



Brexit, what next?

Weeks before U.K.'s scheduled departure from the EU, there are many questions for Prime Minister Theresa May

STANLEY JOHNY

The story so far: British Prime Minister Theresa May has just had one of the most tumultuous weeks in her political career. With just two weeks to go before Britain's scheduled departure from the European Union, MPs voted against her Brexit agreement, for a second time, on Tuesday. The next day, they voted to reject a no-deal exit.

On Thursday, lawmakers voted against holding a second referendum on Brexit, and for seeking an extension for the departure. This means a majority of MPs want an orderly divorce with the EU, but not on the withdrawal agreement Ms. May has reached with European leaders.

What's the withdrawal agreement?

It sets the terms on which a member country will leave the EU. According to the agreement reached between the U.K. and the EU, the transition period (the time to implement it) begins on March 29 and lasts till December 31, 2020. The U.K. will lose membership in the EU institutions as soon as the transition period kicks in, but will need to abide by EU rules till the transition is over. According to Ms. May's deal, the U.K. will have to pay about £39 billion to the EU in instalments to settle all its financial obligations. It also states that U.K. citizens in the EU and EU citizens in the U.K. will retain their residency and social security

Conservative MPs say the backstop will permanently entrap the U.K.; Labour wants to renegotiate a new deal with the EU

rights. On the Northern Ireland border, the agreement has proposed a backstop of a single customs territory between the EU and the U.K., in case no trade deal is reached at the end of the transition period.

What's the backstop?

Even when Brexit talks were under way, many had warned that the Irish border – between Northern Ireland, which is part of the U.K., and the Republic of Ireland, which is an EU member – would be the thorniest issue. In northern Ireland, decades of sectarian violence between protestants, who wanted to remain with the U.K. and Catholics, who wanted to join Ireland, came to an end after the 1998 Good Friday agreement.

Open border was a major part of the peace agreement. But if the U.K. leaves the EU without a proper agreement, there will be a hard border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The backstop intends to avoid such a scenario. According to Ms. May's deal, the British government would seek to reach a trade agreement with the EU that would avoid a hard border between the Irelands. But if no trade agreement is reached between the U.K. and the EU by the end of the transition period, the backstop will come into force – a single customs territory between the EU and the U.K. In that case, Northern Ireland will be bound by many EU rules, and the U.K. cannot leave the backstop without the EU's approval.

Why did MPs oppose the deal?

The central issue of the opposition is the backstop. Conservative MPs who voted twice against their Prime Minister's deal say the backstop would permanently entrap the U.K. within the customs union and the single market. Within the customs union, individual members do not have the powers to impose tariffs on goods they import. Instead, the customs duty is fixed by the EU. So if the U.K. fails to reach a trade agreement with the EU during the transition period and the backstop comes into effect, the U.K. will effectively continue within the customs union. It will have to abide by the EU trade rules without having a say in EU decision-making as it would not be a member. Hard-Brexiters call it a trap. And they oppose the present deal, while Ms. May says backstop is only an insurance and the current deal is the best the U.K. could get from the EU. The Labour Party, the main Opposition, wants a permanent customs union with the EU, but with rights to decide the U.K.'s trade policy. "Labour would seek to negotiate a new comprehensive UK-EU customs union to ensure that there are no tariffs with Europe, and help avoid any need for a hard border in Northern Ireland," the party said. Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn has called for Ms. May's resignation and fresh election and promised to renegotiate a new deal with the EU.

What is the way out?

A possible scenario is the government seeking an extension to Brexit, and the EU is likely to take a decision on March 21. If the EU rejects the request, Britain will crash out on March 29. In the event of an extension, the question is how long it will be. If it's beyond May 23, the day of elections to the European Parliament, the U.K. will have to take part in it. If the extra time is only a few weeks, the challenge is to come up with another deal acceptable to both British lawmakers and the EU.



Boeing: crashed and grounded

Two crashes of Boeing's popular 737 MAX aircraft minutes within take-off raise questions about safety and control systems

MURALI N. KRISHNASWAMY

The story so far: The crash of an Ethiopian Airlines plane, five months after the Lion Air crash in Indonesia, has forced Boeing to ground all its 737 MAX aircraft.

What is the 737 MAX?

The Boeing 737 MAX series is a single aisle aircraft fitted with high-bypass twin-turbofan engines. It is the fourth generation variant of the Boeing 737 aircraft, a base model which has been in production since the 1960s. In the commercial aviation business, it is locked in competition with the Airbus A320, another single aisle and newer aircraft family, manufactured by Boeing's European rival, Airbus SE, in the high stakes and crucial short-haul aircraft market. For Boeing, this model is the fastest-selling aircraft in its history – it cites about 5,000 orders from over 100 customers. Currently, there are four commercial variants (MAX 7, 8, 9, 10), with a seating capacity that varies between 172 and 230. With its CFM-manufactured LEAP engines, the 737 MAX family has, depending on the variant, a flying range of up to 7,130 km. The suffix MAX is a coinage meant to highlight the potential of the aircraft in offering the "maximum competitive advantage" to customers. The flight deck and cabin have had several enhancements, which include more flight control software, some automated controls and touches such as better lighting and overhead storage. The engines, which have composite components in some stages, offer significantly better fuel efficiency – a key draw for customers – compared to earlier engines on the third generation 737 variants.

What led to the global grounding?

On October 29 last year, a two-month-old Boeing 737 MAX 8, operated by low-cost airline Lion Air of Indonesia, crashed approximately 12 minutes after being airborne, killing its 189 passengers and crew. The pilot, with more than 6,000 flight hours and the co-pilot, with more than 5,000 hours, formed an experienced team. Last Sunday, on March 10, another flight by a four-month-old 737 MAX 8, operated by Ethiopian Airlines, crashed approximately six minutes after takeoff. All 157 passengers and crew were killed. The disparity in the flight hours of the crew, about 8,000 for the pilot, and just 200 hours for the co-pilot, has led to some scrutiny. Similarities between the two events, of the flight crew reporting certain technical difficulties, requesting a return to base, the scientific tracking of an unstable flight trajectory and airspeeds and also the 'gathering of some technical evidence' (in Ethiopia), have led analysts to conclude that there could be an issue with one of the aircraft's key control systems. It may take time for data from the black boxes to be analysed and acted upon.

How did India react?

It was in two quick stages, which impacted the operations of the country's two 737 MAX operators, private airlines Jet Airways and SpiceJet, with a fleet of 5 and 12 aircraft respectively (according to data from the Directorate-General of Civil Aviation, the country's nodal aviation agency). Another aircraft data site puts the fleet composition at 9 and 14 respectively. The DGCA initially permitted operations to continue, with key directives that kicked in from March 12. In a notice, dated March 11 (now withdrawn), taking into account "compliance of all manufacturer Standard Operating Procedures/operations circulars and Federal Aviation Administration [FAA] emergency Airworthiness Directives," it advised additional actions for airline engineers and maintenance crew such as "no minimum equipment list (MEL) release" – a list which allows aircraft operation, under specified conditions – if there were control system red flags. It also mandated key checks during aircraft transit. Finally, flight operations departments were to ensure, among other things, that the minimum experience levels of the two pilots were "1,000 and 500 hours" respectively. The DGCA said these were "interim safety measures" and there was communication with the manufacturer and the FAA. On March 13, it issued a follow-up notice, deciding that "the operation of B-737 MAX aircraft would not take place from/to Indian airports and transit or enter into Indian airspace effective from March 13 till further notice." All operations ceased by 4 p.m. local time.

How was it overseas?

The ban was rolled out in phases. In the Asia-Pacific region, the grounding, on March 11, by the Civil Aviation Administration of China, which took

the global lead, has hit the largest 737 MAX fleet in operation. Figures (compiled in early March 2018) from a leading fleet data site show that of the estimated 371 MAX aircraft in operation, a quarter, or close to 97 planes, are used by a raft of China-based airlines. With over 50 operators based in 34 countries, the Asia-Pacific region is the base for close to 37% of the worldwide fleet. The U.S. follows next with 30.2%. The situation was a bit different in the U.S., with the FAA playing outliner and then announcing a grounding.

Is the aircraft flawed?

We don't know as yet. Some media reports cite the huge financial impact of the global grounding per day and potential damage to an order book estimated to be several billions – there is even a figure of "half-a-trillion dollars" floating around. Even worse are signs of a loss in airline confidence: some affected airlines are contemplating demanding compensation (low-cost carrier Norwegian Air has been quite vocal about this, highlighting a "1% loss of its seat capacity"), while other carriers, such as Lion Air, are trying to up the ante by making veiled threats of order cancellations and buying Airbus aircraft. Kenya Airways, though not a 737 MAX operator, says it could re-consider a potential order. Some others still are considering scouting around for third generation and "safer" 737 variants.

But the main attention is now on a control system in the plane. Preliminary analysis of both crashes has focussed on the "anti-stalling system" called the Manoeuvring Characteristics Augmentation System (MCAS). It was introduced after the newer and more fuel efficient engines for this aircraft type, which have a much larger diameter and heavier weight than earlier ones, have had to be fixed higher and more forward on the wings than done previously for the earlier 737 models, consequently making changes to the aircraft's flight profile. As a result, there has been a possibility of the aircraft, while in flight, pitching a bit more higher than intended. In certain stages of flight, this could lead to what is called a stall which can have dangerous consequences. The

automated MCAS comes in here. With the Angle of Attack (AoA) sensors, it detects when the aircraft is at risk and initiates corrective manoeuvres using the stabilisers. A senior Boeing 737 pilot told *The Hindu* that the MCAS is supposed "to work quietly in the background." The MCAS could force the aircraft into a dive if there are erroneous inputs from the AoA sensors (An FAA emergency airworthiness directive highlighted this). After the Indonesia crash, some pilot unions, especially in the U.S., flagged it as being a nasty surprise and there having been inadequate exposure to, information about and training for this feature. There is some commentary on this putting it down to the manufacturer not thinking of creating awareness of this feature to be a necessity.

Are safety issues new to aviation?

No. Aviation incidents have led to a review of every aspect of the aviation ecosystem. For example, Airbus SE faced a crisis when its Airbus A320 aircraft suffered accidents just after its introduction (1988 onwards); there was one incident in India (1990). Its "fly-by wire" controls were deemed too advanced and complex but the aircraft flies on, ticking many boxes for several airlines. More recently, Airbus had a significant technical issue with an engine type (the manufacturer is sorting it out) on its Airbus A320 Neo aircraft. In 2013, Boeing rode out a crisis, but with the cost of compensation, affecting its composite-built aircraft, the Boeing 787 'Dreamliner', and involving its lithium-ion batteries.

Where does this leave Boeing?

An extended grounding – which some experts estimate could be till May or beyond – could hit its bottom line. The Ethiopian crash even caused it to drastically tone down the unveiling of a newer model of its flagship Boeing 777 family, with its unique feature of partially folding wings. Given the reported conflict of interest in certification of aircraft, Boeing will have to work fast and transparently. It will have to look at tackling the issue from three angles, as aviation experts like Diogenis Papiomytis of consulting firm Frost and Sullivan have suggested: if it is a software issue, it could be sorted out in the planned battery of software upgrades – this could be soon. If it is about better pilot training, it will have to work out revamped and comprehensive training modules across the world and additional type certification. Aviation authorities will also have to maintain vigil as passenger safety is paramount. This could affect some airlines in terms of costs. Finally, if it is traced to a structural issue, the American aerospace giant could be hitting an air pocket, with ripple effects down the aviation global supply chain. The 737 is a cash cow, but there are already those who accuse Boeing of pushing its 52-year-old plane model too far. It's over to Renton now.



Quotas and a verdict

What is the basis for challenging the 10% quota for the economically backward sections?

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL

The story so far: The introduction of a 10% quota for the economically backward through the Constitution (103rd Amendment) Act has been challenged in the Supreme Court. The principal grounds cited in support of the challenge are mainly found in a 1992 judgment of a nine-judge Bench in *Indra Sawhney vs Union of India*. A look at the context in which Indra Sawhney, or the Mandal Commission case, was decided, its major findings and how they are being cited in the challenge to the 103rd Constitution Amendment.

What is the background of the case?

In December 1980, the Second Backward Classes Committee, headed by B.P. Mandal, better known as the Mandal Commission, gave its report. It recommended 27% reservation for Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and 22.5% for the Scheduled Castes/ Scheduled Tribes. A decade later, in August 1990, the government issued an office memorandum (OM), providing 27% vacancies for Socially and Educationally Backward Classes to be filled by direct recruitment. Violent protests greeted this memorandum, and a challenge was mounted in the Supreme Court. In 1991, a new government under the Congress issued a second OM notifying an additional reservation of 10% for other economically backward sections. A nine-judge Bench of the Supreme Court pronounced a 6:3 majority

As the Mandal case discusses the basis for identifying OBCs, its findings are being cited by those who have challenged the amendment

verdict in the Mandal Commission case, upholding the 27% quota in the first OM, but struck down the 10% quota based on economic criteria.

What were its main findings?

The majority judgment held that "a backward class cannot be determined only and exclusively with reference to economic criterion". "It may be a consideration or basis along with, and in addition to, social backwardness, but it can never be the sole criterion," Justice B.P. Jeevan Reddy wrote for the majority. It said backward classes could be identified on the basis of caste. The Bench also laid down that reservation not cross the 50% limit, unless a special case was made out for extraordinary situations and peculiar conditions to relax the rule. It wanted the 'creamy layer', the advanced sections of the backward classes, excluded from reservation and asked the government to evolve suitable criteria to exclude the 'creamy layer'.

Why cite the Indra Sawhney case?

After 27 years, the Constitution (103rd Amendment) Act, 2019, provides for 10% reservation in government jobs and educational institutions for the "economically backward" in the unreserved category. The Act amends Articles 15 and 16 of the Constitution by adding clauses empowering the government to provide reservation on the basis of economic backwardness. The 10% economic reservation is over and above the 50% cap. The Constitution does not define the term 'backward classes', though it endorses the role of the state in ensuring and promoting social equality. Over the years, caste has been a constant factor in identifying social and educational backwardness. As the Mandal Commission case discusses the basis for identifying OBCs, its findings are being cited by those who have challenged the amendment. They say the amendment violates the bar on quotas solely based on economic criteria and breaches the 50% quota limit which, they argue, is part of the Basic Structure of the Constitution.

The petitions, including those by Youth for Equality and activist Tehseen Poonawala, argue that the amendment excludes the OBCs and the SCs/STs from the scope of economic reservation. They contend that the high creamy layer limit of ₹8 lakh a year ensures that the elite capture the reservation benefits. They argue that the amendment does not clearly define the term "economically weaker sections."

What is the government's response?

In its response by affidavit, the government says the amendment was "necessitated to benefit the economically weaker sections of the society who were not covered within the existing schemes of reservation, which, as per statistics, constituted a considerably large segment of the Indian population." It quoted the 2010 report of the Commission for Economically Backward Classes, chaired by Major General S.R. Sinho (retired), which said 18.2% of the general category came under the below poverty line. It has said the economically weaker sections required as much attention as the backward classes. The government said the 50% ceiling applies to the SCs/STs and the OBCs. The new provisions separately deal with the economically weaker sections. It argued that a "mere amendment" to an Article would not violate the basic feature of the Constitution. The matter is likely to be referred to a Constitution Bench.



Over a cup of coffee

SUMIT PAUL

The Spanish newspaper *Mundo Deportivo* recently published details of a research project. Its finding was that men generally, and often uncannily, prefer to propose to a woman over a cup of piping hot coffee. So, there's a mysterious relationship between coffee and love. It's indeed true that many a love affair has thrived over a cup of coffee. Pablo Neruda and Picasso, stalwarts of Spanish creativity, proposed to their love interests over coffee. Neruda wrote, "Coffeehouse is a place where love burgeons and also breaks." Picasso fondly called a coffeehouse, "my first studio."

But the question is, what makes coffee and love so dove-tailed. Well, decades ago Carl Gustav Jung, and in 1970 British behavioral researcher Allan Thorpe, observed that women tend to prefer coffee over tea as subconsciously they equate the former with (male) robustness and desirability. There's a machismo about coffee that is unmistakable. Moreover, the aroma of hot coffee makes a man and woman mushy and eggs them on. The vapours from a coffee cup release dopamine, which makes you feel relaxed, euphoric. It eases out the pre-proposal tension and apprehension of getting rebuffed. Remember, coffee is both macho and mellow, a magnificent combination, so to say.

The pout effect

One more interesting observation has been that all women unknowingly pout (their lips) while sipping coffee, which is very sensual for the men and suitors. The very sight can drive some men crazy. The father of Magic Realism, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, admitted that his heart properly throbbled for the first time when at the age of 17 he saw his mother's maddeningly gorgeous lady friend cogitating and sipping coffee with an air of delectably nonchalant ease. It's worthwhile to mention that a woman's lip movements and pouting are very different while drinking tea, sipping coffee and quaffing wine. When a woman drinks tea, she looks as she is. When she sips coffee she looks worth proposing to, and when she quaffs wine she looks desirably wanton and mildly naughty.

Hollywood actor Mia Farrow believed coffee and intellect go hand in hand. That's the reason a legendary Bengali auteur took her muse to a coffeehouse on College Street in Kolkata and proposed to her. He intentionally chose a coffeehouse to unbosom himself to her. She was also an intellectual like him. Their love culminated in the "vapourised ambience of a romantic coffeehouse" (to quote Clarke Gable).

So if you want to propose, take her to a coffeehouse, or at least offer a cup of coffee if your city lacks a decent coffeehouse, and then utter those words that are writhing and wriggling to come out of your mouth, my heart. Coffee will not let you down.

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The promise of a sunset — and a sunrise

There are ways to overcome the empty nest syndrome and offset the inevitable loneliness it brings

VASHIMA SHUBHA

You can see this as your sunset year or sunrise year. Entirely your decision how you write the next few years of your work life'. These words of my friend and colleague forced me to confront my inner self again. As a parent, I am at a juncture where the children are ready to leave the nest for the first time.

In hindsight, as parents we ourselves have been preparing for this day, from the time we choose the little one's school carefully and over 12 years of education, push them to excel in studies, do extra-curricular activities and be on top of everything. Why did we do this? To make them capable to do something worthwhile as adults, to be employable, to be successful. Higher education is the obvious step after school, then why does this shock and this pain grip when the truth of the empty nest confronts a parent? I am one of those parents, and I have no answer to this astute question.

I have definitely known it for the last two years, ever since the boy started preparing for higher education admissions. In this case he chose to apply for studies outside India, so it was true beyond doubt that I will not be in the same place where he aims



ILLUSTRATION: SREEJITH R. KUMAR

to go. Still, didn't I push him to do well in the competitive tests? Didn't I look at all the possible colleges and help him with the research? Then why am I in shock? The despair that life is, coming to a point where I will have no reason to come back home to?

In this state of mind, nursing depressing thoughts, crying even in the midst of hectic work, I have joined scores of other parents perhaps who have gone through this, are at this point

right now, or are about to be part of the bandwagon.

However, it still does not console the aching heart. It's about me, it's about my loss of purpose, it's about my loneliness — so my mind tells me when I try to reason. Wise ones gently remind me that there is the rest of the family to think of, and I try to turn a blind eye. They are all grown-ups, they don't need me, and of course they can take care of themselves.

The wise ones start making

sense somewhere in this madness. So, while the eyes and heart have coordinated the cycle of tears, the mind and brain try to bring some balance. Google Mother scrounges umpteen search results on how to cope with the empty-nest syndrome. After reading three of them, one can quickly understand that there are very few alternatives available to overcome this time — substitute child for a hobby, or fulfill a longtime wish, otherwise conjure up an unfulfilled

dream and try to complete it now — never mind the age, it's just a number! Yoga and social work are other popular choices too. Some very wise ones try to show the miracles of technology and say that the distance is just a click away. I try to believe that and try to imagine new ways of connecting with my child.

In this abyss, the words of my friend and colleague made an impact. I realised he was in a similar timeline as a parent, too. His wisdom was both as a pro-

fessional and as a parent. It will take courage to rise, no doubt about that. To find meaning in this sunset and rise above it.

Many years ago when I was going through another crisis, a friend had said I should take a financial loan and then most of tantrums in life would melt away because the focus would shift to the equated monthly instalment and loan re-payment! Believe it or not, I did exactly that and it worked. The choices and priorities of my life changed forever. I am still paying the EMIs; it remains a driving force to fight difficult people, tough jobs, and to grow in the workspace. None of the self-help guides or researched articles will give this as an option to overcome a difficult time.

Similarly, the perspective to either drown and go down with the tide or to infuse passion in work, is rooted in experience. This time is to rise not only for myself but for the child too, who would be looking over the shoulder for support as he moves into the next phase of this uncertain world. The message is for all parents, while the younger ones explore life as it unfolds for them. May we have the courage and determination to embrace life as it moves to a different sunrise.

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Dreams and the reality

Asinine as they might be, these are visions from deep within

T.M. VALLIKAPPEN

I am a dreamer. But my dreams are totally frivolous, often with no beginning, no end and sometimes no middle either! Scenes from a 'Theatre of the Absurd' play by Beckett.

My adolescent dreams were highly women-centric, fantasising about voluptuous beauties. Elizabeth Taylor and Sophia Loren were hot favourites, followed by *desi* varieties from Bollywood. As testosterone levels declined, my dreams too changed in content and variety but not in fatuity. As a young probationer in the bank where I worked, my dreams were mostly about waylaying and assaulting an exceptionally nasty boss.

Once I entered fatherhood, filial love began to dominate my dreams. A particularly vivid dream was about a race through the Amazon forests which my school-going son and his friends had to go through. I was coach-guide to one of my son's friends. Dressed like Tarzan, I helped the youngster negotiate rapids, swim through crocodile and piranha infested waters, and fight off fierce wild animals. In the end my protegee won the race, beating his nearest rival (his first cousin!) by a huge lead.

The Mayor of Manaus, dressed in his ceremonial robes, then awarded the trophy to him, while I beamed and grinned foolishly,



still in my outlandish Tarzan attire, with loincloth and dagger.

Strangely enough, my son seemed to be nowhere in the picture. I also dreamt that the defeated cousin's parents refused to speak to me for several months.

The transition

Now I am a portly, bespectacled, mild-mannered 70-year-old pensioner. I often wish I was younger, fit and virile. That probably explains some of my more recent dreams where I appear macho and aggressive. One such saw me on the streets of Karol Bagh in Delhi.

I was suddenly attacked by three thugs who demanded my wallet, which I refused to hand over. In the ensuing fight, I kicked and punched my way through, knocking one of the assailants unconscious, while the other two fled! With total *sangfroid* I then

sauntered back to my hotel, ignoring the admiring looks of the bystanders! It was then that I suddenly woke up, to discover my terrified wife cowering at the far end of my bed, trying to protect herself from the vicious punches I was raining on her face. Ever since, she makes sure she sleeps as far away as possible from me.

Patriotism, too

Old age has brought in patriotic dreams as well. A few months ago my wife and I were in Hong Kong, staying with our son.

One night I dreamt I was a freedom fighter, marching along with Gandhiji to gherao a group of Britishers who were ensconced on a small island just off the coast. As we were about to cross over to the island, a gang of *raj* supporters chased us and many of us had no option but to jump into the sea and swim on to the island.

However, I chose a novel method. Springing onto a tall, slender arecanut tree protruding from the sea, I used it to jump across, much like a pole-vaulter using his pole. In the process one of my sandals fell off, whereupon I very magnanimously, and in true Gandhian fashion, threw off the other sandal too, so that my footwear would come in useful to whoever found them.

Landing on the island, I ran to the double-storied house where the British were staying. It was then that I was discovered by some loyalists who shouted, *uske tange thodo* (break his legs) and proceeded to do exactly that, using a large log lying around. I then woke up, screaming in agony, to find my son and his wife rushing in from their room to find out why the old man was making such a racket.

Sigmund Freud is no longer around to analyse my asinine dreams. In his absence, maybe I should request Jhumpa Lahiri to write a sequel to her *Interpreter of Maladies* and call it 'Interpreter of Dreams'. Maybe I should write to the government asking for a freedom fighter's pension. My meagre pension is proving to be sorely inadequate and any supplemental income would be helpful!

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A child without the pronouns

Is this the big piece of wisdom?

RAVINDRA KUMAR ANAND

She is all of two years old. She started speaking pretty late but now that she does, she is unstoppable. We named her Taneesha but she prefers to call herself by the shortened version — Tanna. "Tanna will go with Papa." "Papa... pick up Tanna". It's always Tanna this and Tanna that. Her constant babble enraptures us and energises us, making us want more and more.

Suddenly I realise that a great part of the charm of her speech is that — she knows no pronouns. "Tanna will go with Papa" is a lot more appealing than "I will go.". It may sound naïve to a learned psychologist, but to me it is like the Buddha's awakening. Putting in names instead of pronouns colours the sentences, makes them more alive. And maybe takes away a bit of the ego which is associated with "I" — a bit of separation associated with "You".

So my mind turns to more serious thoughts. Was the invention of pronouns the beginning of the human ego? Speaking is, they say, acting verbally. Action is just effecting what we speak. So could speaking of "I" and "You" have started the con-

licts which resulted in real actions? And could the notions of first, second and third persons in grammar could have been the beginning of division of society?

In the Bhagwad Gita, Krishna says the wise man acts as if it is some other person who is acting, and he himself is just a witness (*drishita*). What better way to implement this sagacious principle than eliminating pronouns? When I say "Ravi is hurt" it does not hurt as much as "I am hurt". Detachment begins the moment you do away with pronouns.

Is this why children are the closest to God? Saptarishi had asked for the boon of always staying five years of age. Were they afraid of pronouns? Is it the great "Da Vinci Code" which all philosophers are hiding behind all the verbose, evasive answers?

I explain my "theory" to my wife and propose that we experiment with it. "Asham will go shopping with Ravi. How does that sound?" I ask, offering a subtle bribe.

"Don't be childish" she says — bringing the issue to a swift conclusion then and there.

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Daddies and those household chores and tasks

They are yet to catch up fully, but contribute a great deal to household chores while pursuing their careers

RAJESH KRISHAN

The other day, after seeing Nobisuke, the protagonist Nobita's father in the children's cartoon show Doraemon, fail miserably to prepare a meal for himself, my seven-year-old son, Devank, asked me, "Dad, why are daddies not good at household chores?"

His question took me back to when I was a small child and my dad would prepare meals for us during the weekends. I would often sit on the kitchen shelf and watch him cooking, which was not a way for him to pass time but something he was very passionate about. At times he would prepare not one or two but all three meals for us. And to be honest, his cooking was better than my mom's. In fact, my mom too was (and still is) a big fan of his culinary skills.

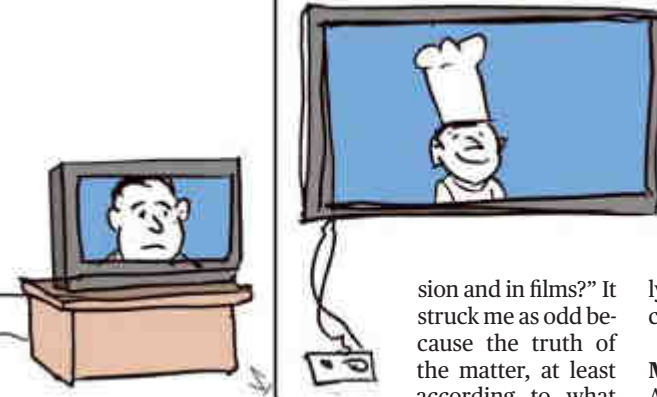
Besides cooking, my father

would spend a considerable amount of time performing other household tasks, from grocery shopping to doing the dishes, from running errands to attending to our homework, even sewing our torn clothes.

So, to go back to the question that Devank put to me, I told him, reassuringly, that not all daddies are the same. But being the never-give-up kind of child that he is, he quickly retorted by saying, "Do you know that Shinchan's dad is also like Nobita's dad. He too can't do household tasks and it's always Shinchan's mom who does all the household chores".

"But they are not real-life dads; they are only cartoons," I said, trying to diligently hold my stance.

This time, however, before Devank could react, his mother cut in. She said, "Actually, he is right. Even in television serials and films,



daddy characters are rarely shown to be doing the dishes, mopping the floor or serving tea to guests"

Her comment left me in a pensive mood. "When was the last time I saw a TV serial or a film where the male lead is shown doing household chores?" I asked myself, but found no answer to. I tried to reason with myself, wondering, "Why are dads projected in such a bad light on televi-

sion and in films?" It struck me as odd because the truth of the matter, at least according to what I've experienced

thus far, is that the modern-day daddies are no less family-centric than their counterparts of, say, thirty, or forty years ago. In fact, nowadays, most dads share the work load at home in equal terms for supporting their partners, taking care of their children and performing domestic chores, however, for some reason, this aspect of dads is rarely, or never portrayed on screen.

One obvious reason for this utter bias and discrimination is that almost all of television serials nowadays are oriented to women; besides, from the producers' viewpoint, it doesn't actually make any sense to portray men as equally capable as their female counterparts.

Mothers at work

Another possibility is that in the present day and age there are more and more moms are pushing the boundaries and joining the workforce. This challenges the traditional idea of dads as bread-winners, making them conspicuous and an easy target. Or, maybe dads are simply victims of primitive thinking that regards domestic work as moms' forte.

This assumption is flawed, not only from a 21st century woman's standpoint, who

works at almost double the rate of her predecessors. Also, in most modern families household tasks are performed through the mutual support of the husband and the wife.

But that's not to say we should undermine dads' involvement in household chores. Their contribution to the household is just as much as that of moms. Dads today are more involved with their families than ever before. They are contributing a great deal to household chores while pursuing careers, thus playing their dual domestic and work roles with aplomb and flair.

Today, this calls on the television and film industry to take cognisance of this off-screen reality and give dads an on-screen image makeover. How about starting with cartoons?

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