



Thin-skinned masters

Arbitrary arrest for a social media post reflects a disregard for law and liberty

The Supreme Court order granting immediate bail to journalist Prashant Kanojia, arrested by the Uttar Pradesh Police for sharing on Twitter a video pertaining to Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, was not unexpected. It was obvious that the arrest was arbitrary, unwarranted and without any basis in law. The State government's attempt to justify its action smacked of perversity and malice. The vacation Bench, comprising Justices Indira Banerjee and Ajay Rastogi, made the right call in ignoring technical objections by counsel for the State government that the apex court should not intervene as only a regular bail petition could secure relief to someone remanded by the jurisdictional magistrate. The Bench did not consider the controversial tweets as sufficient grounds for abridging personal liberty. In observing that the order of release would not amount to an endorsement of Mr. Kanojia's tweets, the court was only making a minor concession to the police claim that he was making inflammatory comments on social media. It is difficult to believe that at a time when social media networks are full of rampant abuse and distasteful material, the police can be allowed to choose one or two that appear to target political functionaries and incarcerate those airing such views, disregarding well-established norms for arrest and remand. In Mr. Kanojia's case, defamation, a non-cognisable offence, and Section 66 of the Information Technology Act were cited initially. The latter relates to damaging computer systems, and is inapplicable to a social media post. It was quite clear that there was no case for remand.

There was a more flagrant illegality when Mr. Kanojia was taken out of Delhi without a transit remand from a local magistrate, mandatory when an accused is taken from one State to another. Faced with criticism, the U.P. Police added a section dealing with the offence of causing public mischief and disturbing public tranquillity, besides Section 67 of the IT Act, which relates to sharing of obscene or prurient material, with the motive of obtaining a remand order. A few other journalists have been arrested for discussing the content of the video clip, in which a woman is seen expressing her wish to marry the Chief Minister. What is disquieting, but unsurprising, is the perfunctory attitude of civil servants towards the personal liberty of citizens. It is one thing to pursue violations through legal action, but quite another to lock up people for posts they deem offensive to their political masters and conjure up justifications for their arrest. It is time magistrates who pass mechanical orders without application of mind and officers who carry out illegal instructions from the political leadership are made to face exemplary disciplinary action.

A welcome verdict

The Kathua case represents a triumph of justice over communal propaganda

The trial court verdict finding three men guilty of the horrific gang-rape and murder of an eight-year-old girl in Jammu and Kashmir's Kathua district last year must be seen as the victory of justice over communal propaganda. It is the answer that due process has given to sectarian interlopers who sought to derail the investigation and trial by projecting the heinous crime against a girl belonging to the nomadic Bakerwal tribe as a plot to implicate Hindus. It is also a triumph for the justice system, as the Pathankot district and sessions court has lived up to the faith reposed in it by the Supreme Court last year, when the case was transferred from J&K to Punjab for a fair trial. The apex court had taken note of the hindrances to a fair trial in the jurisdictional court, especially the hostile atmosphere against the prosecution. The formation of a group called the Hindu Ekta Manch in support of those arrested and the role played by members of the Bharatiya Janata Party, including two Ministers in the then J&K government, had whipped up communal frenzy. It is commendable that the Crime Branch of the J&K Police and the prosecutors have brought home the guilt of Sanji Ram, Parvesh Kumar and Deepak Khajuria, who have been sentenced to life for murder and 25 years in prison for gang-rape. Further, the role of some police personnel in trying to destroy evidence has also been exposed. Sub Inspector Anand Dutta, Special Police Officer Surrender Verma and Head Constable Tilak Raj get a five-year term for washing some blood-stained clothes, concealing the victim's necklace and hair band, and misleading the investigating police team about the place of occurrence of the crime.

The investigation had been fairly quick, and the charge-sheet was prepared in two months. The trial lasted a year, and the verdict has been delivered within 17 months of the occurrence. Appeals by the convicts are only to be expected, and the Judge Tejwinder Singh's approach and the manner in which he appreciated the evidence would be determined by higher courts. Even the prosecution may appeal against the acquittal of one of the accused, whose alibi that he was appearing in an examination in Uttar Pradesh at the time of the incident has been accepted. Some may question the verdict for not imposing the death penalty in what was presented as a crime aimed at dislodging the Bakerwal community from the territory. However, it is a needless cavil, as what matters is that criminal liability has been established and a life term, which ought to mean the remainder of the convicts' natural life, has been awarded. The larger takeaway is that efficient investigation, diligent prosecution and judicial sensitivity can ensure speedy justice in all cases, and more particularly in cases of ghastly crimes that cause widespread revulsion and outrage. It is indeed a judgment that will inspire confidence in the justice system.

Squandering the gender dividend

It is a national tragedy that women unable to find work are dropping out of the labour force



SONALDE DESAI

If labour force survey data are to be believed, rural India is in the midst of a gender revolution in which nearly half the women who were in the workforce in 2004-5 had dropped out in 2017-18. The 61st round of the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) recorded 48.5% rural women above the age of 15 as being employed either as their major activity or as their subsidiary activity – but this number dropped to 23.7% in the recently released report of the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS). Is this part of a massive transformation of rural lifestyles or are our surveys presenting a skewed picture? If this change is real, does it offer a cause for worry?

Incremental decline

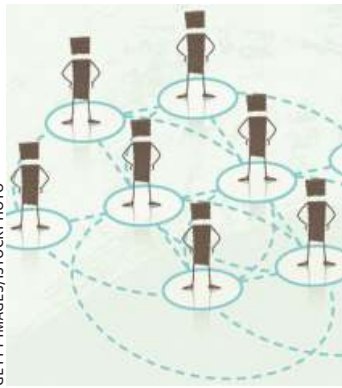
Before we turn to examining these changes, it is important to note that the drop in work participation by rural women is not sudden. The latest data from the PLFS simply continue a trend that was well in place by 2011-12. Worker to population ratio (WPR) for rural women aged 15 and above had dropped from 48.5% in 2004-5 to 35.2% in 2011-12, and then to 23.7% in 2017-18. In contrast, the WPR for urban women aged 15 and above declined only mildly, changing from 22.7% in 2004-5 to 19.5% in 2011-12, and to 18.2% in 2017-18.

One can view this drop in the rural female WPR both positively and negatively. If rising incomes lead households to decide that women's time is better spent caring for home and children, that is

their choice. However, if women are unable to find work in a crowded labour market, reflecting disguised unemployment, that is a national tragedy.

If the WPR is declining due to rising incomes, we would expect it to be located in richer households – households with higher monthly per capita expenditure and among women with higher education. A comparison of rural female WPRs between 2004-5 and 2017-18 does not suggest that the decline is located primarily among the privileged sections of the rural population. Between 2004-5 and 2017-18, women's WPR declined from 30.6% to 16.5% for the poorest expenditure decile, and from 31.8% to 19.7% for the richest expenditure decile. More importantly, most of the decline in the WPR has taken place among women with low levels of education. For illiterate women, the WPR fell from 55% to 29.1% while that for women with secondary education fell from 30.5% to 15.6%.

This broad-based decline with somewhat higher concentration among the least educated and the poorest is consistent with the industries and occupations in which it has occurred. Decomposing the 24.8 percentage point decline in women's WPR between 2004-5 and 2011-12, the decline in work on family farms and allied activities contributed the most (14.8 percentage points), followed by casual wage labour (8.9 percentage points) and in work on family enterprises in other industries (2.4 percentage points). These were counter-balanced by a 0.7 percentage point increase in regular salaried work and a 0.5 percentage point increase in engagement in public works programmes such as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act



(MGNREGA). Most of the decline – 23.1 percentage points out of 24.8 – came from reduced participation in agriculture and allied activities.

Men's participation in agriculture has also declined. Among men aged 15 and above, 56.1% participated in agriculture in 2004-5, while only 39.6% did so in 2017-18. However, men were able to pick up work in other industries whereas women reduced their participation in other industries as well as agriculture – resulting in a lower WPR. Therein lies the conundrum for rural women. Mechanisation and land fragmentation have reduced agricultural work opportunities for both men and women. Other work opportunities, except for work in public works programmes, are not easily open to women. This challenge is particularly severe for rural women with moderate levels of education. A man with class 10 education can be a postal carrier, a truck driver or a mechanic; these opportunities are not open to women. Hence, it is not surprising that education is associated with a lower WPR for women; in 2016-17, 29.1% illiterate women were employed, compared to only 16% women with at least secondary education.

The playwright against the Right

Garish Karnad's commitment to democratic values meant that he often took a vocal stand on issues



SUDHANVA DESHPANDE

It is both apt and reductive that two images dominate others as Garish Karnad is remembered on social media: one, with Gauri Lankesh, protesting the killing of Karnad's fellow Dharwadian, Prof. M.M. Kalburgi; the other, wearing the #MeTooUrbanNaxal placard, at the memorial to mark the first anniversary of Lankesh's own killing. Over the past few years, Karnad was seen as one of the most consistent, fearless and principled defenders of freedom of speech, cultural diversity and democracy. In the face of death threats, he remained unfazed, and even in his frail health, he made it a point to attend protest gatherings.

Even though Karnad, unlike his older contemporary and fellow Jnanpith awardee U.R. Ananthamurthy, did not belong to a particular political tendency (Ananthamurthy was an avowed socialist, inspired by Lohia), his commitment to democratic values meant that he often took vocal stands on issues. While many tributes to Karnad have noted that he was Director of the Film and Television Institute of India in 1974-75, not

everyone noted that he resigned after the Emergency was imposed. And his taking vocal stands against the Hindu Right didn't start in the last few years; he spoke up at least from the early 1990s onwards.

Remarkable pre-eminence

Karnad was perhaps India's most pre-eminent playwright. He was certainly something of a prodigy. It is a truism that Mohan Rakesh, Badal Sircar, Vijay Tendulkar and Karnad form the quartet that shaped India's post-Independence theatrical canon. Karnad was the youngest by a decade. Rakesh's first great play, *Ashadh Ka Ek Din*, appeared in 1958, Sircar's *Ebong Indrajit* in 1962, and Tendulkar's *Shantata! Court Chalu Aahe* in 1967. Karnad's *Yayati* dates to 1961, when he was a mere lad of 22. Generally, playwrights take a little longer to mature as compared to other writers. Good dramatic writing is almost impossible to achieve without the experience of working in, or writing for, a real, active theatre. Having a director take your text apart and reassemble it, hearing actors speak your lines, observing scenographers imagine the setting, having a live audience respond to your text, all teach you as much, if not more, about playwrighting as watching or reading plays.

That he wrote *Yayati* without virtually any previous theatre experience is remarkable enough, but that he wrote it in Kannada



FILE PHOTO/V. SREENIVASA MURTHY

makes it doubly remarkable. As Karnad recalled, when he set sail on a Rhodes Scholarship to England, he had fancied himself a poet who had 'trained myself to write in English, in preparation for the conquest of the West'. Karnad knew at least five languages – Konkani, Kannada, Marathi, Hindi and English – but in a sense it did take some 'unlearning' for him to rediscover the language of his childhood. But clearly the ambition to conquer the West never quite left him – he not only translated his own plays into English, he also wrote original plays in English and translated them into Kannada.

And yet, for most of his playwrighting career, Kannada purists scoffed at Karnad's writing, considering it, and the author, too Anglicised. It was only when he wrote *Tale-Danda*, about the medieval poet revolutionary Basavanna, in a north Karnataka dialect, that finally the murmurs went down.

Karnad's playwrighting oeuvre is

so substantial and varied, both in form and content, that it is impossible to reduce it to neat generalisations. For instance, he is generally thought of as someone who worked with material drawn from mythology and folklore, as well as history, initially, and only turned to an entirely different style with contemporary urban settings in his late work. However, he wrote *Anju Mallige*, set in England and about an incestuous relationship between a brother and sister, in an entirely naturalistic style, early in his career.

Many of Karnad's plays are acknowledged as masterpieces. *Yayati* is the story of a king who pleads with his son to take on a curse given to him, the curse of old age. The son, then, for no fault of his, becomes an old man, older than his own father. *Tughlaq* is a study of a king so far ahead of his time that he is considered mad, and who ends his reign in bloodshed and chaos. In a sense, the play reflected the confusion that Karnad's generation felt a decade or so after Independence, and in some ways it also presaged the Emergency. *Hayavadana* is the tale of a woman with a jealous husband who beheads himself, his friend who also beheads himself fearing that he will be suspected of murder, and the woman preparing to behead herself when the goddess takes pity on her and grants her a boon. She can get both men

Economic Research's National Data Innovation Centre (NCAER-NDIC) suggests a tremendous undercount of women's work using standard labour force questions, particularly in rural areas.

This is not to suggest that fixing the problem of undercount in surveys is the solution to declining WPRs. The undercount is a symptom of the unfulfilled demand for work. Although women try to find whatever work they can, they are unable to gain employment at an intensive level that rises above our labour force survey thresholds. This suggests an enormous untapped pool of female workers that should not be ignored.

Possible solutions

Establishment of the Cabinet Committee on Employment and Skill Development is a welcome move by the new government. It is to be hoped that this committee will take the issue of declining female employment as seriously as it does the issue of rising unemployment among the youth. Not all policies need to be gender focussed. One of the most powerful ways in which public policies affect rural women's participation in non-agricultural work is via development of transportation infrastructure that allows rural women to seek work as sales clerks, nurses and factory workers in nearby towns. If the cabinet committee were to focus on multi-sectoral reforms that have a positive impact on women's work opportunities, the potential gender dividend could be far greater than the much celebrated demographic dividend.

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back to life if she only attaches the heads to the bodies. In her confusion, she mixes up the heads, attaching them to the wrong bodies. Which of the two is her husband, now? The man with the head, or the man with the body? *Nagaman-dala* is a story of a woman with an uncaring husband, who is visited by a cobra at night, who takes her husband's form. The woman is surprised to find her husband loving, tender and erotic at night, but brutish and apathetic in the day. She has to prove her fidelity to the husband, and the cobra again comes to her rescue.

Student of power play

Two overarching themes stand out in Garish Karnad's playwrighting career. One is power – how it opens possibilities but also corrupts, how men fail to use it for the greater good, how it leads to brutality. The other is female desire, women's aspirations, and the inability of men to come to terms with it. Both are political themes, and today more charged than ever.

Garish Karnad stood up and spoke out against the Hindu Right. It would only be fitting if his plays are now re-interpreted with contemporary sensibilities by younger theatre makers to fight the good fight.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

Garish Karnad

Jnanpith and Padma awardee Garish Karnad, who was also one of India's finest playwrights, was a multifaceted personality (Inside pages - "Garish Karnad - actor with a conscience", "Unapologetic critic of the rightwing" and Editorial page - "The script writer of culture", all June 11). He had a modern mind yet was rooted. Karnad was an intellectual giant who always had the courage to speak his mind and wear his heart on his sleeve. He was unconventionally conventional, classy and original. India will miss him deeply as he was a rarity. C.G. KURIKOSE, Kothamangalam, Kerala

■ India has lost a strong voice in support of social causes and the freedom of expression. He was known to many, being a versatile writer, actor and an

intellectual, and on account of the serial 'Malgudi Days' and the science magazine programme on Doordarshan, 'Turning Point'. He stood for his convictions, inspired by our rich cultural values and heritage. As an artist with a conscience, he synthesised India and Bharat as a whole. The best way to keep his memory alive is to keep our institutions alive. R.D. SINGH, Ambala Cantt, Haryana

■ Karnad's passing has brought down the curtain on a glittering career and a life that was dedicated to art and literature. In a way, he was a rebel both in cinema and life. His was a prominent social voice, and there was rarely a social cause or a burning issue of the day that he had not commented on. It is a great loss for India. J.S. ACHARYA, Hyderabad

■ The country has lost an extraordinary playwright who never shied away from embracing progressive ideas besides speaking out boldly against the pernicious trend of stifling dissent and the climate of intolerance. He always took care to ensure that Indian theatre organically linked itself to its performative traditions. The void he has left will be difficult to fill. M. JEYARAM, Sholavandan, Tamil Nadu

■ Many of us feel his passing as a personal loss. He belongs to every one of us as he was connected to the pan-Indian audience through literature. An era of ethical and intellectual inspiration has ended, which is painful. ANANTHI SANTHAIVAN, Pune

Kathua verdict

The verdict in the Kathua case, of life imprisonment, is

grossly inadequate considering the gravity of the offence (Page 1, "Three get life sentence for rape, murder of 8-year-old in Kathua", June 11). A child was abducted, raped and killed. There was also attempt to destroy the evidence. All these ingredients speak about the *mens rea* of the perpetrators. The State government should appeal against the verdict. The punishment seems too lenient. T. ANAND RAJ, Chennai

■ Justice has finally been served. Yet it is a travesty of justice that those who should have been preventing it were themselves involved in the crime. Another point is that the images of rallies organised to shield the perpetrators will scar our conscience for a long time. Clearly, we are not an ideal civil society as yet. The case

held a mirror to us exposing the ugly truth of society. MEGHANA A., Shell Cove, NSW, Australia

Great humorist

The passing, in Chennai, of 'Crazy' Mohan, prominent Tamil theatre artiste and scriptwriter for Tamil films, is shocking (Page 1, "Crazy Mohan is no more", June 11). An excellent stage actor, prolific story writer, and a humorist par-excellence, he ensured without fail that his audience burst into peals of innocent laughter in every scene. His mastery over the art of communication in an astonishingly humorous way also had messages for society. N. VISVESWARAN, Chennai

■ His special bonding with actor Kamal Haasan resulted in absolute rib-ticklers. Mr. Haasan's comic timing and Mohan's impeccable word

play have produced a body of work that still has amazing recall value.

R. SIVAKUMAR, Chennai

Kohli's gesture

Virat Kohli's special gesture ('Sport' page, "Don't boo, cheer Smith", June 10) – to be there for the underdog, more so one with a player he has clashed with and whose star is on the ascendant – is a special gesture, which perhaps represents the kind of Indian our founding fathers had in mind. Kohli has shown that his heart beats for the other India – the one where, in lore, gods, kings and the commoner arrayed themselves on the side of what is right. He has shown the sporting world an inspiring, transformative vision. B.G. KRISHNAN, Chennai

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Truth, technology and the teacher

Remembering Vijaya Mulay means admitting how wrong India has gone on the issue of technology



Vijaya Mulay, who died last month at the age of 98, was an icon of educational technology. She was a pioneer of animated films for children. Her short film, ‘Ek, Anek Aur Ekta’, continues to be an Internet hit many decades after it was made in National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT)’s newly set up unit on educational technology, which she led for many years. She chaired the National Focus Group which drafted the policy on technology included in the National Curriculum Framework (NCF), 2005.

Some members were unhappy that a filmmaker was leading a group that covered the use of computers in education. Mulay’s own vision of educational technology offered no exception to the general rule that technology must promote plurality of use and creative endeavour. That is not the direction that educational technology took in India. She often warned against schools and colleges becoming graveyards of equipment. In an age when schools are perceived as hostage markets, remembering Mulay means admitting how terribly and expensively wrong our system has gone on the issue of technology – and not just technology.

Teachers at the margins

That admission, however, is hardly a tribute to her. Nor is it a tribute to the India that she, like many others of her generation, symbolised. India was an ongoing invention, and you were part of it. The India she signified and carried with her everywhere told you to find new ways to relate to old problems. Togetherness meant that you will not dominate, no matter how much you know. Technology was supposed to enable people to solve their own problems and feel that they could manage the machine on their own. For Mulay, the danger of educational technology leading to centralised decision-making was as great as the attraction that it would bring life into classrooms. How to avoid the risk of making the teacher feel marginal and dependent was the



MECARA GOPAL

key challenge for policy.

The fight between the machine and the teacher is an unequal one. Instead of being together, they have been placed in a state of conflict. At the moment, teachers are at the losing end. They are told to use a range of new gadgets and material to improve teaching. Smart classes are equipped with industrially manufactured lessons and tests. All that the teacher has to do is to facilitate the delivery of these pre-planned lessons. To add to this loss of intellectual autonomy and dignity, surveillance gadgetry is being applied to monitor teachers, to assess what they are doing in the classroom.

From the other end too, namely that of children and their parents, the teacher faces impossible challenges on a daily basis. At a recent conference I met several teachers discussing the difficulties they face when children bring information they have accessed through the Internet or through an app. A teacher from Haryana talked about a child bringing an image with a well-written description of a nuclear test India conducted 3,000 years ago. The teacher asked, how should I explain to this Class VI child that this information cannot be true? She was aware, she said, that information of this kind has political value as it conveys, and also enhances, a certain kind of patriotism. She said many children in her class were convinced that the information was correct. Moreover, they believed that many of the things she told them during her lessons were doubtful although they were aware that for passing the monthly tests, they should write whatever the teacher had told them.

At a young age, these children had developed the capacity to maintain two separate repertoires of knowledge: one for personal conviction and the other for doing well at school.

A double-edged sword

In this new technological environment, it is easy to forget everything Mulay said and ignore her warnings. The dominant tendency today is to perceive technology as a source of all solutions, not as an aid. The biggest hurdle to reforms in education today is the marginalisation of teachers. They have been at the receiving end of one move after another. They had no choice but to follow whatever they were told to do. Regimented and compliant they always were; being repeatedly told to shift gears has made them cynical. This is a far cry from how Mulay defined the purpose of using educational technology. The National Focus Group paper written under her leadership explained how the latest communication technology was a double-edged sword. While it had the potential to enable common causes to create new communities, it also enabled globally dominant corporate power to discourage intellectual autonomy. To survive with sanity in the new technological environment, our children “must know that nothing is value-free (not even Donald Duck).” Learning at school must promote “a sense of discernment”, and this is no easy aim to pursue in the prevailing technological environment.

Mulay lived for nearly a century, yet her passing away makes one feel as if we have lost a robust, young voice we urgently need. To keep her

memory alive, we must ask why our system of education has failed to benefit from new technologies of storage and communication of knowledge. Many people may not agree with my assessment and insist that our record of using technology – radio, television, computer, Internet – for improving education is not bad. I might have agreed if I were not a frequent listener of Gyan Vani. The programmes it offers to students enrolled in distance education courses are mostly just as wooden as the lectures they would have heard at a college or university. Mulay had warned against precisely this tendency of using technology for replicating and magnifying entrenched systemic weaknesses.

What knowledge means

Mulay was neither revolutionary nor radical. She worked inside systems and softened people committed to hard lines and tough remedies. One of her extraordinary attempts at persuasion was to join French film director Louis Malle in writing to Indira Gandhi to convince her that she must watch his films. They were banned in India because they were critical and hurt national pride.

As a bridge between the world of films and education, Mulay set a silent example of persistence in her belief that schools could be softened. Had she been directly asked how, she would have said, by working with teachers, giving them status and the experience of taking decisions. Few people today might agree with her. Contempt for school teachers and suspicion in their competence are widespread, and not merely in the bureaucracy. The so-called aspirational middle class has little patience for the teacher. Its demands from children are as ruthless as the parents’ determination to hound the principal and her staff. They perceive themselves as consumers, and they will go to any length to get the best value. They trust the drill master at the coaching institute because he delivers what he promises. Knowledge brought to life through technology is irrelevant in this scenario. So is its value as truth. What matters is its instrumental value, to let you get on to the next stage of the entrance process.

Krishna Kumar is a former director of the NCERT

The importance of being neighbourly

India is subtly adding four new elements in the policy matrix



RAJIV BHATIA

The Modi government has acted swiftly to pursue its foreign policy priorities. Focused on strengthening India’s place in the world, it has begun by shoring up the country’s position in the immediate neighbourhood. This message emanated from Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s visits to the Maldives and Sri Lanka, and External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar’s trip to Bhutan.

Ties with South Asian neighbours were a priority even earlier, as seen in the invitation extended to SAARC leaders to attend Mr. Modi’s swearing-in ceremony in 2014. After that there were some difficulties. India’s relations with Pakistan soured, while China continued to expand its footprint in Nepal, the Maldives, Sri Lanka and Pakistan. However, India’s cooperation with Bangladesh, Bhutan, Afghanistan and Myanmar showed tangible progress. As a result, attention was consciously shifted from SAARC to BIMSTEC, thereby giving an eastward shift to India’s neighbourhood policy. In 2016, BIMSTEC leaders were invited to the BRICS summit in Goa. BIMSTEC leaders also attended Mr. Modi’s swearing-in last month.

Three visits

A week thereafter, Mr. Jaishankar was in Bhutan holding comprehensive discussions with his counterpart and the Prime Minister. He also met King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck. The visit was perhaps meant to assess the current thinking in Thimphu about Chinese overtures to open diplomatic relations and the border issue before Mr. Modi’s meeting with President Xi Jinping at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit.

Mr. Modi’s visit to the Maldives was astutely designed to showcase that a dramatic turnaround has taken place in India-Maldives relations. Former Maldivian President Abdulla Yameen gave a blatantly pro-China tilt to his foreign policy. The result was that Mr. Modi had to wait until Mr. Yameen’s ouster before he could visit the Maldives in November 2018. Working in concert, the two governments have succeeded in deepening mutual understanding. While visiting India in December 2018, President Ibrahim Solih was still somewhat cautious as he spoke of balancing friends, old and new. But by the time Mr. Modi landed in the Maldives last

week, Male had become more receptive. The President and the Majlis speaker reiterated the Maldives’ commitment to its ‘India first policy’. The Majlis invited Mr. Modi to deliver a special address. The President conferred the nation’s highest honour on Mr. Modi.

This visit demonstrated how India has begun to implement recent decisions to extend ample financial assistance, move ahead with projects to be funded through a new \$800 million Line of Credit, and focus on people-centric welfare measures in accordance with the priorities of the Maldives. This is in sharp contrast with China’s approach of extending massive loans for mega infrastructure projects that end up in debt traps. Mr. Modi hit all the right buttons, highlighting India’s resolve to assist the Maldives in every possible manner. He identified countering terrorism, addressing climate change, and promoting an integrated and balanced Indo-Pacific as the key challenges for the region.

Mr. Modi’s visit to Colombo was prudent. It conveyed India’s solidarity with Sri Lanka as the latter struggles to overcome the overwhelming effects of the Easter Sunday attacks. Mr. Modi held discussions with all the main actors: the President, the Prime Minister, the Leader of Opposition, and Tamil leaders. President Maithripala Sirisena reflected the nation’s view as he publicly thanked Mr. Modi for a productive visit.

Policy essence

New Delhi has clearly indicated that the neighbourhood will continue to be a priority, but four subtle elements are being introduced in the policy matrix. First, without always insisting on reciprocity, India may get into a proactive mode and adopt measures “to incentivise cooperation in the neighbourhood”, as Mr. Jaishankar put it. Second, India will prefer to work on quick impact projects that bring socio-economic benefits to the people. Third, recognising its “limited capabilities”, as Foreign Secretary Vijay Gokhale disclosed, New Delhi would have no objection in forging a trilateral development partnership, involving India and Japan in a neighbouring country. Fourth, SAARC’s drawbacks have caused India’s conscious shift to BIMSTEC. Mr. Jaishankar explained that India sees a mix of “energy, mindset and possibility” in the latter grouping. The government is moving in the right direction. It could also consider bringing the Maldives into BIMSTEC, at least as an observer. Finally, Mr. Jaishankar should visit other neighbours soon, particularly Bangladesh and Myanmar.

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SINGLE FILE

Saving childhoods

Steps India could take to eliminate child labour

DAGMAR WALTER



S. R. RAGHUNATHAN

On World Day Against Child Labour (June 12) in 2017, India ratified two core conventions of the International Labour Organization on child labour. It now has to double its efforts to ensure that the benefit of those conventions reach the most vulnerable children.

Although comprehensive data on child labour are not available for India, as per the 2011 Census, in the age group 5-14 years, 10.1 million of 259.6 million constituted working children. Even though there was a decline in the number of working children to 3.9% in 2011 from 5% in 2001, the decline rate is grossly insufficient to meet target 8.7 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which is to end child labour in all forms by 2025. India therefore needs to embark on new and innovative approaches in its fight against child labour.

The ratification of the core conventions on child labour gives rise to a range of priorities such as strengthening policy and legislative enforcement, and building the capacities of government, workers’ and employers’ organisations as well as other partners at national, State and community levels. It is worthy of mention that India had taken important steps to eliminate child labour even before ratifying these conventions. In addition, there are a few more important steps that the country can take in this direction.

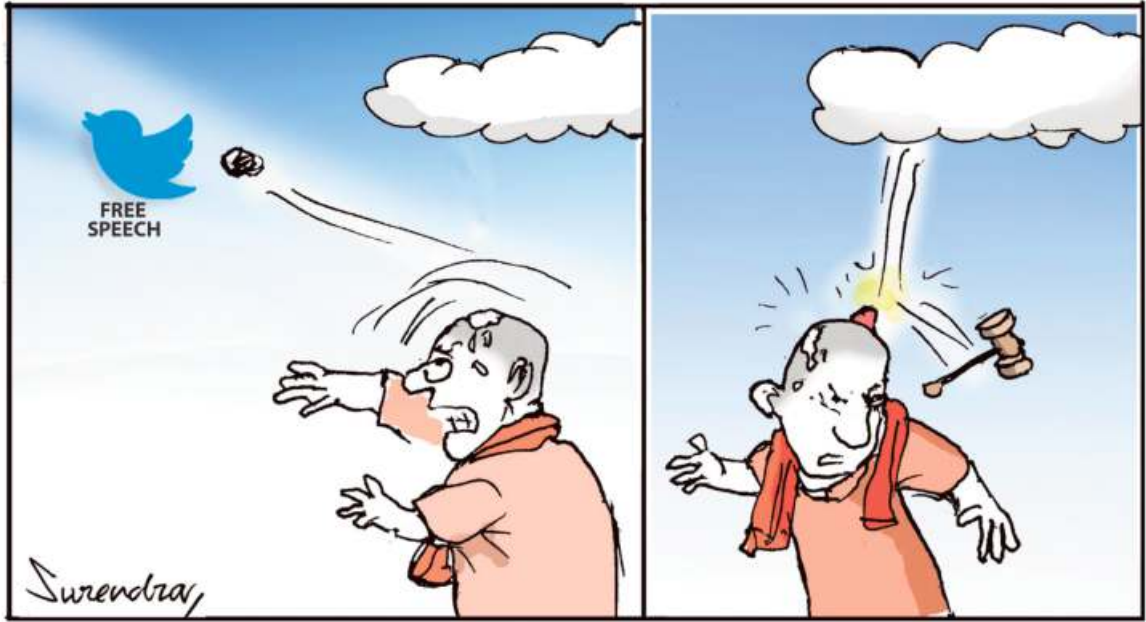
India should invest in enhancing its body of knowledge on child labour, emphasising quantitative information. While there are many common factors across the spectrum, each sector and each demographical segment will have its own set of factors and drivers that push children into the labour market. These have to be addressed. Such factors and drivers can only be identified and analysed through proper research, surveys and assessments.

Eliminating child labour is firmly placed within Goal 8 of the SDGs. A stronger nexus between the discourse on SDGs and the discourse on eliminating child labour can take the advantage of complementarities and synergies of a wide range of actors engaged in both areas of work.

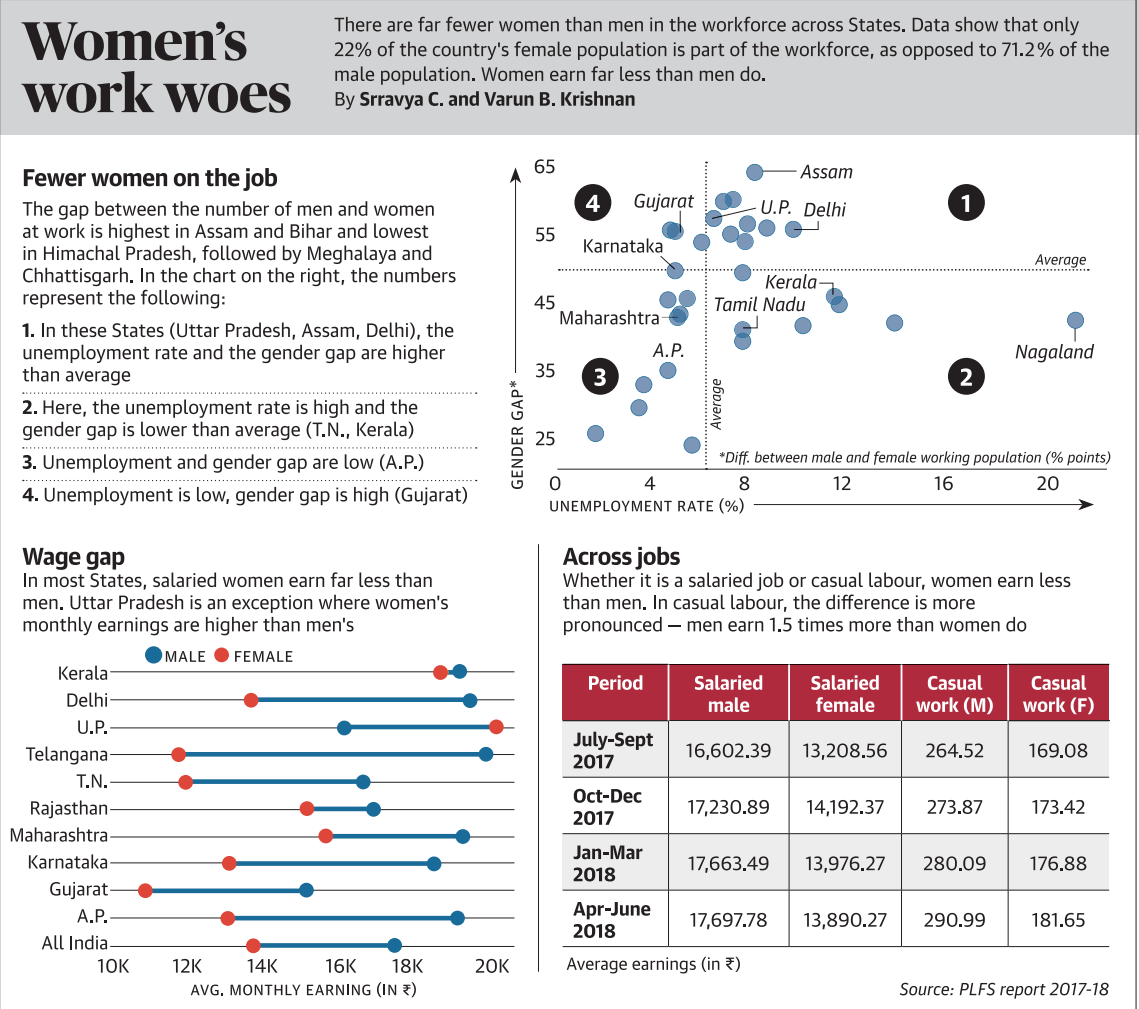
The growing interest of the private sector is a great opportunity that has to be further utilised, particularly to leverage key influencers in domestic and multinational supply chains. It is also a matter of competitive advantage for multinationals to ensure that child labour is effectively eliminated in their supply chains. A sector-wide culture of child labour-free businesses has to be nurtured.

As the world of work is transforming and new actors are emerging, one cannot underestimate the importance of creating a sound and vibrant platform to bring together these actors. The fight against child labour is not just the responsibility of one, it is the responsibility of all.

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DATA POINT



FROM The Hindu. ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO JUNE 12, 1969

Centre against hasty decision on Telengana

The Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, had consultations with her Cabinet colleagues this evening [June 11, New Delhi] on the Telengana issue. No definite line of action seems to have emerged from these consultations at which Ministers of State from Andhra – Mr. K. Raghuramaiah, Mr. B. S. Murthy and Dr. K. L. Rao – participated by special invitation. The only indication available after the meeting of the Cabinet was that the Centre would not take any hasty decision. There is a feeling that no decision may be taken until after the return of the Prime Minister from her Japanese tour in the third week of this month. At to-day’s meeting, Mr. Y. B. Chavan, Home Minister, is reported to have given the impressions he had gained from his fact-finding mission to Hyderabad last week-end. The consensus is understood to be in favour of finding a solution within the framework of a united Andhra Pradesh with the concrete assurance that the people of Telengana would have voice in the administration and all other walks of life.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JUNE 12, 1919.

Mysore Economic Conference.

Since last year the question of making the Mysore Economic Conference permanent received great attention both from the officials and non-officials and opinions varied considerably on the question. At the birthday session last year the matter was discussed but His Highness the Maharaja announced that it would be made permanent in one form or another, the details of the constitution being left to the conference itself. Since then at various committee meetings the matter was discussed but arrived at no decision. The Government instead of committing to any scheme formulated certain proposals as basis for reorganisation of the constitution of the conference. These proposals were discussed the whole of to-day [June 11].

CONCEPTUAL Budget-maximising model

This refers to an economic model which tries to depict the typical behaviour of bureaucrats who work for the government. A government bureaucrat, according to this model, will constantly try to expand the amount of money and other resources that are under his control. The greater the amount of resources under his control, the greater the chances of him wielding power over people who are dependent on these resources. The budget-maximising model of bureaucratic behaviour was first proposed by American economist William Niskanen in the 1968 paper, “The peculiar economics of bureaucracy”.

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Tamil Isai Sangam museum in Chennai

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