



Managing perceptions

What should worry India is the ground reality in Kashmir, not the views of other countries

The Centre’s decision to take another group of envoys on a guided tour of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), and the stated hope of the Ministry of External Affairs that these tours will become a regular feature, point to a belief that these visits have been productive. Clearly, the government, which has been under considerable international pressure to lift restrictions in the former State, has managed to arrange these three visits without any incident. The delegations have been taken to meet with local groups, and shown a glimpse of ‘normalcy’ in the Kashmir Valley, with shops open, people out on the streets, and boating on the Dal Lake. After these tours, no envoy has come forward with any negative account, which indicates that at least for the moment, the government’s narrative has prevailed. The visits have also smoothed other diplomatic exchanges. U.S. Ambassador Kenneth Juster’s trip to J&K paved the way for President Donald Trump’s upcoming visit, and the latest visit by European Ambassadors was timed just before Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar travels to Brussels to prepare for Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s trip next month for the EU-India summit. However, the government must recognise that these gains in the immediate present are superficial in the absence of a change in the situation in Kashmir.

It would not have escaped anyone’s attention that these tours are tightly controlled, and the people meeting the foreign guests in the confines of the Raj Bhavan are handpicked by the government. In fact, European delegates who accepted New Delhi’s invitation on this trip had earlier opted out in order to request freer access and meetings with leaders in detention, but the government refused to relent. The chimera of ‘normalcy’ seems patently fragile: the visit had to be postponed by a day due to a bandh call in the Valley; and just a day after the visit, the Internet was snapped once again due to security concerns. It is also puzzling how the government, which has repeated often that J&K is an “internal affair”, squares it up with this new policy of conducting tours for the international community. The truth is, managing India’s image is important, but the government’s primary responsibilities still lie within its borders – responsibilities to the people of J&K, who have yet to see a return to normalcy; to those detained in and outside J&K, including sitting Member of Parliament and octogenarian Farooq Abdullah, against whom little evidence of wrongdoing has been furnished; and to the people of India as a whole, who are yet to see a credible path to the peace and prosperity that was promised when the momentous decision on Article 370 was announced last August. It is their legitimate expectations, not those of the international community, that must be a priority for the government.

Terror and punishment

Pakistan must give up its strategy of using terrorism for geopolitical leverage

The Pakistani government, which for years tried to protect Hafiz Saeed, the alleged mastermind of the 2008 Mumbai attacks, finally got a conviction and a jail term for the cleric in two terror financing cases. The Jamaat-ud-Dawa chief and his close aide Malik Zafar Iqbal have been sentenced to five-and-a-half years by an anti-terrorism court, vindicating India’s years-long position that Saeed had been using his organisations to finance terrorist activities. While the conviction is a welcome step, Pakistan has to do more if it wants the international community to take its self-declared resolve to fight terror seriously. This is because Pakistan’s actions in the past against terrorist outfits have hardly been convincing. It started cracking down on Saeed’s groups in 2018 only after it was threatened to be put on the “grey list” of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), an inter-governmental body fighting money laundering and terror financing. The government endorsed the UN ban on these organisations in February 2018, just a few days ahead of an FATF meeting. Despite these actions, Pakistan was placed on the grey list.

Unsurprisingly, the conviction of Saeed and Iqbal comes a few days ahead of another crucial FATF meeting. In the 2019 October meeting, the organisation had warned Islamabad to take “extra measures” for the “complete” elimination of terror financing and money laundering. And if the FATF is not satisfied with Pakistan’s actions, the country faces the risk of being downgraded to the “black list”, which could bring tough sanctions on its financial system. So, Pakistan is evidently under international pressure. The question is whether its actions are half-hearted steps aimed at avoiding the wrath of the international community or part of a genuine drive against terror. One can’t blame if India, Afghanistan or any other country doubts Pakistan’s intentions, given that Islamabad had avoided taking action against Saeed and his groups for years. Saeed was put under house arrest several times, only to be released once the international attention turned away. The fundamental problem is Pakistan’s policy of exporting terrorism to its neighbours for geopolitical leverage. Historically, Pakistan has adopted a dual policy towards terrorism – fight it at home but export it through proxies to its neighbours. Unless it changes this policy and joins the regional drive against terrorism, peace and stability would elude the region. This remains a critical issue in Indo-Pak ties as well. So, the international community shouldn’t let up its pressure on Pakistan. Islamabad should be asked to take, not just legal action against terror financing, but also hard measures against terror groups and infrastructure.

Towards a new world order

Effective safety nets; free education and healthcare; and high taxes on the rich need to form part of the system



R.K. KRISHNA KUMAR

The World Economic Forum (WEF), held at Davos last month, has become a Mecca for all forms of new capitalism. It started in 1971 with the noble objective of improving the state of the world, but now serves as a platform for world leaders, billionaires, professionals at the top of the business pyramid, senior government ministerial delegations, and others, who gather to change the world. This is the 49th year of the congregation, which now resembles an ice circus. The messages from Davos drift like snowflakes, on the agendas of the developed world.

If you tear aside the screen that covers all the events at the conference, you could be staring at some of the world’s most complex and intractable problems, with no end in sight. All the issues can be condensed into just one, relating to survival of the planet itself.

Social inequalities and the grim problems of stark and continuing poverty are at the epicentre of the new world. The latest Oxfam Report presented at Davos points out that 2,153 billionaires have more wealth than 4.6 billion people. The emergence of billionaires and oligarchs in different parts of the world coincides with increased poverty among the already poor people, especially children. These realities make observers question the tenability of stakeholder capitalism as a concept.

The ugliest face of this capitalism was visible during the 2007-2008 economic crisis, first in the U.S. and thereafter across the Eu-

ropean Union. At that time, it appeared as if the global economy was on the verge of collapse.

One of the chief characteristics of economic development is the intensification of energy use. There is an unprecedented concentration of high energy density in all economic development strategies. The bulk of the energy continues to be generated from non-renewable sources. The developed world’s, and China’s, central objective is to capture energy-generating resources from across continents and put them to use to push GDP growth to greater heights. In the process, sustainability is becoming a casualty.

How do we define energy? In physics, energy is defined as ‘work done’ or, in other words, the force that moves all objects. It is important to understand the philosophical implications of one of the great laws of physics – the Laws of Thermodynamics. The first law states that energy can neither be created nor destroyed, it merely changes form and is always conserved. The second law states that when ‘work is done’, only a part of the energy is consumed, the balance is lost. The lost part is called ‘entropy’ and it is proven that entropy always maximises. This whole phenomenon also leaves behind inert material as waste. The higher the use of energy, the larger the amount of waste generated. Entropy, like time, is always unidirectional, it only goes forward.

Excess consumption

Egregious consumption of energy by the developed world has been accompanied by the disposal of residual products (‘e-waste’) on the shores of many African and Asian countries. As a result, the poor in the developing world are, unwittingly, drawn and exposed to toxic, hazardous materials like lead,



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cadmium and arsenic. Hence, the ‘globalisation’ phenomenon has turned out to be nothing other than exploitation of the developing world, with most countries being treated as a source of cheap labour and critical raw material.

Most, if not all, transactions are based on the arbitrage between price and value difference, from which only the ‘middleman’ gains, not the primary producer. Countries in the developed world, and China, are ferociously using up finite raw materials without care or concern for the welfare of present and future generations. Certainly, there has been significant technological progress which has brought about revolution in the fields of healthcare and communications, but there is also a dark side to this. High expenses and Intellectual Property Rights load the system further in favour of the rich. To demonstrate how deep the rot is, one can look at the pernicious plan to set up a carbon credit system. Under this, countries with high energy consumption trends can simply offset their consumption patterns by purchasing carbon credits, the unutilised carbon footprint, from poor developing countries.

To sum up, these are tough issues and solutions are not easily

available. We will, however, do well to probe and understand the ‘Nordic Economic Model’, which pertains to the remarkable achievements of the Scandinavian countries comprising Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Sweden, Norway, and allied territories. The total population of the Nordic countries is estimated at almost 27 million people. These nations are among the richest in the world when measured in terms of GDP per capita. They also have large public sector enterprises; extensive and generous universal welfare systems; high levels of taxation; and considerable state involvement in promoting and upholding welfare states. UN reports also indicate that the Nordic countries are the happiest countries in the world. The U.S., in contrast, is in 19th place.

Taking the Nordic model as a template, there are some ingredients that could be part of a new ‘enlightened global order’. These should include – effective welfare safety nets for all; corruption-free governance; a fundamental right to tuition-free education, including higher education; and a fundamental right to good medical care. This also has to involve shutting of tax havens. In Nordic countries, personal and corporate income

tax rates are very high, especially on the very rich. If a just, new world order is to arise, taxes everywhere should go up.

Holding companies responsible

When it comes to the corporate sector, there are some new perspectives. In traditional business accounting, ‘bottom line’ refers to the financial year’s profit or loss earned or incurred by the company on pure financial parameters. However, following vigorous debates, a new format has emerged under which a company’s performance is measured through four ‘Ps’. The first is ‘P’ for ‘profit’. The second ‘P’ is for people – how the company’s actions impact not only employees, but society as a whole. The third ‘P’ is for planet – are the company’s actions and plans sensitive to the environment? The fourth ‘P’ is for purpose, which means the companies and individuals must develop a larger purpose than ‘business as usual’. They must ask: what is the larger purpose of the company, apart from generating profits? Using big data and text analytics, a company’s performance can be measured in terms of all the four ‘P’s and a corporate entity can be thus held accountable. Market capitalisation need not be the only way to measure the value of a company.

I recognise that much work is yet to be done to uplift the global economic order, but the important point is that new tools are now emerging. What is required is a global consensus and the will to make the planet more sustainable, so that all individuals can live with justice and equality, ensuring that not a single child is hungry or seriously unwell because of poverty or lack of affordable medical help.

R.K. Krishna Kumar is a trustee at Tata Trusts

Heralding a politics of change

The Delhi verdict was reflective of the city’s, in particular the youths’, resistance to the BJP’s divisive, hate-filled approach



HARBANS MUKHIA

As we get used to the spectacular victory of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in the Delhi election, it is important to also take note of the characterisation of the win by its leaders as an endorsement of what they term as their ‘politics of change’. They insist that this model of policymaking has marked a shift from the politics of vacuous promises to one of work on the ground. However, even as one grants the AAP leaders this boast, it is equally important to note that the change in politics began a little earlier and for a different set of reasons. But let us first have a look at the salient meaning of the Delhi poll.

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal realised early that his strong electoral plank was his government’s accomplishments in the area of social welfare – provision of affordable education, healthcare, water and electricity – and that his party’s chief rival, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), had nothing to offer on this front. The BJP, he understood, would thus seek to draw him into an agenda which has given it several victories: a programme featuring communal hatred masquerading as nationalism. The passage of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) and the project of National Register of Citizens/National Population Register set the background for the BJP’s characteristically aggressive campaign. The protests against these, symbolised by Shaheen Bagh, gave it further context. Mr. Kejriwal wisely chose to fight the election on his own, rather than on the BJP’s, terms.

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Support across sections

It is remarkable that the AAP received support from affluent colonies like Greater Kailash, Vasant Vihar, as well as colonies of the underprivileged, like Govind Puri and Seelampur; the party gained approval of both the highly educated voters in New Delhi and South Delhi and the supposedly illiterate villagers. Clearly, voters in the richer areas did not choose Mr. Kejriwal for giving them free water and electricity but over something bigger. These were issues that concerned them, but not them alone, in defining the nation.

This concern began with a visible, almost forcible, redefining of the nation by the BJP along the path of ‘Hindu Rashtra’. This was not the path Indians had inherited from their history, which had always celebrated their civilisation’s pluralism. There was also concern



over the BJP’s brazenly partisan use of the state apparatus, including police and bureaucracy.

Unprovoked thrashing of students at Jamia Millia Islamia by policemen and the latter’s protection to goons with masked faces who entered the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) were widely witnessed on TV channels for days, and met with public condemnation. Incidentally, there has not been a single arrest over the JNU incident so far.

Protests against the CAA, as well as in response to police action and inaction, took place in civil society – in the form of silent, passive, non-violent satyagraha marches and sit-ins, especially with women at the forefront. Shaheen Bagh became a marker for such acts of resistance. That the protests became widespread all over the country, from the invisible corners of small towns to other metros, brought the larger issue to the forefront. These protests were unconnected with either political parties or

electoral battles and therefore left the government resourceless.

It is this attempt by the Narendra Modi-Amit Shah duo to fundamentally alter the character of the nation, and the civil society’s resistance to their designs, that has brought about a change in the pursuit of politics. Shaheen Bagh formed the centrepiece of the BJP’s campaign in Delhi, with hate-filled slogans by its top leaders and second-rung politicians like Anurag Thakur and Parvesh Verma acting as a counter to Mr. Kejriwal’s focus on social welfare. The BJP clearly made the election a referendum for its CAA/NRC/NPR and for its communal vitriolic, in other words its version of nationalism. The voters responded with their verdict.

The youth deserted the BJP

The biggest loss to the BJP’s support base in this election was from the youth. Until a year ago, a portion of India’s young generation formed the unquestioning, adoring fan base of Mr. Modi even if they were not committed to the BJP or trained in Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) shakhas. However, the CAA has made them aware of the unabashedly divisive politics of the government headed by Mr. Modi and they have refused to fall for it.

Here, a very interesting indicator is the fact that the BJP’s vitriol

in public is now being met with roars of disapproval from the crowd. The youth are at the forefront of this condemnation of the BJP’s ‘divide and rule’ policy. And, they have voiced their disapproval through ballot power.

Will the Delhi elections persuade the BJP to abandon or even modify its strategy of spreading hatred for mobilising electoral support? The party can adopt a different approach if it has an alternative economic or social vision. But generating an alternative vision will require it to change its fundamental character, its organising principle.

It is noticeable that far from cautioning its leaders against the use of vitriol during the Delhi campaign, the BJP’s top leaders extended full support to them through their eloquent silence. Now, after the party’s resounding defeat, a line of argument propagated in BJP circles is that the Delhi voters neglected grave issues of religion and nationalism for the sake of freebies.

It is the tension between this inability of the BJP to change and the growing urge and energy for change at the ground level among the voters that will constitute the political and social dynamics of India in the next few years.

The author taught history at Jawaharlal Nehru University

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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AAP 3.0

The Narendra Modi-Amit Shah juggernaut was, yet again, stopped by Arvind Kejriwal. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP)’s emphatic victory is an endorsement by Delhi voters of the political culture established by the party. The results come as a fitting acknowledgement of the political will and commitment displayed by the AAP government in fulfilling its major election promises. The government endeared itself to the electorate by providing free water, cheap electricity and door delivery of 40-odd services to citizens. The highly personalised, negative campaign targeting Mr. Kejriwal, and excessive confidence in the ‘Modi wave’ boomeranged

on the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Given the string of setbacks in recent State elections, it needs to groom State-level leaders and focus on local issues rather than relying solely on the charisma of the Prime Minister. The complete wipe-out of the Congress Party added insult to injury for a party that is in a state of free fall and struggling to recuperate from the drubbing received during the general elections. To sum up, the message of the electorate was loud and clear – their priority continues to be bread and butter issues.

B. SURESH KUMAR, Coimbatore

■ The voter has cast his valuable vote for the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP)’s good

work for the poor and the underprivileged is definitely a positive sign for electoral democracy. It will encourage leaders to think that sincerity will pay. Mr. Kejriwal’s victory speech brings to my mind Jawaharlal Nehru’s words, “I stand before you not as your first Prime Minister but as your first servant.” That people have thought beyond divisive agenda, which is disastrous to constitutional polity, is a positive feature of this election.

N.G.R. PRASAD, Chennai

■ The repeat victory for Mr. Kejriwal’s AAP in the Delhi Assembly elections amply demonstrates the voters’ political maturity in refusing to be swayed by the vitriolic campaign led by Home

Minister Amit Shah. It is also a triumph of good governance over any kind of polarisation. It speaks of Mr. Kejriwal’s amazing grace that he refused to be provoked even when he was called a “terrorist” by some members of the BJP. Reduced once again to a single digit in the Assembly, the lesson the BJP needs to learn is that boasts do not necessarily ensure electoral success, issues do.

S.K. CHOUDHURY, Bengaluru

Archbishop’s apology

The Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby has shown admirable candour and courage to call his Church “deeply institutionally racist” and apologise for Britain’s treatment of black people and other minorities since

Second World War (World page, “Anglican leader calls his Church deeply racist,” Feb. 13). The British government owes a forthright answer for not giving documents confirming citizenship, and denying basic rights, to the Windrush generation that moved from Caribbean colonies to the United Kingdom to help rebuild it from the ravages and ruins of war. The

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS: >>Ashmolean museum is part of the University of Oxford, U.K. The location of the museum was wrongly mentioned as London in a front-page story headlined “Missing idol traced to London museum” (Feb. 13, 2020, some editions) and an inside page story headlined “Azhavar idol traced to London museum” (Feb. 13, 2020, some editions). Consequently, both the headlines were wrong.

>>The headline of a Business page report on Royal Enfield’s expansion plans (Feb. 11, 2020) has been corrected to say: Royal Enfield eyes global markets for apparel business. Mr. Puneet Sood, who has been quoted in the report, is actually the head, Apparel Business at Royal Enfield.

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Archbishop’s call to decisively do justice in the matter is poignant. Will the political leadership suitably respond? It is time that all religions and their heads spoke vehemently against all kinds of injustice and exploitation. It is a duty that they all owe to the gods who they proclaim and worship. C.G. KURIAKOSE, Kothamangalam, Kerala

Should women be given command posts in the Army?

PARLEY

Like men, women should be judged on the basis of their professionalism and merit

Last week, in response to an ongoing hearing in the Supreme Court on permanent commission for women officers, the government cited “physical” and “physiological limitations” in granting command positions to women officers in the Indian Army. To this, the Supreme Court responded that there is a need for administrative will and “change of mindset”. In a conversation moderated by Dinakar Peri, Lieutenant General Syed Ata Hasnain and Lieutenant General D.S. Hooda discuss this question. Excerpts:

Could you provide an overview of the reasoning behind the government’s stand?

Lt Gen Hasnain: Till September 2019, permanent commission for women was restricted to only two departments: the Army Education Corps and the Judge Advocate General’s branch. In September, the Defence Ministry announced that it is opening this up to eight other arms and services from April this year, for women already selected for the Short Service Commission. So, permanent commission now is open in 10 departments, or what you call arms and services. Now, women’s careers can be furthered only if they get what are called command assignments or criteria appointments. The question is, how do you define a criteria appointment? The Indian Army is what is called a command-oriented Army. That is, anyone who has to be given further positions up the chain of command has to first be experienced in command at the level of a full Colonel, a unit command. So far, this was denied to women. That is the main issue.

My opinion is that the time has come for us to at least experiment, if nothing else, and that experiment needs to be done first with the Services – Army Service Corps, Army Ordnance Corps and Corps of Electrical and Mechanical Engineers. In all these there are women who have been commissioned for the last 30 years as Short Service Commissioned officers. Many of them have commanded workshops. Some of them are in a position to be selected. The focus is on the word select-

ed because they have to be selected through their confidential reports, a board of officers, a promotion board, which will determine whether they are fit to command. Only then will they command a unit.

Gen Hooda, apart from the point about gaining acceptability from other soldiers, the government has argued that there are other issues such as motherhood and domestic obligations. Do you believe that these are stumbling blocks in women holding command positions? For the last 30 years we have had women in the Army.

Lt Gen Hooda: There are challenges – domestic issues, fitness, pregnancy – all that has been quoted by the government in its affidavit. But this is an argument we had 30 years ago when we were inducting women into the Army. All these issues have been handled by the Army in a very mature manner over the years.

Coming specifically to the issue of whether they should be given command or not, there is very little justification in saying that while women officers can be company commanders, platoon commanders, second in command, [they should be excluded] when it comes to command appointments, commanding a unit, only on the basis that they are women. This argument doesn’t hold water. As Lt Gen Hasnain said, there is a board of officers to decide whether promotions to the rank of Colonel can take place or not for a particular officer. It’s not as if all male officers get automatically promoted as Colonels. In some cases, in some services, less than 30% of male officers are promoted to the rank of Colonel. The decision is made by a board of officers. Let the same board of officers decide whether a woman officer is fit to command a unit. Women should be judged on the basis of their professionalism and on the basis of merit.

The Commanding Officer holds a very significant position in the Army. What distinguishes the command positions and



what’s the way forward to have women in these roles?

Lt Gen Hasnain: Let’s understand it from a career management angle as well as a functional angle. What are criteria appointments which someone has to fulfil before they can be promoted to even higher ranks? These appointments can be directly in command of troops or many times they are also not in command of troops. For example, there can be appointments in the Army Education Corps and the Judge Advocate General’s branch or such things where you have a certain responsibility, but you are not directly commanding troops. There are arms and services such as the Army Service Corps and Electrical and Mechanical Engineers where you have resources under your command and you have a large number of personnel under your command. In the Engineers Corps, a criteria appointment could be to set up an appointment such as the Commander Works Engineer who is responsible largely for projects of maintenance, of a lot of construction assets, and things like that, and very little responsibility for the personnel under you. So, there is a whole range of such responsibilities.

But the one important aspect is that the difference between a sub-unit command and the command by a Commanding Officer is that the Commanding Officer is the place where the buck stops. So the question many are asking is, do women have it in them to be able to accept that kind of responsibility? And will they be able to exercise that authority over male personnel under them? Now, this has only been experienced in sub-units where there could be 100-120 men serving under

The time has come for us to at least experiment, and that needs to be done first with the Services – Army Service Corps, Army Ordnance Corps and Corps of Electrical and Mechanical Engineers

LT GEN HASNAIN

a lady officer of rank of a Major or Lieutenant Colonel and they have done extremely well in those appointments. So there is nothing wrong in giving them command assignments. That is why I said let’s experiment with it. Give it a five-year period, and if you find something drastically wrong, which I’m sure you will not, then maybe you can give it a review. But on the face of it, denying them this opportunity only on the basis of their gender is not legally correct, I think, though of course the Supreme Court will decide that. I don’t think it is morally correct. Because now that you have given them permanent commission, you’ve given them this on the basis of the assumption that they are equally good [as men], they’re responsible, and they can be developed to become better, I think it’s incumbent on the organisation to actually repose a certain level of trust in them and give them these command responsibilities.

Gen Hooda, you had written that there is some merit in not having women in combat roles. Can you elaborate on this?

Lt Gen Hooda: I think there is some justification in not permitting women in combat roles at this time. There are issues about soldiers and officers living on the front lines. Officers and their men all live together

in, say, one bunker along the Line of Control. So, there are issues and if you are going to induct women in Combat Arms, try and shield them from some of these more difficult roles. At this stage, it could only invite more resentment regarding why we are having women in Combat Arms. We should keep that debate for later. Let’s start with mainstreaming those arms and services where women already are present.

You had mentioned stressful conditions like working in close proximity on the front lines. Now we’re talking about command positions, but combat roles in front line combat will come up after that. How can these issues be addressed?

Lt Gen Hooda: We need to look at things in a more practical manner. We’ve already started inducting women as permanent commission in some of the supporting arms and services. We need to completely integrate all the people in the Army, and that includes women officers. It’s ridiculous that we are fighting battles in court. The Supreme Court might give some judgment based on its wisdom. But within the Army, if we can internally resolve these issues, that will be a much better approach. So let’s look at both sides of the debate. And the fact is, you have to integrate women better in the Army, you have to give them their professional aspirations, their personal aspirations have to be met. Let’s start debating this and see how everyone can be pulled together. Frankly, some of the arguments that have been made in the Court – I dare say I’m using this word with a little caution – are regressive, and don’t reflect the reality on the ground today.

What were your efforts in this direction?

Lt Gen Hasnain: That’s a good question. I admit that I started with a negative mindset myself, way back in 1991. But my mind changed very early because of the demonstrated capability on the ground. In almost every arm and service, I visited in my own division on the Line of Control, I saw a detachment of engineers working feverishly on a particular operational track and the

person commanding that detachment and spending time on the deck of the bulldozer at night, for three to four weeks with the men, was a lady officer. Thereafter, there have been many occasions where I’ve seen young women, convoy commanders, who’ve done a marvellous job under the most challenging circumstances in cases of ambushes on the Uri-Baramulla road.

Lt Gen Hooda: I will give you two stories. In 2005, I took over command of the Brigade from Lt Gen Hasnain, and we had this earthquake in September 2005. My Brigade Major wasn’t there [in Uri]. The officer below him, the captain who is called the G3, was injured. And we had no officers there, we were completely cut off. The Education Officer, Captain Rosie, performed the role of Brigade Major and she handled the whole operational side. Hats off to the way she handled it. So, I have no doubts about women officers handling responsibilities during a crisis. Then we had Colonel Santosh Mahadik, Commanding Officer of a unit, when I was the Army Commander, who was killed while fighting terrorists in September 2015. When my wife went to pay condolences, his wife said she wanted to join the Army. She was 35 years old, 10 years older than anybody who can get commissioned into the Officers Training Academy. We took up her case. She got commissioned in 2017 as a Lieutenant in the Ordnance (Corps). Now, the inspiration we get from her story is beyond words.

Generals, in retrospect, would you have taken orders from a woman officer?

Lt Gen Hasnain: Without blinking an eye, if someone above me, whether man or woman, was someone who demonstrated capability and leadership qualities, there is no question that I would not accept directions, orders. In the Army, we are trained to do that. It’s just a mindset [regarding women], we need to overcome that. I would have overcome it almost immediately.

Lt Gen Hooda: Soldiers respect professionalism, good leadership, irrespective of whether it is demonstrated by a male or female officer.



Syed Ata Hasnain is former GOC 15 Corps and is now the Chancellor of Jammu University



D.S. Hooda is a former Northern Army Commander



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A marriage story for everyone

The Kerala High Court has an opportunity to make the concept of marriage less exclusionary

SHRADDHA CHAUDHARY

The only thing that is ‘special’ about the Special Marriage Act of 1954 is that it allows and facilitates the registration of inter-religious marriages. In that sense, it is a legislative tool for social change, an attempt to remove a social barrier to the exercise of individual autonomy. In the last few years, the Supreme Court has championed the cause of individual autonomy in matters of love, sex and marriage, including in *Shafin Jahan v. Asokan* (2018), *Shakti Vahini v. Union of India* (2018) and *Navej Johar v. Union of India* (2018). In *Navej Johar*, not only did the Court hold Section 377 of the IPC to be unconstitutional, it explicitly recognised the rights of the LGBTQ+ community to express their individuality, sexual identity and love on par with heterosexuals, as fundamental to Articles 14 (right to equality), 19 (right to freedom), and 21 (right to life) of the Constitution.

Discrimination

A petition recently filed in the Kerala High Court by a male same-sex couple challenges the constitutionality of the Special Marriage Act on the ground that it discriminates against same-sex couples who want to formalise their relationship through marriage. At one level it seeks a simple and logical extension of the rights already recognised by the Supreme Court in *Navej Johar* – the right of same-sex couples to express their sexual identity, right to privacy and non-interference in the conduct of their personal affairs, and the right to be recognised as full members of society. To refuse their plea would cause them very real, tangible damage, considering that marriage carries a range of legal rights and protections, available during the marriage as well as on its dissolution by divorce (the right to seek maintenance) or death (the right to inherit property).

A more esoteric, but no less devastating, deprivation caused would be the inaccessibility of symbols that are germane to how people visualise their identities and envisage their relationships. For better or for worse, marriage continues to be the cornerstone of social legitimacy and family

in India. For most people, marriage, commitment and family are not abstract legal concepts, but stages of human development and aspiration which give meaning to their personal lives. They represent the sanctification and extension of the deep emotional and spiritual bonds that may often accompany sexual intimacy.

Aside from blatant homophobia, which the law ought not to legitimise, the reasons commonly cited as to why these symbols should be the preserve of opposite-sex couples do not stand scrutiny. Purportedly, the social purpose of marriage is to provide stability; financial, physical or emotional care and support; sexual intimacy and love to individuals; and to facilitate procreation and child-rearing. Aside from procreation, none of these objectives are dependent on the gender of the parties concerned, so much as on the bond they share and their ability to make the relationship work. And if procreation were quite so central to marriage, opposite-sex couples would be required to prove their fertility and, indeed, commit to having children before being allowed to register their marriage. As we know, that is not the case. The right or the legal ability to marry, it would appear, has little to do with the reasons commonly cited to deny marriage to same-sex couples. Therefore, any consideration of the law of marriage ought to be completely divorced from the mould that marriage is socially expected to fit.

A unique opportunity

The petition before the Kerala High Court represents a unique opportunity – a potential first step towards making marriage, as an institution, as a legal concept, more accessible and egalitarian, less arbitrary and exclusionary. It gives the High Court the chance to prioritise the fundamental and human rights of the petitioners over the abstract heteronormative tendency of the majority to deny legitimacy to relationships that challenge oppressive social structures and established hierarchies. In other words, it’s high time love and logic are given a chance to triumph over homophobic tradition.

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NOTEBOOK

The Kashmir despatch before the Internet

Communication links were open even in the worst days of militancy in J&K

AMIT BARUAH

On October 31 last year, after many years I waited in queue to email a news story to *The Hindu*. The place was a government-designated media centre in Srinagar and it was on the day the State of Jammu and Kashmir was formally reduced to a Union Territory. Scores of reporters thronged the Information Department’s media centre on Residency Road, hoping that one of the dozen-odd computers would be free. It had almost become a habit given that nearly three months had passed since Internet services had been snapped in the Valley.

For me, there was a sense of déjà vu with a twist. It took me back to the scary days of December 1989, when I first travelled to the Kashmir Valley to cover the turmoil and violence in the region as a young reporter for *The Hindu* and *Frontline*.

In those days, the fax machine was pretty revolutionary technology. You even got a ‘transmission’ report once the pages were received on the other side. But it was a tough job to dial and connect to Madras, as Chennai was called then, or to Delhi.

The telex machine was more reliable and, when all else failed, there were alert ‘teleprinter operators’ of the newspaper who would take down our stories on the telephone. It was part of their job.

Most of my visits (1989-1995) to Srinagar began with navigating the curfew and hiring a vehicle to move around, a task in itself. The only good thing was that Kashmiri leaders not in detention were always to be found at home.

After a day of newsgathering, I would go to the Central Telegraph Office and begin the arduous task of sending my story for the day, which was written on a



typewriter either at Ah-doos Hotel or the Broadway Hotel when they were open during the early days of militancy.

One day is etched in my memory. I entered the Central Telegraph Office, said hello to the heavily armed BSF guards outside, managed to fax my story, and then heard a loud bang outside. One of the BSF men I had spoken to had been hit by a militant bullet. It was tragic and surreal.

There were days when one page went by fax, the other on telex, and the third by telephone. Every day was an experience and, post-transmission, I would make a headline call to my News Editor, K. Narayanan, or Mr. KN, to confirm that

the story had reached his desk.

There were other occasions when we went to a friendly police officer’s house to file copy if there was a big rush at the Central Telegraph Office. I am ever grateful to those friendly civil servants. The day only ended when I was able to send my story.

Even in the worst days of militancy and curfew, the Central Telegraph Office was open to all journalists who could access it. The administration never shut it down; it was one mode of communication available to all. Landline services were not shut down either, in Srinagar or the rest of the Valley. The fact that in the worst period of militancy communication links were open is testimony to the commitment of previous governments to the freedom of press. Today’s frequent Internet shutdowns are a blot on our democracy.

The Hindu

FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO FEBRUARY 14, 1970

69 no-balls in a Test

“One unusual feature of the second Test (Durban) match (between South Africa and Australia) was the number of no-balls. There were 69 in all, which must mean either that the two umpires are men of unusual perception (a view with which Lawry would not agree) or that almost all other umpires are lax in their interpretation of the law.” John Woodcock, cricket correspondent of the Times, London, covering the tour, continues, “The fact that there’s a slight rise or ramp at each end just behind the bowling creases at Kingsmead might have had something to do with it; but they have always been there and there has never before been such a surfeit of no-balls.” The no-ball is now declared with reference to the front foot, if it lands clear beyond the popping crease, or with reference to the back foot if the umpire is not satisfied that the bowler’s back foot has landed within and not touching the return crease or its forward extension. The reason behind this rule is if there is a restriction on the landing of the front foot it will prevent the bowler from dragging his back foot, down the pitch, beyond the bowling crease, an evil prevalent with fast bowlers.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO FEB. 14, 1920.

The Common Sense of Coercion.

Mr. Bernard Houghton. -- writes to the New Statesman. “Let not a prince,” declared Machiavelli, “complain of the faults of a people under his rule, for they are due to his own negligence or his own example.” Perhaps, in modern conditions, we may substitute “blunders” for “example.” If a Government finds it necessary to shoot, the first question we should ask is, Why is the shooting necessary? Without cause men do not collect in mobs and loot. What is the cause of the riots? In particular, why have Indians, admittedly peaceful, quietistic, and law-abiding to a fault, resorted to mob violence? The silly talk of Bolshevism, officially repudiated, merrily shows the credulity of the Anglo-Indian mind. The only thing Bolshevistic in the Punjab events was the ferocity with which the Government repressed the riots. Their real cause is well known. They were due to the Rowlatt Act, coming as it did in the Punjab on a population irritated by a series of tyrannical war measures, the immediate cause being the arrest under *lettres de cachet* of Drs. Satyapal and Kitchlew, coupled with the forcible exclusion of Mr. Gandhi.