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BOOK REVIEW

HINDU 10.8.10 BOOK REVIEW

A quintessential “outsider”

M.K. BHADRAKUMAR

Mehta had a complex story to tell as his career as a diplomat spanned tumultuous times

THE TRYST BETRAYED - Reflections on Diplomacy and Development: Jagat S. Mehta; Penguin Books India Pvt. Ltd., 11, Community Centre, Panchsheel Park, New Delhi-110017. Rs. 350.

Imagine you are sitting down at 7 p.m. for what promises to be a memorable dinner. What do you have for starter? Smoked trout fillet with celeriac remoulade and chive dressing. Then you're startled to find that poached fillet of brill with white wine sauce follows, and thereafter ballantine of salmon with warm ratatouille dressing. Of course, scintillating conversation ensues all through, over the dry white bordeaux, and soon it is 9.30 p.m. Just as you eagerly await the main course listed in the menu — braised lamb shank with root vegetables, wild mushrooms, and risotto — the dessert is served.

Enduring

Former foreign secretary Jagat Mehta's memoirs offers a feast of terrific starters but somehow it fails to lead to the main course. Once again it brings to one's mind that India is starved of top-notch political biographies by its gifted diplomats. Somehow the culture never quite developed. Their memoirs tend to be chatty and anecdotal, whereas they ought to have fascinating tales to tell about politics and diplomacy and can offer priceless windows to the cloistered avenues of statecraft that lie perennially closed to public viewing in our country.

K.P.S. Menon, T.N. Kaul or P.N. Haksar could have told tales of enduring value that were no less mesmerising and intellectually stimulating than Anatoly Dobrynin's or Henry Kissinger's. They strode corridors of time when a great country with an ancient past was rediscovering its baby steps on the world stage. Mehta, too, had a complex story to tell as his career as a diplomat spanned tumultuous times when India was aspiring to trot. What made him, for instance, such a quintessential “outsider”? This might sound a bit odd as he had a stellar career in the Foreign Service, held interesting assignments and ultimately rose to the top of the heap in the Indian foreign policy establishment to the absolute envy of many in his peer group.

Outsider

Yet he remained an “outsider” — branded unkindly at times as an American agent, as Mehta recalls. Such things can happen to diplomats who do “out-of-the-box” thinking (to borrow the famous words of Pervez Musharraf). The Indian security establishment, as the self-appointed custodian of patriotism, felt uncertain as to where Mehta's loyalties lay as a serving Secretary in the South Block.

The tragedy of Mehta's career as a top functionary in the South Block was that he often found himself ahead of his times. Without doubt, he belonged to the era of India's globalisation and the Washington consensus — after India crossed the so-called Rubicon, began putting on fat, and shifted to an unabashedly U.S.-centric foreign policy — rather than to a prior history that saw an emaciated country, which bled white through centuries of colonial rule, was struggling to regain its self-respect and found strength in the numbers of the newly liberated countries of the developing world.

Mehta was a misfit in the “Nehruvian” world of India's non-aligned diplomacy and indeed he frankly admits it. Yet, it goes to the credit of Jawaharlal Nehru and his fairness that he offered plum assignments to Mehta, and the young diplomat steadily climbed the bureaucratic ladder.

Indeed, the expansive foreign-service life that Mehta quaintly sketches no more exists and it almost leaps out of a museum.

The incomplete feeling at the dinner table becomes most despairing when Mehta recounts his assignment in China. No doubt, he is absorbingly anecdotal about life in the Indian chancery in Beijing but has added little worthwhile. Given his erudition and professional expertise as a “China hand”, he could have contributed meaningfully to India's strenuous effort to come to terms with China's rise.

Mehta could have made a solid contribution to the foreign policy discourse had his memoirs been a blend of minimal anecdotal sallies and long intellectual voyages. He was impeccably well-placed to do that.

To a degree, though, the memoirs make up for all lapses by the great story he has to tell which was the stuff of his own life — growing up in a privileged feudal family in Rajasthan, a first rate education in England, a breathless journey on the fast track of the foreign service, and the final unexpected abrupt arrival at a cul-de-sac, from where, through sheer grit and tenacity, he eventually resurrected himself into an absolutely new incarnation so far removed from the world of chandeliers and champagne, diplomacy and statecraft: an improbable post of the elected president of Seva Mandir, an NGO in Udaipur devoted to adult education “with volunteers going on bicycles to neighbouring villages with a blackboard and a hurricane lamp.”

TRIBUNE 15.8.10 BOOK REVIEW

Challenges ahead

Reviewed by B. G. Verghese

Comprehensive Security for an Emerging India

Ed. Air Vice Marshal Kapil Kak.

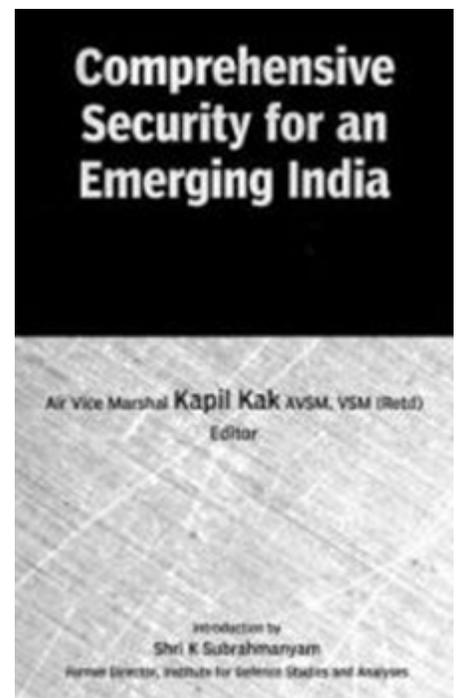
Knowledge World.

Pages 394. Rs 780.

THERE are many more aspects to a nation's security than the threat of war. Battles can be won and lost even without armies moving, which is now better understood. And the danger of armed conflict escalating to a nuclear exchange induces sobriety and restraint in military responses, though many have speculated on what could still happen below a certain threshold. The Indo-Pakistan and Korean stand-offs are two cases in point. Even so, the prospect of nuclear terror or irresponsible action by rogue elements leaves much unanswered.

The discourse in the Indian context is carried forward, covering many dimensions, in *Comprehensive Security for an Emerging India*, edited by Air Vice Marshal Kapil Kak. It is, as K. Subhramanyam, the country's security doyen, says in *Introduction*, a daunting task in an uncertain world. Yet, one positive factor he pointedly notices is that "emerging India" does not appear a looming threat to most, as it is a democratic, plural and non-irredentist state.

India is already recognised as a regional power with its growing economy and technological sophistication. Arvind Virmani, the economist, puts numbers on this trend line. India will be the third largest economic power by 2015, with China growing faster to catch up with the US by 2025 to



create a bipolar world. India will follow by 2040-50, but will be even by 2035 to become a balancer for the US in offsetting Chinese power in a tripolar world. After 2050, China and India will be the world's two leading economic powers, as they were until 1700.

The gaps to be filled to assume this power are real. India's missing defence doctrine and the need for a more robust higher defence management and planning structure with a Chief of Defence Staff in place (N.S. Sisodia, director IDSA), is amplified by Admiral Arun Prakash who stresses the increasingly crucial role of the Navy in projecting power for which it must adopt a transformational rather than an incremental approach. Air Marshal Asthanna supplements this with emphasis on aerospace power and the need, with the other services, for developing network-centric warfare capability for making available the combined operational picture at all levels in real time. These strengths have to be matched with improved defence resource management and defence research and development efforts so as to reduce high levels of external dependence on external platforms, equipment and stores (Vinod Misra).

Given current concerns over the menace of terror, the argument for developing smart counter-terror capability merits serious attention. B. Raman notes that India's limited covert action capability was "wound up as a unilateral gesture to Pakistan" in 1997. He describes this as an extremely unwise step. It is also his considered opinion that the time is ripe for establishing a separate Ministry of Internal Security outside the Home Ministry and to beef up the country's intelligence and investigation and prosecution capabilities.

Wajahat Habibullah writes of the importance of the right to information. But this by itself does not answer to the need for a national communications policy to give meaning to "Satyameve Jayate" or a sound defence/security information policy that is totally lacking and was singularly botched up in Mumbai through 26/11. Indeed, this is a grave lacunae in the context of the instant and global reach of convergent media when everybody—military commanders, intelligence agencies, foreign offices, prime ministries and the man in the street—get their first information report on events far and near through the media. Not to report is to be

fed with disinformation and to ignore the real, established fact that the world's true hyper-power is national and international public opinion. The neglect of this in India and the failure to discuss it meaningfully with allied subjects like cartographic and archival secrecy has been extremely damaging.

The economy, water, food security, renewable energy, hydrocarbons, nuclear power and climate change are competently discussed by learned authors. So too are the bare bones of the Left-wing extremism. But the structural failures in dealing with the root causes of Maoism, on account of the total bypassing of the Fifth Schedule and the lack of a sturdy governance delivery mechanism for socio-economic change, are singularly lacking. For something described by no less than the Prime Minister as India's greatest internal security threat, the lack of discussion on these critical aspects represents a national blind spot.

Future discussions on climate change also need to address issues of "greed" versus "need", the plundering rather than management of global natural resources, lifestyle changes, social consumption versus individual consumption and demand management through pricing and other mechanisms. However, the present volume marks a good beginning towards a better understanding of comprehensive security.

CIVIL SERVICE

SAT stalls OPSC joining process

- Eight candidates allege faulty implementation of reservation rules

OUR CORRESPONDENT

The appointment process of the 378 candidates recommended by the Orissa Public Service Commission (OPSC) for the Orissa Civil Service (OCS) two months ago has run into fresh legal hurdle with the State Administrative Tribunal (SAT) admitting a batch of petitions challenging it.

The OPSC declared the results of OCS-2006 on May 22.

As per the merit list, altogether 378 candidates including 126 women applicants were recommended for the Orissa Administrative Service (OAS) and the Orissa Financial Service (OFS).

Of the successful candidates 156 belong to the scheduled caste and scheduled tribe category.

However, eight unsuccessful candidates, who had taken the viva voce test, challenged the merit list alleging faulty implementation of the reservation rules.

The candidates, in separate petitions, alleged that a number of applicants belonging to the general category had been included in the slot for candidates belonging to the reserved category.

They refused to give any specific details.

The SAT bench comprising chairman Justice Nityananda Prusty and member (administration) Amarananda Pattnaik admitted the batch of petitions on Wednesday and issued notices to the OPSC to clarify its

stand within six weeks.

The case assumes significance as the 378 candidates recommended by the OPSC had aspired to become civil servants and responded to applications four years ago.

The OPSC had invited applications in August 2006 along with the backlogs of 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004 and 2005 to fill up the 381 Class-II posts in the Orissa Administrative Service and the Orissa Financial Service after a gap of six years.

However, the OPSC had failed to complete the selection process in time after conducting the OCS preliminary and main examinations owing to protracted legal disputes.

In fact, the viva voce test should have been completed after the Supreme Court endorsed the high court order giving the OPSC a go-ahead to conduct it on March 15.

The OPSC started the viva voce test on February 15 after completing the OCS (main) written examination and declaring 750 candidates eligible for it.

The viva voce test was scheduled to continue till April 6.

However, the SAT issued a stay order on February 16 after the dispute was raised by some unsuccessful candidates.

By then only 220 candidates had been interviewed.

The OPSC moved the high court, which on its part nullified the SAT order and directed the OPSC on March 15 “to proceed with the viva voce test by giving notice to the rest of the successful candidates who have not been interviewed”.

Cuttack, Aug. 12: The process of appointment of the 378 candidates

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But eight unsuccessful candidates - who had taken the viva voce test, had challenged the merit list declared by the OPSC alleging faulty application of reservation rules. Without giving specific details they had in separate petitions alleged that some candidates belonging to the general category had been included in the merit list in place of slot for candidates belonging to reserved category.

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The matter was taken to the High Court by OPSC, which on its part nullified the SAT order and directed the OPSC on March 15 “to proceed with the viva-voce test by giving notice to the rest of the successful candidates who have not been interviewed”.

E-GOVERNANCE

TELEGRAPH 15.8.10 E-GOVERNANCE

e-boost to prison visits in Dhanbad

PRADUMAN CHOUBEY

Relatives and friends of undertrials and prisoners lodged in Dhanbad Jail will no longer have to wait for hours in long queues to meet them as all the eight block headquarters of Dhanbad district have now been e-connected to the prison to facilitate video conferencing.

Inaugurating the prison e-interview service, Dhanbad deputy commissioner Sunil Kumar Burnwal — he was earlier state IG (prisons) — said the move would greatly reduce stress among prisoners regarding the well-being of their family members as most often they do not get an opportunity to interact with them due to rush at the jail gate during meeting hours.

“Women find it most difficult to meet their relatives in jail due to social compulsions,” said the DC, adding the new facility will address all their concerns.

The e-connecting efforts would be co-ordinated by block pragya kendras, a key element in the Centre’s national e-governance plan under which unemployed youth are used to man service centres equipped with computers.

The kendras in eight block headquarters of Dhanbad district have been

e-connected with the jail by Jharnet, the state arm for implementing the e-governance project.

According to district officials, a family member of a jail inmate would have to contact the nearest pragya kendra to be allotted a time slot. The kendra will fix a time in consultation with the jail authorities.

Under normal circumstances, time allotted to a family would be 15 minutes for a nominal charge of Rs 10.

Jail superintendent Hamid Akhtar said the facility would be available from 8 am to 1 pm throughout the week except Sundays. “Two studios have been created in the jail premises,” he said, adding that the hardware and software required to start the facility were already in place.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

HINDUSTAN TIMES 15.8.10 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Economic growth: create it, don't condemn it

Gautam Chikermane

In the intellectually-heavy week preceding Independence Day, I met four of India's top economists who are simultaneously driving and observing a changing India. My question to all of them came in the context of how economic growth has been turned into some form of evil by a pseudo-literati that is rightly concerned about growth not trickling down but lacks the rigour to explore the phenomenon accurately. If growth doesn't reach the poor, what's the point of having it, goes the argument that's turning popular, pandering to rabble rousers and broadly reducing growth as an idea worth pursuing in our 64th year of Independence and further. I'm not sure where this argument is leading us and I pray that it is not towards this: if high economic growth cannot be equally distributed, let's not have it at all.

It would be criminal if this argument gained popular political support.

The 9 per cent growth we have been experiencing, and the 10 per cent growth aspiration we harbour, has brought prosperity to the rich, the middle classes and a large chunk of those living in metros, no doubt. That it has not trickled down in the same proportion to the villages in general and to agriculture in particular is also true. But certainly, rejecting the growth momentum the Indian economy has gained after

decades of economic somnolence is not the way out. What do the worthies pushing for distribution over growth push — poverty?

Besides, the contention that growth has not trickled down at all is incorrect. I have heard complaints from three different rural constituencies about the way in which NREGA is changing the economic landscape there. An extremely rich farmer told me that he doesn't get labour to work his farm. A wealthy entrepreneur who has turned his fort into a tourist resort told me that he doesn't get hands to work his business — all of them are busy “destroying the environment through unplanned NREGA work”. Poor farm labourers in the Nainital hills I regularly visit told me that they find it better to work as construction workers because NREGA has forced contractors to raise the rates they offer.

Growth is trickling down, please don't waste your precious tears on that movement. Instead, go to the rural areas and see for yourself the change it's bringing — the “poor” have mobile phones, cable TV, and are rich enough for insurance agents to dump ULIP policies on them.

Has this growth reached each and every poor citizen of India? Of course not. But I can see it marching ahead at a faster pace than ever before. Also, I am excluding the Maoist-controlled tracts, where leave alone economic development, even the presence of the state through a workable law and order is missing.

“Don't take growth for granted,” Raghuram G. Rajan, professor at Chicago's Booth School of Business and Economic Advisor to Prime Minister, told me last week. “Too many countries have grown strongly for decades, only to stagnate,” he writes in *Fault Lines*, a book that you must pick up right now and read. His warning: to assume that growth can come automatically is wrong, a lot of work still needs to be done.

“It would be a mistake to take high growth for granted,” Planning Commission Deputy Chairman said. “We have the ‘potential’ (his

eyebrows stressed the word) to achieve high growth.” The growth challenges he identified were to make agriculture more productive and expand infrastructure. We need to solve these problems he said, but if we gave up growth, we are doomed to fail.

“Growth in itself cannot reduce inequality,” C. Rangarajan, chairman of Prime Minister’s Economic Advisory Council said in his book-filled room at Vigyan Bhawan. “The trickle down effect will work as the economy grows. But for it to be effective, the economy has to grow at a strong rate.” High growth, he concluded, helps the government to launch distributive schemes.

“Short of political turbulence, it is reasonable to expect that we will be on a sustained 8.5 per cent growth path,” said Chief Economic Advisor Kaushik Basu over an extremely lively discussion in his North Block office. “Even if we do not have compassion and morals, a better income distribution is in our self-interest. Otherwise political instability will come home to roost.”

I look forward to the next decade as one of high economic growth that simultaneously trickles down. I think the economic model India is following — racing towards free markets to deliver growth (something the markets are best at) and simultaneously inching forward on distributive justice through government intervention — will work well to balance the two. We need to push the government to deliver more efficiently, where projects like UID will help.

But for India’s sake, let’s stop stalling economic growth simply because it’s not omnipresent today. Create it, don’t condemn it.

JUDICIARY

HINDU 12.8.10 JUDICIARY

Politics and the performance of courts

V.R. Krishna Iyer

Judges have, and should have, their politics as in the case of other professionals.

The Bench is a lofty, sublime, sacred and hallowed place where every word uttered and every phrase articulated, should be dignified and solemn. So high is the court from where justice is delivered that it is considered next only to divinity and royalty. In this sense, the robed brethren as a class are a wonder in themselves.

This article does not refer to any particular judge or to any particular observation made in lighter vein. However, one judge observed recently with some passion that judges have neither politics nor philosophy, and act without politics. This is not entirely correct; perhaps it is wrong. Many judges claim they are above politics. This is absurd because they are a third instrumentality of the state and are governed by the politics of the Constitution. The art or science of government or governance is especially the governing of a political entity, such as a nation, and the administration and control of its internal and external affairs.

Many judges disclaim all politics and hold that they have no politics but only interpret and enforce the laws. They forget the fact that critics see through this hidden politics of the justices. It is on the pretext of

interpretation that they cleverly, perhaps unwittingly, practise the politics of their class and defeat the social philosophy of the Constitution — to uphold which they have taken their oath of office.

What is politics? The Constitution has politics, and semantics is the spelling out of its politics. What they hide in linguistic semantics is their alleged innocence of politics. Professor Griffith of London University exposed the myth in his book *Politics of the Judiciary*. He quoted Churchill and Lord Scrutton.

This was from Churchill: “The courts hold justly a high, and I think, unequalled pre-eminence in the respect of the world in criminal cases, and in civil cases between man and man. No doubt, they deserve and command the respect and admiration of all classes of the community, but where class issues are involved, it is impossible to pretend that the courts command the same degree of general confidence. On the contrary, they do not, and a very large number of our population have been led to the opinion that they are, unconsciously, no doubt, biased.” (The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. W.S. Churchill) on the second reading of the Trade Unions (No.2) Bill, 1911 (26 H.C. Deb. col. 1022).)

This was from Lord Justice Scrutton: “The habits you are trained in, the people with whom you mix, lead to your having a certain class of ideas of such a nature that, when you have to deal with other ideas, you do not give as sound and accurate judgments as you would wish. This is one of the great difficulties at present with Labour. Labour says ‘Where are your impartial Judges? They all move in the same circle as the employers, and they are all educated and nursed in the same ideas as the employers. How can a labour man or a trade unionist get impartial justice?’ It is very difficult sometimes to be sure that you have put yourself into a thoroughly impartial position between two disputants, one of your own class and one not of your class.”

Political philosophy

Judges must have a political philosophy. A political critique will reveal their political perspective. Our socialist, secular, democratic republic must appoint only judges who share the political philosophy of the Constitution, since judges are under the Constitution, not above it. When a case concerning reservation in favour of the backward classes was quashed by the Supreme Court, Jawaharlal Nehru critically observed that the highest court was no third chamber of the House.

We all belong to a class conditioned by our nation, economic environment, social status and the like. If a millionaire tells a slum-dweller he has no politics, do you believe him? Likewise, if a trade union leader asserts to his industrial employer that he has no politics, it is baloney. To have political views and beliefs is not a form of guilt. To hide it is guilt. If you take an oath before taking office to uphold the Constitution, you are declaring your socialist, secular, democratic politics.

Let us be frank. Judges have their politics as in the case of other professionals. The nation's politics is reflected in the Constitution. Let us not define ourselves and others by a claim of 'no politics.'

When judges, like Ministers, have fabulous salaries and fantastic perks, that is politics of the moneyed class. Those who belong to Class IV, the lowest level of government service, have their own politics.

My judgments as a Judge of the Supreme Court, I should confess, had politics in them. A corrupt judge will have 'make-money politics.' If you run an industry exploiting your workers, that is politics. Independence of the judiciary is not 'no politics', but the fearless and impartial philosophy of the Constitution that you have taken an oath to uphold. You are a trustee. All public power is a trust. So is judicial power. The people are the beneficiaries. Your commitment to democracy is oath-bound. You cannot shirk it.

Socialist dimension

Democracy in its economic dimension is socialist. Our Constitution, which you are bound to uphold, is expressly socialist and secular. So you have a socialist commitment. If you disown it, you violate your oath, and must go. Secularism transcends religion. So you cannot be communal. If you are casteist, communal or sectarian, you forfeit your office. The judicial process is above class, caste and community. Be firm on this. You may be Hindu, Muslim or Christian, but functionally you are above religion.

This is what Felix Frankfurter had to say: “A judge should be compounded of the faculties that are demanded of the historian and the philosopher and the prophet. The last demand upon him — to make some forecast of the consequences of his action — is perhaps the heaviest. To pierce the curtain of the future, to give shape and visage to mysteries still in the womb of time, is the gift of the imagination. It requires poetic sensibilities with which judges are rarely endowed and which their education does not normally develop. These judges must have something of the creative artist in them; they must have antennae registering feeling and judgment beyond logical, let alone quantitative, proof.”

I would add the wisdom of Justice Black: “Judges are not essentially different from other government officials. Fortunately they remain human even after assuming their judicial duties. Like all the rest of mankind they may be affected from time to time by pride and passion, by pettiness and bruised feelings, by improper understanding or by excessive zeal.”

NATIONALISM

TIMES OF INDIA 15.8.10 NATIONALISM

'Our freedom was born with hunger, we're still not free'

Saira Kurup

On August 15, 1947, 22-year-old [Monkombu Sambasivan Swaminathan](#) famously headed for [Auroville](#) even as almost everyone else in [Madras](#) seemed to be bound for Marina Beach to celebrate the birth of a free India. Later, he would choose to study agriculture rather than medicine, rightly judging that plentiful food production had an important role to play in keeping a country independent. He went on to play a leading role in India's [Green Revolution](#) of the 1960s. In 1999, he was one of only three Indians to be on [TIME](#) magazine's list of the 20th century's 20 most influential Asians. The other two were [Rabindranath Tagore](#) and Mahatma Gandhi. Swaminathan, 85, was in the capital recently and spoke to [Saira Kurup](#) about India's many revolutions — those past and still to come.

It's 63 years since [India](#) became independent. But we are still fighting for [freedom](#) from hunger and poverty. Is this a battle we might never win?

Our freedom was born with hunger. It was born in the backdrop of the Bengal famine. If you read the newspapers dated August 15, 1947, one part was about freedom, the other was food shortage. This is why Jawaharlal Nehru said after Independence that everything else can wait but not agriculture.

The battle against hunger is a battle we have to win. It requires a fusion of political will, professional skill and people's participation. Our country is fortunate to have fairly good water resources, reasonably good rainfall, a hardworking farming population. We must bring about a

marriage between brain and brawn in rural professions. We need a large number of educated young people to go into farming using science and new eco-technologies. We have all the necessary ingredients for progress. But the gap between scientific knowhow and field level do-how is large.

The green revolution was the product of four things: the first was technology. The [genetic technology](#) of the 1960s was transformational and changed people's understanding of wheat and rice yields. The second was services that took the technology to the field like extension services, credit and insurance; third was public policies of input-output pricing like the prices commission, and lastly, the farmers' enthusiasm. Today, unfortunately, the most important thing is missing — farmers' enthusiasm. A revolution cannot come from a government programme. A [National Sample Survey](#) study says 40% of the farmers want to leave farming. It's important to revive that enthusiasm.

There's no shortage of food in terms of production. Why are people going hungry then?

There are three parts to the problem. First, availability of food in the market, which is not bad; second, access to food or purchasing power. Under NREGA, a worker gets Rs 100 a day for 100 days i.e Rs 10,000 a year. If he has a family of five, it means Rs 2,000 a year per person. When dal is selling at Rs 80 to Rs 90 a kilo, how do they buy it? Third, is the absorption of food in the body, which means getting clean drinking water, sanitation. Otherwise, it means a leaky pot — a child would keep getting infections.

How do you view the green revolution now, when the widespread use of pesticides in Punjab is being linked to increase in cancer rates in some areas?

In 1966, I had said the green revolution should be an “evergreen revolution”, which is enhancement of productivity in perpetuity without ecological harm. I had warned against overuse of pesticides and

fertilizers and against converting the green revolution into a greed revolution.

What can be done to set things right?

There are two aspects of the green revolution — farm ecology and farm economy. But if farm ecology goes wrong, nothing else will go right. Soil quality must be taken care of, water quality must be ensured. We should also be ready for climate change. I call it a two-pronged strategy — get the best of a good monsoon or climate and second, minimize the adverse impact of unfavourable weather.

Why are you objecting to [Bt brinjal](#)?

I didn't oppose it. I supported Jairam Ramesh's moratorium. I chaired a committee in 2004 and recommended in a report the setting up of a regulatory authority, which would have its own testing facilities. The [Genetic Engineering Approval Committee](#) has no such facility. I advocate safe and responsible use of [biotechnology](#) particularly in the case of human nutrition. Some long-term residual toxicity tests should be done. If you introduce some good-yielding hybrids, farmers will grow only those. So I said, “Use the moratorium to collect all the genetic material or germ plasm.” We also need a literacy programme for the public.

You have been influenced by the philosophy of the Mahatma and Sri Aurobindo. In an age when technology is the new god, do you think there can be a meeting point for science and spirituality?

There can be no science without spirituality. It gives purpose to science. Vivekananda said, 'This life is short, the vanities of the world are transient, but they alone live who live for others.' That's my personal philosophy. My father was a doctor. He died when I was 10. My mother wanted me to go into medicine. But the papers were full of Bengal famine and I asked myself how I could serve my country better. I got calls from a medical college and an agricultural college. After I joined, the principal of the agricultural college asked me why I took up

agriculture because the subject was not considered as important as medicine!

Do you have any unfulfilled dreams?

My only dream is a hunger-free India. Every fourth child here is born underweight. We are denying our own children opportunities for a fulfilled life. I wanted to see a hunger-free India in 2007 when we celebrated our 50th year of Independence. But it has not happened. That's why I accepted nomination to the Rajya Sabha because in a democratic country much depends on the political system. Fortunately, when I was [Farmers' Commission](#) chairman, we recommended a food guarantee Act. Now I am in the [National Advisory Council](#) and am working on the Right to Food Act. It's the last chance to make food a legal right. Gandhiji said in Noakhali in 1946 that the first and foremost duty of independent India is to see that no child, woman or man should go to bed hungry, because to the hungry, bread is god.

POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT

Judgement Day

Karan Thapar

Independence Day is an occasion for taking stock. In his address from the ramparts of the Red Fort the prime minister will reflect on the state of the Union and his thoughts for the future. What he won't do is talk about the state of his government. Let me, therefore, try my hand at that.

The Opposition claims that just 15 months after re-election the government has lost direction and is adrift. Many independent observers concur. But is that really so?

There's no doubt that in several areas the government appears confused, contradictory or, worse, paralysed. This seems to be the case with regard to Kashmir, tackling the Maoists, preparing for the Commonwealth Games, handling inflation and relations with Pakistan.

At times the government is actually at odds with itself. For instance, the prime minister has repeatedly said the Maoists are the biggest threat facing the country but Mamata Banerjee holds rallies with their support, where the IG of police says men wanted for attacking the Janeshwari Express are present. Her speech only made matters worse. She called for an end to the joint operations forgetting the home minister's commitment to pursuing them. She called Azad's death "murder" and "unjust". P. Chidambaram insists it happened in a legitimate police encounter.

Elsewhere the government looks paralysed, if not clueless. Since June 11, Kashmir has been in a state of turmoil but Delhi has sat on its haunches, silently observing, as if Srinagar was another country. If the Omar Abdullah government cannot fathom what to say or do, why did the prime minister wait till Tuesday to step into the breach? Whilst you and I fear the Valley might be slipping away the government seems not to share that concern. There are even occasions when the government is simply bluffing or in plain denial. Despite the delays, the proliferating allegations of corruption and the shambolic state of Delhi's pavements and roads, Jaipal Reddy insists these will be the best ever Commonwealth Games. At the very least, such braggadocio is ludicrous. But it also comes perilously close to an insult. Does he really think we believe such vain boasts? The sad part is even where the government has performed admirably it's the problems which remain that dominate discourse. So whilst it's true it's overcome the threat to growth what's remembered is the government cannot curb inflation. Today its promising inflation will fall to 6 per cent by December. But earlier it swore it would peak at 6 per cent by last March. Inflation, it'd seem, has beaten this administration. Perhaps all of this doesn't add up to drift and loss of direction but it does suggest an inexplicable loss of resolve and resoluteness. It's as if an affliction has stricken the government. Nothing makes this more obvious than the way ministers are behaving. Sharad Pawar wants his responsibilities reduced, whilst Digvijay Singh and Mani Shankar Aiyar strive to limit Chidambaram's mandate. Kamal Nath and Montek can't agree on roads and highways whilst Jairam Ramesh seems to irritate most of his colleagues. North Block and South Block are just across the road but behave as if they're poles apart, whilst Mamata Banerjee thinks Calcutta is the centre of India.

The strangest part is the prime minister's behaviour. As his government lurches from crisis to crisis he's either silent or invisible. So are you surprised if some have concluded he's opted out? And do you now understand why his government appears to have dropped the ball?

The views expressed by the author are personal

HINDUSTAN TIMES 8.8.10 POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT

It's time to wield the stick, Mr PM

Pankaj Vohra

Dr Manmohan Singh is set to become the longest-serving Indian prime minister after Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi when he unfurls the tricolour for the seventh time from the ramparts of Red Fort this week. He will also be setting a record of sorts by being the longest-serving PM who has never been a member of the Lok Sabha. He represents Assam in the Upper House. Fourteen months into his second term as the prime minister, Manmohan Singh needs to be more assertive in order to correct the direction of his government. It is perceived as a loose non-cohesive unit where ministers often take on each other publicly. In coalition politics, political compulsions are such that they do not give a free hand to the head of the government who has to perform with the tools he has been given by various constituents.

In the process, he and the Congress party have been unable to communicate the achievements of his government to the people and also explain its limitations so as to correct several perceptions. It would be an accurate assessment if one were to state that this government has failed to present its side of the story to those who have elected it. On every issue, when the government is on the defensive, it has no mechanism to explain its viewpoint except the Congress spokespersons trying to do the impossible. Ideally, all its constituents should collectively explain the actions of the government. In reality, it is only the Congress which is left to defend on its own. What is astonishing is that whether it's about charges of corruption levelled at A. Raja, the charges of apathy against Mamata Banerjee or those of casual behaviour on the part of Sharad

Pawar, it is left to the Congress media team to deflect the heat. This is where the government and its constituents need to do some homework and work out an effective mechanism for conveying its point of view. This is a serious failing which needs to be rectified immediately.

The prime minister has to often face the flak since like the Congress high command, he too believes in status quo. Even in the face of scathing criticism, he looks the other way and waits for the crisis to blow over. This must change. Second, the government, by its actions, has to demonstrate that it has zero tolerance for corruption. The Commonwealth Games irregularities have tarnished the reputations of many top functionaries. These irregularities whether they pertain to the Organising Committee, or the Delhi government and its allied agencies or the central government need to be investigated and the guilty, however mighty, must be brought to book. After the price rise, the Commonwealth Games fiasco is becoming the greatest embarrassment not only for the various agencies involved but also for the common man who will suffer the most.

Singh has entered the history books but he needs to do much more. His clean and upright image had contributed to the return of the UPA government in 2009. But people expect a lot from him. His policies need to be synchronised with the interests of the common man. Even if he has no stake in the future of the party, he has to ensure that his government performs and errant ministers and bureaucrats are taken to task.

Even though he is not a typical politician, he has to dispel the perception that in UPA-II, the bureaucracy or unelected components of his government have more muscle than the politicians. Simultaneously, he has to tick off ambitious colleagues who are fighting for their place in the 2014 scenario and have no qualms about undermining each other. He should correct the erroneous impression that he no longer enjoys the support of the Congress high command. The time has come for him to wield the stick. He has nothing to lose. Between us.

PUBLIC POLICY

HINDU 12.8.10 PUBLIC POLICY

Oliver Twist seeks food security

P. Sainath

The NREGS is restricted. The PDS is targeted. Only exploitation is universal.

The rotting of lakhs of tonnes of foodgrain in open yards, while shocking, is hardly new or surprising. Remember the rural poor marching on godowns in Andhra Pradesh in 2001 in similar circumstances? The Supreme Court was quite right in jolting the Union government. “In a country where admittedly people are starving, it is a crime to waste even a single grain,” said the annoyed Court. And suggested that the grain be released to those who deserve it.

Strong and welcome words. However, the Court could take matters much further if it sees why the Government of India would rather have that grain rot than let the hungry eat it. The failure to understand that leads us to pit poor against poor. To see people in the APL category as the enemies of those who are BPL. Hence the suggestion that we take away grain from one to give it to the other. APL was itself a fiction created by the government to “reduce” the number of poor it was obliged to help. So the GoI would act selectively on this part of the Court's advice with glee. This would exclude those in APL from even the pathetic little aid they get.

It will ignore the more important order of the Court to distribute the grain before it rots. It might pull up Food Corporation of India officers unable to look after the grain but who did not cause it to pile up in the first place. When you have twice the grain you are equipped to stock, you have a problem. The GoI could distribute that grain. Or release it at

low prices through the public distribution system. It would hate either option. That would run against the grain of its ideology and economics. Letting the hungry eat it would, for the government, increase the “subsidy burden.” Why would the government do that after successfully slashing Rs. 450 crore from food subsidy in the current budget?

Two arguments mark the opposition to a universal system (whether in the PDS or other sectors like health). One, there is no money. Two, we do not have enough grain for a universal system.

The nation has spawned 49 dollar billionaires and about a 100,000 dollar millionaires in a decade. But it has no money to feed its hungry. So says a government that tosses Rs.500,000 crore of tax exemptions to the wealthy in the current budget under just three heads.

Not producing enough grain? Well, we spent two decades shifting countless lakhs of farmers from growing food to raising cash crops. That shift involved greater input costs, higher debt and more. We sowed risk and harvested hunger.

The impact on foodgrain? The average daily net per capita availability of foodgrain between 2005 and 2008 is a dismal 436 grams per Indian. That's less than it was half a century ago. In 1955-58, it was 440 grams. Take pulses separately and the fall is 50 per cent. Around 35 grams in 2005-08 from nearly 70 grams in 1955-58.

This hasn't stopped governments from claiming “record production” every other year. Remember the “record surpluses” in 2001-03? Those years we exported millions of tonnes of grain at prices lower than those offered to our own deprived. That grain fed European cattle — the most food-secure creatures on earth. While hundreds of millions went hungry at home. Today's rotting grain, too, will at some point be flogged off to private traders at throwaway rates.

These last two decades also saw the collapse of public investment in agriculture. To starve farming of funds and say we haven't enough grain is a travesty. Actually, commit yourself to universalisation, revive food crop, give the farmer a good price and boost the dismal levels of procurement that now exist. You'd be surprised how fast you can meet that challenge of production.

Instead, we seem to be heading, courtesy the National Advisory Council (NAC), for a “universal” system in 150 districts. “Universal” here could mean rice or wheat at Rs. 3 a kg to a limit of 35 kg per household. This “universal” stops at rice and wheat, will not include pulses, oils and millets, does not see the size of a household and is limited to a fourth of the country. You can't, goes the saying, be a little bit pregnant. You can't be a little bit universal either. The debate between “targeting” — which is what the 150-districts notion is — and a universal PDS is not one over different routes to the same goal. It is one over different goals. You are either universal, or you are not. This move invites chaos.

First, as an editorial (August 10) in this newspaper pointed out, this seems to equate hunger with geography. What of millions in other districts? Are they not hungry? And how, for instance, would this impact on millions of poor migrant labourers?

Take Orissa's Ganjam district which sends out four lakh migrant workers to Surat alone in Gujarat. Now Ganjam could well be in the 150 districts. How will its hungry migrants access that grain in Surat? Surely, Surat will not be in the list of 150? Can't you just see the store keeper in Surat telling the migrant: “Yes, son, I've seen the law, too. Here's your rice at Rs. 3.”

Meanwhile, even as these migrants fail to access their Rs. 3 a kilo grain, Ganjam could well be dropped from the list of 150 at some point — citing “poor demand.” Thane in Maharashtra with its famished adivasis, could well be a Rs.3-a-kilo district. Next door is Mumbai where rice

goes at Rs.30 to Rs.40 a kilo. Result? Most of Thane's cheap rice will migrate to Mumbai.

Or take agricultural labourers in Orissa. An adult needs at least 750 grams of rice a day. So a family of five (including children) needs around 3 kg of rice a day. Let's say they cannot manage more than 2.75 kg a day. They would still consume 82.5 kilos a month. The new “universal” would give them 35 kg of that for Rs.105. The remaining 47.5 kg, at Rs. 22 a kilo or more, would cost them well over Rs.1000. Where will they get that from?

Why do lakhs migrate each year from Kalahandi or Bolangir seeking work outside when the NREGS exists in those districts? Why do so many prefer the lesser pay of brick kilns in Andhra Pradesh? One major reason is that the NREGS restricts them to 100 days per household. In the awful brick kilns of Andhra Pradesh, every member of a five-strong family (including children) can get work for up to 180-200 days. The NREGS is restricted. The PDS is targeted. Only exploitation is universal.

Yet the debate has been over things like whether each family should have 25 or 35 kg. This is an Oliver Twist approach to food security. “Please, sir, I want some more.” Coming from within the NAC, that wrongly casts Montek Ahluwalia of the Planning Commission in the role of Bumble, or Pranab Mukherjee as Fagin. In truth, the two make Bumble and Fagin seem reckless philanthropists. But there's a bigger problem to what's going on. It happens with each sector. The sequence is the same.

The good guys create a demand for legislation. The government agrees. Next, the well-intentioned come up with a draft the government then dilutes. After which the Planning Commission declares the effort to still be unworkable. So it's thinned down again. Then the Finance Ministry says: “where's the money?” And it's watered down to an irrelevance.

What remains is something that enshrines the right of the Indian people to cross the street (when the green signal that says 'walk' is on).

Obviously it fails badly in practice. Targeting always does. That's when Bumble, Fagin, The Artful Dodger and the rest of the Dickensian crew come up with what will be their solution to every such problem: smart cards, unique identification numbers, food stamps, vouchers and cash transfers. (And GM foods to meet production targets.) That's where it's headed — towards a worse disaster.

The food security legislation in the form that now seems likely weakens and dilutes the Directive Principles of State Policy of the Indian Constitution. Those are universal, not targeted. Sure, we have to move towards making them real. But we need at every stage to ask whether the steps we take strengthen or weaken the Directive Principles. These steps on food security weaken them. Also when we act in isolation in one sector like food, we undermine the vital others. What we could do with is a comprehensive universal programme that covers nutrition, work, health and education. At one time, for one nation.

HINDU 10.8.10 PUBLIC POLICY

The right to food must be for all

The recommendation by the National Advisory Council for a revised Food Security Bill is, in essence, a proposal to enhance entitlements in some spheres while reducing them in others. The enhancement lies in the fact that the Bill will recognise, for the first time, a justiciable right to food for all persons in the yet-to-be-identified 150 'most disadvantaged' districts. The reduction lies in the fact that the revised Bill will not envisage such a right to food as a universal right, but as one restricted to a target group — in this case, to be identified by geographical targeting. This is in contravention of the letter and spirit of Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which declares that the right to food must be for all individuals (and not circumscribed by region or any other factor) and that a variety of instruments must be used to respect, protect, and fulfil that right. The most unjust feature of the proposed revised Bill will be the restriction of the right to food to people living in a fourth of India's districts and not even necessarily comprising a fourth of the country's deprived population — the world's largest mass of poor, credibly estimated to be in the region of 800 million. A malnourished person must have recourse to the same justiciable right to food wherever she or he lives. The parallel the NAC draws with the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme in this respect, that is, with a scheme begun on a pilot basis in 150 districts and then extended across the country, is misleading. The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act

offered a new entitlement. By contrast, the institutional structure for the public distribution system and other measures of food and nutrition security — notably, school meals and supplementary nutrition for mothers and young children — are already in place throughout the country.

'Rising India' is way off track in implementing the first Millennium Development Goal, that is, halving (during 2000-2015) the population in extreme poverty and hunger. The central government must wake up to the enormity of the task of ensuring adequate food and nutrition to our population. The least it can do here and now — in line with international covenants — is to make the right to food a universal entitlement. Tamil Nadu has shown that this is eminently achievable. Not committing the necessary financial resources to this end at the all-India level signals weakness of political will. It also means ideologically misconstrued social priorities. It goes without saying that the obligation to fulfil a right to food for all will require special and additional interventions and safeguards to serve the most vulnerable and food-deprived sections of our population.

How to stop the rot

Samar Halarnkar

Today, the Supreme Court of India will hear arguments in what is emerging as a national disgrace: One of the world's largest stockpiles of foodgrain going to rot and rodent because the government lacks the vision, ability and commitment to either store it properly or distribute it to the poor.

Let me recap what I reported on the front-page of this paper last month: About a third of India's grain reserves, 17.8 million metric tonnes of wheat and rice, are being stored outdoors under tarpaulin. Roughly valued at R17,000 crore, this mountain of grain is enough to feed 210 million Indians for a year. That's as much grain as France consumes in a year. There are no precise figures but at least 150 million Indians go to bed hungry every night.

Foodgrain shouldn't be out in the open, and if it is, it shouldn't be there for more than six months. Indian norms are notoriously elastic, but even we say the grain shouldn't be under tarpaulin for more than one monsoon, meaning, one year.

There are 5.17 million tonnes of wheat that has now seen two monsoons, or three, in Punjab and Haryana; 49,000 tonnes has now become "non-issuable". In plain English, it's not fit even for animal consumption. It

will get worse. Within the next seven months, India will have more than double the grain that it needs for its food security.

Bereft of ideas and serious action, the government wants to do — well, nothing.

This is the short-term argument: We've already spent money buying the grain. If we were to spend more money to sell this grain at subsidised prices to the poor, the fiscal deficit will swell. In isolation, this sounds fair: The government is striving to keep the deficit below 5.5 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for 2010-11; it was 6.7 per cent for 2009-10. It's cheaper to let the grain rot than get it to the poor, that's the argument.

Last month, an Empowered Group of Ministers decided to release some bit of the grain to the states. That doesn't mean it's reached the poor. Moreover, in the first six months of 2010, only 25 per cent of subsidised rice and wheat sent to the states was distributed.

The long-term problem is that India's grain storage is a government-controlled mess. One example: some warehouse owners get as little as 40 paise per square foot of storage from the Food Corporation of India. Others who lease land to store grain in the open get as much as three times that amount. Contracts are arbitrary, and bedeviled by corruption. There are no more than 1,800 warehouses; more than a fourth of India's grain stockpile is stored under tarpaulin. To build more storage would cost nearly R 8,000 crore.

So, if India cannot get grain to its poor and doesn't have an immediate solution to what is going to become a bigger problem, why not earn some money and pare the mountain by exporting it?

There is no better time than now. As I write this, the world's granaries are reeling from weird weather. Australia is facing what scientists are calling the perfect swarm, the biggest locust plague in 30 years,

scheduled to hatch between August and October. A decade of warm weather, new farming techniques that leave soil — and locust eggs — undisturbed, and a summer of heavy rains have combined to threaten the vast fields of the world's fourth-largest wheat exporter.

Far to the north, in Russia, the world's third-largest exporter, wheat fields have been devastated by the worst drought in 50 years, the worst heat-wave on record and wildfires. The global price of wheat surged last Thursday to a two-year high when Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin last week announced a ban on exports. Floods have hit fields in Canada, the world's second-largest exporter (the US is the largest).

Since June, a growing commodities panic has seen global wheat prices soar by nearly 80 per cent, triggering worries of food inflation and even unrest across the world. When this column went to press, some of panic had abated, with wheat prices dropping 9 per cent since last week's surge, which analysts now say was an overestimation of the impact on global supply of Russia's drought.

Still, speculation and slippery prices will continue. With growing consumption and climate malfunctions, foodgrain problems won't end any time soon.

Wheat and rice are today the main global food crops. However, it is wheat — it comprises 60 per cent of India's stocks; the rest is rice — that underpins urban civilisation. Wheat is the raw material for a variety of food and drink: from flour to cakes; pasta to couscous; beer to biscuits.

If more Indian wheat rots, it could drive global prices up further, the Associated Press reported last week, because though India's wheat isn't intended for export, it is counted in global wheat stocks.

India has banned exports of non-basmati rice and wheat since 2007, save for "humanitarian purposes", for fear it could increase food prices. But

prices have surged anyway because India can't reach food to those who need it.

To the government, the export of wheat and rice is politically sensitive. "It's impossible, it can't be done," a minister told me. Why not? On Wednesday, MPs in Parliament asked the same question.

India's grain stockpile is now an international shame. Finding a creative way of getting it to the poor is the best solution. Exporting it is another. Letting it rot isn't.

POVERTY

TRIBUNE 15.8.10 POVERTY

A nation of assets, but...

The blame for the present situation must lie squarely with the government whose ignorance about its own country is abysmal

Pushpa M. Bhargava

IF one takes multiple criteria into account, more than 50 per cent of our countrymen would score below the poverty line. According to Arjun Sengupta, MP, 77 per cent of Indians lived in less than Rs 20 a day till just a few years ago. The situation today is, comparatively speaking, probably worse.



Our score in Human Development Index is amongst the lowest in the world. Leave aside any modicum of good education, more than one-third of Indians are totally illiterate. Unfortunately, it has been rarely realised that this is in spite of India having assets that are unmatched by any country in the world. Let us look at them.

We have all the world's geo-climatic zones. Therefore, we can grow anything and everything that is grown anywhere, somewhere or the other in India. We can host winter Olympics, if we wish to, while taking the visitors to a native tropical forest, the Silent Valley, for a memorable ecological site-seeing trip.

We have a coastline of 8,000 km. It is a pity that we have not used marine biotechnology to produce extremely cheaply a large number of

drugs (such as polyunsaturated fatty acids) which are otherwise extremely expensive.

We have unmatched inland water bodies and water sources such as rivers, and rainfall — and abundant sunlight. The forests we had when we became independent and the variety of materials that the forests produced, has again been unmatched.

Our mineral resources are vast; it is just that we have not learnt to use them fairly and in the interests of the people. Our land has had the capacity to feed even two billion people. It is just that we have mercilessly exploited it to destroy this capacity. Even half-a-dozen countries have no rich animal and plant biodiversity that we have. We have not recognised this diversity as a resource.

We have the third largest scientific and technological manpower in the world consisting of some three million trained personnel. We have a high level of expertise in virtually every area of human endeavour — be it space or nuclear technology, biotechnology or making the cheapest car in the world.

No country in the world has repertoire of traditional indigenous knowledge that we have, that too, in a large variety of areas. For example, we have over 40,000 distinct plant-based traditional drug formulations, using some 10,000 different plants, for curing or containing various diseases. Even if 10 per cent of them were found to be valid, using the most stringent criteria that we apply today for validating a new drug, India's contribution to world medical and healthcare would become seminal as less than 20 new drugs come into the market every year, each costing about US \$ 1.5 billion to produce.

We have the greatest human biodiversity in the world with close to 40 major and some 450 minor ethnic groups. We have the largest number of young people anywhere in the world and will continue to have them for the next several decades. We could, in fact, with our facility with

English, become the most important supplier of manpower around the world.

We have a tradition — modern, medieval and ancient — of science and technology that is matched by very few countries in the world including developed countries and, certainly, not by any developed country.

We have had ten major revolutions pioneered by our human assets: the Green Revolution that made us sufficient in food grains; the White Revolution that made us the largest producer of milk in the world; the Information Technology Revolution making us the preferred destination for customised software; the Telecommunication Revolution that has 60 per cent of Indians own a cell phone; the Space Revolution so that we can make our own satellites and launch vehicles; the Atomic Energy Revolution so that we can produce our own nuclear fuel and reactors; the DNA Technology Revolution that led to the development of our own technology of DNA fingerprinting which is now used widely in the country; the Defence Technology Revolution so that we can make even highly sophisticated missiles ourselves; the Institutional Building Revolution so that we have today some of the world's best institutions in every area of human endeavour — be it management, technological education or research in modern biology; and the Drug Revolution so that a large number of drugs even today cost in India less than one per cent of what they would in the United States.

We are one of the most ancient civilisations with an unbroken history of 5,000 years. In fact, we have history that very few countries have but, unfortunately, no sense of history. Our variety in every area is unmatched so that the only statement that is true about India would be that no statement about India is either true or false.

We have the longest and the most varied tradition of beauty expressed through a mind-boggling variety of arts, crafts, music and dance to give just a few examples. Art has been a part of everyday life of Indians for

centuries till the compelling desire of the middle class to copy the West put a break on its dissemination and development.

Family and friends mean a great deal to us. The closeness of social relations and social bonding are amongst India's greatest assets. Ours has been a highly value-based society, unfortunately corrupted by degenerated politics. For example, our tradition of hospitality is unmatched. Travelling by car, this writer and his wife had on occasions spent a night in an unknown village. We were always given a place to sleep and food for which no charge was levied. Perhaps, our nameless host had gone hungry to feed us. We are the world's largest democracy and our Constitution is amongst the best except that we do not follow it, just as we do not stick to democratic values.

Where else in the world one would find all of the above at one place? Therefore, the blame for the present situation in India must lie squarely with our government — exceptions granted — the ignorance of which about its own country would appear abysmal. Not surprisingly, it is concerned almost exclusively with those who are governing us rather than with those whom it is supposed to govern.

In fact, there is no problem in the country for which a solution cannot be found within the framework of our own assets — if only we would recognise and use them rather than seek a solution by becoming an appendage to powers elsewhere that cannot match us in the totality of assets that has been enumerated above.

The country is currently paying a much higher price for the ignorance of its rulers and of the so-called rich and the powerful than for the ignorance of the poor, the unprivileged, the uneducated and the ruled.

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