Babus fear transparency 12-13

CORRUPTION

2010: Year of scams 15-18

Corruption and cynicism 19-21

INTERNATIONAL RELATION

Common sense wins 23-26

The new colonizers 27-30

POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT

CVC choice was clearly a mistake 32-33

Bihar a wake-up call for Congress 34-36

Nitish sweeps Bihar 37-40

POVERTY

Hunger in the valley 42-46

RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Towards resuscitating CAPART 48-52

SOCIAL JUSTICE

Intellectually dishonest 54-57

BOOK REVIEW

PIONEER 28.11.10 BOOK REVIEW

The great divide

Meenakshi Jain's book explains the leitmotif for Hindu-Muslim relations for over a millennium and demolishes the 'harmony' theory, writes A SURYA PRAKASH



Parallel Pathways: Essays on Hindu-Muslim Relations (1707-1857)

Author: Meenakshi Jain

Publisher: Konark

Price: 600

Hindus and Muslims lived amicably in undivided India until Britain colonised the country, promoted conflict between the two communities, pursued a policy of divide and rule and eventually presided over the division of the country before exiting from the subcontinent. This is the standard narrative of many Left-leaning historians who shut their eyes to historical truths and moulded history to suit their ideological predilections.

Much of this, however, is false because it seeks to hide the facts regarding the cruelty and despotism of many Muslim rulers, the destruction of thousands of Hindu temples, the religious persecution of Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains and the sustained efforts of these rulers to dismantle the cultural edifice of the Indic civilisation — all of which created a Hindu-Muslim divide that existed when the British arrived on the scene and remained thereafter, resulting in the country's tragic partition.

The producers of this counterfeit history have just one objective in mind — to denounce indigenous religions and culture, to eulogise religions imported into this land and to expurgate from history books all facts that show the latter in poor light. A logical extension of this spurious enterprise is to imagine Hindu-Muslim harmony before the advent of the British and blame the coloniser for the discord that emerged between the two communities in the 19th and 20th centuries leading to Partition and much else.

For example, historians who carry this ideological baggage have tried — and continue to try — to paint even a despotic ruler like Aurangzeb in ‘secular’ colours. Aurangzeb persecuted Hindus, imposed a tax on them and destroyed hundreds of Hindu temples including the Krishna Temple in Mathura and the Vishwanath Temple in Benaras. He heaped indignities on Hindus and Sikhs and some eminent historians like Jadunath Sarkar, RC Mazumdar and Will Durant, who have remained true to their calling, have chronicled the many facets of his oppressive regime.

However, in recent years, historians belonging to the pseudo-secular school have been working overtime to bury these truths and give Aurangzeb a more acceptable face. This is the common thread that runs through these narratives, however laughable it may seem, in the light of the chronicles left behind by Aurangzeb’s official historians, including the *Akhbarats*, which were reports on the orders passed by the emperor and other accounts like *Mirat-i-Alam* and *Alamgir-Nama* written by Mughal court officials. This is just a sample of the monumental disservice that historians of this ilk have done to our understanding of medieval history and thereafter, the historical background of Partition.

However, the enterprise of this school is not confined to just

manufacturing the past. It extends to management of the present as well, with members of this school entrenching themselves in academia and institutions owing allegiance to those who are the prime beneficiaries of their spurious output and denying opportunities to those who oppose this disjunction between truth and history.

Given this background, Meenakshi Jain's *Parallel Pathways* is a path-breaking work, seeking to blast the myths vis-à-vis Hindu-Muslim relations from 1707 to the Great Uprising of 1857.

As Jain points out, a school of historians believes that the revolt of 1857 "was the last notable manifestation of Hindu-Muslim unity". That thereafter, this unity was undermined by the policies of the British leading eventually to Partition. In other words, Hindu-Muslim unity was "an accomplished fact" in the centuries preceding the great revolt. The reality, she says, is "considerably more complex" and can be traced to some precepts that are central to Islam and which have influenced Muslim rulers since the Arab conquest of Sind in 712 AD. For example, Church and state were intertwined in Islam and Muslims believed that "Islam could be Islam properly only in conjunction with political power". As a result, "secularisation of the polity and society were incompatible with Islam". Islam, she says, divided the world into believers and non-believers and "designated all Indians as *kafirs*". As these concepts were at the core of Islamic belief, there was little scope for harmony between Hindus and Muslims. These concepts also had a great bearing on how a succession of Muslim kings ran their kingdoms and the attitude of the Muslim elite in India.

Jain says Islam and the civilisation that it confronted in India espoused "markedly differing ideals". While Islam gave primacy to universal Muslim brotherhood and promoted a centralised autocratic

polity, “the civilisation as it evolved in the subcontinent was... secular (in that the religious identity was not paramount), decentralised and democratic and exalted patriotism (love of the land) above other loyalties. The subsequent history of India was to a considerable degree shaped by the contest between these two varying perspectives”. This single paragraph in Jain’s book explains the leitmotif for Hindu-Muslim relations for over a millennium and effectively demolishes the ‘harmony’ theory.

This conflict between Islam and the Indian civilisation has been recorded by many travellers, court historians, writers and poets, and Jain packs her book with valuable quotes from the most authentic chroniclers to clinch the argument that the disjunction was too deep and fundamental for any kind of concord to emerge between the two civilisations. Further, the attitude of Islam towards the Indic religions resulted in the sustained and barbaric campaign against the adherents of these religions and their places of worship, besides the imposition of *jizya* (tax) on Hindus and the plethora of discriminatory practices by Muslim rulers.

This onslaught, however, was not just confined to matters of religion. It extended to the wider canvass of culture, including architecture and language. For example, Akbar made Persian the language of administration and the Mughal empire was “closely connected with the cultivation of Persian culture in all its aspects”. Further, Jain says no native language of India received any meaningful patronage from the ‘great’ Mughals, “who were widely perceived in the regions as unsympathetic to indigenous languages”.

Following the decline of the Mughals, it became imperative to replace Persian and Hindi/Hindavi seemed the natural choice, but for the Muslim elite “its (Hindi/Hindavi) principle drawback was its profusion of *tatsama* and *tadbhava* Sanskrit words”. So, a solution

was found by purging Sanskrit-origin words and replacing them with Arabic and Persian words — “a process that culminated in the birth of Urdu”. In other words, the assault on Indian civilisation was comprehensive and nothing was left out. Chapter VI on “Language: A Calculated Rupture” offers a wide-ranging analysis on the language issue as it deals with the expurgation of Sanskrit, the origins of Hindi/Hindavi and Urdu.

The Hindu-Muslim cleavage, largely fuelled by the bigotry of Muslim rulers, remained apparent during the revolt of 1857 and persisted thereafter. In the final chapter, the author explains the impact of this cultural dissonance on the subcontinental politics in the latter half of the 19th century. Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan’s thesis that promoted Muslim separatism and the eventual Partition seems an inevitable corollary when one sees and acknowledges this dissonance. In short, this is a book that is worthy of recommendation, especially for those who wish to shift history from mythology.

CIVIL SERVICE

PIONEER 30.11.10 CIVIL SERVICE

Direct OPS recruitment to begin from 2011

PNS

The State Government has already begun the process for direct recruitment of Odisha Police Service officers through Odisha Public Service Commission. The new cadre OPS would be included in State Civil Services and the exam for the same would be conducted from 2011.

“The creation of OPS posts are aimed at giving opportunities to the Odisha cadre police officers to get promotion in IPS level posts.

There are 57 IPS posts in State meant to be filled up by Odisha cadre police officers on the basis of promotion. In the present service provision, the class I officers are not able to get promotion into such posts before they attend 54. The new cadre would facilitate the Class I officers to get promotions to the posts which have remained vacant,” said Home Secretary Upendra Nath Behera.

Regarding recruitment criteria, the Home Secretary said as the new cadre would be included in civil services, the educational eligibility would remain same as applicable to OAS and OFS officers. But the OPS candidates would face physical test in addition.

Behera further said,”the Odisha Police Service Rules have been sent to Odisha Police Service Commission for its Procedural consent on it. We expect to receive the OPSC consent in three days time and after that it would be placed in State Cabinet for its approval.

The successful OPS candidates would directly be absorbed in the Junior Class posts both in civil and armed police forces. After serving for eight years in Junior Class I and Senior Class Posts and before reaching 54 years of age, the officers will have chances to get promotion into IPS posts.

Notably, the State Government has increased number of DSP and DSP level posts from 197 to 404. The vacancy posts of DSPs would be filled up by both OPS candidates and police officers through promotions.

“There would be no problem for police officers to get promotions into DSP posts as the Government has already increased the number of the cadre and posting of DSP has been fixed at 15 every year,” the Home Secretary informed.

ASIAN AGE 28.11.10 CIVIL SERVICE

Babus fear transparency

Dilip Cherian

In these times of Right to Information (RTI) and increased public pressure for transparency in government, babus are finding it hard to adapt to these new demands. But ever since Union ministers and Supreme Court judges agreed to divulge their assets under the RTI Act, the pressure is now on the bureaucracy to follow suit.

Four months ago the government, acting on a call from the Chief Information Commission, sought the views of the “Big 3” — Indian Administrative Service (IAS), Indian Police Service (IPS) and Indian Foreign Service (IFS) — on disclosing information about babus’ assets to the public. Curiously, while the IPS and IFS associations have no objection to disclosure, it is my favourite tribesmen — the elite IAS — who seem to be wary of offering their opinion. Officially, of course, the IAS association claims that it has sought views of their state-level associations, but others see it as a typical delaying tactic. Of course, the government’s personnel department already has all the information, but sources say personnel secretary Shantanu Consul would rather wait for an official response from the IAS association before responding. Will the IAS babus oblige? Or will it be left to Central Information Commissioner A.N. Tewari, who sought the government’s opinion in the first place, to take the next step?

Faded khaki

For a nation battling terrorism and Naxalism, not to mention a million other mutinies, to face a shortage of police officers in the Indian Police Service (IPS) should be an alarming situation.

Apparently the IPS currently has 630 vacancies across the country. While practically every state reports large number of vacancies, primarily due to police officers quitting in search of greener pastures (read corporate world), the situation is similarly bleak even in the capital. According to sources, while the IPS has a sanctioned strength of 4,013 officers, only 3,383 were on the rolls at the beginning of the year.

Home secretary G.K. Pillai reportedly has ordered a cadre review and increased the annual intake of IPS officers to 60, but babu-watchers say that this attempt is clearly not enough to bridge the yawning gap. Of particular concern to Mr Pillai and his political master P. Chidambaram is the shortage of officers in such organisations such as the Central Bureau of Investigation, Research and Analysis Wing and Intelligence Bureau. Besides shortage of IPS officers in sensitive states such as Jammu and Kashmir (shortage of 28 officers), Bihar (48), West Bengal (71), among others, has got the ministry babus wracking their brains to stop the exodus of the men in khaki. But so far we have yet to see the result of their exertions!

CORRUPTION

2010: Year of scams

P.C. Alexander

The rate at which the information about fraudulent business practices involving several thousand crore of rupees is doing the rounds in the media, the year 2010 is bound to go down in modern Indian history as “the scam year”. Most of these scams had their origin two or three years ago but the public has come to know about the sordid details of these deals only this year. In a survey conducted by the Washington-based Foreign Policy about four years ago, India ranked 97th in the list of 146 countries in the Failed States Index. According to the latest grading of the Transparency International based on the criteria of cleanliness in business practices, India’s position is 70 in a list of 183 countries, a fairly low one in a country that boasts of being the third largest economy in the world. The details about the scale and nature of frauds started creating genuine doubts in the minds of the ordinary citizens whether the progress in economic growth has really been a healthy one promising a brighter future or are we also witnessing signals of decline that may drag the state into the list of failed states that exist in our neighbourhood?

Swedish Nobel Laureate economist, sociologist and politician Gunnar Myrdall mentions five characteristics of states in danger of being stuck in the track:

lack of social discipline arising out of deficiencies in law observance and enforcement,

lack of obedience to rules and directions handed down to public officials,

collusion between these officials and powerful persons,

general disinclination of people to resist public control and their implementation and corruption.

The 2G spectrum scam — that has caused a loss of `1,76,000 crore to the exchequer — has earned the name of “mother of all scams”. Equally shocking has been the information on the manner in which public funds were plundered by certain officials and contractors in the recently-concluded Commonwealth Games. While people are still trying to find explanations as to how such frauds could take place in an administrative system claiming to be based on the principles of accountability and collective responsibility, news about frauds in Adarsh Cooperative Housing Society in Mumbai and the allotment of valuable land by the Karnataka chief minister B.S. Yeddyurappa to his close relatives, makes one wonder whether even at the chief ministers’ level such misuse of power has become common?

The allegation about the Vedanta project in Orissa involving allotment of vast extent of land to a private company is another case of chief minister misusing the power. The recent revelation that Indians have \$1,456 billion in black money in Swiss banks and is the largest national group with deposits of black money has tarnished India’s reputation. Also, disgracefully India has the distinction of being assessed as No. 1 bribe payer in the list of 30 countries based on the readiness to pay bribes in order to secure business or clinch contracts.

I wish to avail of the opportunity provided by the revelations so far on the 2G spectrum allocations to the ease with which those in power in the government, and in business, can subvert the rules and regulations to enable few people to enrich themselves. This is a typical example of what I have referred to Gunnar Myrdall’s observation earlier in this article namely lack of social discipline arising out of deficiencies in law observance and enforcement.

When I first heard that the former telecom minister A. Raja had ignored the advice given by the Prime Minister’s Office and other

ministries regarding his scheme of allocating 2G spectrum, I could not believe it as true. As a person who had worked at all levels of decision-making in the administrative side at the Central government, the question that arose in my mind was how it was possible for any ministry to take decisions on subjects like this without obtaining the concurrence of all the concerned ministries? More important, how could in a parliamentary democracy like ours, a minister ignore the advice of the Prime Minister in such a matter? Equally difficult is to believe that why the ministers in-charge of the concerned ministries remained silent when they found that their advice was not followed by the telecom ministry?

In the Central government differences of opinion between the implementing ministry and other concerned ministries are common occurrences, but they are sorted out through a variety of ways like inter-ministerial meeting at the highest levels, or seeking the intervention of the Prime Minister to sort out the differences or to place the issue before the relevant committee of the Cabinet or before the whole Cabinet itself.

It was only later that information became available that the Prime Minister had agreed to leave the 2G spectrum allocation solely to the implementing ministry namely, the telecom ministry.

The Prime Minister in a parliamentary democracy does not send mere advices on matters like this to a minister through a letter. What he communicates is the decision to be followed by the ministry concerned and not a pious advice that can either be taken or rejected. The government is of the Prime Minister and the ministers are appointed by the President on the recommendation of the Prime Minister. The ministers of finance, law etc. are quite aware of the rules and conventions in decision-making at the Central government and ordinarily would not have stopped with communicating their views. Now, the whole blame for what had happened is placed at the Prime Minister's doors and the ministers concerned appear to believe that a Prime Minister like Dr Singh's sound reputation for

integrity and zeal for conforming to rules and regulations would ultimately help in preventing any mud sticking to their own ministries.

Even without waiting to know the full and correct facts about this matter from the decision of the Supreme Court which is seized of it now, I thought of raising a warning signal about the likely damage that this type of decision-making, unless corrected immediately will cause to our young democracy and therefore am doing it through this article.

P.C. Alexander is a former governor of Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra

PIONEER 30.11.10 CORRUPTION

Corruption and cynicism

Dina Nath Mishra

Even though the maxim 'everyone is corrupt' is on everyone's lips, many people still do not believe in it. In cities, towns and villages, there are people who are corrupt neither in their thinking nor in their deeds. Not everyone thinks like a big industrialist that 'everybody is purchasable, the only difference is the price tag.' In fact, today, millions and millions of people in the world are not corrupt. They live a simple and honest life. Honesty is not a popular trait. One can visit any office in the countryside and get to hear about honest people, though they may not be popular. They may even have been punished for their honesty.

As per the old adage 'bad coins replace good coins,' nowadays everybody is shouting of corruption and it is really prevalent more in old countries rather than the whole world. However, there may be difference in degree. For instance, in early '60s, in a case of corruption Rs 10,000 was given as bribe. In this case, the concerned MP was also punished. But today, corruption runs in astronomical figures. In recent years, a Chief Minister of a small State collected money earned by illegal means worth Rs 4,000 crore. Numerous similar stories are floating in air these days.

The issue of corruption should neither be over-emphasised nor undermined. If it is over-emphasised, the number of honest people in society will decrease. In that scenario, faith and honesty will evaporate. And if it is undermined, corruption will ultimately be legalised in practice if not on the paper by the law of land. Probably,

this is what is happening even today. There is an old saying, 'power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely'.

Now, let us think if we are living under absolute power or not.

Recently, when I heard that Baba Ramdev was thinking of launching a new political party, my instant reaction was that it would be a Himalayan wonder if it happens. The fame and worldwide success that he has achieved has given hope to India that he would harbinge a rare Indian Renaissance and the country would attain civilisational greatness. Our great Rishis described politics as a profession of prostitution, but politics is a must to run the State. What can you do if you want to build a first class house? Can you avoid building a sewer? Therefore, politics is essential.

The age we are passing through is materialistic in nature. It is bound to be corrupt. The Western civilisation is very emphatic about this. Fewer people are bound to be able to remain outside the bond of corrupt network. Only partial remedial measure of fighting corruption and the notion that the guilty must be punished comes to our mind. But, the billion dollar question is: Who would punish them? We have heard umpteen number of times that a lot of corruption occurred during Commonwealth Games. Similarly, an astronomical corruption figure came to light in the case of allotment of 2G Spectrum to telecom companies. Ordinary citizens believe it from the core of their heart that no guilty is going to be punished in this sort of corruption deeds.

It may sound foolish, but the Government bribes the electorate just before every election. The so-called popular measures breed poverty by leaps and bounds because they are misused by powerful people. One of the most powerful visions of corruption is the election expenditure of political parties and the contesting candidates. There

was a time when Rs 1,00,000 was enough to contest an Assembly election. But, now, candidates spend crores of rupees for a single Assembly seat. One must realise that those who purchase power at high cost will surely sell the Government at even much higher cost.

In rural India, there is a saying that the whole well is intoxicated with *bhang*. But, I am not that pessimistic. Let me take the liberty of assessing the honest people in the society. My assessment is that 10 per cent people in society are still honest. But this perception does not account for the cynicism we are living in. During the recent CWC meeting, Congress's media managers' calculations went haywire. There was a virtual ban on using the word 'corruption' by any big-wig of the party. But, the result was just the reverse. The media's theme song on that day was, "*Yeh public hai yeh sab janati hai.*"

INTERNATIONAL RELATION

Common sense wins

Barkha Dutt

Two years ago when the world was still mesmerised by Barack Obama's historic election victory, I asked if India's political culture would ever allow us our own Obama, metaphorically speaking, that is. Was there anyone within sight on our own political firmament who could qualify as a desi Obama? While many of the answers were predictable, historian Ramachandra Guha came up with an interesting and unusual answer. He said, his choice would be Bihar's Chief Minister, Nitish Kumar.

At first glance, in terms of personality Obama and Kumar are antithetical and placed at opposite ends of political style. Obama is a master-rhetorician whose flamboyance and oratory catapulted him onto the centrestage of global imagination. Understatement may not even be a word in Obama's lexicon. But that in fact is the word that best captures the much more quiet, earthy, workman-like essence of Kumar. At the time, of course Guha's comparison was probably based on the perception that both were self-made politicians marking their own in a world which has very few lateral entries and both were possible symbols of hope. The irony is that as time goes by, many have begun to question whether the US president was more about charisma than content. And in Kumar's case the question has been the opposite. As he delivers an extraordinary verdict in his state, driven by a dignified, performance-oriented electoral campaign, it's worth asking whether the Indian voter has matured beyond caste and creed and now cares mostly about content.

As if to underline the voters' impatience with the rhetorician, Kumar's erstwhile rival, Lalu Prasad — once the darling of the TV soundbite soldier — seems horribly stuck in time with his frayed humour and feeble attempts at flair.

Some political scientists have accused the media of romanticising the Bihar verdict. The results, they argue do not mean the absolute end of identity politics in a state where the joke used to be that you voted your caste, instead of casting your vote. Instead, they say Kumar has turned out to be a master at social engineering, bringing together a larger coalition of identities, such as 'Mahadalits, Muslims and Mahila' under one umbrella, with a Chanakya-like cleverness. That may be so, but almost everyone agrees that none of the caste configurations or electoral mathematics would have mattered had it not been for substantive, identifiable governance. Whether it's Kumar's pet scheme of giving cycles to young girls so that they have an incentive to go to school, better roads where none existed, or the thousands of criminal convictions in the last five years, commonsensical policy interventions have worked on the ground.

Add to this, is what Rajya Sabha MP, NK Singh, has described as "economic engineering". Bihar's attempts at economic recovery have created a new set of aspirations blurring the lines between caste and breaking down the typical prejudices and silos of competitive identity politics. Interestingly, shortly after his victory, one commentator described the verdict as a victory for left-of-centre politics. But while, Nitish's political origins may have been shaped and formed by the socialism of Ram Manohar Lohia, whilst in government he appears to have borrowed freely from both the Left and the Right to evolve a genuinely centrist ideology.

Therein lies an important takeaway from this election for the BJP as well. The BJP's stand-alone performance has been extraordinarily successful; it's relative gains impressive markers of an efficient and

energetic party organisation. In fact, many BJP leaders have been privately commenting on how Kumar's personality may have defined the election, but his party's own organisational strength can hardly compete with the BJP's. In other words, they argue that Kumar may have been the general, but the troops were the BJP's.

While that may be true, the deeper lesson for the BJP is that governance is much more moot for the voter than ideological distinctiveness. Elections don't always need an emotional flashpoint to build relationships with the voter. Despite some key ideological differences between two parties, Kumar and the BJP fought this election on the same platform. Measure us by our performance, they said to the voter, and he did. Wherever, BJP leaders have sought to do this — whether it's Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh or now, in Bihar, the voter has met them half-way. Even Narendra Modi — who Kumar adamantly kept away during the campaign, has refashioned himself in the mould of a chief minister who delivers on governance.

Of course, Modi is a more debatable example for several reasons and hasn't altogether abandoned emotion as a tool of mobilisation. But largely, the Bihar example makes it clear that there is more than enough room in India for a responsible, moderate right-of-centre party. The BJP's big advantage is that it has allowed regional leaders to grow and thrive and craft their own agendas. It must now step back and look at the big picture nationally. Many of its pet issues belong to the past, and in a changing India, they simply have no resonance with the voter anymore.

Arun Jaitley succinctly described the verdict as one that had taken Bihar from Fear to Hope. That may be the biggest change in the Indian voter today. Negative campaigns don't work anymore but if you give people something to look forward to, even if it's a work-in-progress, they will be willing to walk the hard journey, along with

their politicians. And for those who like to distribute TV sets, or rice or electricity connections as populist ways of wooing the voter, remember, you can also do it the Kumar way. If you must be a salesman, the wares you carry, must include Hope.

Barkha Dutt is Group Editor, English News, NDTV. The views expressed by the author are personal.

The new colonisers

Dr Suman Sahai

A new colonialism is underway. Rich, food-importing countries are grabbing the world's farmland for captive food production for their people. China, South Korea, Japan, as well as Saudi Arabia and the Arab states are the new colonisers. Africa, with its large land mass, fertile land in most places and abundant water, is a target, like India, with its fabled wealth that once was. Only this time, India is joining the ranks of the land grabbers, not on the same scale as the biggies but India, too, is acquiring land in Africa.

The tragedy of Africa is that it remains food insecure despite its fertile farmlands, receiving food-aid from UN agencies like the World Food Programme. Ethiopia, which is aggressively promoting the lease out of its land to foreign investors, receives food aid worth \$115 million but its lands generate cereals worth \$100 million for Saudi Arabia. Ethiopian land produces food for foreigners but cannot do the same for itself! Similarly, Sudan which receives as much as \$1.6 billion worth of free food from international agencies, grows wheat for Saudi Arabia, vegetables for Jordan and its own staple food, sorghum, for animal feed in the United Arab Emirates. The food crisis of 2008 and high food inflation brought home to many how fragile the global food situation can be, not just for the poor but also for the rich who do not have sufficient land to grow the food they require. When global food commodities disappeared from the international market as a result of factors like speculation leading to hoarding, diversion of foodgrains like corn and soybean to biofuels and increased demand for animal feed, the rich food-importing nations realised that it was not sufficient to have money.

To be food secure, they decided, they could not depend on international food stocks but must have control over food production directly. If they did not have enough land in their sovereign territories, they would simply acquire this land elsewhere, produce the food there and ship it home. This would allow them to bypass global food markets and the volatility associated with them in the recent past. It is estimated that in the last few years, up to 20 million hectares of land are either already leased or are being negotiated for lease.

This new colonialism takes forward the trend of the last centuries. The 19th century Europe took over large tracts of farmland in Africa for coffee and cocoa plantations. US-based fruit growing conglomerates appropriated farmland in South and Central America and in Southeast Asian countries like the Philippines to produce bananas, pineapples and other tropical fruits for the world market. The farmland grab of today is fundamentally different though. Earlier it was cash crops and a means to wealth generation, today it is based on straightforward food security instead of revenue generation. Food-importing countries are seeking the first instance to secure food supplies for themselves.

Not just the wealthy countries, others have also joined this exploitation of global farmland. South Africa, it is reported, could negotiate a deal to lease 10 million hectares from Congo and Java-based companies in Indonesia are trying to occupy land in Indonesian islands like Borneo and Sulawesi. In neighbouring Pakistan, the government is offering farmland to (largely) Arab investors. Government-backed roadshows are being held in the Gulf state, offering extremely generous tax incentives to attract investment. Given the state of the country's domestic security situation, an additional bonus that Pakistan offers is a one lakh strong security force to protect the foreign investments.

India too is in the thick of the land grab. Indian companies have found a way out of the land ceiling laws in India to build vast

agriculture operations in Africa where there is no ceiling on land ownership. Building huge agriculture empires is not possible in India, but it is in Africa. The Indian government supports this move and provides soft loans and reduced import duties to enable the shipment of agriculture produce to India. Indian farming companies have bought thousands of hectares of land in Africa and are growing rice, maize and pulses which they sell to India. These companies have invested upwards of \$2.4 billion to buy up farmland in Ethiopia alone. Karuturi Global, a Karnataka-based company is one of the biggest land owners in Africa, where it grows cash crops like sugarcane and palm oil, as well as rice and vegetables. Not surprisingly, the backlash from people in Africa against foreign investments has begun. Karuturi is one of the prime targets. Activist groups are calling the investments a “land grab” taking away the entitlements of the African people. They say such alienation of land will deprive local people of their livelihoods leading to destitution. They have a point.

There is a fear that the foreign investments in food production will end up hurting farmers as corrupt local governments allow the land to be leased out without building in any securities for the land owners. These could often be small farmers with little idea of what has been negotiated or what would be the terms of getting their land back. Would the land owner have some right to the food that is produced on his land? Would the local community have preferential rights to access the food or could it be all exported without leaving anything for the local people? Who would ensure that the land is not degraded during the lease period and that it is returned to the owners in a healthy state? Such investment deals have been notoriously non-transparent in most cases so far.

If this form of land leasing is to be made fair and sustainable, and if the small landholders are also to benefit from it, a code of conduct must be formulated. This could be done by bodies like the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation. They should define the terms and

conditions under which land is made available for contracted food production. There must be a consultative process with not just the governments but with the land owners directly and the terms and conditions must be made clear to them. Prior Informed Consent, a feature of recent negotiations determining access to resources, as for instance in the Convention on Biological Diversity, must be made standard features in all such arrangements, before a deal can be finalised. The international community must put its weight behind compliance of the code of conduct in both the host and investor country so that such deals do not become tools of exploitation, depriving the poor and hungry and robbing them of the chance to ever become food secure.

POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT

CVC choice was clearly a mistake

At a time when UPA-2 finds itself in political difficulty following revelations over the 2G spectrum allocations, the Supreme Court has embarrassed the Manmohan Singh government by questioning its decision to appoint P.J. Thomas as chief vigilance commissioner two months ago, although it appears the government did so in good faith. From the arguments advanced by attorney-general Goolam E. Vahanvati in the court on Monday, the government appeared to believe it had the right man for the job, even though his name figures in a chargesheet filed in Kerala in 2000 as an accused in a case of import of palmolein. There is an impression that the case has not moved forward, or been withdrawn by the state in the past 10 years, for reasons that appear partly technical, and partly an attempt on the part of the CPI(M) — now in power in the state — to embarrass the Congress during whose tenure the import was made. Nevertheless, the Leftist administration did not hesitate to appoint Mr Thomas as state chief secretary, possibly signalling that they did not see him as being corrupt. The attorney-general has also argued that there was no case involving the Prevention of Corruption Act against Mr Thomas. He noted that when the then chief secretary was empanelled to become parliamentary affairs secretary at the Centre, his name was cleared by the CVC of the time. The final point in Mr Vahanvati's brief is that former chief election commissioner J.M. Lyngdoh had once noted in an annual confidential report on Mr Thomas' performance that he possessed "integrity beyond doubt". The irony is that the questioning of Mr Thomas' appointment as the new CVC has come in a public interest litigation case filed by Mr Lyngdoh and others.

To be fair, the first instance we should perhaps suspend judgment on

Mr Thomas' presumed guilt. We should also hope that the system is made to improve so that no case is permitted to drag out so long. This perverts the course of justice. All the same, given the totality of circumstances, it is clear as day that appointing Mr Thomas to the sensitive position of CVC has been singularly unwise. The most important reason is suggested by the key question posed by Chief Justice of India S.H. Kapadia. The CJI has maintained quite appropriately that since the CVC remains an accused in a listed case, he will not be in a position to issue notice to a party in matters brought before him, rendering him effectively "non-functional". This makes eminent sense. It is a pity that the attorney-general did not grasp this, especially when he is dealing with as sensitive a constitutional appointment as that of the CVC, whose role is decide corruption matters concerning senior officials.

To make matters worse, the attorney-general argued with uncommon foolishness that if the idea of "impeccable integrity" were to be strictly adopted, key judicial appointments might come under scrutiny. This would sound like a threat to most people. No government law officer must be permitted to do this. Indeed, the attorney-general must be asked why the Indian citizen must not aspire to have only those of "impeccable integrity" holding top administrative and constitutional positions. Besides, Mr Thomas was telecom secretary when the controversial 2G spectrum allotment decisions were in the works. And that does not look like a pretty thing today. This is among the reasons why the BJP's Sushma Swaraj, Leader of the Opposition, had opposed Mr Thomas' appointment. The CVC is chosen by a troika comprising the Prime Minister, Union home minister and the Leader of the Opposition. This lends the institution greater weight as it denotes a consensus within the parliamentary system in dealing with issues of probity. Overlooking Ms Swaraj's objections clearly looks like a mistake and amounts to the disregard of a well-conceived institution.

Bihar a wake-up call for Congress

Pankaj Vohra

The inability of the Congress to present itself as a potent force in the Bihar assembly polls may force the grand old party to once again abandon any thoughts of coming to power at the Centre on its own steam, at least for the time being.

The reality of Bihar will haunt the Congress for quite a while and the fact that the Independents got more seats than its candidates will worry the leadership for years to come. But the biggest lesson for the Congress is this: it must reconcile with the idea of pursuing coalition politics even in the next parliamentary polls.

The same holds true for the BJP, which like the Congress will have to be dependent on smaller regional parties in the general elections. Many may argue that the Lok Sabha elections are far away and a lot can change. But it is unlikely that the prescription of Bihar in favour of a coalition government is going to be reversed.

In fact, the fear for the Congress is that the Bihar results will get replicated in the rest of the Hindi belt, particularly in Uttar Pradesh. If that happens, many grand plans may never see the light of day. Uttar Pradesh has 12 districts bordering Bihar where the demographic profile is similar. This is where the maximum damage can be done. In addition, the party will have to reckon with the formidable Mayawati and a resilient Mulayam Singh Yadav in UP.

With Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra witnessing the transition of new leadership and with no headway being made in Madhya

Pradesh, Gujarat, Chhattisgarh and West Bengal, the Congress will have to reinvent itself to be relevant in many places. The shadow of various scams is refusing to go and the party is also trying to cope with the challenge from the combined Opposition in Parliament.

The tragedy of the party, which at one time controlled as many as 16 states before its numbers started dwindling, is that it has no roadmap to move forward. The advisers and office-bearers seem to have lost touch with ground reality or are engaged in outwitting each other or their rivals elsewhere. The casualness is visible in the fact that there is no Cabinet minister from UP or Bihar, the two states so key to the party's resurgence at the national level.

Without UP and Bihar, there is little hope for the Congress of even crossing the 200 mark in the parliamentary polls. In political terms, it is bad news for Rahul Gandhi who is being groomed to take over the mantle of leadership.

The bright side is that there is still time for course correction and Congress president Sonia Gandhi will have to resume the mass contact programme with her cadres. Remember before the Congress came to power in 2004, Sonia Gandhi had taken several steps to energise the organisation. For instance, it has been ages since block-level or district-level meetings of the kind she held at the Ferozeshah Kotla ground have taken place. There has been no conclave of senior party leaders and chief ministers in which some sort of brainstorming could be done. Many veteran Congressmen have been complaining that since 2006 even the All India Congress Committee (AICC) sessions have sought to segregate the workers from the leaders. An AICC session was always the place where the rank and file mingled with the leadership and carried back the message. Now for all practical purposes, different enclosures are for different categories and there is restricted movement.

All is, of course, not lost. The Congress leadership has to have another look at its advisers and those who are in important positions. A strong political element to strengthen the organisation at various levels has to be introduced.

The Bihar elections are a setback but also a wake-up call. The leaders have to look beyond the 24 people who handle various roles most of the time. The party proved in 2004 and 2009 that it has the ability to overcome the challenge from the BJP and its allies. But this time, the challenge is from within and problems and problem creators have to be edged out if the party has to move forward.

Poll verdict a thumbs up for development; Congress, Lalu crushed

Nitish sweeps Bihar

Abhay Kumar

Putting behind decades of divisive caste politics, Bihar's electorate on Wednesday returned the state's development mascot Nitish Kumar to power in a landslide victory that all but decimated the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) and the Congress.



The results scorecard reflected a complete whitewash of the RJD led by Lalu Prasad and the Congress. The ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA), comprising Nitish's Janata Dal (United) and the BJP, won 206 seats in the 243-strong state Assembly, leaving a dismal picture of how the Opposition fared: the RJD could secure only 22 seats, down 32 from a strength of 54 in the outgoing Assembly.

The Congress, which has nine MLAs in the outgoing Assembly, managed to scrape through in just four seats, although it contested all the 243 constituencies on its own.

Even the youthful charisma of Congress general secretary Rahul Gandhi did not work on the state's voters.

It recorded the worst performance since Independence in the state

which it ruled till March 1990. Independents and small parties got eight seats. Immediately after the results were announced, a beaming Nitish Kumar went to Raj Bhavan and submitted his resignation so that he could take charge of the reins of power on Friday when, sources said, he will be sworn in for the third time as chief minister.

In May 2000, he was appointed chief minister for the first time. He could not then muster support for a simple majority and quit within a fortnight.

In November 2005, he again became the chief minister after getting a thumping majority.

Rabri defeated

The scale and magnitude of the NDA landslide, which was not entirely unexpected, could be gauged by the defeat Bihar's voters inflicted on Lalu's spouse and former chief minister Rabri Devi who lost both constituencies she contested, Sonapur and Raghapur, the last a seat which she had never lost in 13 years.

Her estranged brother Sadhu Yadav, who was the Congress nominee from Gopalganj, too, had to bite the dust.

Other prominent contestants who were drubbed included Lovely Anand (wife of jailed ex-MP Anand Mohan), Ranjeeta Ranjan (wife of incarcerated former MP Pappu Yadav), Bihar Congress president Choudhary Mehboob Ali Kaisar and Ram Vilas Paswan's younger brother Pashupati Kumar Paras. Paswan's Lok Janashakti Party (LJP) could wrest merely three seats. The JD(U)'s election symbol—arrow—hit the bull's eye of brute majority as the RJD's

lantern (party symbol) flickered.

The poll verdict was an unequivocal mandate for not just the Janata Dal (United) strongman, but a clear sanction that the people of Bihar, which hitherto was a byword for feudalism, caste divisiveness, criminalised politics and grinding poverty, prefer the path of development.

Shared goals

By all accounts, the state, often viewed as an anachronism that contradicted India's optimistic vision of itself, appears to have set sights on shared development goals, including greater participation of women in politics.

“The people of Bihar had two options—either vote for development, or return to the age of darkness (read Lalu Raj). The voters preferred the first option.

“And I will try to live up to their expectations,” said Nitish who, along with his deputy Sushil Kumar Modi (of the BJP, which won 91 seats), did not contest the Assembly elections since both became members of the Legislative Council in 2006 and their terms are to expire in 2012.

Like his RJD bete noire Lalu Prasad, Nitish did not ignore caste politics, but cleverly framed his development agenda in a more broad-based fashion that appealed to all sections, cutting across caste and religious lines. Lalu's attempt to resurrect the Yadav-Muslim card, once a potent political machine which many Bihar watchers believe wrecked the state, had few takers.

Reacting after much persuasion, Lalu reacted to his defeat, saying,

“I accept the people’s verdict. I will analyse what went wrong. But the results are mysterious and I will unravel the ‘mystery’ behind it very soon.”

The man who ruled Bihar for 15 uninterrupted years and made it synonymous with extreme governmental dysfunctionality, apparently failed to read the pulse of the people this time around.

Having sidelined the Congress on the eve of the 2009 Lok Sabha elections, Lalu must be ruing his fate now. Had he conceded the demand of the Congress for a few more seats at that time, he would have been a Union Minister at the Centre and possibly got the Bihar throne back in 2010. But a divided Opposition split the votes and spelt doom for the RJD, LJP and the Congress.

Yet another reason for Lalu’s decimation was the loss of trust. The people of Bihar did not take him seriously whenever he harped on the development plank. “Give me another chance. I am a changed man. I will script Bihar’s growth story in a similar way as I did in the Railways,” Lalu would plead at every election rally. But nobody trusted his words.

POVERTY

HINDU 28.11.10 POVERTY

Hunger in the valley

HARSH MANDER

Even as the larger battles are being fought, Kashmiris have to struggle for simple everyday needs like food and job security...

The state government must be held far more accountable than it is at present to secure the rights of people, to food, healthcare, education...

Whenever Kashmir is mentioned, people tend to think either of an idyllic paradise, or of a valley wrought with the suffering of two decades of violent conflict. The aching reality of the convergence of both these images have tended to exclude Kashmir in the popular imagination from the more everyday discourse of poverty and hunger, governance and the delivery of programmes for disadvantaged people.

Official data suggests that indeed levels of poverty are negligible in the valley. As compared with 28.3 per cent people officially estimated to survive below the poverty line in India in the year 2004-05, the comparable ratio for the state of Jammu and Kashmir in the same year was pegged by the Planning Commission a meagre 4.5 per cent. Kashmir is one of the most egalitarian societies in the country, in which land reforms were implemented with greater vigour than in most other regions of India. In the first decade after

India's Independence, big farms were abolished resolutely, and subsequently surplus lands were distributed among landless farmers.

A couple of years ago, I spent 10 days touring villages and slums in Kashmir, investigating the impact of the two decade long conflict on children. Although I did not find evidence during my visit of extreme destitution of the kind I had observed in Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and Jharkhand, I still observed widespread visible poverty, and struggles for livelihoods and food, across the valley.

Lagging behind

A careful examination of the disaggregated official data also suggests that although overall ratios of poverty are much lower in Jammu and Kashmir than in the rest of India, the state lags behind many others in several specific indicators of poverty. This is a predominantly agrarian economy, in which 80 per cent of the population of the state is dependent on agriculture directly or indirectly. Ninety-seven percent of the cultivators are small or marginal farmers, with average land holdings as small as 0.7 hectares. There has been a worrying deceleration of agricultural production in the state. The valley suffers from a 44 per cent deficit in food grain production, 33 per cent in vegetables and 69 per cent in oilseeds, all of which are imported into the state from the rest of India. These crises of livelihoods have been aggravated by the collapse of the carpet weaving industry, and setbacks to tourism. The per capita income of the state is only two thirds of the national average, at Rs. 17,174 against Rs. 25,907 in India taken as a whole. Its unemployment rate is 4.21 per cent, against a national rate of 3.09 percent.

The great socialist and humanist L.C. Jain who recently passed away, on his deathbed was worried most about the teenaged children who were driven by despair and anger to throw stones at policemen

in Kashmir. His dream was: This winter why does not every Indian resolve to wear Kashmiri clothes? “If those young hands have work,” he said with characteristic compassion and wisdom, “only then will they not lift stones.”

The two decade long conflict has gravely impacted on the normal functioning of government at local levels, but it also provided an alibi for public officials to not perform. The failure to hold elections to Panchayats for two decades has meant that people do not have local elected representatives from whom they can seek redress for everyday survival problems. It has also impacted badly on actual implementation and reach of various food, social security and livelihood programmes, critical to the survival with dignity of poor and vulnerable residents of the region.

We decided therefore to undertake a survey of the status of actual implementation of food, social security and livelihood schemes in 50 villages in Kashmir. We took the help of students and alumni of the Department of Social Work in the University of Kashmir in Srinagar, led by my young colleague Tanveer Ahmad Dar.

The researchers found it difficult to even find five job card holders in each of the surveyed villages under the employment guarantee programme JKREGS (the local version of the Mahatma Gandhi NREGA). Those who did could not access an average of more than seven days of work in an entire year. The programme anyway was designed for failure, with wage rates until recently pegged at Rs. 70 rupees a day, whereas the prevailing wage rate is almost double this figure; and no work is provided in winters when hunger and the demand for work is highest. Many officials claim that there is no demand for public wage employment in the valley. But when wages were raised to a more realistic Rs. 110 a day, there was a massive expansion of demand. An unfamiliar state administration is still to gear up now to meet their statutory duty to provide work to all who

seek it.

Irregular payments

Only around six per cent eligible women received maternity benefits. The coverage with old age pensions was only slightly better, with 35 per cent eligible aged people being able to access pensions. Pension rates are low, and distributed very irregularly. An old woman we spoke to recalls getting pension only twice a year, on the two Eids. And when the pension dues are accumulated in this way for many months, it is easy for local officials to make large cuts.

Given that this is a food deficit state, the contribution of the Public Distribution System to food security of the residents of Kashmir cannot be over-stated. The researchers found functioning ration shops even in the deep interior, and less than four per cent people did not have ration cards. Most reported that they were able to access the subsidised grain, even if sporadically. But the shops are opened only one or two days in a month, and if they miss their chance, their allocations of food lapse, and are presumably sold in the black-market.

The study found gaps in the opening of ICDS centres in some remote locations, but the supply of hot cooked food to children was heartening. However, in most locations, the centres functioned as little more than feeding points. Children were not weighed, and malnourished children not identified or treated. Few centres run pre-school classes, and expectant mothers are not examined or advised about their nutrition and that of their children. Ninety-eight per cent children reported that they ate hot cooked meals at school, although there are many months in which the meals are not served as supplies do not reach. Teachers are burdened with this work, instead of this being entrusted to women's groups as in some other parts of the

country.

This study indicates some pointers of the colossal unfinished agenda for public officials in the state, to implement various programmes that are critical for the everyday survival, and social and economic development, of the people of Jammu and Kashmir. Even as people and the government must struggle to find a just and peaceful solution to the on-going militant conflict in the Kashmir valley, impoverished women, boys and girls who live in this beautiful but troubled land must in the meanwhile be enabled to survive with dignity. The state government must be held far more accountable than it is at present to secure the rights of people, to food, healthcare, education, livelihoods and security.

In villages I visited in the valley in the past, I heard everywhere grim stories of violent deaths, detention, disappearances, crackdowns and searches. During the study it was strangely almost a relief to hear people clamour instead for ration cards, school meals, pensions and feeding centres. It was an important reminder that even as 'big' battles play out, the 'small' battles of everyday survival never cease. People still have to struggle to ensure sufficient food for their children, for decent work, for survival for the aged and infirm. No government should forget this.

RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Towards resuscitating CAPART

Pramathesh Ambasta

An innovative space for a meeting between civil society and government, CAPART will need firm resolve and purposeful action by the Rural Development Ministry to bring it back from the brink.

The Council for Advancement of People's Action and Rural Technology (CAPART) is perhaps a unique example of an institutional meeting space for government and civil society. The Union Minister for Rural Development is the Chairperson of CAPART, which is registered as an autonomous Society. It has eminent and distinguished people from civil society on its General Body (GB) and Executive Committee (EC). Compared to the parent Ministry, the CAPART budget is minuscule. However, the *raison d'être* of CAPART is to facilitate and support voluntary action so that people-led models of excellence can be created in backward and remote villages which would, in turn, show the way forward for all social sector initiatives of the government. CAPART was also visualised as an autonomous space for the voluntary sector, which would foster and encourage grass-roots action even if this sometimes went against the grain of the local vested interests. What makes CAPART unique is that its funds belong to the people and can be used well for the empowerment of the poorest in the country.

In all fairness to the Council, in its life of three decades, it has contributed to some very good and innovative grass-roots work done in India. A feature of this work has been its regional spread and its

encouragement of small voluntary organisations. For many of them, CAPART's support in their formative years was a critical factor. It has also been the first and perhaps only funding agency to have attempted institutional reform by inviting independent experts and civil society luminaries to be part of its National Standing Committees (NSCs), empowered to sanction and review CAPART support to voluntary organisations. Being associated with the government, it is periodically reviewed by Parliament, the highest decision-making body in the country. How many funding agencies in the voluntary sector can claim similar scrutiny?

Despite all this, the institution has shown a remarkable commitment to keep its self-destruct button firmly pressed. In its 30-odd years, it has been dogged by controversies over corruption, lack of accountability, lack of understanding of voluntary action and its context, and an inability to move fast enough to innovate. Indeed, the best in the voluntary sector sooner rather than later began to see it as something they would like to keep a safe distance from. And CAPART began to reflect some of the most serious accountability issues facing the voluntary sector.

While CAPART has tried to learn from experience, the process has been sluggish and partial and the will to give expression to the lessons on the ground, indifferent at best. One such attempt to learn (and the most significant to date) was the drive to reinvent itself launched last year. This was fresh on the heels of the United Progressive Alliance winning the Parliament elections on the “Bharat” plank, and the sinking in of the realisation in government that civil society action could be potentially helpful in re-connecting with the people. The drive was launched by reconstituting the EC and the GB, and inviting some of the best in the voluntary sector to participate in giving direction to both bodies. At the first meeting of this reconstituted EC and GB, the Chairperson strongly signalled his intention of overhauling CAPART and clearing the way for it to be

led by the voluntary sector itself, creating a powerful groundswell of support in the sector. To back his intentions with action, he announced the setting up of four sub-groups of the EC led by the Member, Planning Commission, in-charge of Rural Development. These sub-groups were to look at new and innovative ways of CAPART facilitation in the areas of capacity building, social mobilisation and people's institutions (with a focus on the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, the Right to Food, the Forest Rights Act and the Right to Information). They were to devise innovative programmes for promoting nature based livelihoods and appropriate technology, micro-credit, rural industrialisation and marketing, and suggest measures for the structural reform of CAPART.

After several rounds of intense deliberations, the sub-groups submitted their reports, which reflected the vast experience and rich insight of the EC members. New and detailed programmes for voluntary action were worked out for each of the flagship areas. Perhaps the most crucial recommendations came from the sub-group on structural reforms. The sub-groups took serious note of the high turnover at the top with 24 Directors-General appointed in the space of 25 years at last count. This clearly meant that the top post (reserved for an IAS officer, normally in the rank of Additional Secretary to the Government of India) was not one where selections were made on the principle of best fit for the post, but was a waiting ground for senior bureaucrats before they got better postings.

Among the most radical of the group's recommendations, and perhaps one which has ruffled the maximum feathers, was opening up the top post and institutionalising a search-and-screen process to get the best people available in the country to head CAPART. These people could be sitting officers of the government or people from outside with an impeccable track record of public service, in-sourced by CAPART. In order to infuse the functioning of CAPART with

greater quality, the group similarly recommended that programme heads be in-sourced after a due search-and-screen process. The sub-group worked out a detailed blueprint for fostering voluntary sector participation through a consortium model, which would bring in a healthy culture of mutual accountability, peer review and partnership with CAPART based on mutual respect and trust. To ensure proper performance of staff and to disincentivise non-performance, the sub-group went on to suggest performance-based evaluation of personnel. The group took note of the tendency of foot-dragging when it came to swift action on vigilance issues and suggested a tighter control of the EC over the vigilance and monitoring functions.

Alas, however, all this labour of love met with stiff resistance within CAPART from those who predictably saw this as an invasion of their turf. The first meeting of the EC, after the reports were submitted, did not see any discussion on the reports. At the subsequent meeting three months after, the reports were relegated to the last five minutes or so with the “insiders” winning the day when the Chairperson announced that the reports of the sub-groups should be referred to a third-party external review. EC members from the voluntary sector then wrote to the Chairperson, pointing out that the decision was an attempt at subversion of his own clear vision spelt out at the first meeting of the new EC. They also said that since CAPART had put on hold its programmes until after the review by EC was over, it would be in the best interests of the organisation to start action on the schemes even as external review was being carried out. As a result, another meeting of the EC was convened in August this year and it was decided that detailed programme guidelines would be drawn up on the themes for action based on the recommendations of the sub-groups. Simultaneously, NSCs would be constituted for each of the thematic areas and a process of dialogue with the voluntary sector to seed these new ideas would be kicked off.

However, this is still to be implemented. In sum, the entire effort initiated last year, heralding a new era of a different kind of “public-private partnership,” has somehow morphed into a process which has brought the institution to a complete standstill. It has also clearly pointed to the roadblocks to reform of governance, without which inclusive development will remain an empty slogan. For if change in an organisation with such a small budget and scope is so obdurately resisted by a fiercely recalcitrant executive leadership, what hope can there be of larger governance reforms for the poorest in the country? It is clear that the Chairperson needs to step in with a clear resolve to reclaim his own vision for CAPART so that the institution is brought back from the brink.

(The author is member of the Executive Committee, CAPART.)

SOCIAL JUSTICE

Intellectually dishonest

Shashi Shekhar

Arundhati Roy once described BR Ambedkar as India's most important thinker and alleged that his life story had been 'sidelined'. Ironically, she has shown little or no faith in constitutionalism which was so dear to Ambedkar. Instead, she is constantly on the lookout for the proverbial oxygen of publicity

Writer and activist Arundhati Roy while endorsing a new book on BR Ambedkar titled *Bhimayana — Experiences of Untouchability* described Ambedkar as India's most important thinker while making the charge that Ambedkar's life story has been deliberately sidelined.

The irony of course is the little faith Arundhati Roy has shown in Ambedkar's constitutionalism.

Ambedkar, speaking in the Constituent Assembly on November 4, 1948 had this to say on the nature of the Republic of India: "Federation not being result of an agreement no State has right to secede from it. Federation is a Union because it is indestructible." In the same speech Ambedkar also made a poignant observation on 'Constitutional Morality', saying it is not a natural sentiment and that it needs to be cultivated.

Sixty-two years on Ambedkar could not have been more correct, given what little appreciation his most ardent fan Arundhati Roy has shown for

the same ‘Constitutional Morality’.

In August of 2002 the *Financial Express* carried a telling editorial on how thanks to the Tehri Dam 11 lakh hectares of land in Uttar Pradesh were irrigated while farmers who depended on an additional seven lakh hectares would be able to withstand another year’s drought. The “*bhooka nanga*” Bharat of these drought struck farmers did not let them down that year despite the excessive snow melt and unprecedented levels of water. The editorial asked a poignant question —“Where was Arundhati Roy”. The reference of course was to the anti-Dam agitation by Medha Patkar and Arundhati Roy that also saw her in contempt of the Supreme Court.

Arundhati Roy’s obstructionist activism in so many ways reminds us of the many dangers Ambedkar had warned in his closing speech to the Constituent.

On September 29, 2001 exactly 18 days after the most devastating terrorist attack in modern history, a contingent of 25 Hartford Connecticut firefighters, including its chief made the morning bus and ferry trip across Long Island Sound to pay their respects to one of 343 New York City firefighters who died trying to rescue people in the September 11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center.

On September 29, 2001 while New York City was still burying its bravest fire fighters and mourning their loss in funerals across the city and its suburbs, an opinion column appeared in the *Guardian*, headlined, “The Algebra of Infinite Justice”. A column in which a presumptuous Arundhati Roy sermonised to an America on how there was no moral distinction between President George W Bush and Osama bin Laden. That was just 18 days after 9/11 while America was still mourning its dead conducting funerals.

It was back then in 2001 a sign of the harvest of intellectualism gone

horribly wrong when Arundhati Roy failed to make a moral distinction between a democratically elected head of state and a known terrorist. It was also a travesty of human values that in her failure she mocked those who died defending that democracy and had not yet been buried.

It is the same travesty playing all out again as the moral legitimacy of those who die defending the Indian Constitution is questioned while forgetting that they died protecting that freedom to question. Individuals like Arundhati Roy have no credibility not because they hold views ideologically opposite to the rest of us but because they are intellectually dishonest.

Intellectual dishonesty that was abundantly on display during a trip to Pakistan when the phrase “Azaadi for Kashmir” never once crossed Arundhati Roy’s lips.

On August 16, 2002 Arundhati Roy famously declared herself a “Citizen of the World” on a visit to Pakistan. In the same trip when asked for her position on Kashmir, Arundhati Roy went on record to say that “she had no position on Kashmir”.

In fact according to the PTI report of August 16, 2002, when pressed further she had no “direct solution” to offer. That she has become the flavour of the *azaadi* season in Kashmir in the present times speaks of both her penchant for pitching herself against the state to attract attention as well as to the naiveté of her hosts.

This is why we must neither ignore intellectual anarchists like Arundhati Roy nor must we unwittingly give oxygen to their acts of intellectual arson. We must instead shame them by showing them up for the hypocrites they are so that the unthinking masses don’t make the mistake of indulging them.

Hypocrites, who on the one hand swear by Ambedkar’s vision, then go

on to sully that vision with their practice of the very same “Grammar of Anarchy” that Ambedkar so disapproved of.

The writer is a social media commentator on contemporary Indian issues.