

## 2003 redux

Trai's latest intervention in the cable and DTH market has created more confusion than it has solved



### NOT FOR PROFIT

NIVEDITA MOOKERJI

It's the 2003 syndrome hitting us all over again 15 years later. The idiot box is once more under attack and so is our TV viewing habit, whatever is left of it post Netflix and Facebook. Ironically enough, while the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (Trai) got additional mandate for managing the television broadcasting sector to settle

the mess after the government-ordered conditional access system or CAS went completely out of hand in 2003, this time the regulator itself has triggered a situation that is no less messy.

Trai, originally just a telecom super regulator, has set a February 1 deadline for broadcasters and platform owners such as direct-to-home (DTH) and cable services to comply with its new tariff order. The essence of that order is that a consumer should get the channels of her choice and pay for only that, instead of her being charged for a package or a bouquet tailored by a DTH or a cable company. The idea is to reduce the monthly TV bill for a consumer by offering every channel à la carte, with the price displayed on the electronic programme guide. If there are packages, the prices must be published in a transparent manner too, rather than camouflaging things in the fineprint.

Since the order has gone against the

way a broadcasting company would like to do business, all hell has broken loose, threatening a blackout if the companies in question don't comply by February 1. This is not very different from what happened when the government believed (or did it?) CAS — watching channels of choice through a set top box — was the only way to bring order to the unorganised broadcasting industry. The entire Atal Bihari Vajpayee government, including the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), was at work for months trying to put together a policy that would streamline the sector, which was at the mercy of a handful of cable sharks and thousands of small corner shop operators who got us hooked to those prime time soaps.

Needless to say, the government failed miserably even after much brainstorming with all stakeholders including state governments. By this time, the set top box for cable TV had become a dirty word, prompting then Delhi chief min-

ister Sheila Dikshit to say, "I don't want the ugly box in my drawing room".

The CAS politics was unfolding too close to the upcoming 2004 Lok Sabha elections and it had to end. The best option before the government was to roll it back. It did that, while getting Trai to expand its role so that it could manage broadcasting along with telecom. The first thing that Trai did was to cap prices at the existing level, while saying it was a temporary measure. The regulator didn't want to lose any time in sending a message across — that consumers wouldn't be hurt. It was necessary because while trying to bring transparency into the system, it was found that getting pay channels through CAS was pushing up the monthly bill for a large number of consumers. That's the reason, Chennai — predominantly a free to air market at that point — was the only city to roll out CAS rather successfully.

On the whole, regulation in broadcasting, through Trai, was meant to promote growth and competition in the sector so that consumers have affordable prices for their home entertainment and can choose between alternative platforms and channels. This was stated in the Trai preamble for the broadcasting sector. "Regulatory intervention is

required to bring in a radical change and to stimulate the market to provide choice of viewing", Trai had said in 2004.

The latest Trai order may not meet the vision with which it started regulating the broadcasting industry. For instance, growth and competition of businesses could be stifled through the diktat on à la carte pricing, as packaging holds the key to success in the broadcasting industry where content offered across platforms is mostly similar. Where packages and bouquets will be allowed, those must come with transparent pricing. The catch lies there. What exactly would be transparent pricing of packages? The second point is about affordability. Just like in the case of CAS, a consumer wanting a host of pay channels of her choice would shell out a large sum, possibly much more than she would get in a package tailored by a DTH or a cable operator even if it means getting a bundle of irrelevant and silly channels with some good ones of your choice.

The regulatory intervention was supposed to stimulate the market, but the latest order seems quite on the contrary. Ahead of another Lok Sabha election, should the government allow another CAS like confusion when it can be very well avoided?

## CHINESE WHISPERS

### All in the family



Nakul Nath's (pictured) appearance in the social media and with state Congress leaders has fuelled rumours that

the son of the new Madhya Pradesh chief minister, Kamal Nath, may contest from Chhindwara in the coming Lok Sabha elections. The seat is held by his father, who will vacate it and contest an Assembly seat. Nath Junior resides in Delhi but many local Congress leaders have been demanding his candidature from the seat that his father had won nine times. He has started visiting Chhindwara regularly since campaigning for the seat kicked off last November. He can be seen on social media, promoting various state government initiatives including loan waivers, grants on purchasing agricultural instruments, and so on.

### Digital farmers

The Congress government in Madhya Pradesh is taking the digital India campaign to a wholly new level. To bring farmers on the digital platform, the government is planning to allot them real time wallets. With a fund of ₹15,000-45,000, these wallets will help farmers to buy seeds and fertiliser even if they don't have money in their bank accounts. Farmers will also get a smart card with real time update of their acreage, crop and livestock data. The card will be linked to the Google Map as well. This is expected to help government officials know about the possible bumper production or shortage.

### Message and messenger

Priyanka Gandhi Vadra's appointment as Congress national general secretary in charge of eastern Uttar Pradesh on Wednesday has enthused not just party leaders close to her but some like Janata Dal (United) Vice-President Prashant Kishor. In his earlier avatar as an election strategist, Kishor had managed the Congress' assembly poll campaigns in Uttar Pradesh and Punjab in 2017. "One of the most awaited entries in Indian politics is finally here!..." Kishor tweeted. The former election strategist would consult her frequently during the UP Assembly poll campaign, but found himself out of favour with Congress President Rahul Gandhi after the polls. Kishor, however, might find rehabilitation with the Congress first family difficult after Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar revealed earlier this month how appointing Kishor party number two, and his deputy, was not entirely his decision. "I got calls from (BJP chief) Amit Shah twice to give him a post in the party," Kumar said.

# Missing the jobs for the data

The government has scrapped existing job surveys but has moved slowly on creating replacements

SOMESH JHA

The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) has been combatting criticism of poor job creation with a counter-narrative that the country lacks proper employment statistics.

But the conundrum is this: The existing exercises to collate official jobs statistics have been discontinued and replacement surveys are still to begin. The result: Whether Narendra Modi has fulfilled a 2014 campaign promise to create millions of jobs cannot be verified.

The critics contend that, with official and private surveys indicating a sharp rise in unemployment, alternative methodologies are meant to counter an embarrassing narrative on jobs and open to interpretation.

In January last year, an exercise by two researchers under the government's aegis interpreting monthly payroll data released by the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) in 2017-18 showed a job creation of 7 million — much higher than any other estimates available. That finding created controversies on the veracity of the interpretation.

That study, however, inadvertently put job creation and data front and centre of the debate, causing the government to discontinue or halt temporarily various official surveys on grounds that they contained flaws. In April last year,

the government had stopped making public the result of quarterly enterprises survey (QES) of the Labour Bureau.

A panel, led by former chief statistician TCA Anant and set up on the recommendations of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), recently recommended doing away with the Labour Bureau's QES and replacing it with either a first-of-its-kind Employment Index or an improved version of the EPFO data.

Before that, towards the end of 2017, the household surveys of the Labour Bureau were discontinued and the

National Sample Survey Organisation's quinquennial (once every five years) surveys have also stopped. But it is planned to be replaced by a more comprehensive Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) by the NSSO for period 2017-18. It will be an annual household survey country-wide and a quarterly survey in urban areas.

Explaining the core issue, Standing Committee on Labour Force Statistics Chairman S P Mukherjee, former University of Calcutta professor of mathematics, said there is no mechanism to get a comprehensive picture of employment in the country.

So what is the solution? The answer is to capture two kinds of data, with one verifying the other. "Both household and establishment surveys need to be conducted simultaneously," said Mukherjee. "Household sur-



**REAL SCENARIO** The government's promise to create millions of jobs cannot be verified considering the existing exercises to collate official jobs statistics have been discontinued and replacement surveys are still to begin

veys establish the employment-unemployment rate and the establishment surveys give a better idea of various sectors of the economy and employment policies are sector-based."

This led the government to initiate an overhaul of the employment statistical framework, for which the PMO, no less, took the initiative.

Arvind Panagariya, who was then the Niti Aayog vice-chairman, was asked to suggest solutions. He submitted a report in August 2016. The draft report was made public but the final version was never disclosed.

The final Panagariya panel report, reviewed by *Business Standard*, has recommended that a monthly household survey is the ideal way of mapping job creation. The task force had recommended a shift to a monthly household survey, similar to the Current Population Survey of the United States, in the long run, and suggested experimentation with data collection via mobile technol-

ogy. But it agreed, a monthly household survey in a country as large as India may take some time.

"Household surveys are the best way of capturing the employment situation. Enterprises-based surveys are mainly threshold-based. For instance, it will only cover firms with at least 10 workers whereas a majority of the establishments employ less than 10 workers. For establishment surveys, the Economic Census, which is planned to be released this year, may become a base for further employment studies," Chief Statistician of India Pravin Srivastava told *Business Standard*.

Srivastava said the Economic Census will be a much improved version, as it will be GPS-mapped allowing real-time capturing of data on factories which are functional and those that have become defunct. But relying on the Economic Census 2019 would mean that a quarterly enterprises-based survey on jobs may come only by the end of next year. The Anant panel has suggested an alter-

## INSIGHT

# Recipe for change

If India has to have a globally competitive industry, the government must emulate China on creating the right ecosystem



DHIRAJ NAYYAR

The next big disruption in India's trade policy may happen by the end of the year if the 16 members of the proposed Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) reach a final agreement. The potential of the world's largest free trade area, which includes the world's two most populous and fastest growing major economies, China and India, is tantalising. That this may happen when the West, led by the United States, is turning its back on openness is significant. Given trade's close link with prosperity and indeed geo-strategic leadership, RCEP could well be the beginning of a decisive shift in economic power from the West to the East. And yet, at least in India, there is deep scepticism about what RCEP might lead to.

Leading the pessimists are wide sections of the manufacturing industry. Historically, India's trade policies have never succeeded in creating a globally competitive industry. Before 1991, tariff and non-tariff barriers protected infant industries that never quite grew up, fleecing consumers while producing substandard products that would not have withstood any degree of international competition. Post-1991, the narrative of trade liberalisation took over

but reductions in tariffs and non-tariff barriers have not sufficiently boosted manufacturing. The share of manufacturing in India's GDP hasn't budged much since 1991. In fact, in the last decade, the signing of ambitious free trade agreements with ASEAN, Japan and Korea, all manufacturing powerhouses, has caused industry further distress — imports have surged and exports have stagnated. With China, it hasn't even taken a free trade area to see the balance of trade deteriorate from under \$1 billion at the turn of the century to over \$60 billion almost two decades later.

Given continued stress on the issue of creating better jobs for more people as well as periodic bouts of serious worry on the current account deficit, the consequences of signing on to one more free trade area are non-trivial.

The government could argue, and does argue, that it is industry's job to become more competitive rather than to ask for protection. In theory, it is possible to argue that trade liberalisation is one way to nudge greater competitiveness in the economy. The example of China is instructive. The doomsday prophets had forecast that Chinese manufacturing would collapse once the country acceded to the "free trade" World Trade Organization in 2001. On the contrary, China's exports (and GDP growth) took off into the stratosphere precisely after it joined the WTO. Clearly, China gained from the additional market access it got and minimised losses from import competition.

Of course, it is possible to argue that by the time China signed on to the WTO, it had already gone through two decades of internal reform (from 1978 to 2000). And so, its manufacturing industry was



**HISTORICALLY SPEAKING** India's trade policies have never succeeded in creating a globally competitive industry

ready to compete. Arguably, Indian industry also had almost two decades between the start of trade liberalisation in 1991 and the signing of the first FTA in 2010. However, there is one big difference in the India and Chinese experience. In China, not only did firms become competitive, but so did the government. In fact, it was because the government got many of its policies right — building world-class infrastructure, cutting red tape, opening up to FDI, providing cheap and plentiful land, inexpensive power, flexible labour laws, low capital costs — that industry in turn became competitive.

In India, industry has had no option but to improve competitiveness in order to survive trade liberalisation. But it has been let down by the government's failure to be "competitive" in the domain of policy. The reality is that if India has to have a globally competitive industry, the government must emulate China on creating the right ecosystem.

RCEP may actually provide an opportunity, if it provides a peg for every ministry of the government to

set right policies in a time-bound manner. The commerce ministry's negotiators will drive a bargain and commit to liberalisation in different categories across different time frames (immediate, 10 years, 15 years, 20 years). Industry will be directed to prepare. So should ministries, with time deadlines. The ministries of coal and power must sign on to a plan for cheaper tariffs; finance must commit to a structural reduction of capital costs; mines and steel must open the mining sector for raw materials which will enable steel and aluminium to compete. Agriculture must reveal its plan for internal market reform; industrial policy and promotion must tell us whether India will be in the top 10 in the world in the Ease of Doing Business by 2030. The list goes on.

If the performance of ministries is tied in with RCEP commitments, India may actually be able to create world beating industry. For real transformation, RCEP needs to disrupt policy, not industry.

The author is Chief Economist, Vedanta

## LETTERS

### Improve capacity

This refers to "How insolvency is reshaping steel" (January 22). It is true that ownership of a few steel companies has changed, thanks to insolvency proceedings under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), but the annual steel output of our country needs to go up if India has to develop faster. Though the IBC is helping major Indian steel producers consolidate their capacity by taking over the stressed assets, the total steel capacity, nationwide, has not changed. What we need now is a few greenfield steel projects to significantly augment the capacity, thereby giving a much-needed fillip to economic growth.

Sanjeev Kumar Singh Jabalpur

### Perception & reality

This refers to "Jobs, tolerance, protection of institutions key issues: Rajan" (January 23). Often perceptions about the degree of autonomy enjoyed by important institutions is as important as the reality. Over the years, there has been an increasing tendency on the part of the mandarins of the North Block to stray into the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) regulatory domain. In the UPA II period, the then secretary of Department of Financial Services (DFS) used to issue circulars to public sector banks (PSBs) containing instructions that often contradicted the regulatory instructions of the RBI on those subjects. In the present context, the DFS mandarins are given to making public statements on issues that fall in the regulatory domain — that is,



capital adequacy, prompt corrective action framework, level of reserves to be maintained etc. These statements confuse the banks, markets, investors and the public about the level of operational autonomy enjoyed by the central bank.

While the RBI is accountable to the government, these avoidable public statements create the perception that its ability to perform its stated functions is being slowly eroded. These issues need to be quietly discussed between the government and the RBI rather than be aired in public. This is important since the RBI has set up committees with the permission from the government to look into many important issues. Nothing should be said or done that creates the perception that these committees will merely echo the publicly stated views of the government.

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## HAMBONE



## Good on paper

But direct income support for farmers tough to implement

The NITI (National Institution for Transforming India) Aayog has recommended direct income support of ₹15,000 per hectare per annum to farmers. To prevent this from becoming a fiscal nightmare, the Aayog has suggested scrapping all subsidies for agriculture, including fertiliser, electricity, crop insurance, irrigation and interest subvention, and transfer an estimated saving of around ₹2 trillion directly to farmers. There are two reasons why this proposal makes sense. One, the existing subsidies are often inefficiently disbursed and a direct transfer to a farmer's account will be a more efficient alternative. The other reason is that unlike minimum support prices, a direct income support does not accentuate market distortions and the associated efficiency losses. This method is far more acceptable globally and in line with the demands of the World Trade Organization, apart from being more inclusive and equitable.

There is also growing evidence that such direct income support schemes may also provide rich political dividends. A case in point is the stellar success of the Rythu Bandhu scheme, promoted by Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao. Telangana has a higher proportion of workforce in agriculture than the national average. Much like other states, it too was in the habit of giving a whole host of subsidies and farm loan waivers. Rythu Bandhu provides all farm owners ₹4,000 per acre of land owned. In the case of double cropping land, this transfer was doubled. The scheme played a leading role in the Telangana Rashtra Samithi winning the elections with a huge mandate. There were two key aspects of this scheme. One, these transfers did not come at the cost of existing subsidies. Two, by design, it benefitted land owners and left out landless labourers. Odisha is another state that is proposing to use this template, albeit with some tweaking. The KALIA (Krushak Assistance for Livelihood and Income Assistance) scheme in Odisha provides ₹5,000 per acre per season to all small and marginal farmers as well as tenants and share-croppers.

However, there is one huge hurdle that targeted income support schemes face in India. That has to do with the political reality of the problem in rolling back existing subsidies. An income support scheme can work efficiently only if all such subsidies are withdrawn. Given the acute poverty in India as well as the reluctance of politicians to do away with existing subsidies, it is more likely that an income support scheme will only be in addition to the existing subsidies. That leads to the question of the financial viability of any such scheme. Governments, both at the Centre and in the states, are stretched and it is likely that targets of fiscal deficits and overall public debt to gross domestic product will not be met. The other drawback of the scheme is that India does not have digitised land records and without them the scheme is almost impossible to implement. While the debate goes on, the government should rather think of alternatives such as investment in marketing infrastructure, storage and food processing, allowing direct purchases from farmer producer organisations instead of requiring farmers to sell their produce at registered markets.

## The temptations of dynasty

Priyanka Gandhi's entry shows politics remains a family affair

Buried in the third paragraph of a press release from the All India Congress Committee about an internal reorganisation of party office-bearers was a big political news story. The party president, said the release, has appointed Priyanka Gandhi Vadra AICC general secretary for Uttar Pradesh East, with effect from the first week of February. The Congress in Uttar Pradesh was reeling from the decision of the Bahujan Samaj Party-Samajwadi Party alliance to effectively ignore its claims to any more Lok Sabha seats in the state than the two Gandhi family satrapies of Amethi and Rae Bareilly; this news might conceivably enthuse the party cadre not only in India's most populous state, but across the country. The larger question, however, is whether one member of the Gandhi family appointing another to a significant political post is good news for a party that has long been accused of being reluctant to hold internal elections and remaining hereditary property.

Dynasties are not good for democracy. The spread of dynastic politics prevents the creation of genuine mass leaders. It is not a coincidence that the only major national mass leader to have emerged in the past 30 years — Prime Minister Narendra Modi — was neither a dynast nor has a family to which he can bequeath his political following. Mr Modi's appeal lies in his ability to position himself as a man of and from the people. He has often, and expertly, attacked dynastic politics, and the elevation of Ms Gandhi Vadra is only likely to give him one more piece of evidence in this attack. Mass leaders invigorate and revive the democratic spirit. The visible possibility that leadership is open to all ensures that the inclusive character of liberal democracy is preserved, and that disillusionment does not build up across the electorate about a closed system. It also reduces the chances that the political class forms a self-serving, exclusive elite that is out of touch with the real problems of society.

While the Congress receives a lot of justifiable flak for its tolerance — and, in this case, promotion — of a dynasty, it is far from being the only offender. In fact, dynastic politics is more the rule than the exception in India. While the top leadership of the Bharatiya Janata Party and the communist parties have been by and large exempt, the second rung of the former has several dynasts in it. And many regional and caste-based parties have now become little more than family-run concerns — literally from Kashmir to Kanyakumari. The two parties of the Valley are family-run, as is the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam in Tamil Nadu. Karnataka has a chief minister who is the son of a former prime minister; the chief minister of Andhra Pradesh is the son-in-law of a predecessor; the CM of newly-formed Telangana is setting up his own dynasty. Odisha is ruled by a dynast, and Punjab by a royal. The "socialist" OBC parties of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh are similarly now controlled by families. This is revealing of a deeper malaise within Indian politics. Until more vibrant and inclusive party structures are put in place, Indian democracy will not achieve its full potential.

ILLUSTRATION BY AJAY MOHANTY



## How to reform Indian public research

Freeze budgetary allocation to national laboratories in nominal terms and allocate the annual increase to the higher education sector

In India's R&D imperative, in an earlier column (*Business Standard*, 06 December, 2018) we showed that India is an outlier in global R&D, both in the proportion of national R&D done in industry (44 per cent vs a global average of 71 per cent) and in the small proportion of national R&D done within the higher education system (4 per cent vs a global average of 17 per cent). We argued that India needs to increase its investment in in-house R&D by industry by a factor of 5 (to go from 0.3 per cent of GDP to the global average of 1.5 per cent) and increase public research done within the higher education system by a factor of 10 (to go from 0.04 per cent of GDP to the global average of 0.4 per cent). This article is about public research. How is it best done to maximise social welfare? Even more, where is it best done to maximise social welfare?



**INDIA'S WORLD**  
NAUSHAD FORBES

### Governments world-wide invest in public research — and India fits in well

Policy-makers worldwide have long argued that left entirely to private initiative, society underinvests in research as the benefits that flow are either too uncertain or not fully captured by the investor. Seminal papers 60 years ago by Richard Nelson (1959) and Kenneth Arrow (1962) provided a strong theoretical basis for state subsidy of public research. Consequently, even the most free-market of governments invest heavily in public research. Around

one-quarter of global R&D is funded by government, amounting to around 0.5 per cent of global GDP. India is no exception. Our first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, took a keen interest in Science, and our first two decades as an independent country saw us establish many of the public laboratories that to this day conduct much of the publicly-funded research in this country. By the late '70s, India was investing 0.6 per cent of GDP in Public Research, uniquely for a developing country, and matching government investment in R&D of the richest countries. This share has remained at about this level for the last 40 years. But while India's overall public investment in research is very healthy, the location of this research is heavily skewed. The world does most of its public research within the higher education system; we do over 90 per cent in autonomous R&D laboratories. This skewed investment starves the higher education sector of funding for research. The consequence is an order of magnitude gap: India invests 0.04 per cent of GDP in research done in the higher education system, against a global average of 0.4 per cent.

### Why do public research in the higher education system?

Most observers place America's research universities at the core of its successful innovation ecosystem. There are manifold advantages to doing public research in universities. First is the apprentice-jour-

## Marketing a political leader

Philip Kotler is to marketing professionals what Peter Drucker was to management gurus. That is why his decision to bestow an award in his name to Narendra Modi can best be described as odd. So odd, in fact, that it prompted media houses to investigate. *The Wire* came up with a carefully-researched piece [<https://www.thewire.in/business/exclusive-the-saudi-connection-behind-modis-first-ever-kotler-presidential-prize>] linking the award to a Saudi government-owned petrochemical group with a unit in Gujarat that is hoping to expand its presence in India. And it turned out, two of the jury members, ad industry veteran Walter Vieira and Gautam Mahajan, did not take part in the judging process for the award.

Eventually, the issue generated enough controversy to compel Mr Kotler to issue a clarification via an "interview" in *The Marketing Journal*, to its editor Christian Sarkar. His answer to the question on who exemplifies model political leadership by his definition deserves some space (actually, the whole interview from about the third question onwards has an entertainment value that neither Mr Kotler nor Mr Sarkar must suspect).

He said: "The concept underlying the award is to honor a major public leader who has given new life to democracy and economic growth in that nation. A Kotler Leadership Award leader is one who:

- believes in representative government and in social justice.
- believes that a good society will build a healthy business climate.
- encourages businesses to practice the triple bottom line, namely to balance profits, people, and

the planet in their deliberations.

■ sincerely and wholeheartedly works for the Common Good.

On these criteria, Prime Minister Modi stood the highest. He has improved his country's image and visibility on the global stage. A committee in the WMS voted on possible leaders given the above criteria." He does not identify, nor is he asked to, name the other leaders in contention. Then came the emphatic addendum: "The final decision was mine." (italics in original). All this stuff speaks directly to Mr Modi, who revels in corporate phraseology (such as the leader of the nation being the "brand guardian of the nation") and, like Chandrababu Naidu, fancies himself a CEO-type politician. The hazards of this approach can be seen in Donald Trump, who claims his business acumen gives him a special insight into running the world's largest economy.

A cursory reading of the four Kotlerian criteria reveals not just the weakness of the marketing guru's arguments but the hazards of linking corporate standards of judgement to politics and politicians. More so when the exercise is applied to an insanely complex and diverse polity such as India. The four points Mr Kotler lists above are boilerplate attributes to which any politician in a functioning democracy would lay claim. Equally, in the rowdy, argumentative political theatre that is India, all four points could be disputed with just as much facility.

Let's consider point four first: "Sincerely and wholeheartedly works for the Common Good". At the time of writing, there is a whole raft of people who may dispute that: farmers, for instance; small



**SWOT**  
KANIKA DATTA

ney-man benefit. Students learn how to do research by working alongside their professors. The graduates industry hires come trained in doing research. Second, the industry-institute linkage issue is immediately drastically reduced: every university has an automatic, costless and strong linkage with industry through students. Each time industry hires a graduate, a new link is formed. Third, not only does teaching benefit from combining research and teaching, but research benefits too. A steady flow of bright young students keeps the research environment constantly refreshed.

The critical point, though, is that research is not the key output of doing research in universities — it is the flow of talent. Stanford University is often held up as a poster-child for doing great industry-relevant research. Whether it is biotechnology, computer science or semiconductors, Stanford has been the source of great break-throughs. But a clear-eyed assessment of Stanford would say that the world would not be markedly poorer without its research output. But the world would be markedly poorer without the output of its graduates — who founded Google, Hewlett Packard, Varian, Yahoo, Biogen and a hundred other great companies, which have powered the research done in a thousand other companies, and who lead the world in so many fields. The same holds true for any other leading Research University. The purpose of a Research University is articulated as both education and research, but the talent produced far outweighs the research produced in impact. By doing public research in autonomous laboratories, we completely miss the essential benefit of doing public research.

### How should we reform Indian public research?

The current level of investment in public research is around ₹80,000 crore (the exact figure is hard to get at, as it needs to be extracted from the budgets of several line ministries). This increases by approximately ₹7,000 crore each year. We have a modest proposal: Freeze the current budgetary allocation to the national laboratories at their current level in nominal terms. Allocate the annual increase in public research funding to the higher education sector. We will, at a stroke, almost treble the research done in the higher education system — increasing the current ₹4,000 crore by ₹7,000 crore. And we can add ₹7,000 crore more each year. Universities — public and private — should be forced to compete for these extra funds by writing proposals for new centres of excellence, recruiting leading faculty and researchers working worldwide to come and teach and do research in India, investing in new disciplines. We would at a stroke transform the research environment in our education system, and directly impact the quality of education provided. This one act — which costs us nothing — would have a greater impact on the country's innovation system than any amount of extra funding for our national laboratories.

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## India's Beat Generation



### BOOK REVIEW

SOURADEEP ROY

This is the first book in English on a generation of writers in the 1960s who called themselves the Hungry Generation. They were self-proclaimed "anti-establishment" writers and wrote mostly in Bengali. Some of their publications, which were bulletins, were also published in English and Hindi. In the "Epilogue", Ms Bhattacharjee Chowdhury acknowledges that the Hungry Generation never made a comeback in Bengali literature, but "recent years have seen a better understanding of the movement". While interest in the poets has certainly piqued in recent years — and this book is certainly a result of that —

readers will be left with more questions than answers after reading the book.

One reason for the recent interest in the Hungry Generation is a renewed interest in the Beat Generation. Allen Ginsberg met the poets when he visited India, but, unlike him, one of the Hungry Generation writers, Malay Roy Choudhury, was arrested and jailed for obscenity. Ms Bhattacharjee Chowdhury relies on Ginsberg's *India Journals* among other sources, but the singular attention in following Ginsberg's journey in India — his fallout with his lover Peter Orlovsky, for instance — makes for unnecessary deviations. Midway through the book, one wonders whose story is being told. But Ms Bhattacharjee Chowdhury handles the two narratives deftly in the beginning which alternates between Malay Roy Choudhury's train ride to Calcutta in October 1962 and an exposition of Ginsberg's visit to India in Bombay in February 1961. She convincingly imagines the anticipation Roy Choudhury would

have felt when he was visiting the big city for the first time as she sets the social and political context in which Ginsberg visited India. We are gripped by the narrative even as there is a diversion. As the book progresses, the narrative meanders into two separate streams and her control over structure is seldom seen again.

Her choice of narration, as well as some of her claims, can be called more accurately a reimagining of the Hungry Generation movement. The reviewer would advise against reading the book as literary history, or even, as an introductory history to the Hungry Generation movement. The book, of course, does not claim to be an authoritative history but even as popular non-fiction, there are too many jumps in the narrative. The book, for instance, claims there was a rivalry between those who published the Hungry Generation bulletins and the editors of another cult magazine, *Krittibash*. This does not mean that writers who published

in one magazine didn't publish in the other. Ms Bhattacharjee Chowdhury correctly points this out. In page 64, we learn that an editorial by Sunil Gangopadhyay in *Krittibash* had admonished the Hungry Generation movement. Ms Bhattacharjee Chowdhury says that this was because of a letter Sandipan Chattopadhyay, another contemporary writer, wrote while declaiming the state of contemporary literature, which named Sunil and other writers. After 20 pages, on page 84, we see an episode where Malay Roy Choudhury and his brother Samir Roy Choudhury, visit Sunil Gangopadhyay's house. In spite of the tensions between the Hungry Generation and the *Krittibash* group, Malay Roy Choudhury's first poetry collection is published by *Krittibash* Prakashani in 1963. Ms Bhattacharjee Chowdhury reasons that this was because Samir was close to Sunil. But how can one explain why Malay's book was brought out by the same publication that had publicly stated in an editorial that the Hungry Generation literature has no literary worth? Or why Sunil had testified for Malay Roy Choudhury in court in the obscenity case? Finding reason in literary

rivalries is difficult, and Ms Bhattacharjee Chowdhury must be congratulated for her effort, but one wishes such questions are answered more pointedly.

The Hungry Generation has often been labelled an-establishment group, but what constitutes the establishment often gets muddled in the course of the book. Ms Bhattacharjee Chowdhury points out some biographical details: the bohemian lifestyle of the writers, their attempts at changing their upper caste food habits, the inclusion of Dalit writers in their fold. Literature, however, primarily concerns itself with language, and we get the impression that it was the Hungry Generation's use of language that offended the establishment. Early in the book, Buddhadev Bose is described as "Bengal's premier literary figure". Later on, we learn that Bose's novel *Raat Bhore Bishti* (Rain Through the Night) had also been censored. What happens when a novel by a "premier literary figure" also gets censored? How is he different from Malay Roy Choudhury — anti-establishment's favourite child? Ms Bhattacharjee Chowdhury does not attempt to probe these questions. Looking through some of

the labels the Hungry Generation writers had proclaimed for themselves, and not taking them at face value, would have worked better.

The book does have flashes of Ms Bhattacharjee Chowdhury's lyrical narration. Here is an example: "The winds would often howl while they were in Chaibasa, scream like a widow losing her hair." Her inclusion of letters exchanged among the various people embroiled in the tumultuous period in this literary history, are the best parts of the book. The reviewer, however, was particularly disappointed to see almost all the names in the Bengali script were misspelt, editing errors that could have easily been avoided.

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