

The importance of democratic education

Without it, we will continue to allow unhealthy scepticism about democracy to grow



RAJEEV BHARGAVA

A persistent concern exists about democracy's failure to fulfil our expectations. While our votes are forceful 'paper stones', effective in getting rid of governments we dislike, they are powerless to give us effective, efficient, good governments. Why do we have to put up with corrupt rulers with criminal records – qualities that obstruct good governance? Why tolerate those who strive to do more good for themselves than for the people, who have neither vision nor wisdom? Why have mediocre politicians who shun contact with people with ability and talent?

Better, wiser governments

Some cynics may respond to this crisis of democracy by arguing the following: to achieve our national goals, we must assemble the best team to govern. Such a team cannot be elected by popular mandate but instead by those who have the intellectual wherewithal to select those fit for it. To such people, democracy – which is committed to the principle of one person, one vote, and which extends franchise to all regardless of ability – can never produce the best team.

They might draw an analogy from cricket where we play to compete at the highest level and win – something not possible if the best cricketers are not selected. But this is not achieved by popular vote. Instead, we rely on experts – a selection committee consisting of experienced cricketers. If popular mandate can't give us the best team that realises our national goal in cricket, why expect a different result in politics? Why not select our government by a similar procedure involving experts?

So, to reiterate the conundrum: democratically elected governments in our times are neither efficient nor wise. They show a propensity to fail at achieving their national goal – a high quality of life for all people. Then why not abandon democracy? Or at least introduce an eligibility criterion, restricting the vote to those with formal education? Won't educa-



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tion help in identifying the best political representatives? A democrat need not reject this argument. She may respond that this need not entail abandoning universal adult franchise but the distribution of education to all. This seems a decent solution. Sustainable democracies require a high rate of literacy. The more educated we are, it might be claimed, the better we become at choosing the best people to run our government.

But this argument is flawed. Literacy and education by themselves do not create good citizens or yield mature democracies. Many are formally illiterate but are politically astute and even possess qualities of good citizenship. Conversely, many educated people are prone to being self-obsessed, undemocratic, and even authoritarian. Primary, secondary or even higher education by itself does not guarantee good citizenship.

The solution then is not just education per se, but universal education of a certain kind, one that is focused on improving the quality of our democracy. Our current education system does not focus on education in democracy or what we might call democratic education. Nor does it build on elements of democratic culture embedded in our traditions.

Core elements

What then are the core elements of democratic education? For a start, it requires the cultivation of democratic virtues. For instance, the ability to imagine and articulate a minimally common good. This requires that we distinguish what is merely good for me from what is the good of all. And since each of us may develop our own distinct idea of the common good, to find an overlapping common good. Relatedly, an ability to

handle difference and disagreement and to retain, despite this difference, the motivation to arrive at the common good through conversation, debate, dialogue and deliberation.

The ability to imagine and conceive a common good is inconsistent with what the Greeks famously called 'pleonexia', the greed to grab everything for oneself, to refuse to share anything, to not acknowledge what is due to each person, to have no sense of reciprocity or justice. It follows that the idea of the common good cannot be developed without some sense of justice. Democratic education requires training in not succumbing to pleonexia. Also crucial is a spirit of compromise, of moderation, and a willingness, within acceptable value parameters, of mutual give and take. None of this is possible without other general capabilities such as listening patiently to others, being empathetic to the plight of others, and having a commitment to continuing a conversation with people despite disagreement.

More important is the ability to participate in a particular historical narrative or, as the political theorist Jeremy Webber puts it, a "commitment to a particular debate through time". Members of a political community become better citizens when they relate to critical issues through historically inherited terms of debate, a continuing narrative, a specific ongoing conversation. The reflection of that debate in political decision-making is central to the members' feeling of engagement and participation. For example, there is a particular way in which the question of religion has been framed in India, as also issues of nation, caste and gender. Individuals become effective and meaningful citizens only by

learning the terms set by debates around these specific issues. Since a useful entry to them is available through rich debates in the Constituent Assembly, a familiarity with them is a crucial ingredient of democratic education in India.

It also follows that democratic education involves a basic understanding of our society and its history, of its multiple cultural, intellectual and religious traditions, which set the terms of specific debates. I am frequently appalled at my own ignorance of the historical trajectory of our complex social problems. And saddened to find that my highly educated friends do not know that a constitutional minority in India is not just a numerically small group but one potentially disadvantaged by virtue of that fact; some mistakenly believe that religious minorities have reservation in jobs and in institutions of higher education; massive illiteracy continues to exist about the atrocious nature of our caste system; many continue to think that 'secularism' is a wholly western concept, as if 'religion' is not! Only a proper democratic education can remove these misunderstandings and flaws.

What then is democratic education? Conceived broadly, it is a historically specific enterprise, determined by the inherited vocabulary of specific political languages and the terms of debates in a particular community. It is designed specifically to enable conversation on issues central to a particular community, to strive for agreement where possible and to live peacefully with disagreement where it is not. In short, it involves social and historical awareness and key democratic virtues.

Many of these understandings and virtues can be inculcated by a good liberal arts education. The 2019 National Education Policy recognises this but alas insufficiently. And as far as I can tell from my skimpy reading, it has virtually nothing to say about how this relates to democracy. So, it appears relatively innocent of the more specific requirements of democratic education. Without proper democratic education, I am afraid we will continue to perpetuate bad democratic practices, allow unhealthy scepticism about democracy to grow and eventually imperil it.

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A myopic view of foreign-made generic drugs

The U.S. is using the Ranbaxy experience to create a bogey



SRIVIDHYA RAGAVAN

Allegations of widespread fraud concerning generic drugs manufactured overseas, especially in India, were recently highlighted in the U.S. Much focus was on the contamination found in one drug made by Ranbaxy. I do not wish to support Ranbaxy's deplorable behaviour. Nor do I wish to belittle the importance of the ongoing efforts to fix India's drug regulatory framework. The point here is that this focus has been deployed to undermine foreign generics.

For instance, the Ranbaxy saga unfolded 14 years ago. Since then, several pharmaceutical companies, both foreign and local, generic and innovative, have been implicated in similar or worse behaviour. Notable examples include those of Martin Shkreli's Turing Pharmaceuticals, which hiked the price of a drug to 5,000%, and Purdue Pharmaceuticals, a company currently implicated for causing the opioid crisis. The strategy of raising fears of 'contaminated' foreign generics has successfully prejudiced Americans against valid generic drugs, even though they have remained a viable option.

This frenzy about contamination of drugs is due partly to the expansion of the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) to include global inspections. One objective in thus empowering the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) was to work with regulators of foreign countries and create a universal Current Good Manufacturing Practice (CGMP) system for drugs.

FDA's regulatory overreach

Instead, the FDA has positioned itself as a 'global regulator'. For example, in a recent statement, it mentioned that it inspects all brand-name and generic manufacturing facilities around the world based on information from whistleblowers or out of concern for drug safety. Arguably, this amounts to regulatory overreach as there is no international instrument standardising American CGMP practices as the global standard.

Further, under the FSMA, if a foreign facility refuses inspection, the FDA's power is limited to refusing the food/drug entry into the U.S. America's interest in good manufacturing practices to protect its citizens is commendable. Nevertheless, given Washington's current zeal to propel exports, if India or

China pass legislation to inspect U.S. food or drug manufacturing facilities, U.S. companies may not readily welcome the move.

A prejudiced dialogue

In 2018, out of the 4,676 human pharmaceutical sites inspections that the FDA conducted worldwide, 61% were of foreign-based facilities. Similarly, out of 1,365 human drug CGMP surveillance inspections conducted, 55% were conducted at facilities outside the U.S. The FDA's publicising of its 'global vigilante experience' paints a picture of foreign-manufactured drugs as 'defective' or 'contaminated' while not fully acknowledging some of the regulatory failures within America. To provide a perspective, the 'drug recall list', a list of drugs deemed defective in spite of having cleared FDA regulatory approvals for the last 14 years, runs into over 149 pages. I cite this to merely highlight that a prejudiced dialogue that does not capture all perspectives can create imprecise impressions.

As such, when the FDA inspects production facilities, there are both smaller and bigger issues that will come up. There is no scale to determine whether the problems portrayed in the final report are simple ones, such as one tap not working, or more impactful ones, such as use of contaminated water. The absence of a proper scale provides a loophole, enabling the regulator to cherry-pick and treat all instances of non-compliance as egregious violations.

In addition, in the U.S., there is no proper legal definition of the oft-used term 'contaminated drugs'. Section 351 of Title 21 of the U.S. Code defines 'adulterated drugs' and when a drug is deemed 'adulterated' for being contaminated, the regulator needs to specify whether the adulteration relates to the manner of preparation, the packaging standards or the manufacturing practices.

For India, the discussion in the U.S. is notable not only because it houses generic manufacturing facilities but also because India is a nation on the verge of breaking into the innovation market. Thus, it is time India took a more robust role to ensure public availability of facts on both the importance of generics and their limitations. The country needs to create strong voices and partnerships that can highlight the benefits and pitfalls alike to create a robust space for innovation that can coexist with access to medication. After all, innovation and policy failings need not be an excuse to deny access to lifesaving medication to productive workforces.

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Towards a free trade agreement

India and the U.S. should aim to progressively eliminate trade and investment barriers

MARK LINSOTT

Trade turmoil has been putting at risk the U.S.'s strategic partnership with India. In the last two months, the U.S. has withdrawn from India preferential tariff benefits under its Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) programme, and India has imposed retaliatory tariffs in response to tariffs that the U.S. applied last year on steel and aluminium.

Conflict and disputes are not new to the U.S.-India relationship. They have ranged from trade in jute and almonds in the period of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade to poultry and solar panels under the World Trade Organization (WTO). But this moment is different because the conflict may run deeper with more serious implications. If the two fail to relieve the building tension, a tit-for-tat trade war mimicking that between the U.S. and China may follow. The U.S. is India's single most important export market; India is a huge and growing market for U.S. investment and exports. An escalating series of retaliation and counter-retaliation could undermine efforts to advance what might be the most consequential bilateral relationship in the 21st century.

Resolving differences

On the positive side, a serious effort by both to solve some trade problems could even lead to a new and exciting set of opportunities. But this will require moving from effective management of current tensions to thinking big for the future. Assuming the two sides can come together to resolve outstanding issues such as the GSP, U.S. tariffs on steel and aluminium and India's retaliatory tariffs, and differences on e-commerce, they can set the stage for building a trade relationship that better complements the strategic one.

A starting point would be to empower the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative and the Ministry of Commerce and Industry to develop some problem-solving cooperative efforts under the existing Trade Policy Forum on issues such as digital

trade, regulatory coherence, and intellectual property rights, matching their earlier successes on the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement.

This future work would be better advanced if India created a new career trade staff that reports directly to the Prime Minister's Office. The U.S. administration has experienced trade staff, even at senior levels, who build negotiating skills over their careers and relationships of rapport and trust with their foreign counterparts. India could better serve its trade interests with the same kind of approach. This is a scenario that could evolve into a new relationship of common purpose on trade.

Trade disputes will continue to crop up, as they do even in the healthiest of relationships, but these would be best pursued through the WTO.

Thinking big

However, even this scenario is a limited one; the U.S.-India strategic partnership deserves higher aspirations on trade. The goal should be a more comprehensive platform for expanding trade and investment through the progressive elimination of trade and investment barriers, from protectionist regulatory measures to tariffs and restrictions on trade in services. This might even lead some day to the negotiation of a free trade agreement, which is the ultimate example of economic integration in a trade relationship.

Neither country has been particularly successful at negotiating free trade agreements compared to others around the world – the EU just concluded one with Vietnam. Each has a strong but messy democracy with many voices against free trade agreements. Each is a tough negotiator with a passionate commitment to its national interests. But both can dream big together and trade should be central to those dreams.

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DATA POINT

When gains and tax don't match

The Union Budget has pegged the statutory corporate tax in India at 25% for firms having an annual turnover of upto ₹400 crore, which covers 99.3% of all companies. Budget documents show the effective corporate tax rate is unevenly distributed among firms. By The Hindu Data Team

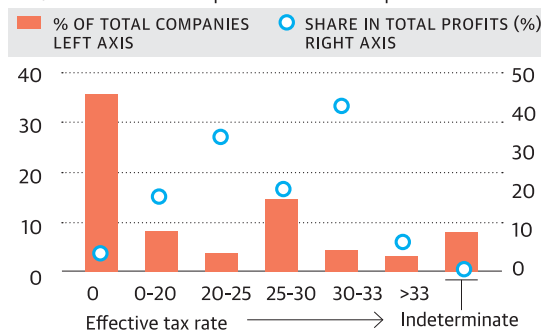
Steep fall

India's statutory corporate tax has fluctuated over the years, with FY19 and FY20 seeing steep drops. However, it still remained above the global average of 23.79%



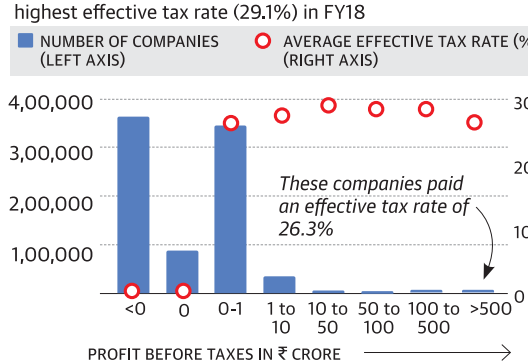
Uneven distribution

Tax liability remains unevenly distributed. Over 60% of the firms paid an effective tax rate of <25% in FY18 despite having 45% share in the total profit of all the companies



What do companies pay?

Firms with profits between ₹10 crore and 50 crore paid the highest effective tax rate (29.1%) in FY18



Global front

In fiscal 2019, U.A.E recorded the highest corporate tax rate (55%). The global average was 23.79%. Among BRICS nations, India and China had the same statutory corporate tax rate



FROM THE HINDU ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO JULY 9, 1969

U.S. troops in Viet Nam begin pull out

The initial pullout of 25,000 American troops from Viet Nam began to-day [July 8] with the departure of a battalion of 814 infantrymen. Garlanded with plastic flowers thrown round their necks by pretty Viet Namese girls, most of the young troops laughed and smiled as they boarded nine giant transport jets. The men had stood to attention in blazing sun at Saigon's Tan Son Nhut airport for three hours. Girls handed them parcels of gifts - dolls, tapes of Viet Namese music and flags. South Viet Nam President Nguyen Van Thieu flew in by helicopter minutes before the end of the ceremonial farewell parade and told the soldiers: "Your departure bears testimony to the success of the role of the U.S. force in Viet Nam." The departure of the battalion, the third of the 60th Infantry Regiment, Ninth Infantry Division, for Tacoma, Washington, marked a turning point in the Viet Nam war, which has cost 36,866 Americans dead. To-day's vanguard left exactly a month after President Nixon and President Thieu announced on Midway Island that 25,000 Americans would be sent home by the end of August. The pull-out reverses a process that began almost exactly 19 years ago.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JULY 9, 1919.

Housing in Bombay.

At a meeting of the Bombay Municipal Corporation on Monday [July 7], Mr. Cowasjee Jehangir presiding, discussion was resumed on the proposition moved by Dr. A.G. Veigas that the President be requested to address the Government regarding the desirability of appointing a committee to investigate and report early the housing question in all its bearings and suggest practical measures for increasing the housing accommodation for the poor and the middle class population of the city. The subject was discussed at great length. The Medical members of the Corporation touched upon the medical aspect of the question and urged that on the proper solution of the housing question depended the health of the city. The city's slums had become the breeding places for a number of diseases and it was the duty of the Government, the Municipality and public bodies to take up the question in right earnest. The President pointed out that the question of housing was at present occupying the serious attention of the Government who were considering the scheme whereby the Government, the various local bodies and the employers of labour could solve it.