

The paradox of faith

When protesters let their ego overcome their faith, they are no longer true disciples of their god



SUNDAR SARUKKAI

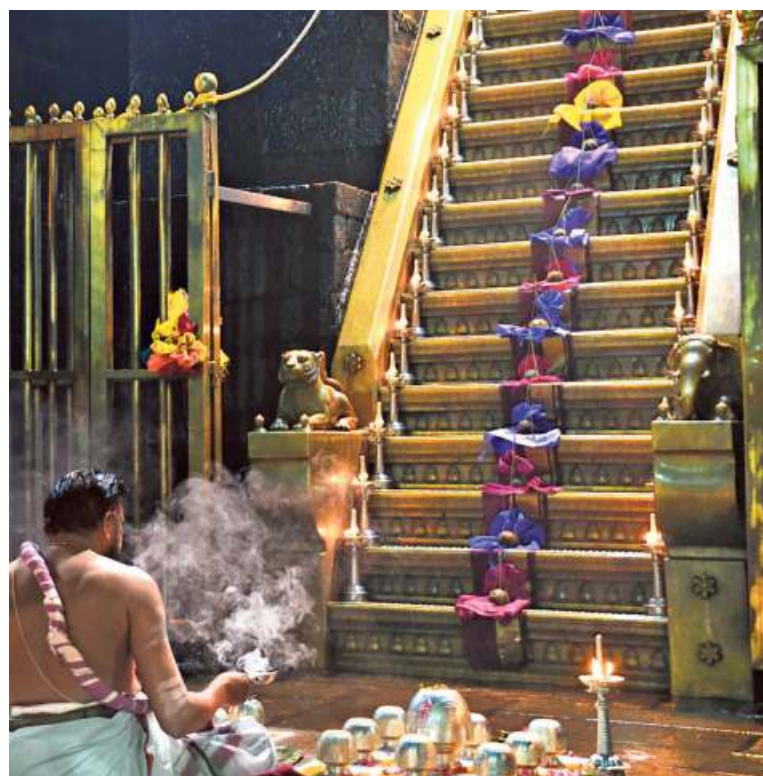
Every day we see people brazenly driving through red lights, breaking queues with impunity or getting their way through bribes. Each time I see this, I despair, but then these people invoke a particular reason to justify their actions. They say that they act in this manner because they have lost faith in the police, the government or just the people around them. They take the law into their own hands because they have lost faith in something or the other.

Promises, hope and the future
There are many kinds of faith: faith in a person, a system, a government; faith in systems of thought like liberalism and secularism. Having faith in a person often means that we believe that the person will live up to our expectations. Similarly, when we have faith in a government, we believe that the government will live up to what we think it will do.

Faith is also related to promise. Faith in a government could mean that we believe that the government will deliver on its promises. Thus, faith is not just belief but a qualified belief related to expectations and fulfilling promises. Even in these cases, it is not easy to 'prove' that the faith is justified. There are many who will continue to have faith in a government although the government may not have lived up to its promises.

Faith is sustained very often by hope. Faith in a person is not about some belief about that person. It is the hope that this person will continue to behave in the expected manner. Faith in its most profound sense is really about the future and is most often an expression of promise and hope.

The future is indeed a problem. It is radically unpredictable. That is, you cannot even attempt to find models of prediction of one's life in the future. In the face of this unpredictability, our daily life is filled with moments of faith. For example, we have faith that nature is not unpredictable and that the solid ground will not



"All faith has some notion of trust and surrender but true faith in god has often been equated with complete surrender." The Tantri performing the Padipoja at the Ayyappa temple in Sabarimala. *H.VIBHU

turn into water at the next moment. We can act because we have faith in the constancy of the world around us. That is why when people we know well behave unpredictably it can be quite a shock to us.

Faith in the constancy of nature cannot be 'proved'. Having faith in nature is to have a belief that nature will live up to our expectations of it. Faith is thus always more than mere believing. It is about expectations, promises, hope and the future. None of these can really be 'proved' in the usual meaning of the term since by definition they are all yet to happen.

Faith in god

And then there is god. One could also have faith in god. What kind of a faith is this? At its core, there is not much difference between the meaning of faith mentioned above and the case of the divine. Faith in god might mean any of the following: that god exists, that god will fulfil our expectations, that we can trust god to take care of us, and so on. Since faith is one way we engage with the unknown future, it should not be a surprise to find that there is an intrinsic

relation between god and time. These positions range from the idea that god is time to god conquers time. For many, faith in god is as much a way of discovering some hope about the future.

But there is a difference between faith in god and faith in humans or social systems. This has to do with the autonomy of the individual. Whatever our beliefs are, there is one central core to our behaviour. This is the assertion of our individuality, of not trusting anything or anyone completely. There is always a crack in our trust and faith.

The meaning of true faith

What distinguishes faith in god as against faith in everything else is the tension between human autonomy and complete faith. This is very well exemplified by life-changing religious experiences. Almost without exception, all religious mystics have had moments when they have undergone a major crisis about their belief. This crisis is often manifested as a strong doubt in their belief in god. They struggle through this crisis and only when they come out of it do

they really achieve true faith.

All faith has some notion of trust and surrender but true faith in god has often been equated with complete surrender. In the tradition of Ramanuja and bhakti saints, this is the true sense of *saranagati*: completely surrendering oneself to god. One of the most important consequences of this surrender is that the devotees cannot begin to think that their faith is more important than the divine. They can act as agents to protect human interests related to religious institutions but they manifest a crack in their faith when they begin to privilege their own autonomy. This is well illustrated in the apocryphal story about Vivekananda. When he was upset at what he thought were attempts to destroy temples, goddess Kali is reputed to have asked him whether he was protecting her or she was protecting him. In the name of faith if we think we become protectors of gods, then we have lost true faith. When we act in this manner, we are only showing that we are not capable of true surrender and trust that are needed of the faith in the divine.

This really is the paradox of faith: true faith demands the autonomous choice of giving up our autonomy. The paradox arises from our inability to surrender completely, to completely trust our faith. When humans decide to act to protect their gods, they are only manifesting their lack of trust in god as well as their belief that they have to act to protect the divine. The recent happenings in Kerala are a classic instance of this fractured belief.

And so, just as in the case of people breaking various rules of society, when faith breaks down we take law into our own hands. Those who took the law into their hands at Sabarimala by refusing to abide by the Supreme Court's directives may think that they are expressing their loss of faith in the police, the Supreme Court and the Kerala government. But they also lost their true faith in their god when they decided to act in the manner they did. When they let their ego and self-importance overcome their faith, they were no longer the true disciples of their god.

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FROM THE READERS' EDITOR

How fair is social media criticism?

Instant online opinions impoverish our public sphere



A.S. PANNEERSELVAM

Social media activists seem to have different notions about corrective action, justice and fairness. They want retribution, revenge and punishment rather than non-punitive course correction, which is the essential function of a news ombudsman. A news ombudsman adopts a light-touch approach to visibly mend mistakes. I refrain from naming the reporter while reporting errors or the subeditor in case of editing errors because the primary focus is on rectifying the mistake rather than stigmatising individuals who work under deadline pressure. A disturbing element about the shrill criticism of activists is the suggestion of overreach and breach of other rules in their overwhelming focus on a single theme.



The issue gets more complicated with a newspaper like *The Hindu* because its online archive is available from 2000. Is it right to pull out an old story and take it down because it violates a law that came later? Can we alter our past to reflect the present? Is it right to play with archival material? Can history be moulded in such a way that all contentious issues are eschewed from the public domain? Over the last six years, I have tried to explain in detail why this newspaper generally refrains from altering or taking down a story. Does the non-existence of particular material online mean that it does not exist in any other form in the archives? What about the existence of the physical newspaper, which carries content that some readers want to take down, in not only the newspaper's office but also various public libraries?

Activists working on a single theme tend to be oblivious to the requirements of a complex, multi-layered society, which media scholars term as interlocking public, and come up with solutions that might not empower in the long run but undermine some of the wellsprings of plural coexistence.

Laws related to the newsroom

I would like to share a portion of a recent note from our senior managing editor that lists various laws relating to the newsroom. Apart from the well-documented laws of defamation – both criminal and civil – he listed more than 25 specific laws that govern reporting. For instance, contempt of court where, technically, fair criticism is allowed but there are instances of the courts being inconsistent in interpreting what is fair comment. Legislative privilege, where we are yet to codify the privileges of our elected members, is a powerful tool to keep the media on a leash. The laws relating to sexual crime, juvenile crime and crime against children are explained to every reporter and subeditor during their induction period in the newsroom. Twitter warriors may not know that a newspaper can be prosecuted under Rule 13 of the Aircraft Rules which says that "no person shall take, or cause or permit to be taken, at a government aerodrome or from an aircraft in flight, any photograph". Instead of studied reflection, many who are active in cyberspace come up with instant opinions and impoverish our public sphere.

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SINGLE FILE

Gulf in strategic precepts

Japan must adopt an independent approach in the Indo-Pacific that is more amenable to partners like India

SOURABH GUPTA



Twenty years after exchanging bitter words following New Delhi's nuclear tests, India-Japan ties exude exceptional warmth. From development assistance to maritime cooperation, both countries view each other as "special strategic and global partners." But an unsavoury truth is apparent beneath the surface: ties are a mile wide but an inch deep. In 2011, India and Japan began implementing the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement; yet seven years later, bilateral trade has yet to hit even the \$20 billion mark. India's exports to Japan have in fact contracted in four of the past six years. Since early 2010, Japan and India have discussed joint infrastructure projects in third countries, including announcing an Asia-Africa Growth Corridor. But not a single project has taken off, including in Myanmar and the Mekong countries where the two share complementary interests.

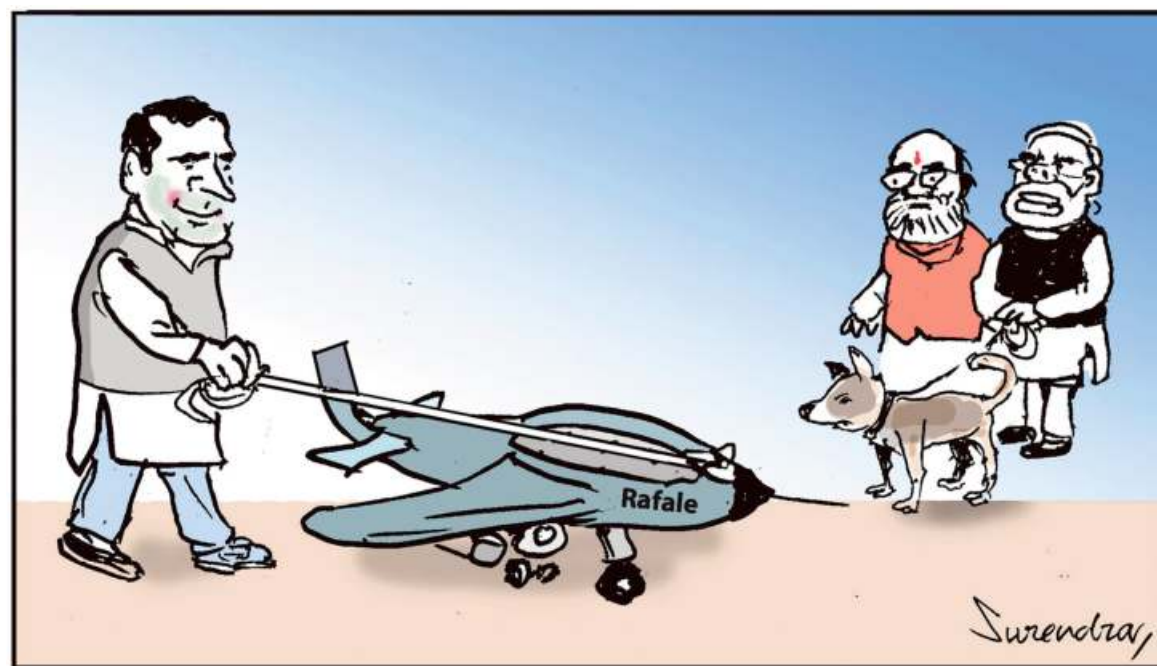
The largest gap between form and substance is evident in the area of defence cooperation. The framework of Indo-Japanese defence ties has grown considerably, including the joint declaration on security cooperation, the action plan to advance such cooperation, a defence equipment transfer agreement, a classified military information security protection agreement, and the ongoing logistical support cooperation talks. Yet, 10 years later, the two sides have failed to realise the sale of a single defence article and there exists no conventional threat-specific contingency scenario in which the two militaries can practically cooperate. The veiled threat to interdict Chinese shipping at the Indo-Pacific's chokepoints might make for good theatre but is poor policy. Not since the Napoleonic wars has a campaign to interdict the shipping of a major power been successfully mounted – except during a general war.

India and Japan must grapple with the gulf that separates their guiding strategic precepts if they are to transcend the hollow institutionalisation that infects strategic ties. Though swayed by competing currents of Asia-oriented or autonomy-centred diplomacy, Japan, ever since its Meiji opening 150 years ago, has never been able to successfully postulate an order beyond a Western-led alliance framework.

For its part, independent India has never sought to articulate an identity within the framework of an alliance system – be it Western or any other. As Prime Minister Narendra Modi eloquently restated at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, New Delhi remains conspicuously committed to a non-Western, pluralistic model of cooperative security in Asia.

Nuzzling together within a broader anti-China coalition can only go so far in bolstering strategic congruence. Rather, Japan must adopt a more independent-minded approach in the Indo-Pacific that is less attached to the West and more amenable to partners like India.

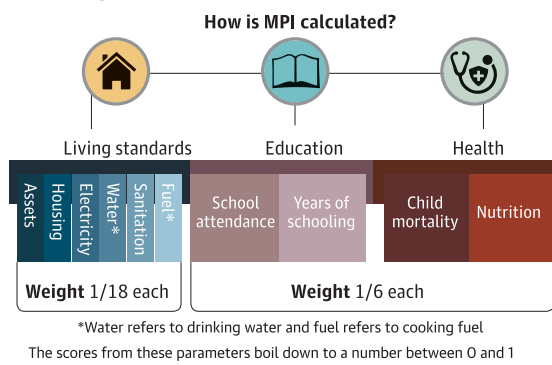
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DATA POINT

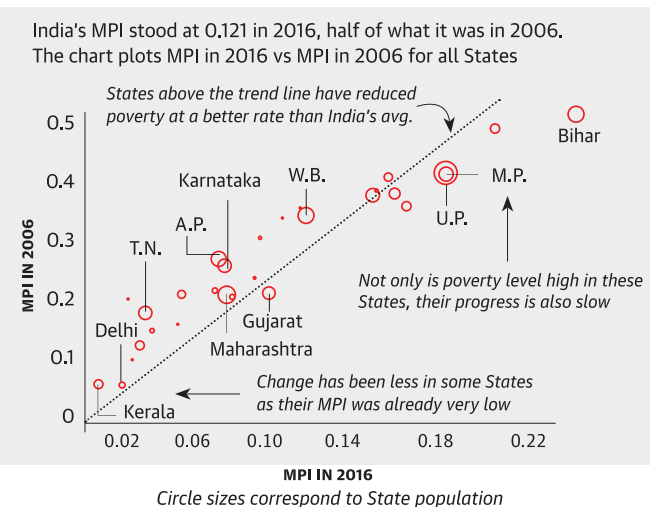
States of poverty

While overall poverty in India has come down, the progress has been uneven among States and communities. Varun B. Krishnan looks at the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) to reveal variations. A MPI value of 1 indicates the highest deprivation level, while 0 indicates the lowest

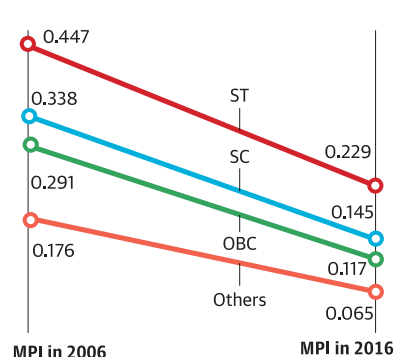


India's MPI is lower than the global average (0.159) but higher (worse) than BRICS countries

Rank	Country	Region	MPI
1	Armenia	Europe and Central Asia	0.001
25	Brazil	Latin America	0.016
26	China	East Asia and the Pacific	0.017
35	S. Africa	Sub-Saharan Africa	0.023
53	India	South Asia	0.121
71	Pakistan	South Asia	0.228
105	Niger	Sub-Saharan Africa	0.591



The MPI has gone down across communities, but it is still nearly double among Scheduled Tribes when compared to Others.



Source: Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, UNDP

FROM The Hindu. ARCHIVES

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO OCTOBER 29, 1918.

Secondary Education in Bombay.

The following reply from the Bombay Government is received by Sir M.B. Chaubal, Chairman, Provisional Governing Body, Nutan Maharashtra Vidya Prasarak Mandal: The Secretary to Government says: I am directed to your representation, dated the 9th September, 1918, on the subject of the establishment at Talegaon Dabhade in the Poona District of a new type of secondary school to be known as the Navin Samartha Vidyalaya under the management of a new education society to be called "The Nutan Maharashtra Vidya Prasarak Mandal" and in reply I am to say that the Government hope that the aims of the society will be fulfilled and will watch the progress of the school with sympathetic interest. I am to request that you will be so good as to furnish that Government in due course with a list of the teaching staff of the proposed school.

Poona Betting Case.

Without hearing arguments for or against the acquittal of Lieutenant Colonel Peck, the Cantonment Magistrate, to-day [October 28, in Poona] acquitted accused Vithaldas Bhattia who was charged by the police under Section 67, Cantonment Act, with accepting bets on horses in the first enclosure at the race course on the 21st August. The Court observed that the case against the accused had failed as beyond the admission made by the accused to Mr. Boyd, Superintendent of Police at the time of his arrest, which was admission made to a police officer, there was no evidence against the accused. The only other witness cited by the police, Husserwanji M. Marshall, had proved unreliable as the persons he had named as having been seen by him taking bets with the accused had disproved the statement. Mr Reuben Solomon for the defence said that he would have been glad of a ruling on the point whether betting is gambling and whether the race course enclosure is a public place. However as the court had acquitted his client he had to be satisfied.

CONCEPTUAL

Tullock paradox

PUBLIC POLICY

This refers to an apparent paradox where the cost or price paid to obtain rent-seeking favours from the government is far lower than the monetary benefits that could be obtained from such bribery. The Tullock paradox is used to wonder why the world is not more corrupt than it is already given the benefits derived from rent-seeking. Many reasons have been cited to explain the paradox. One of them is that the cost of seeking favours from the government is lowered by competition between politicians to pocket bribes from citizens. Politicians demanding lower bribes can outcompete those demanding higher bribes, thus limiting corruption.

MORE ON THE WEB

A video on players who scored successive hundreds in ODIs

<http://bit.ly/successive100s>