

The Indian EXPRESS

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BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

When the state looks away

Gujarat 2002, like Delhi 1984, is a case of state culpability. One was ideological, the other strategic



ASHUTOSH VARSHNEY

THE GUN OBSESSION

Kashmir calls for political outreach, not innovative weaponry

HERE IS A math question. If a pellet gun muzzle is fixed with a deflector that prevents the pellets from flying upwards, and reduces the chance of injuries above the abdomen from 40 per cent to 2 per cent, how many of the 1,200 people who were hit in the eyes last year would be hit in the eyes with the new attachment? While you work on the answer, ask yourself what is an acceptable number. Last August, when Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh visited Srinagar during the height of the trouble, he acknowledged that pellet guns, despite their classification as non-lethal weapons, had caused "some incidents", and promised in his meetings with several groups of Kashmiris that the government would consider an alternative. In September, the Ministry of Home Affairs cleared for use PAVA shells, which use an organic compound — pelargonic acid vanillylamide — found in chilli peppers, and temporarily disable targets by causing a burning sensation. But the outgoing director general of the CRPF has said these are ineffective, and the modified pellet gun is to make a comeback. That our security forces can think of innovations to guns in order to bring down casualties is commendable. But innovations in weaponry, of the lethal or non-lethal kind, are not what Kashmir needs today. For Kashmiris, and indeed in the entire world, the pellet gun has become a powerful symbol of the Indian state's brutality, and dressing it up and sending it back is no solution to the alienation that afflicts large sections of the population in the Valley.

What the Valley needs more urgently are innovative political strategies to reach out to the people. Unfortunately, the army chief Bipin Rawat's warning that the army would treat all those in Kashmir who do not support army operations or obstruct security personnel during encounters "as overground workers of terrorists", and now the decision on deploying the pellet gun once more are the only two "political" signals that the Kashmiris have received from Delhi. A recent report by the Ministry of Home Affairs suggests that the Centre seems to believe that it can manage the situation in Kashmir by controlling mosques, madrassas and the media, and by reaching out to moderate politicians. The Centre would do better to reflect on the dynamics of last year's unrest in the Valley, the participants in it, and why the tensions continue to simmer today.

Labelling huge sections of the population of Kashmir as "terrorists" in the pay of Pakistan is certainly not in the national interest, even if they throw stones. Nor is using the pellet gun to disperse such stone throwing civilians. The PDP, the BJP's alliance partner in Jammu & Kashmir, which has more credible ideas to deal with home-grown militancy, should convey as much to the Centre. For those still trying to work out the math question, the answer is 60. Sixty too many.

STANDING UP

LSR faculty show the way — teachers can help protect a student's right to free speech

GURMEHAR KAUR HAS retreated from the "Not Afraid of ABVP" campaign as well as from social media saying "I have been through a lot and this is all my 20-year-old self could take". Kaur's creative engagement with university politics, however, has received unequivocal support from her teachers — the faculty at the department of English at Lady Sri Ram College, Delhi University. In a signed statement the faculty said, "We feel that it is the bounden duty of educational institutions to nurture sensitive, responsive and critical thinking students without the fear of violent retaliation". This effort at presenting a united front is not only welcome, but also necessary, if the university as a place for originality and innovation is to be preserved.

The teachers' statement couldn't be more relevant. Of late, attacks on freedom of speech in institutions of higher education have not been limited to students alone. At the Jai Narayan Vyas University in Jodhpur, an assistant professor was suspended by the university administration for organising a seminar at which JNU professor Nivedita Menon spoke on nationalism, Hindutva and Kashmir. The violence at Ramjas College did not discriminate between teachers and students, nor have the JNU faculty been spared the "anti-national" tag. In July last year, Ashoka University, a private institution, did not want its name associated with a petition by its students demanding an end to state violence in Kashmir. The idea of the university as a place for discussion and debate must be protected by all those who have a stake in its growth. Too much of the discourse now seems to be centred on the political morality of speech-acts. Former Finance Minister P. Chidambaram put it best when he said, "I think we're confusing universities with monasteries. A university is a place where I have the right to be wrong."

The path taken by the LSR faculty must be followed by the university administration. The way to deal with disagreement, particularly in institutions of learning, cannot be name-calling. Robust economies and secure polities are marked by the quality of their universities and the novelty of thought they produce. After all, Make in India, cannot be limited to just goods and services. To be a true global leader, India must generate ideas, look at a campus as a crucible for thought, its students as agents of the future. Not as an "alliance of subversions".

MACHINE SMARTER

Masayoshi Son predicts the singularity is near. But it's just a business pitch

WHILE ELON MUSK, Bill Gates and Stephen Hawking say that unregulated artificial intelligence (AI) could open the door to a technological dystopia, the man who would be the Warren Buffet of technology investment has spoken up for the machines. Delivering the keynote address at the Mobile World Congress in Barcelona, Softbank founder Masayoshi Son anticipated a brave new world where computer chips could have an IQ of 10,000. At that point, 30 years away, your shoes could be more intelligent than yourself. That's fairly dystopian, actually.

Science fiction loves and fears the hardware littering its worlds. Our fascination with labour-saving devices is reflected in machines which slavishly tend to humans. But the possibility of machines replicating and taking control inspires anxiety. And there is dark talk of the singularity — the point at which machine intelligence passeth human understanding, and reality baffles us.

By buying the mobile processor maker ARM for \$32 billion, Son has invested in the utopia. But why does he use the language of the dystopia, which suggests that machines will soon be so smart that they could take over the world without humans even understanding what happened? Your shoes cannot be more intelligent than you because you, or a human much like you, must design its circuits and program it to meet human objectives. Which, naturally, do not include being menaced by machines. By way of evidence, Son says that since the human brain has not changed in the last 2,000 years, it necessarily follows that AI will soon outstrip it. Actually, humankind has not evolved biologically in the last 20,000 years, but surged ahead through mental products like politics, culture and technology. AI is only the next big technology. We shall use it, and survive it. And in the meantime, Son will profit handsomely from it.

February 28, 2002, had a routine beginning for me. I was in Varanasi, evaluating a student programme of the University of Michigan as a professor. Those were not social media times. While cable TV had emerged, news from Gujarat was still not filtering in, as it did in a torrent later.

When I arrived in Delhi that evening, PBS Newshour, a television news show in the US, called. They wanted me to go live to discuss the Gujarat riots at 4:30 a.m. IST, which would have been 6 p.m. on the US East Coast, saying the killings were gruesome. I could not say yes for I was to fly to the US at that time. They knew that Yale University Press had just published my book *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India*. The book had three chapters on Gujarat.

As the phone call ended and I switched on TV, a certain clarity emerged. I witnessed an exchange between M.J. Akbar, then with the Congress, now a BJP junior minister, and Arun Jaitley, then India's law minister, now its finance minister. "*Hinduon ke kanun mantri ho, ya Hindustan ke*" (Are you the law minister of Hindus, or the law minister of India), thundered Akbar. Jaitley was nonplussed. By midnight, it was clear that Muslims had been slaughtered in large numbers, in retaliation for the alleged Muslim burning of two carriages of a train carrying Hindu nationalist *kar sevaks* (volunteers) in Godhra.

As I arrived in Michigan, it also became clear that the state government had not just failed to prevent retaliatory attacks on Muslims, but had simply looked on, or abetted. To identify those who burned Sabarmati Express was the government's constitutional responsibility; it was not the government's job to allow, or abet, tit-for-tat killings.

Some days later, I was on a CNN show with then-chief minister, Narendra Modi. That morning, Celia Dugger of the *New York Times* had published a story in which she described watching a mass burial of Muslim children in Ahmedabad (NYT, March 7, 2002). On CNN, Modi argued that things were under control and the design of those who had partitioned India (Pakistani Muslims, in other words) would be defeated. He had no words of

sympathy for Gujarati Muslims.

The three most important questions about Gujarat 2002 are: Who should bear the responsibility for the mass violence? Did Gujarat 2002 have any parallels? And what should be done?

Two analytically separable issues are at stake here — legal and political. Unfortunately, the two have often been conflated. We, the social scientists, can't determine legal culpability. That is the domain of the courts. Our tools of inquiry concentrate on groups, organisations and large social aggregates (classes, castes, ethnicities, nations). We don't analyse individuals, except in an abstract sense.

That is not altogether helpful to courts, for they are not in the business of establishing group culpability. They need to ascertain which specific individuals are responsible for which specific acts of carnage. Some punishments have been meted out, including to a minister in Modi's Gujarat cabinet. But Modi is the highest object of liberal and leftist ire. He not only remains legally untouched; he is now India's prime minister. Activists might keep legally pushing, as they should if they are convinced. But I don't think social scientists can analytically go any further. Law is not a branch of social science. We can provide data and arguments on groups and organisations, not on individual culpability.

However, we can legitimately probe a matter of great political and moral relevance, namely, the distinction between riots and pogroms. The former is a case of government failure; the latter of government culpability. Which category applies to Gujarat 2002?

A pogrom is defined as "a mob attack, either approved or condoned by authorities, against the persons and property of a religious, racial, or national minority". Gujarat 2002 fits this definition well. Dozens of eye-witness stories can be cited. The non-state organisations, most closely allied with the BJP government, approved of violence. The VHP called it "the first positive response of the Hindus to Muslim fundamentalism in 1,000 years". The RSS said: "Let the minorities understand their real safety lies in the goodwill of the majority," not in laws. Finally, the courts sentenced a minister in Modi's government to jail for leading mobs. In short, it was not a case

of the government trying to prevent massacres, but one in which the government looked the other way, and considerable abetting also took place. It was a pogrom.

Unfortunately, it was not the first pogrom of independent India. One is reminded of the Delhi massacre of Sikhs after the assassination of Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards on October 31, 1984. In Delhi at the time for graduate research, I watched a Sikh neighbour's house attacked by a mob in Safdarjung Enclave. Though the city was under curfew, I could drive all over New Delhi, but there were no Sikhs on the street, not even in taxi stands, inconceivable in 1984. Trilokpuri was the biggest site of brutality. The cops were nowhere to be seen. Mobs attacked wantonly.

Gujarat 2002 was different from Delhi 1984, only in that the Delhi violence was strategic, whereas the Gujarat pogrom was primarily ideological. Hindu nationalism is ideologically anti-Muslim, but Congress ideology has never been anti-Sikh. That is why Sikhs have returned to the Congress, but Muslims continue to stay away from the BJP. That is also why Gujarat 2002 comes closest to the anti-Jewish pogroms of pre-revolutionary Russia.

That, despite the evidence of complicity, both Congress and BJP governments were re-elected after the massacres points to the dark belly of India's democracy, which can turn brutally majoritarian. Luckily, no pogroms have taken place since 2002. India's democracy now allows small riots and quotidian acts of prejudice, some quite awful, but it permits no big communal conflagrations, excepting those that get linked to national security.

Lower levels of communal violence, however, cannot be a matter of celebration. The majoritarian threat remains. Citizen oversight and the use of institutions checking executive power are the main vehicles of hope.

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UDIT RAJ

THE GREAT DECEPTION

Richest 1 per cent do not owe their wealth to intelligence and hard work

ACCORDING TO A study done by Oxfam, the richest 1 per cent of Indians owns 58 per cent of its economy. The eight richest people in the world own half its wealth. India's population has touched \$1.3 billion mark and its economy is valued at up to \$3 trillion. There was a time when a majority of the population used to believe that the disproportionate distribution of wealth was organised loot and there was regular rich-poor conflict.

The accumulation of wealth started with the growth of mercantile capitalism in Europe and reached its zenith with the massive exploitation of labourers. Communism and Socialism are products of the war against this exploitation and the fight against capitalism. As a result, the state started to own the resources and wealth of the nation and efforts were made for their redistribution.

The 1917 Bolshevik revolution, led by Lenin, Stalin and Trotsky, was one such uprising. It was one of the bloodiest revolutions. The state began to own the wealth of the nation and property was snatched away from the privileged classes. This led to the spread of Communism throughout the globe.

However, the US led the battle against Communism. This led to the emergence of a Cold War between the US and the USSR. Communism was winning the battle during the initial phase of the Cold War and many nations accepted it as their means of governance. In response, welfare states came into

existence in Europe. Labourers and the masses felt relieved because measures were taken for their benefit. This was entirely based on the philosophy of equality. Every measure was taken for the success of Communism and Socialism. For five decades, Communism had immense support. It was only the collapse of the USSR in 1991 that led to the dissipation of the myth of the invincibility of Communism.

This decline in faith re-energised Capitalism in a new way. Capitalist ideas were spread with more energy and vigour. This has led to the extremely disproportionate distribution of wealth. But now, such accumulation of wealth is being attributed to the skill and intelligence of the person accumulating it. Excessive accumulation used to be called immoral. Now a wealthy person is idealised as a smart, intelligent person capable of making money. A person building a Rs 10,000-crore bungalow and another gifting his son an aeroplane worth Rs 500 crore are a result of such an ethos. Inequality and injustice are not only the result of illegal activity; there are also legal methods which are being used by cunning people.

A scientific approach too leads to the conclusion that it is not possible to accumulate such an enormous amount of wealth in a single lifetime. According to research studies, the size of the human brain is about 1,600 cc. Another study suggests that a

normal human being is capable of using around 8 per cent of her brain and a genius can use up to 12 per cent. The question is: How did the wealthiest 1 per cent of the population get their brain and from where did they acquire the high-functioning biology which the other 99 per cent does not own? If intelligence is the source behind wealth accumulation, then the wealthiest group ought to have a higher functioning brain. Clearly, the level of inequality can't be justified even in scientific terms.

The level of inequality can be judged from the fact that the rich do not have time to enjoy their prosperity, while, on the other hand, the poor have ample time but no prosperity to enjoy. The inequality in society is further aggravated by spreading the idea to those at the bottom of the pyramid that such an amassing of wealth is the result of the hard labour and smart planning done by the top 1 per cent. With the level of inequality, poverty and hunger prevailing in India, it is hard to believe how that privileged class enjoy their wealth and prosperity.

Though the prosperous section of society has succeeded in convincing the masses that the accretion of capital is a result of their hard work, this is not true. Nor is such inequality sustainable. It is only a matter of time till this myth is busted.

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MARCH 1, 1977, FORTY YEARS AGO

CPI TURNAROUND

STATING THAT THE present political situation could not be seen in terms of black and white, CPI general secretary, C. Rajeswara Rao, said both the Congress and the Janata Party have oversimplified the issues at stake during this election. According to the CPI, the issues were much wider. Not only was democracy at stake, the question of whether imperialism would dominate the economy of this country and the question if India would continue to be non-aligned and maintain its friendship with the socialist countries. The CPI had thought that the danger to democracy came only from one side but the danger had also come from another side

which was within the Congress and "we must admit that we did not expect this". But once the CPI had seen it emerging, it had fought this new danger frontally and openly. Since April 1976, when there had been the Turkman Gate incident in Delhi, the CPI had directly told the prime minister that the Emergency was being misused.

INDIRA ON CPI

PRIME MINISTER INDIRA GANDHI said she failed to understand the CPI's stand that it would back only those candidates of the Congress in the coming elections who, according to the party, were progressive. She said that party had backed the proclamation

of Emergency as also many plans and programmes of her party as being progressive. Nevertheless, she failed to understand the present stand of the CPI. She did not know how the CPI would decide which of the Congress candidates were progressive.

BOGEY OF FASCISM

CAUTIONING THE PEOPLE against falling a prey to "the bogey of fascism and dictatorship" raised by the Opposition, Mrs Gandhi, addressing a public meeting in Patna, said if this had been true there would have been no election and the Opposition leaders would not still be having their heads on their shoulders.