

# The danger of territorial nationalism

The Opposition has not done enough to defend India's inclusive and plural ethos



MANASH FIRAQ BHATTACHARJEE

Talking to the American political journalist, Norman Cousins, in 1961, Jawaharlal Nehru shared his idea of democracy: "I would say that democracy is not only political, not only economic, but something of the mind." Nehru emphasised democracy as "a certain tolerance of others and even of others' opinions... a certain contemplative tendency and a certain inquisitive search for truth." Democracy for Nehru was akin to a political culture where a hundred opinions could bloom.

Since the Narendra Modi government took power in 2014, the mind of democracy is under attack. There is intolerance towards differences. Democracy is facing political authoritarianism. The return of the Modi government at the Centre has tightened Hindutva's grip on the political narrative. Despite the agrarian crisis, job unrest, and the hardships of demonetisation, the electoral outcome was in the BJP's favour. Making political capital out of the air strikes on Balakot, playing up the threat to the nation's security over real issues, and using divisive language worked for the BJP.

## Ideology of the state

Hindutva is no longer a political ideology of a political party. It is now an ideology of the Indian state. In 2015, when about 40 writers and artists returned their Sahitya Akademi awards in protest against the silence on the killing of writers by Hindu right-wing organisations, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley called it a "manufactured paper rebellion" by writers of "Left or [with] Nehruvian leaning." The murder of writers was sidelined by an ideological allegation. The political tactic was to turn an issue of public morality into a friend-enemy discourse.

Since the JNU incident of 2016, we witnessed the mainstreaming of the term "anti-national" by BJP members. Anyone who raised concerns on violence against Kashmiris, spoke against war, supported writers and



"Territorial nationalism is a predatory idea that hunts for enemies." People wait to check their names on the draft list of the National Register of Citizens centre in a village in Nagaon district, Assam. • REUTERS

journalists facing threats, welcomed the idea of Pakistani artists in India, spoke up for Muslims attacked for allegations of cow slaughter or beef consumption, or simply questioned the government faced the epithet. The BJP became the sole custodian of national pride and security.

## Defending Nehru's idea of India

Nehru's idea of India was defended by sections of India's civil society rather than the Congress or other secular parties. A section of mainstream media dropped its ethics and peddled the government's line. A handful of journalists braved legal, physical and verbal threats in order to ask the truth. When journalist Ravish Kumar asked Congress president Rahul Gandhi why he did not defend "Nehru's legacy", Mr. Gandhi skirted the question. Mr. Gandhi also spoke against hate, and for love, in his election campaign. But he was iffy in naming the real victims of hate politics. This weakened the counternarrative, and failed to bolster confidence in the electorate.

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee took the BJP's anti-minoritarian agenda head-on. She risked public mood to oppose the National Register of Citizens (NRC) being implemented in Assam, and welcomed the refugees in her State.

Earlier, she sided with the United Nations in support of granting asylum to the Rohingya, against the position of the Central government. She managed a thin victory – the BJP made big inroads into West Bengal with an unprecedented 40% vote share. The general secretary of the CPI(M), Sitaram Yechury, admitted that Left supporters shifted allegiance to the BJP. The instrumental aim of the Left parties was to dislodge the local rival, not the BJP, and this helped the BJP's cause. Improvising on Lord Acton, the conservative writer, Nirad C. Chaudhuri, had warned in *Thy Hand, Great Anarch!* that "loss of power corrupts, and absolute loss of power corrupts absolutely."

Has "the mind of India" (to borrow Nehru's phrase) shifted to the right? If the mind has abandoned the spirit of democracy and fallen for territorial paranoia, then yes. In *We Or Our Nationhood Defined*, the ideological guru of the Hindu right, M.S. Golwalkar, defined the nation as "hereditary territory". Hindutva is a territorial project. Thinking is reduced to marking territory, an act of self-preservation. It promotes exclusionary laws, as seen in the move to implement the NRC nationwide. This will throw the lives of poor migrants into a legal quagmire. The detention, detention and deportation of "fo-

reigners" will make people turn into stateless populations without rights.

According to Golwalkar, "Hindu religion, Hindu culture and Hindu language (the natural family of Sanskrit and her off-springs) complete the Nation concept." India is imagined as mono-religious, mono-cultural and mono-lingual. Golwalkar's options for minorities were either to "adopt" the majority culture "or to live at its mercy". When the Hindu vigilantes force Muslims to chant "Jai Shri Ram!" and "Bharat Mata ki Jai!", it isn't just perverse cultural pride that is involved, but the surplus pleasure of humiliating others.

Since 2014, India in the nationalist narrative is being imagined as a fortress being guarded against imagined enemies and hated political opponents and minorities. Ideological opponents are forced to fear every word and act of nonconformity. Muslims are killed or harmed on mere allegations of beef eating and cow slaughter. Territorial nationalism is a predatory idea that hunts for enemies.

## Cultural heterogeneity

Nehru wrote in *The Discovery of India*, "A Buddhist or Jain in India is a hundred per cent product of Indian thought and culture, yet neither is a Hindu by faith. It is, therefore, entirely misleading to refer to Indian culture as Hindu culture." Nehru's idea of India is not reducible to a single faith. "In later ages", Nehru wrote, "this culture was greatly influenced by the impact of Islam, and yet it remained... distinctively Indian." Cultural transformation of religions in India is the basis of its heterogeneity, and a historical fact. In Nehru's enlightened view, India is not a Hindu idea, or a Hindu nation.

The poet-critic, Octavio Paz, in his book *In Light of India*, wrote: "India, as a country and as a history, is much greater than Hinduism." Despite being an admirer of Hindu thought and architecture, Paz was aware of the immense contributions made by other cultures.

Humility is a desirable ethic for civilisations to live by. If India lives in territorial paranoia and exclusion, it will lose its mind.

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# Unleashing the potential of urban India

India could learn from the U.K.'s model of City Deals



V.R. VACHANA

The Global Metro Monitor 2018 reports that 36% of employment growth and 67% of GDP growth were contributed by the 300 largest global metros, with those in emerging economies outperforming those in advanced economies. Metropolitan areas concentrate and accelerate wealth as these are agglomerations of scale that concentrate higher-level economic functions. Nine Indian metros feature in the top 150 ranks of the economic performance index. By 2030, India will have 71 metropolitan cities, of which seven would have a population of more than 10 million. Clearly metropolitan areas are going to be a key feature of India's urbanisation and will play a crucial role in fuelling growth.

## A fragmented architecture

Article 243P(c) of the Constitution defines 'metropolitan areas' as those having "population of ten lakhs [a million] or more, comprised in one or more districts and consisting of two or more municipalities/panchayats/ other contiguous areas, specified by the governor through public notification to be a metropolitan area". It recognises metropolitan areas as multi-municipal and multi-district entities. It mandates the formation of a Metropolitan Planning Committee (MPC) for preparing draft development plans, considering common interests between local authorities, objectives and priorities set by Central and State governments, and investments likely to be made in the area by various agencies. To ensure the democratic character of the MPC, it is mandated that at least two-thirds of the members of the committee must be elected by and from among the elected members of the municipalities and chairpersons of the panchayats in the metropolitan area, proportionate to the ratio of their respective populations. The size and manner of filling such seats are left to the State's discretion.

MPCs were expected to lay frameworks for metropolitan governance, but on the ground they do not exist in most cases. Janaagraha's Annual Survey of India's City-Systems (ASICS) 2018 found that only nine out of 18 cities mandated to form MPCs have constituted them. Where constituted, their functionality is questionable, with the limited

role of local elected representatives raising further questions on democratic decentralisation. Thus, the provision for an MPC has not introduced robust governance of metropolitan areas, as the metropolitan areas continue to be a collection of parastatals and local bodies in an entirely fragmented architecture.

The U.K. has rolled out 'City Deals', an agreement between the Union government and a city economic region, modelled on a 'competition policy style' approach. The city economic region is represented by a 'combined authority'. This is a statutory body set up through national legislation that enables a group of two or more councils to collaborate decisions, and which is steered by a directly elected Mayor. This is to further democratise and incentivise local authorities to collaborate and reduce fragmented governance, drive economic prosperity, job growth, etc. 'City Deals' move from budget silos and promote 'economic growth budget' across regions. The U.K. has established nine such combined authorities. Australia adopted a regional governance model along these lines in 2016 and has signed four City Deals till date. Meanwhile, China is envisioning 19 seamlessly connected super city clusters.

India, however, is yet to begin the discourse on a governance framework for the future of its metropolitan areas. It is yet to recognise that disaster management, mobility, housing, climate change, etc. transcend municipal boundaries and require regional-level solutions. The World Bank notes that despite the emergence of smaller towns, the underlying character of India's urbanisation is "metropolitan", with towns emerging within the proximity of existing cities.

## Way forward

It is time India envisions the opportunities and challenges from a 'city' level to 'city-region' level. The Central government must create a platform to build consensus among State governments. Perhaps, the Greater Bengaluru Governance Bill, 2018, drafted by the Expert Committee for Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike Restructuring, could offer direction. It proposes for a Greater Bengaluru Authority headed by a directly elected Mayor, responsible for the overall planning of Greater Bengaluru with powers for inter-agency coordination and administration of major infrastructural projects across the urban local bodies within the area. However, this Bill is yet to see the light of day.

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## SINGLE FILE

# Across sectors, over time

Policies should be directed towards longer-term Sustainable Development Goals rather than short-term growth

VINOD THOMAS & NAMRATA CHINDARKAR



The re-elected government has a unique chance to change India's policy direction from a drive for short-term GDP growth at any cost to confronting the vast social and environmental gaps. A way forward is to make the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) the policy guide rather than short-term GDP growth. SDGs target human, social and governance improvements, and their linkages. Studies in Asia document the impact of corruption in aggravating illegal logging and deforestation. And environmental destruction and climate change hurt the poor the most. Other crises resulting from a short-term focus at the expense of the long term also harm the poor the most. The 1997 Asian financial crisis and the 2007-08 global financial crisis are examples. Even when policy assessments show the merit of looking at lasting welfare, there is political pressure to only show immediate growth. To overcome this conundrum, we need to bring together three approaches in evaluation: impact evaluation, cost-benefit analysis, and objectives-based evaluation.

Impact evaluation can serve as a valuable way to gauge the causal effects of a programme – for example, providing vaccination to the population. An example is an impact evaluation of 24x7 rural electrification in Gujarat, showing that benefits of reliable electricity go beyond having lighting and have positive spillovers on maternal and child health.

Cost-benefit analysis too has a growing role to play in enlarging the focus of evaluation. For example, growth analysis could give special attention to the time frame when impacts are assessed to ensure that sustainability is rewarded. Cost-benefit analysis could also apply distributional weights to address income disparities.

Extensions of objectives-based evaluation can show the importance of considering growth plus equity and the impacts of natural disasters. Odisha is an example in 2019 of ensuring early warning and evacuation. But budget allocations for preventing calamities remain woefully inadequate.

India is ranked 130th out of 189 countries in the UN's human development index, and 114th among 142 countries in gender gap. Of the world's 30 cities that are ranked worst in air pollution, 22 are in India. India needs to vastly increase spending on education, health and the environment, and build smart components into projects. An example of incorporating social inclusion is that of the JICA-funded Delhi Metro, which included gender elements.

The new administration can direct policy towards longer-term SDGs rather than short-term growth. To support this effort, policy assessments that only have a myopic focus on one sector and election cycles need to give way to ones that span across sectors and over time.

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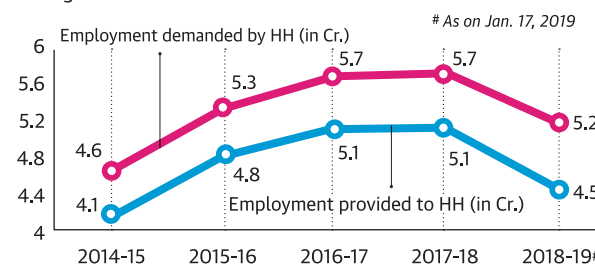
## DATA POINT

### Promise & delivery

The gap between the number of households that demanded jobs and the number met in Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) widened marginally in the financial year 2018-19. In at least nine States the wage rates paid were below the minimum assured in FY18, according to a report published by the Centre for Policy Research. By Srravya C

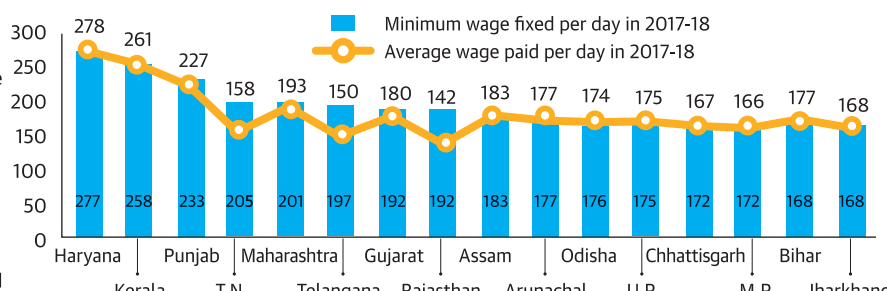
### Demand-supply gap

In FY19, only 4.5 crore households (HH) were provided with jobs through the scheme – 70 lakhs less than the demand.



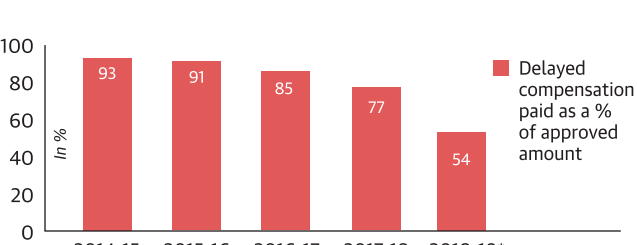
### Falling below the minimum

In Rajasthan, the average wage rate for workers was ₹192 in FY18 – ₹50 less than the minimum fixed by the Central government. In at least eight other major States, the rate was less than the minimum guaranteed



### Delayed pay checks

In FY19, only 54% of the amount approved to compensate the delays in wage payments have reached the aggrieved workers. MGNREGS workers are entitled to receive a compensation, if there are delays in wage payments. The compensation amount is based on the duration of delay. The proportion of delay compensation paid to workers has been decreasing in the last five years



## FROM THE HINDU ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO JUNE 18, 1969

### Work permits for non-citizens in Malaysia

About 3 lakhs non-citizens in Malaysia will have to register themselves for work permits beginning next month, the Minister for Labour, Mr. V. Manickavasagam, said in Kuala Lumpur today [June 17]. All non-citizens over the age of 12 would have to register themselves for work permits whether they were working temporarily or on permanent basis. Self-employed people also would have to register though they may not have to take work permit. The Minister said the permits would not be issued automatically but it was not the intention of the Government to cause hardship to those who gave loyal service to Malaysia. He assured the investors that the relevant Act would be applied as liberally as possible so as not to affect industrialisation. Mr. Manickavasagam said the Ministry of Home Affairs will also keep a complete record of non-citizens employed in the country.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JUNE 18, 1919.

### Calcutta Improvement Trust.

The Government of Bengal has issued a resolution reviewing the progress made by the Calcutta Improvement Trust during the last three years. The resolution says that in spite of the difficulties arising out of war-time conditions and the litigation in which the Trust was involved in regard to the acquisition of surplus lands, much has been done in the transformation of congested areas and insanitary slums and the planning of new streets. Of the sixteen improvement schemes submitted to the Government during the last three years, twelve have received sanction and one is under consideration while three have been abandoned or modified. Of these the most costly scheme is central avenue, a wide thoroughfare passing through from north to south, the acquisition of land for which will cost two hundred lakhs gross and fifty lakhs net.

## CONCEPTUAL

### Cyberchondria

PSYCHOLOGY

This refers to severe anxiety that is fuelled by medical information found on the Internet. People who try to self-diagnose their health condition by searching their symptoms on search engines usually suffer from cyberchondria as they often misdiagnose their condition. They may, for instance, experience the unfounded fear that they suffer from serious diseases like cancer even though the symptoms they experience may be better explained by a medical condition that is far less serious. While cyberchondriacs may be searching the Internet to feel better, the information they find on the Internet might, in fact, increase their anxiety.

## MORE ON THE WEB

Multilingualism on display in 17th Lok Sabha

<http://bit.ly/MultilingualismLS>