

# The ethical act of voting

It is the duty of having to act not for individual benefit, but for the benefit of the larger society



SUNDAR SARUKKAI

There is a puzzling trait that is pervasive and human. It is that we often judge others with a different yardstick than with which we judge ourselves. When I visit an organisation, there is always somebody who complains that their colleagues do not work at all. Ironically, the colleagues also say the same thing about others in the organisation. Our self-perception is often at odds with the way others see us. This is also part of a deeper human malaise: we think others are wrong and we are right in our beliefs and opinions. Elections exemplify these tendencies very well.

In the time of elections, we repeatedly hear these sentiments about other voters. The upper classes will tell you that poorer citizens vote only to get benefits such as cash, clothes, television sets and other consumer goods. The majority group will say that the minorities vote as a bloc since they have all been told whom to vote for. These are seen as examples of voters not doing their duty of voting for the best person, namely, the best political representative who will govern well. Those who support a particular party will say something similar about those who are voting for another party. It is as if when people vote for money or as a vote bank, they are not doing what they should. But then it could also be argued that a person who blindly votes for one ideology or another is pretty much doing the same thing.

## Getting paid to vote

What does it mean to perform the act of voting correctly? It is often said that voting is a duty, but what kind of a duty is it? Is it to make a mark on a sheet or is it actually a particular process of thinking and deciding?

Consider the act of voting by those who get paid before they vote. This practice is not only endemic across States but is also done quite brazenly in some places. Party members go house to house and distribute money and other goods. This is done in the open and is a performance in itself.



"The problem lies in viewing voting as a transaction, the aim of which is to get some benefit for an individual or a group." A voter poses in Teliamura district, Tripura, after casting her vote in the Assembly election in 2018. •RITU RAJ KONWAR

In other cases, people are given money and goods in more surreptitious ways. This cash-for-votes practice seem to go against the very grain of democratic election. But why so?

In the case of taking money or goods, voters see elections as a transaction. What they are basically asking is this: what am I getting in return for voting for you? This goes against a fundamental principle of democratic voting, which is that voting is not a transaction. When we do a job for someone we don't know, and which benefits that person, we generally expect to get paid for that act. Voting is not a job in that sense. It is not a job which is eligible for some compensation. So, the fundamental question about voting is this: are we voting for our own sake or for the benefit of others? Does voting improve our well-being or that of others, the elected politicians? Or is it that the ultimate purpose of an individual's vote is to improve the well-being of the larger society?

We are clearly helping somebody else by voting. If a person wins because of our votes, then he or she de-

rives enormous benefit from being a member of the legislature. There is a direct benefit to the person who is elected – she enjoys a lot of power after being elected. This is the dilemma in electing somebody. We are supposed to vote for free, whereas the result of our action ends up making another person better off. So why is voting not seen as a business transaction since the winner of the election profits from the action of the voter? Why can't the voter who is enabling opportunity for another person's wealth ask for a share in that wealth? If voters do so, then they are behaving rationally.

People who stand for elections understand this logic well and they deal with it merely as a problem of economics. Their calculation is also based on this understanding: let us say a person wins an election, because of which she expects to make one crore in the next year. The person needs enough votes to make this happen and spends in anticipation that she will be able to recoup the money if she wins. Giving money to voters is thus like an investment. The

amount of payment to voters is really a measure of how much elected representatives hope to make during their tenure!

When we vote based on our ideology, we are following the same logic as those taking money. Those for whom small amounts of money do not matter ask for other favours, including protection of their interests, whether their religion, their caste or even economic benefits appropriate to their class. When a group of rich people vote for a person who supports lower taxes, they are doing exactly the same as the poor, since voting is used as a transaction to get something they desire.

The dynamics of voting is thus a complex problem of rationality, similar to problems in rational choice theory. First, how do politicians know that the people will vote for them after taking their money or listening to their promises, especially if more than one politician pays the same group of people or makes similar promises? Moreover, how do they know that enough people will vote for them to make them win? For the voter, it is a much simpler calculation. They get paid for a service they perform by voting. Interestingly, many of them do vote for the person they take money from, because they feel they are morally bound to do so.

## For the larger good

The fundamental problem lies in viewing voting as a transaction, the aim of which is to get some benefit for an individual or a group. But we have to recognise that voting is not like any other transaction. The duty that is inherent in the act of voting is an ethical duty, not just a constitutional one. It is the duty of having to act not for individual benefit, such as money or ideology, but for the benefit of the larger society. Such benefit for the larger society will include others benefiting as much as each one of us does through each of our votes. That is, when I vote, I vote on behalf of others as much as on behalf of myself. This duty is the ethical rationality related to voting. It is also a recognition that a democratic action like voting is primarily for the good of something larger than one's self interests.

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# End of the runway

The plans to rescue Jet Airways came too late



RAGHUVIR SRINIVASAN

Jet Airways seems to have approached the end of the runway. With banks unwilling to throw in more money to rescue the airline and no saviours visible on the horizon, it seems destined to follow the flight path of Kingfisher Airlines, which bit the dust in 2012. From over 120 aircraft, the storied airline is now down to just five. Almost all its leased aircraft have been repossessed by lessors. On Wednesday night, the airlines decided to temporarily suspend all its flights. Its experienced pilots have either moved to competitors or are queuing up before them now. And the Jet brand, which was once reputed, stands tarnished with passengers complaining of cancelled flights and delayed refunds.



PRASHANT WADKAR

## Emergency funding

Jet Airways has been pleading for emergency funding of at least ₹400 crore. But banks have refused to budge, and rightly so. From their perspective, more lending to the sinking airline would simply mean squandering money. Emergency funding is a viable option when there is a high possibility of the borrower's business bouncing back and enabling repayment of the money borrowed. That is not the case with Jet Airways now. It was a different story a couple of months ago when the banks did attempt a bailout package for the airline. But the descent in the airline's fortunes since then has been rapid. Only a foolhardy banker would write a cheque for Jet now. Besides, given the atmosphere of political uncertainty, bankers would think twice before trying to save a private airline that is probably beyond rescue. No banker would like to get in the crosshairs of a new government. As it is, some are asking why banks should try to rescue the airline instead of taking it to insolvency court, which is the prescribed route for such cases.

It is interesting that the present government, despite all the pressure that has been brought to bear on it, has kept away from all the action. Bailing out a private enterprise with public money is something that it would not want to be seen doing at this point in time.

The lenders consortium is still trying its best to find a suitor for the airline. They have

invited expressions of interest from prospective bidders and will shortly call for bids. But what will the prospective buyers bid for? The airline is now down to about 16,000 employees, has a debt overhang of ₹8,414 crore (as of March 31, 2018), and accumulated losses of over ₹14,000 crore. Its routes and departure slots at major airports have been appropriated by competitors, albeit on a temporary basis. If Jet Airways does not show up on the radar again in full force before the end of the summer schedule in October, the routes and slots will be foregone.

For any prospective bidder, the attraction is not just the number of aircraft that the airline flies but also the routes, departure and landing slots, and parking rights. Besides, the brand loyalty, of course. Jet scored high on these accounts, but not any more. In short, Jet today has more liabilities than assets to speak about. So, why will any serious bidder agree to take over the airline now?

## Stepping down

The fact is that the rescue act was mounted too late. That the airline was in trouble was known since October, but the desperation set in only in February. Part of the blame for the delay lies with founder and chairman Nareish Goyal, whose reluctance to part with control over the airline put off not just prospective investors such as the Tata Group (which admitted to have been in talks for an investment in Jet) but also Jet's partner, Etihad Airways. In the event, Mr. Goyal's decision to step down probably came too late in the day.

Mr. Goyal is a veteran of many a battle in the Indian skies and his influence over successive governments since the mid-1990s ensured that the skies were kept clear for him. The 5/20 rule (a government norm under which national carriers are required to have five years of operational experience and a fleet of minimum 20 aircraft to fly overseas) was clearly designed to help Jet. So were the restrictions on foreign investment in domestic carriers, until Jet decided to invite Etihad as a partner.

But Mr. Goyal has run out of options now. After all, what goes around comes around. Jet Airways was a superb brand and had built strong loyalty among fliers. It is sad that it has to go. But more unfortunate is the plight of Jet's employees, who will now be forced to work with competitors at lower pay scales, if at all they find openings. And of course, fliers, who are already forking out 20-30% extra on fares thanks to the fall in airline seats.

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## SINGLE FILE

# The facade of art house

Mediocrity is often celebrated in our collective zeal to uphold the alternative in cinema

KUNAL RAY



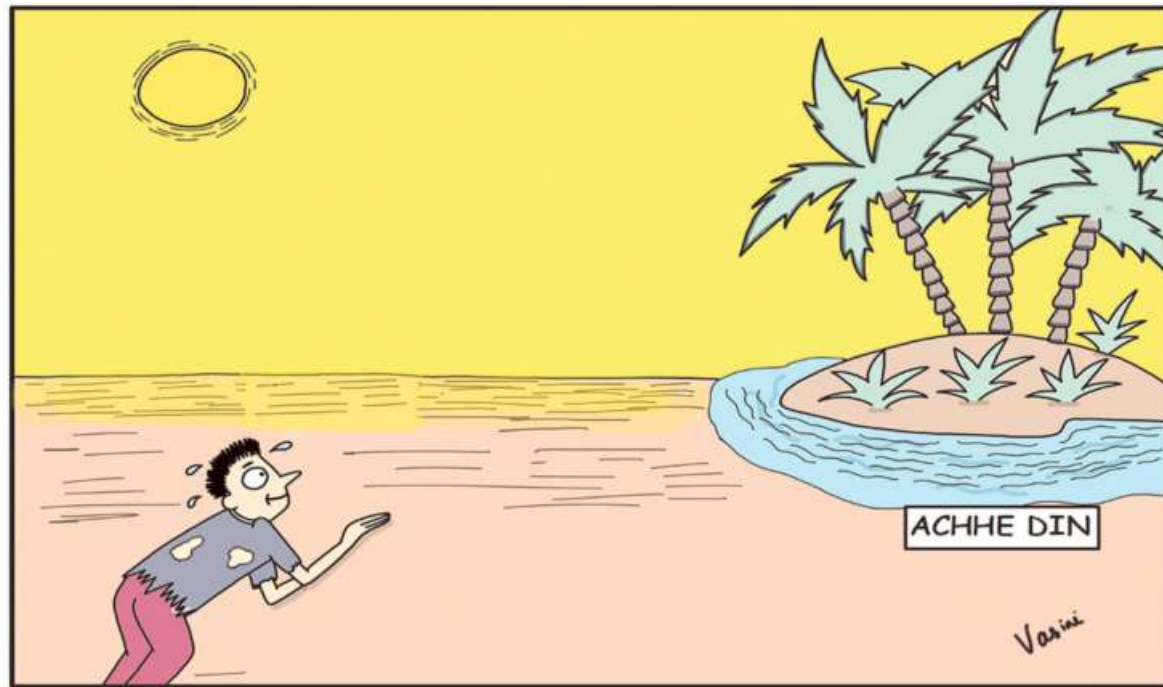
In India, particularly in art, the alternative to the mainstream is applauded. The alternative is shown more courtesy owing to the limited means of production that undergird this art, so much so that limited means are often wrongly adjudged as a precondition for good art. This assumption reflects our simplistic understanding of art and its making. A considerable volume of mediocrity is thus celebrated in our collective zeal to uphold the alternative.

In Indian cinema, the alternative is often synonymous with the absence of a popular star cast, small budgets, experiments in storytelling, and radical themes. All these together have created a formula for the alternative in Indian cinema. The question to then ask is, can the alternative ever be formulaic? And if it is formulaic, then how or what is the alternative really?

Take, for instance, the recent Hindi film, *Hamid*, which attempts to explore the problems of Kashmir. The film has been made on a small budget, features a relatively unknown star cast, and is shot in real locations in Kashmir. It also features a child actor who plays the lead and has all the necessary tropes of the alternative, yet the depiction of the problem is too simplistic. The message simply echoes the truism that terror is bad and the innocent always suffer. Don't we know that already? The film takes no position on Kashmir and merely reduces it to a chronicle of problems that are probably well known in India. I wonder what the filmmaker's position is vis-à-vis the issue and how it can be considered an alternative to portrayals of the Kashmir conundrum as seen in popular Hindi films such as *Fiza*, *Mission Kashmir* and *Fanaa*. Sections of the media were quick to applaud *Hamid's* realistic setting and performances but realism alone doesn't make the alternative.

When mainstream films attempt the alternative, they provide magnified access. A case in point is Alia Bhatt's character in *Gully Boy* and her zealous appeal for women's education. She is unabashed in her obsessive love for Ranveer Singh's character without losing the focus of her career goals, and why can't the two co-exist? This, to me, is authentic, alternative character creation. Kerala's avowal of the alternative in literature, film and visual art is common knowledge. From O.V. Vijayan's *The Legends of Khasak* to G. Aravindan's films, the alternative aesthetic is deeply entrenched in the cultural landscape of the State. A clutch of recent mainstream contemporary films such as *Angamaly Diaries*, *Thondimuthalum Driksakshiyum* and *Kammatti Paadam* have compelled us to rethink the alternative in the commercial format. The stories are new, the range of characters diverse, and the performances riveting, thereby establishing that the mainstream can be radical too. Perhaps this is the new alternative without the facade of the art house and its hoary pretensions.

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## DATA POINT

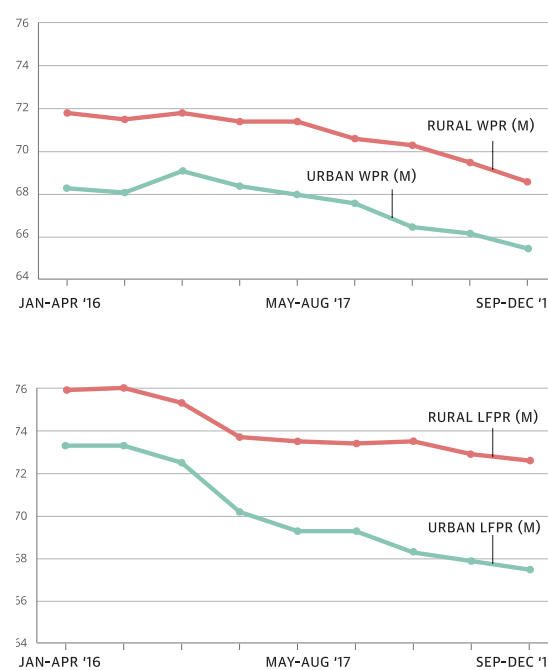
### A rise in joblessness

A combination of major household surveys since 2016 shows that there has been a decline in the size of the labour force as well as the workforce and a corresponding increase in the unemployment rate, according to the State of Working India 2019 report.

By Varun B. Krishnan

#### Bleeding jobs

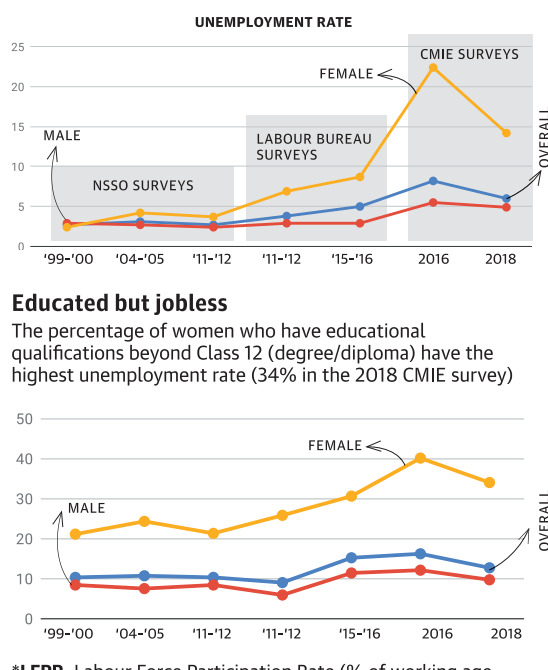
Trends in WPR and LFPR for men in rural and urban areas (across surveys) show a drop of at least three percentage points between January-April 2016 and September-December 2018



This decline in WPR translates to a net loss of 50 lakh jobs from among the male workforce post-demonetisation (2016-18), but a causal link can't be made based only on these trends

#### Higher unemployment

All the surveys since 2016 indicate a rise in unemployment. The 2016 CMIE survey shows the % of unemployed women as being very high, but the 2018 survey shows this falling to 14.2%



\*LFPR: Labour Force Participation Rate (% of working age people working or looking for work); WPR: Workforce Participation Rate (% of working age people who are working)  
Source: Centre for Sustainable Employment, Azim Premji University

## FROM The Hindu ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO APRIL 18, 1969

### High-level committees for Telengana

The Andhra Pradesh Cabinet, which met here [Hyderabad] today [April 17], decided to constitute a high-power Telengana Development Committee and a Plan Implementation Committee in pursuance of the Prime Minister's statement on Telengana in the Lok Sabha on April 11. The Development Committee consists of the Chief Minister (who will be Chairman), a Planning Commission member, all the Ministers from the Telengana region and the Chairman of the Telengana Regional Committee. The main functions of the Development Committee will be to identify within the overall framework of the Five-Year Plan the programmes and schemes relating to the Telengana region with reference to the physical as well as financial targets to be achieved and to review from time to time the implementation and working of the programmes and schemes.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO APRIL 18, 1919.

### Bose Research Institute. A New Discovery.

A new discovery of great scientific interest has just been made by Sir J.C. Bose in his Research Institute [in Calcutta] which proves that plants in general perceive and respond to long ether waves used in wireless signalling. In a vast range of electrical spectrum, plants are extremely sensitive to ultraviolet rays wave, the length of which is shorter than a hundred thousandth part of an inch. Going to the opposite end of the spectrum, in the region of invisible heat rays, the whole wave length is about one thousand part of an inch. Professor Bose has shown that plants also perceive and respond to them. The heat raised is also perceived by us as the sensation of warmth but we have no sense organ to perceive wireless message where the electric waves employed vary from many yards to miles in length.

## POLL CALL

### Voter ID

A voter ID, or the Electors Photo Identity Card (EPIC), is a document that is issued to an Indian citizen who is above the age of 18 and is eligible to vote. Voter IDs were first issued in 1993 when T.N. Seshan was the Chief Election Commissioner. The card primarily serves as an identity proof for the citizen for casting her ballot in a municipal, State or national election. Holding the card, however, does not guarantee the right to vote. The right to vote is available only for those citizens whose names can be found on the electoral roll. EPICs are provided only to general electors and not service and overseas electors. If a voter moves residence to another Assembly constituency, she will have to register afresh as a voter in the new constituency and will be provided with a new voter ID. Her EPIC number will remain the same though.

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