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# **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

**‘Asia has the potential to drive global economic recovery’**

The Inquirer

**With above 7 per cent economic growth and a handsome investment in social sector schemes to enhance the condition of its poor, India along with its other Asian peers can be the driver global economic recovery, especially when other major economies of the world are either faltering or just plodding through.**

But, Asia as a whole can also be hit if it does not take care of some of its downside risks to growth, tells Noeleen Hayzer, Under Secretary General of the United Nations and the first woman executive secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (Escap), Annapurna Singh of Deccan Herald in an interview after the launch of Escap subregional office for South and South-West Asia in New Delhi. Excerpts.

Unrelenting European debt woes knocking at its door alongwith home grown problems of lower economic growth and the government’s policy inertia, is India running out of options on economic front and unable to play any role in bringing the world out of the present crisis?

India is still having a growth rate of above 7 per cent, which is quite high when we see from the global perspective. At the time when the developed economies are not showing any signs of speedy recovery, India’s growth story is quite satisfying. Yes, there are certain internal issues, but they also bear reflection of the global situation as a whole.

I agree, there are certain issues with which India has to deal on its own. If it is able to deal with these issues, it can perfectly be the driver of

growth for all other economies in the region and outside with such good growth rate and strong fundamentals.

The current global economic crisis is impacting almost every country. India, came out unscathed in 1997 and also in 2008. But, this time do you think Indian economy is going to be impacted for a long time as a fall out of the present situation?

The 1997 crisis was largely an Asian crisis. So the export markets of Europe and America were not really affected and we were able to trade with these countries. Our exports had not taken a hit. But, this time the crisis has started with the developed world. It is really their crisis and it has spread to others. Now, the global economy is so interlinked and so interdependent today that everyone seems to be affected.

But at the same time, Asia has been the centre of stability and in fact it has the potential to drive global economic recovery and to rescue other nations from their dire state. But, also we have to keep in mind that this recovery is fragile, and it is also uneven. Therefore, Asia could be hit if we do not take care of the downside risks. And, here we cannot depend on external sources to pull us out of the crisis. We need to look for new drivers of growth within our own region. Build our own market, generate demand within the region. There is tremendous opportunity to look at regional cooperation. We should also look at a cooperative financial architecture in the region.

Do you mean a financial union on the lines of the European Union? But, seeing their experience can we think of going that way?

Not exactly on the lines of the European Union, but yes, some kind of cooperation within the countries of the region. That's what we are looking at. We are also looking towards having some kind of a common fund, which we can pool from during the time of any crisis. But, right now we are only concentrating on financial cooperation.

If you were to name two things that can make India's growth story more durable and more permanent, what would they be?

Growth with sustainability, and investment in women. You cannot get the economies going if you do not invest in women. We need to ensure that our women workforce are better absorbed. We have to look at their involvement in the labour force. That they are protected from external shocks, they are employed and are part of productive economic system.

Also, we cannot live in a way that brings about a large gap between the rich and the poor. Growth with sustainable development is important. We cannot just think of only high growth. The fruits of this growth will have to percolate down to the needy, the poor. And this can be done through investing in our social services, basic services.

We need to ensure that when we urbanise, we do not create slums. We get better housing to our people. We need to ensure more and more people have jobs and they move up the value chain. We need to have better productivity and also better distribution. The growth has to be holistic.

## **CRISIS OF COMPETENCE**

### **- Economic policy in India has lost its focus**

S.L. Rao

Economic policy in India, especially in the last two years, has been unfocused on the real issues and instead has diverted attention to more peripheral ones. The separation of political power from the leader of the government has made things much worse. The National Advisory Council is the ultimate policymaker, particularly on all domestic economic policy issues, not the cabinet; that is, the leader of the Congress, not the prime minister. The NAC is composed of many extraordinary and compassionate people, with sympathy for the poor and vulnerable, but little capability for thinking through the mechanics for policy implementation. They designed thoughtful programmes that have, despite being poorly implemented, benefited many millions of the very poor.

However, the United Progressive Alliance government's official economic policymakers have not quite grasped the implications of the phrase, 'inclusive growth', or of concern for the '*aam aadmi*'. The NAC is all for inclusion. That led to the national rural employment guarantee scheme, the national rural health mission, education for all and food for all. These were unique programmes in India and where they reached the targeted populations, they were of great benefit. Because the NAC is headed by the Congress president, more powerful than the prime minister, NAC programmes were launched nationally, speedily, without testing and with few budget constraints.

The NAC programmes were not accompanied by a tightening of other government expenditures. Inflation resulted. The deputy chairman of the Planning Commission (I remember) responded that inflation was

bad but nothing should be done that would adversely affect growth. So for two years he and the government left the control of inflation to the Reserve Bank of India. The RBI used monetary policies of higher interest rates and a squeeze on liquidity. The liquidity squeeze was a failure since large inflows of volatile foreign institutional investment and non-resident Indian deposits kept supplementing the rupee supply. Interest cuts did not dampen inflation which was driven by a relatively slow growth of supply, not by galloping demand. Industry suffered because of rising capital costs and declining demand as in the costs of borrowing for housing. Cars, white goods and so on became very expensive. Investment began to suffer. Growth of industrial production fell sharply.

During the second half of 2010, the world was hit by the financial crises of many European Union countries. The instability of the euro led to a rush to the dollar despite the dire straits of the American economy. The dollar value rose like a phoenix. The rupee fell in relation to the dollar. Fund inflows into India were hurt by the sense that India was not in control of its macro economy. The rupee's precipitous fall by 15 per cent within four months raised the rupee value of foreign borrowings and interest on debts. Corporate results were hit, import costs rose, affecting margins and raising product prices, and industrial production fell sharply. Power shortages owing to shortfalls in coal and gas and humongous mining scams hit industrial production further. High fiscal deficit, rising national debt, falling corporate performance, the falling rupee, a high current account deficit (as imports stayed high in rupees), a decline in exports which were booming only a few months earlier, and declining capital investments added up to a set of adverse signals that affected investor confidence in the economy. The indecisiveness of the government and the onslaughts of the Opposition parties added to the perception of instability in India.

Thus it is not the global economy that is to blame for India's present

economic plight. It only made it much worse. It was the inability of the government to manage the macro economy. The government would not recognize that its expenditures were too high, as was its deficit, and trusted its optimistic growth forecasts to add to tax revenues and cut the deficit. Instead, growth fell, as did tax collections. It was also generally accepted that a good part of government expenditure on social programmes and on infrastructure was wasted or stolen, but the government was doing little to plug the holes.

This is not a criticism of the social programmes of the NAC. They were important and, to the extent that they reached target populations, very useful. But fiscal management required that the money be spent properly and other cuts made to keep the macro-economic balance. There was no attempt to tighten the weak administrative apparatus and enhance individual accountability of bureaucrats at all levels, that is, of those who were responsible for the spending. This was despite a national revulsion against corruption, manifested by the Anna Hazare agitation.

The root causes for our wayward economy go back to the reforms from 1991 when the urge to cut deficits led to cuts in investment in agriculture that lasted over 10 years, and a freeze on social expenditures, especially on health and education. Reforms also did nothing to tighten the delivery and the administrative system.

The more immediate failure was in the government's inability to tackle the fiscal situation that had been behind the persistent inflation. The finance minister who let this happen is most experienced in that portfolio and is also politically very astute. He and his staff must have been aware of the consequences of fiscal indiscipline and the corruption in administration. But he went with the flow, not wanting to appear to oppose the party leader and the NAC and also not be seen as acting in ways that could set back ambitious growth targets of the

prime minister.

Inflation in double digits, declining production, GDP growth at a record low level, stock market and rupee collapse, rising deficits and rising foreign debts as well as current account deficits, all happening at the same time is unusual for us. At some point soon we will see restrictions on imports, tax benefits on increased industrial production, more price controls, more incentives to — than just freedom from — capital gains taxes and anonymous remittances as at present to foreign investment, incentives for bringing black money and illegal foreign holdings back to India, and the many other schemes that we saw in Indira Gandhi's days as prime minister.

With national elections in two years, individual members of the Congress must be very worried about an electoral thrashing if the present situation is not reversed. There is bound to be a groundswell already against the present prime minister and a growing demand for a strong and astute politician to lead the country and the party. No member of the Nehru-Gandhi family fits this bill. Could the finance minister have thought this through and is he waiting for the call from the party?

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## AT A MOMENT OF CHANGE

### - The UPA government is remarkably out of sorts

Swapan Dasgupta

It is striking that economists have joined hands with politicians to practise sophistry. Earlier this week, a British Treasury official, Sir Stephen Nickell, expressed hope that this year's so far exceptionally mild winter in his country turns out to be as severe as last year's. Sir Stephen's wish had a tangential connection with the High Street retailers who have been frustrated by the slow sales of winter wear this season. In the main, however, his calculations had more to do with statistical jugglery. A severe winter invariably leads to slowdown and disruption which tell on the quarterly results. However, the wintry bedlam also leads to a rapid catching-up process once the snow melts and the sleet is washed away. What Sir Stephen was thus really hoping for was that one dreadful month of depressed or even negative growth is followed by a much better performance the following month. As *The Daily Telegraph* helpfully explained, the Nickell logic was based on the jugglery that "[O]ne dreadful month and the next slightly positive don't count cumulatively as a recession".

The Indian economy, despite all its shortcomings, is nowhere as precariously poised as Britain's. The awesome 8 per cent growth of the gross domestic product may have fallen to below 7 per cent, but we are far from uttering the dreaded R-word. At best, the effervescent deputy chairman of the Planning Commission, Montek Singh Ahluwalia, may have admitted to seriously miscalculating the persistence of high inflation, but his *mea culpa* was so discreetly buried in the inside pages that there was not even a token demand for his head to roll. Consequently, the need for economists and economic advisers to engage in statistical jugglery to show that they were right after all was less pressing.

In India, economists are rarely, if ever, charged with quackery; the fall guy for economic mismanagement is inevitably the politician. The commerce minister, Anand Sharma, who was looking terribly self-important last week and choosing his words with a great deal of thought, is a much deflated figure this week after the Bengali Brahmin duo comprising the finance minister, Pranab Mukherjee, and the West Bengal chief minister, Mamata Banerjee, decided that foreign direct investment in multi-brand retail could wait a more favourable constellation of stars and planets. The prime minister, Manmohan Singh, emerged from the 10-day storm that exposed the vulnerabilities of his government with his *maun vrat* strictly intact.

India must be a novel democracy for a political crisis to come and go with the three key figures of the dispensation — the prime minister, the United Progressive Alliance chairperson, Sonia Gandhi, and the designated heir apparent, Rahul Gandhi — to emerge without saying a word on the subject.

Yet, lots of people said lots of things and the social media went viral with uncharitable remarks about the silent triumvirate that governs India silently. Was that the reason why the multi-portfolio minister, Kapil Sibal, entered the arena and, without any compelling reason, demanded that the anarchic social media be subject to political censorship?

To many economists the logic may have seemed flawless: if you can't outdo China in the economic race, you can at least start emulating it politically. To the less intellectually endowed, however, the timing seemed characteristically Sibal-esque. During the brief storm over retail trade liberalization, the Congress (if not the UPA as a whole) appeared to be recovering its composure and getting over its state of rudderless inertia. There was evidence to show that a section of the alienated middle classes welcomed the move to liberate the consumer from the distributional inefficiencies that contributed to exceptionally high food prices. The media, unrelentingly hostile since the Commonwealth

Games scandal broke in August 2011, also seemed in a mood to be charitable towards the reformist impulses of the government. Even the letter-writing Eminent Persons Group seemed inclined to be supportive. And, more important, the principal Opposition party which had backed retail reform in its 2004 manifesto appeared cussed and blindly obstructionist and too willing to obliterate the difference between itself and the Communist Party of India (Marxist).

In such a situation, in stepped Sibal with his dossier of grievances against netizens who are naturally irreverent and insolent. The result is that the Congress is back to exactly where it was before the cabinet met last month to approve FDI in retail with the added stigma of intolerance attached to it.

Not since Charan Singh waged civil war against Morarji Desai and brought the Janata Party edifice crashing down in 1979 has India witnessed a government that is so utterly out of sorts. The problem stems only partially from an Opposition that is hell-bent on disrupting Parliament for the most trivial of reasons. At the heart of the growing dysfunctionality is the fact that the Congress no longer seems entirely convinced that the system of dyarchy that saw the UPA through in its first term is working. There is still personal respect for the prime minister. But his clumsy political management and his deadpan style of communication have convinced many of the party faithful that the next election is as good as lost unless there is a shake-up.

By instinct the average Congress activist is wedded to the idea of dynastic succession. In 2004, when Sonia's "inner voice" told her to refuse the prime minister's post, the party accepted it grudgingly and with the realization that the 'Regency' would facilitate the political apprenticeship of Rahul, the chosen heir. Since Manmohan Singh had no political base and was disinclined to create one for himself, the interim arrangement was accepted.

What has changed? First, the economic situation is no longer conducive to the mega-welfare style of governance that came with 9 per cent growth. The resources to fund Sonia's lady bountiful act no longer exist, and the cost of uninterrupted profligacy is a mounting fiscal deficit, a declining rupee and a possible balance of payments crisis. The Congress is in a limbo between a preferred recklessness and the countervailing pulls of responsible governance. Its instincts favour rolling back the reforms initiated between 1991 and 2004, yet it lacks the political will to pursue the path of counter-revolution in a country where the majority of the electorate will be below the age of 40.

Secondly, Sonia's health problems — still a State secret — are a source of worry. This is a subject that is still not discussed openly but Congress leaders are aware that the issue of succession can no longer be put off indefinitely. Earlier it was imagined that a good showing in the Uttar Pradesh assembly elections next summer — by which is meant the Congress's ability to finish third in the four-cornered race — would be sufficient to catapult Rahul to the top job. Yet, as the election approaches, there is insufficient confidence in the Congress's ability to break new ground in India's largest state. A bad result will leave the Congress even more disoriented.

Finally — and this is the truth that dare not speak its name — Congress supporters are worried that there is nothing else going for Rahul apart from pedigree. His aloofness and unbroken banality has been masked by careful handling but doesn't appear to be yielding the necessary electoral dividends — Bihar being a prime example. It is not that Rahul is without charm but he lacks charisma. His only hope in 2014 lies in the Bharatiya Janata Party scoring many self-goals and putting forward someone completely inappropriate as its prime ministerial candidate. Rahul can perhaps win but only by default. He is no longer the 'youth icon' as he is made out to be; he is merely the face of the dynasty.

# **INTERNATIONAL RELATION**

**Stalling Parliament  
It sends out a wrong signal**

**Kuldip Nayar**

INDIA is the only country in South Asia where democracy has survived in its classical form. It has got disfigured in Pakistan because the military, not the elected government, has the last word. In Bangladesh, the perpetual boycott by the opposition, this time by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), has lessened Parliament's credibility, and in Sri Lanka, the confused opposition has affected its representative character. Nepal is yet to settle down to face the basic norms of parliamentary democracy.

Unfortunately, the political parties in India have come to believe that stalling Parliament is the best way of expressing their opposition to legislation or any other action of the government. The Congress party did it in the late 90s and early 2000 when the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was in power. The BJP has adopted the same methods today. The Congress is repenting over what it did then as the BJP would do if and when it came to power. Not allowing Parliament to function has somehow become part of their political lexicon.

Since the proceedings of both Houses are watched throughout the country, the non-functioning of Parliament which sends out a generally negative signal. Many wonder the utility of Parliament, and some suggest the Presidential form of government prevailing in the US and France. The worst fallout is the mood of uncertainty that is sweeping the country.

I do not want to make politicians a whipping boy for India going downhill. They may be more to blame than others like the judiciary, the government and the media. All are naked in the bath. The point to find out is why a nation which has largely followed democratic methods since 1950, when the Constitution was adopted, is turning violent in its action and the language that people use.

A slap on the face of Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar remains as unacceptable as was the shoe thrown at Home Minister P. Chidambaram. Both are violent expressions which neither the Constitution nor the country's ethos allow. The "Shining India" suddenly appears to be receding into shadows. The economy continues to register a slowdown and governance is practically non-existent.

No official wants to take any decision, much less quickly. HRD Minister Kapil Sibal rationalises that officials are afraid because they will be taken to task if the decision turns out to be wrong. Officials would have to get over such an apprehension because they are not to blame if the decision is not motivated. All this does not say much about the country's health. So much so, it looks it is coming apart from the seams.

If I were to point out one lapse, I would say that politics or, for that matter, every segment of society has shed morality. The realisation that certain things are not done or that wrong methods are not employed is not there anymore. Therefore, no political party has any compunction in doing anything to get what it wants, through peaceful methods, if possible, or the use of violence, if necessary. The Lakshman Rekha does not exist any more and the tendency to hit below the belt is not only common but also considered permissible.

Had the rot been confined only to politicians the nation might have saved its equilibrium. Every activity has been affected. The media, puffed up by a sense of self-righteousness, has deteriorated to the extent that you can publish anything on any page in the news columns by giving a price (paid news). But this does not call for any control over the

media. India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, said: "I would have a completely free Press with all the dangers involved in the wrong use of that freedom than a suppressed or a regulated Press."

The judiciary, thumping its back for independence, can be generally "managed" according to eminent lawyers and former judges. It is an open secret that the clients know which judge has what type of predilection and the price involved. Cases are accordingly preferred before a particular bench. Some judgments astound you and they suggest that there is something that does not meet the eye. No one criticises the judges fearing the contempt laws. Thus, the veneer of respectability stays.

The bureaucracy, which runs the administration, is so divided hierarchically that the right hand does not know what the left is doing. Joint secretaries and their seniors cannot be touched without the permission of ministers who are mostly corrupt. The Supreme Court gave a judgment to stop the practice, called single directive, but Parliament restored it. An appeal against the new law is awaiting the court's verdict. All parties know from their experience how handy these joint secretaries and secretaries are.

Take the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in retail. Ministers and bureaucrats decided on the step, worked out on the details and announced its introduction to India without consulting anyone outside the government. The pronouncement was made when Parliament was in session, not in any House, but through a Press statement. Rightly, all parties, including the Congress's ruling allies, were up in arms. The Prime Minister consented to have an all-party meeting to explain the FDI in retail but this was like adding insult to the injury.

Nothing came out of it. Why couldn't the meeting be convened earlier even if the government was determined not to brook any opposition? And how does the government's prestige suffer if the FDI takes

precedence over a discussion on the price rise or black money? What havoc the FDI in retail will cause is another story.

A senior Congress minister's remark that "Where is India going?" is pertinent. But his party is more responsible than the Opposition because it is ruling the country. The minister, used by the party to sort out knotty problems, will concede that a consensus is the only way to govern. The ruling Congress has to lessen the distance from the Opposition. When the BJP and the Communists are on the same page, there is something wrong in Dr Manmohan Singh's policies. Assembly elections in five states may have influenced the government and the Opposition not to have a meeting point. Surely, India is more important than that.

The stalling Parliament is not a good precedent for the neighbouring countries where the democratic system is already under sufferance. New Delhi feels good when the countries in South Asia applaud it for certain steps. How will the common man on the streets of Lahore, Dhaka, Colombo and Kathmandu feel when he sees that Parliament in the largest democracy in the world does not function day after day?

# **POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT**

TIMES OF INDIA 14.12.11 POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT

## **The common man's voice**

Abhay K

*Creation of a global parliamentary assembly at the UN would be in India's interest*

A new digital age has dawned. Today, our planet has over five billion mobile phones, most of which will soon be able to access the internet. Facebook, Twitter, [YouTube](#) and other channels of [new media](#) have fundamentally changed the landscape of global information flow, and turned the whole world into a connected community. This empowerment of individuals via new media can now enable us to make the people stakeholders in the United Nations system along with governments and non-governmental organisations.

Recent events in the Arab world and [Occupy Wall Street](#) protests all across the world demand that India and the world should take calls for global democracy more seriously. A second chamber at the UN - directly elected by the people across the world as a new subsidiary organ of the [United Nations General Assembly](#) (UNGA) - can make the world's citizens stakeholders in the UN system and global governance.

An international campaign that promotes this idea has been endorsed by over 800 serving parliamentarians from more than 100 countries. The parliament of Argentina, the [European Parliament](#), the Pan-African Parliament and [the national](#) assembly of [Seychelles](#) are among those that have already called for the creation of a second peoples' chamber at the UN.

In the UNGA, India has just one seat and so do, for instance, [Samoa](#) and Tuvalu, both of which have a population of just a few thousands. Though there is nothing wrong in

the one state, one vote principle followed at the UNGA, it neither reflects the great differences in the population size or economic weight of the different nation states, nor recognise individual citizens as a relevant building block of the international system. This major lacuna in the present Westphalian world order could be overcome by creating a directly elected United Nations Parliamentary Assembly (UNPA).

A UNPA, in principle, could be easily established under Article 22 of the UN Charter without making any amendments to the Charter as is required for adding seats to the UN Security Council, for example. Initially, the role of the UNPA would be to debate matters of policy priority and make recommendations to the UNGA. At a later stage, it could exercise parliamentary control over the UN secretariat as well as the UN special agencies including the [World Bank](#) and the [International Monetary Fund](#).

The UNPA's purpose would be to facilitate policy on genuinely global matters. The democratic and representative nature of the UNPA, vesting it with unprecedented legitimacy, will ensure that this new global body acts as a unifying force at the global level and does not become just another white elephant in the UN system.

In the beginning, members of the UNPA could be elected by the parliaments of the 193 UN member states, or regional elected bodies such as the European Parliament. But at a later stage, its members should be directly elected by the world's citizens. The UNPA will probably have about 800 elected members, distributed on the basis of degressive proportionality with each member state having at least two seats.

India, being the second largest country in the world in terms of population size (and soon to be the largest), should have the second largest number of seats in a UNPA. Indian representatives in the UNPA would be a formidable force and could become a source of great influence for India in shaping global affairs. This would complement India's global influence as a permanent member of the UN Security Council (whenever India becomes a permanent member).

India's historic commitment to world peace and the establishment of a world federation to achieve this goal is clearly reflected in the Quit India [Resolution](#) endorsed by

the All-India Congress Committee on August 8, 1942, of which Gandhi and Nehru were key architects. The creation of a UNPA would be a realistic and pragmatic first step in this direction. Already, 38 Indian parliamentarians endorse the creation of a UNPA as a subsidiary body of the UNGA.

It should be noted that a poll conducted by BBC in 2007 showed that 63.8% of respondents in India had a favourable opinion regarding the establishment of a global parliamentary assembly and only 5.3% didn't like the idea. Supporting the proposal would thus not only serve India's interests, it would also be in line with the wishes of the vast majority of voters.

India itself is a laboratory for democracy on a large scale and thus can offer its extensive experience in building a workable UNPA. It is also the second largest contributor to the UN Democracy Fund and was a founding member of the Community of Democracies. Promoting a UNPA would fit well into India's international support of democracy. By actively advocating the establishment of a UNPA, it could capture the world's imagination as it did when it strongly advocated the end of colonialism and apartheid from the 1940s through the 1960s. India's lead role in the creation of a UNPA would be in its national interest as well as in line with the vision of Gandhi, Nehru and Tagore.

## The case against division

**Badri Narayan**

SIMPLY put, the proposal for the division of Uttar Pradesh into four units is an exercise for the multiplication of 'lal battis' (red beacon lights).

The ever multiplying breed of politicians, who are entering the trade, so to speak, for no greater reason than to acquire a 'lal batti', have to be accommodated in the ministry or the ever-increasing number of commissions and corporations funded by public money seemingly for this express purpose alone.

But even in a vast state like Uttar Pradesh, there cannot be more than one Women's, SC ST, Backward Castes or any other commission through which favorites can be given the benefits of power. With the magic wand of the division of the state, the numbers of such offices multiply manifold.

Recently a team of Govind Ballabh Pant Social Science Institute conducted a survey in Bundelkhand and Purvanchal, which went on to confirm what is already well-known. The 'aam admi' wants development - division or no division. He is still pre-occupied with mundane 'dal-roti' questions of how to light the evening 'chulha', arrange for a 'chappar' over his head, a dhoti, some kind of education for children in government schools and affordable medical care.

The division of UP has never been an emotional issue of cultural or linguistic identity, having a vast number of supporters at the grassroots level. Just look at the forces that have spearheaded the feeble demand for separate states in recent times. Who do Rashtriya Lok Dal's Ajit Singh, Bundelkhand's Congress leader, actor turned politician Raja Bundela or Lok Manch's Amar Singh represent? At best they



represent the kulak peasants and crony capitalist forces and not the marginalised farmer or artisans who form the bulk of the state's agrarian economy.

Development requires vision and political will rather than smaller size or more resources. Take the contrasting profiles that are emerging from Bihar and Jharkhand. Bihar was said to be left with only 'Lalu, aloo (potatoes) and baalu (sand) and Jharkhand was to become the more developed state with the richest mineral resources in the country and with an enviable industrial base.

However, ten years down the road, Jharkhand is a state beleaguered with corruption, mining scams and political intrigues while Bihar with its limited resources is picking up on the development front and reasserting its lost glory.

In the present political culture across parties having a presence in Uttar Pradesh, there appears to be little to cheer about even if the new states come into existence. At the moment there is no dynamic personality visible in any of these regions who has a vision for the region beyond the lal batti, battery of SUVs and state-sponsored personal security.

The number of ministers of the Mayawati government facing charges of misappropriation of MLA's development fund, encroachment of gram sabha land and general misuse of office for personal gains needs no recounting. More than the division of the state, what Uttar Pradesh needs is a shift in paradigm towards good governance. The state needs leaders who can be the change they want to see in society.

As for what needs to be done, there is no better tool than the talisman given by Mahatma Gandhi of recalling the face of the poorest and the weakest man [woman] whom one may have seen, and asking if the step one contemplates is going to be of any use to him [her]. Will he [she] gain anything by it? Will it restore him [her] to a position from which he or she can have control over his [her] own life and destiny?

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## **Small is not always beautiful**

### **Dr Ramesh Dixit**

**REORGANISATION** of any existing unit is a major policy decision having multi-dimensional ramifications. Economic viability, territorial or geographical feasibility, cultural cohesiveness, demographic composition, and, above all, administrative convenience must be accorded due weightage before any such decision is reached. Proper public debate through relevant democratic fora should precede such pronouncements.

The sole criterion for creation of new states should be the removal of regional imbalances, economic development and overall progress of the people.

The Indian experience with smaller states suggest that smaller states are as likely to become green pastures for the corrupt nexus of politicians, bureaucrats and the corporate houses as the bigger states. The constant dependence of some of the smaller states on central subsidies as in the case of many north-eastern states also raises some concerns about the efficacy of smaller states.

Another concern would be whether smaller states are in fact more vulnerable to political instability and horse trading as any corporate house, multinational corporation or politically ambitious business tycoon with the ability to spend a thousand odd crores of rupees may conveniently convert a small state into a vassal or banana state. Exclusive rights over mines, minerals, forests and water bodies are already up for grabs for the highest bidders.

The performance of smaller states like Jharkhand and Chhatisgarh has also not been very encouraging, either economically or socially. It is said that Jharkhand and Chhatisgarh have attained more coverage in recent times for Madhu Koda and the Maoist insurgency respectively.

It is reasons such as the ones given above that make us sceptical about the wisdom in the decision to partition the state of U.P. as taken by the U.P. Chief Minister.

I would say that this decision is only a political gimmick intended to divert popular attention away from the failures of the present ruling party in U.P. in almost every sector of governance.

Another important aspect for consideration in the matter is that in Uttar Pradesh, unlike in the case of Telangana or Vidarbha or Gorkhaland, there has been no comparable popular grass root movement demanding the partition of the state.

However, the Central Government must constitute the second state reorganisation commission to consider and examine the demands for new states on the basis of empirical study of the aspiration of the people of various regions.

The first state reorganisation commission was set up in 1953 under the chairmanship of Mr. Fazal Ali and Mr. Hirdaya Nath Kunjuru and Sardar K. M. Pannikar as its members and recommended the creation of new states on linguistic basis. Today, however, development and economic viability may afford a better parameter for reorganisation of Indian States.

### **Easier to manipulate small states**

**Dr Girish**

**THE** demand to divide Uttar Pradesh into separate states has been raised off and on for over two decades. But such a demand has never received popular support as the division of Uttar Pradesh has never been a people's issue.

Politicians periodically raise it to serve their own selfish, political goals. The latest attempt by BSP supremo Mayawati is nothing more than an attempt to divert popular attention from her government's failures.

The argument that smaller states accelerate the pace of development isn't true. Development depends on the political will of the ruling class, equitable distribution and utilisation of resources across regions. Merely carving out small states is certainly not enough.

To create the basic infrastructure in the newly created states will require massive investment. Such huge resources diverted to set up fresh infrastructure would impact the availability of resources for overall development.

The proposed Bundelkhand, Purvanchal and Awadh Pradesh are relatively backward compared to the prosperous Pashchim Pradesh. At present the revenue generated from the better off region helps the development of the regions lagging behind. Disturbing this arrangement would make the new states vulnerable and dependent on the generosity of the central government. The smaller states will also suffer from the political tug of war if the central government and the state government are not of the same political party.

It is also misleading to claim that industrialisation will pick up with the creation of smaller states. Under the neo-liberal policies governments are selling off existing industries and they simply can't be expected to promote the setting up of new ones.

In the private sector, entrepreneurs invest according to their priorities. Governments forcibly acquire land from farmers and hand them over to industrialists at throw-away prices. Even after acquiring land at such dirt cheap prices, industries either never come up or, even if they do, often close down due to various reasons. The land is then sold off at huge profits, leaving the farmers high and dry. The example of Noida and Greater Noida is there for all to see.

The creation of Uttarakhand, Jharkhand and Chattisgarh also demonstrates that if anything has grown unchecked in these states, it is rampant corruption. Capitalists find it easier to 'manage' the governments of these smaller states. Controlling the numerically small state assemblies on the strength of their money power is relatively easier just as pushing through legislations in their favour.

The mineral wealth, land and forest resources of these smaller states have become vulnerable to the whims and fancies of such crony capitalism. Former Jharkhand CM Madhu Koda is in jail for the Rs 4000-crores graft, money

laundering and mining scam.

Correspondingly, the strength of the people's movement to raise their voice against such a sell out diminishes after divisions. Several attempts have been made in the past to divide the people of Uttar Pradesh in the name of religion, caste and now a fresh effort is being made to segregate them on geographical lines.

Why should Uttar Pradesh's stature in the country be undermined for the idiosyncrasies and unbridled political ambitions of a certain politician or political party? There is, after all, hardly any hard evidence that such divisions improve the lot of the common people.

## **Congress just doesn't get it**

Rajesh Singh

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### **The Government will have to finally accept the 'sense of the House' on Lokpal Bill**

Some people never wake up. They live in a world of fantasy that is created by their own fallacious interpretations and misreading of situations that are stark enough for any bipartisan mind to understand. Thus, their action in response to these situations is inevitably flawed, and contributes to further complicating matters when the need is to de-escalate and reconcile. In an attempt to be too clever by half, they end up with egg on their face. This is what is happening with the Congress-led UPA as it confronts a combined Opposition over the allegation that the Government has backed out of its commitment that it had made to bring before Parliament an effective Lokpal Bill.

The Congress is primarily responsible for betraying the 'sense of the House' that Parliament expressed when it adopted a resolution for a strong Lokpal institution. Principal among the points in the resolution was that the entire bureaucracy would be covered under the Bill and that there would be provisions for the establishment of a citizens' charter to address the grievances of the people who fail to get the desired services from Government departments. The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Lokpal has prepared a report that excludes both these points. Of course, the report is full of dissent from members who belong to the Opposition, but more importantly, there are also a few Congress members who are said to have protested against the exclusion. The parliamentary panel headed by Congress's Abhishek Manu Singhvi, has completely disregarded the popular sentiment expressed not just in

Parliament but also within the Standing Committee. And that has led to the fresh round of agitation.

Anna Hazare's warning of a prolonged campaign against the Government notwithstanding, the Congress this time has to also face an openly united Opposition on the issue. Prominent leaders of BJP and its allies in the NDA, CPI(M) and CPI, besides others such as TDP, Samajwadi Party and BJD, shared the platform at Jantar Mantar during the anti-corruption activist's one-day sit-in on December 11. This is the first time that Opposition leaders have come out in the open and endorsed the anti-corruption campaign. Until now, the Congress had been trying to find political cover by propagating that Mr Hazare was subverting parliamentary democracy in bypassing the political system, ridiculing politicians and seeking to impose his will on representatives elected by the people. This was an attempt by the Congress to unite the Opposition against the movement. But Mr Hazare has obviously seen through the game-plan. He invited political leaders at the December 11 event. They came, they saw and they assured the gathering that they were with him on most of the contentious issues.

The Congress's troubles have thus manifested multiple times. And it is not just on the twin issues of including the entire bureaucracy and citizens' charter within the Lokpal ambit. The Opposition leaders who attended the December 11 sit-in and addressed the gathering spoke in one voice in favour of bringing the Prime Minister within the Lokpal's ambit. This is something that the Congress has strongly resisted, considering that Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, who presides over a Government that is steeped in corruption scandals, could be hauled up for an explanation. The Opposition leaders left no scope for ambiguity, and indicated that they were set to challenge the Congress-led Government in Parliament if the Lokpal Bill is going to be what the Standing Committee has designed it should be.

But that is not all. Party leaders who attended the December 11 event also slammed the Government for seeking to keep the Central Bureau of Investigation out of the Lokpal's jurisdiction. As one speaker pointed out, the investigating arm of the CBI that handles allegations of corruption against Government servants should be brought under Lokpal. Other speakers too pointed to the political misuse of the investigating agency, and said it could end only after the CBI reported to an independent authority such as the Lokpal. Given the manner in which the Congress has been using the CBI to fix or bail-out political leaders — the incidents of such misuse have been reported umpteen times to need further elaboration — the demand is entirely valid.

The ever-growing resentment and opposition against it is bad news for the Congress at a time when it faces elections in various States next year. It is entirely possible that Team Anna will campaign against the Congress and its allies in the Assembly elections, complicating things for the UPA which is already faced with a resurgent Opposition. But, apart from the immediate political fallout, the Congress should worry about — if it still considers the need to worry when it should — a further loss of image. How is a party that is consistently losing credibility, going to continue leading a coalition with any amount of success?

Of course, the Congress has entirely itself to blame for the fresh round of crisis. After the resolution expressing the 'sense of the House' had been adopted by Parliament, the people had begun to look with optimism at the party and the Government. They had begun to appreciate the Congress's stand that Mr Hazare cannot always keep pushing his agenda in a dictatorial manner. It then appeared that Mr Hazare's sheen was wearing off. Had the Congress been rightly guided, it would have seized the opportunity and neutralised the activist by ensuring that its members in the parliamentary panel piloted strong provisions for the proposed legislations.

The brilliant idea of Congress members in the panel to promote Mr Rahul Gandhi's agenda of making the Lokpal a constitutional body, has left the party more vulnerable than before. There is perhaps merit in the idea as a long-term solution. But the issue here is not one of merit, but of intention. The point of making the Lokpal a constitutional body has never been a matter of debate. Where then was the need to introduce the subject when there are so many other unresolved points that need to be sorted out? It was a calculated move by the Congress to deflect people's attention from the desire to have a Lokpal Bill in the form the people of the country want. That cunning strategy has, unfortunately for the Congress, boomeranged, with Mr Gandhi himself under direct attack from the anti-corruption activist for trying to derail the process to have an effective Lokpal Bill passed in the ongoing Winter Session of Parliament.

Not having learned any lessons from its past dealings with the anti-corruption movement, and showing absolutely no indication of doing so this time as well, the Congress is doomed to ignominy in the coming days. No amount of effort by its spin doctors, both within the party and in the media, is going to restore the credibility that it has been losing in huge lumps with consistent regularity. It can still redeem the situation by accepting the Opposition demands to include the Prime Minister and the lower bureaucracy in the Lokpal's ambit, and free the Central Bureau of Investigation from political control. Will it?

## **Rahul lacks sincerity**

Surya Prakash

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**Despite trying hard for seven years to find his place in politics, the scion of the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty is getting nowhere.**

It is now seven years since Mr Rahul Gandhi made a formal entry into national politics after successfully contesting the Lok Sabha election from Amethi constituency in Uttar Pradesh in 2004. Three years later, he was formally inducted into the Congress 'high command' when he was appointed general secretary of the party. Over these years Mr Gandhi has been trying to find his place in politics, but the political dividends accruing to the party do not appear to be commensurate with his labour. Unlike his father Rajiv Gandhi, who caught the imagination of the nation with his 'Mr Clean' image when he entered politics, the response to Mr Rahul Gandhi's political forays in Uttar Pradesh and elsewhere has been nothing more than lukewarm.

There could be many reasons for the absence of the 'Rajiv Gandhi magic' and the indifferent public response. One can explain this away by saying that the present political environment is extremely hostile to the Congress and this could be reducing his chances of success. But, apart from the external environment, two aspects of his personality which could be contributing to his limited success are lack of conviction and lack of courage.

Let us take a look at Mr Gandhi's conduct and utterances over the last seven years and see whether he scores on any of these points — commitment, sincerity and courage — qualities that endear politicians to people.

Mr Gandhi declared some years ago that if a member of his family had been the Prime Minister in December 1992, the disputed Babri Masjid structure would not have been razed to the ground. He was being downright dishonest because it was his father Rajiv Gandhi who had ensured the opening of the locks on the Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhoomi structure when he was Prime Minister. Again, it was his father who had sent Home Minister Buta Singh to Ayodhya to participate in the *shilanyas* ceremony for the Ram Mandir just weeks before the Lok Sabha election in November 1989.

In other words, Rajiv Gandhi enabled Hindus to offer prayers at the site and thereafter put his Government's stamp of approval on the Vishwa Hindu Parishad's idea of building a 'Bhavya Mandir' for Ram. After all this, Rahul Gandhi wants us to believe that if Rajiv Gandhi had been Prime Minister in December 1992, the Babri Masjid structure would not have fallen. This is an attempt by the scion of the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty to fool the Muslims, to portray PV Narasimha Rao, the Prime Minister in 1992, as a villain, and to pretend as if members of his family had no role whatsoever in the events leading to December 6, 1992. This is a crude, dishonest attempt to falsify history.

More recently, when the scams relating to the Commonwealth Games, Adarsh Cooperative Housing Society and 2G surfaced, people across the country were horrified at the extent to which public servants could go to feather their own nests and rob the nation of its wealth. The youth were particularly exercised over these scandals and became vocal participants in the anti-corruption movement spear-headed by Anna Hazare. While all this was on, the nation's 'youth icon' and the Congress's heir apparent virtually went off the political radar.

Mr Gandhi was reluctant to speak up against corruption because if he did, he would be seen as speaking against his own Government. Had he spoken up, he would have fallen foul of the Congress's allies like the DMK. Also, he would have had to face uncomfortable questions vis-à-

vis Bofors and other scandals. Yet, this was a risk worth taking because it would have put him in the vanguard of the anti-corruption movement. But this was not to be. Instead, it is Anna Hazare who holds the reins of the anti-corruption movement and has caught the imagination of the youth. Mr Gandhi has been reduced to reading out written speeches hailing Mr Hazare and demanding the establishment of a strong Lok Pal.

Apart from lacking in sincerity and courage, he is given to making bizarre statements when he is caught off guard or when he strays from the written text. Some years ago, when a correspondent of a weekly magazine caught up with him in Amethi, he claimed that he could have become Prime Minister when he attained the age of 25 but he had chosen not to because he “did not want to shout at his seniors”. In recent times, he has strayed from the script and landed in trouble, like when he asked his audience at Phulpur how long would they go to Maharashtra “to beg”. The people of Uttar Pradesh felt offended by this remark because a majority of those who migrate from the State are skilled workers who pick up well-paying jobs in other parts of the country.

Mr Gandhi is also given to making strange claims about his interventions. For example, after reading out the text of a prepared speech in the Lok Sabha on the Lok Pal issue, he told mediapersons outside Parliament that his statement was “a game-changer”. Is it not strange for someone to make such a claim about his own speech? Is he naïve or disingenuous? The jury is still out.

Another aspect of his persona which has now come to notice is his disrespect for Parliament. Although he is one of the younger MPs, he seems to take Parliament for granted, something which even parliamentarians of the stature of Indrajit Gupta or Mr Atal Bihari Vajpayee never did. Mr Gandhi’s disrespect for this institution came through when he set off on a five-day *yatra* of Uttar Pradesh beginning November 22, the opening day of the Winter Session of Parliament.

Finally, a word about sycophancy. It must be admitted that sycophancy had come down substantially after Ms Sonia Gandhi took over the reins of the Congress. Compared to the heyday of Mrs Indira Gandhi when Congress president Dev Kant Barooah declared “Indira is India and India is Indira”, the times have changed. Yet, there is no shortage of people who try this old trick to catch the attention of the Nehru-Gandhis. At the recent Youth Congress convention, a member of the Congress Working Committee hailed Mr Gandhi for leading the biggest youth movement, the kind which had not been seen even in China or Russia. As Mr Gandhi prepares for a bigger role in the party, are we in for a return of sycophancy as in the 1970s?

## **Stalling Parliament negates democracy**

Swapan Dasgupta

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Provoked by a group of socialist louts singing the 'Red Flag' in the House of Commons, Heseltine picked up the ceremonial mace and twirled it menacingly. No harm was done and Heseltine was duly reprimanded by the Speaker (he may even have been suspended for a few days). However, this incident, for which he was instantly dubbed 'Tarzan' by the media, continued to haunt Heseltine for the rest of his days in active politics. His momentary lapse into indecorous behaviour became a permanent blot on his character.

It would have been so refreshing if the Indian political class and the electorate applied the same exacting standards of parliamentary conduct on our MPs. Far from it. Once upon a time, the disruption of Parliament by the likes of Raj Narain (who was often bodily lifted out of the Rajya Sabha by marshals) was a novelty and viewed as an individual deviation. During the first 10 days of the winter session, both Houses of Parliament did not function. For reasons as varied as price rise, Telangana and FDI in retail, groups of MPs that included both the Opposition and members of the ruling coalition felt that disruption was the best way to register protest. Even after normal functioning resumed last week, Question Hour was disrupted by BJP MPs for flimsy reasons: The demands for the resignation of Home Minister P Chidambaram and External Affairs Minister SM Krishna.

Of late, there has been a sense of public revulsion against the frequent disruption of Parliament but this does not appear to have made too much of an impact. Instead of using Zero Hour effectively, there are some members of the Opposition who have got it into their heads that disruption is always preferable to arguments. Since it takes barely 15

MPs to throw a House into confusion, this extra-parliamentary approach is used with increasing frequency inside Parliament, with the same devastation. In the final years of Rajiv Gandhi's five-year stint in Government, Parliament witnessed the creation of a "shouting brigade" of Congress MPs who used lung power against a tiny Opposition. In hindsight, Rajiv set an unfortunate precedent. Today, the same shouting brigade has entered the bloodstream of the Opposition and has contributed immeasurably in lowering Parliament to the level of a fish market.

What is important to note is that the debasement of Parliament hasn't happened because a few MPs have no respect for institutions. It has occurred because those with a full awareness of their actions have encouraged the disruptionists. In other words, it is not ignorance or cultural inadequacy that has led to the assault on parliamentary functioning, but deep cynicism. Rajiv Gandhi knew the consequences of unleashing his shouting brigade; and LK Advani was aware that the reason for disrupting the first substantive session of the UPA Government in 2004 wasn't any substantive grievance but astrological advice — some Babaji had apparently forecast that the UPA would be tottering before Diwali 2004.

Today, it is the same story of wilful culpability. Sushma Swaraj and Arun Jaitley, the two Leaders of Opposition in Parliament, have distinguished themselves in parliamentary debates. They have the ability to take on arguments with arguments, eloquence, sarcasm and wit. Yet, they have been mute spectators to their less accomplished colleagues running riot. Unless we see evidence of Swaraj and Jaitley actively opposing this mindless culture of disruption, it will be presumed they are co-conspirators in this game.

Of course, the blame should not be directed solely at the Opposition. The Government, whose parliamentary majority rests on maverick and demanding allies, is always anxious to prevent any discussion that

involves voting. As the BJD member Jai Panda has written on various occasions, negating all voting resolutions is tantamount to short-changing the electorate. Parliament, apart from being a talking shop, is primarily all about the numbers game. If a formal division is limited to law-making, it leaves out of its purview the entire process of governance. Had the Government agreed to a voting resolution on FDI in retail, there would have been no logic to the disruption of Parliament. Instead, we had the bizarre situation of the Government taking a major initiative, its coalition partners and the Opposition opposing it bitterly and it finally doing a U-turn, without the matter reaching Parliament at all.

The Government cannot pretend that lowering the public esteem of Parliament has been a one-sided contribution of a cussed Opposition. The Opposition has much to answer for but let us not forget that the atmosphere in which Parliament has lost its sheen has been the contribution of the Government. How will parliamentary institutions be strengthened if the Prime Minister, the UPA chairperson and the heir-designate are uncomfortable participating in the proceedings of Parliament? The symbols of electoral democracy, it would seem, have been reduced to tickets for generous housing in Lutyens' Delhi. We have created a privileged class that has a sense of entitlement but little accountability.

# WOMEN

## **The Other Half : Should women run our cities?**

Kalpana Sharma

Even if elected women representatives are as bad as their male counterparts in cities, why should they be denied a role in governance?

When all other structures in our cities fall apart, one will survive — the ubiquitous garbage dump. It is resilient to every kind of strategy. Try as you may, it refuses to budge. Around every corner, practically on every street and in every neighbourhood, this quintessential monument symbolising urban mismanagement continues to thrive and grow.

One such stubbornly resilient dump is part of our neighbourhood in Mumbai. Despite its impressive size, it gets cleared sporadically because it is hidden from view, lying at the back of our building compound. We contribute a fair share to it. So does the large slum that is as much part of our neighbourhood as the *pucca* buildings. Both have coexisted, often with a sense of resigned co-dependency, for more than four decades.

Years of daily calls to the municipality to send a truck to clear the dump have made little difference to its size or spread. Recently, we saw a glimmer of hope when we realised that a municipal election was around the corner. Surely the thirst for votes would prompt the elected representatives of the richest municipal corporation in India to at least pretend that they cared for their constituents.

### **Typical response**

So a message was sent to the corporator. A woman. Surely, women are concerned about garbage, clean water, issues that affect the ordinary person. The response was almost instant. But 'madam' was too busy. So

she sent her husband who, without a shadow of embarrassment introduced himself, took down the complaint and promised action. That the 'action' finally taken consisted of building a retaining wall to prevent the slum from collapsing in the next monsoon without dealing with the garbage is another story. But the husband's role at a time when the Maharashtra government has decided to increase reservation for women in panchayats and nagarpalikas from 33 per cent to 50 per cent highlights one of many issues that swirl to the surface each time the subject of women's reservation comes up.

Last week, the Bombay High Court dismissed a petition challenging this increase in the percentage of reservation for women. The man who went to court argued that combined with the existing reservation for scheduled castes and tribes, the number of 'general' seats in the 227-member municipal corporation of Mumbai would be reduced to a mere 77. This, he felt, was unjust. The court thought otherwise.

What this judicial challenge raises is why the question of reservation for women met with practically no resistance when it was first introduced through the 73 and 74 Constitutional Amendment and why now, in the case of a big city like Mumbai, there is opposition.

Reservation at the panchayat level has made a difference. It has not only opened the way for literally thousands of women to get a share in political decision-making but it is changing relations within families and forging new role models for a whole new generation of young women. So why the resistance in cities like Mumbai?

The core issue is money. Panchayats and nagarpalikas in smaller towns do not manage large funds. Municipalities in cities like Mumbai do. Wherever money is involved, the stakes are higher. And the higher you go in the political ladder, the greater the resistance to reservation for women.

It is hardly surprising that the Women's Reservation Bill, that provides for 33 per cent reserved seats for women in Parliament and in the state assemblies, has still not been passed. Although the Rajya Sabha passed it last year, there is no sign of it in the Lok Sabha. In any case, given the political deadlock in the Lok Sabha during the current winter session, there is absolutely no chance of it surfacing this year, or possibly even the next.

### **Crucial differences**

The few studies on the role of women in urban governance suggest that there are important differences in what women can do in elective office in urban areas compared to panchayats. Besides the money factor, in cities political parties can openly back candidates unlike in the panchayats. As a result, both monetary and political stakes are higher in urban local body elections.

So far, there is little to indicate that elected women representatives in cities or megacities like Mumbai have made a marked difference to the quality of governance. They appear to be as good or as bad as their male counterparts and usually follow the dictat of their political party. Mumbai, for instance, has a woman Mayor but you would never know that. There is nothing in the way in which the city is managed that suggests that the presence of a woman Mayor or of women in the municipal corporation has made any difference to the quality of governance.

One of the few studies of women in local urban governance was conducted a few years back in Delhi and Bangalore. Mary E. John, who heads the Centre for Women's Development Studies in Delhi, wrote a fascinating article based on this study, which looked at the relationship of women to power, in the *Economic and Political Weekly* (September 29, 2007). The picture that emerged was not entirely black and white. There were too many different factors at play such as class, caste,

community as well as level of education and occupation that had to be taken into account.

For instance, the study found that the most common occupations of the elected men were contractor, developer or factory owner while 75 per cent and 42 per cent of the women in Bangalore and Delhi respectively were housewives. The majority of women who had a profession were teachers. This alone gives some indication of the difference in the 'connections' men and women have when they are elected. Of course, even if the women were housewives, their husbands often had businesses that benefitted from the wife being an elected representative.

Another interesting factor that emerged was that both men and women acknowledged that they could not have entered the election race without a "godfather" who brought them into the political arena. In contrast, in panchayats many women have managed to enter without such patronage.

### **Fiefdoms**

Also, while the issue of 'proxies', or husbands standing in for their wives who have been elected, has generally been seen as a negative aspect of women's reservation, the study suggested that this was not confined to the women and that many men were also 'proxies' for those who had backed them. Also, in many instances, as at the national level, political participation had evolved into a family business. When a woman's seat became a general seat by virtue of rotation, the husband contested for that seat. Thus the seat remained within "the family". Is this any different from what is happening in Amethi, Rae Bareli and Baramati, to name just a few such family fiefdoms?

What seems clear, given the differences between urban and rural areas, is that we cannot assume that more elected women will automatically mean better governance in cities. Reservation is essential because women have not managed to enter the system without it. So even if they

are as inefficient or corrupt as the men, should they be denied a share of the decision-making pie?

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