



Beyond talaq

India needs a non-sectarian, gender-neutral law that addresses desertion of spouses

Both Houses of Parliament have passed a Bill making instant triple talaq a criminal offence, amidst persistent doubts whether it ought to be treated as a crime or just a civil case. It is true that the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill, 2019, is a diluted version of the Bill as it was originally conceived. Earlier, it did not specify who could set the law in motion. Now the offence is cognisable only if the affected wife, or one related to her by blood or marriage, files a police complaint. A man arrested under this law may get bail, after the Magistrate grants a hearing to the wife. Thirdly, the offence is compoundable, that is, the parties may arrive at a compromise. The government says its main objective is to give effect to the Supreme Court's 2017 verdict declaring instant triple talaq illegal. It claims that despite the court ruling, several instances have been reported. Making it an offence, the government says, will deter further resort to triple talaq, and provide redress for women in the form of a subsistence allowance and custody of children, besides getting the erring husband arrested. However, the core question regarding the necessity to criminalise the practice of *talaq-e-biddat* has not been convincingly answered.

In the light of the Supreme Court ruling on its validity, there is really no need to declare instant triple talaq a criminal offence. The practice has no approval in Islamic tenets, and is indeed considered abhorrent. Secondly, once it has been declared illegal, pronouncing talaq obviously does not have the effect of "instantaneous and irrevocable divorce" as this Bill claims in its definition of 'talaq'. The provisions that allow a woman to claim a subsistence allowance from the man and seek custody of her children can be implemented in the event of the husband abandoning her, even without the man's arrest. If triple talaq, in any form, is void, how the questions of children's custody and subsistence allowance arise while the marriage subsists, is not clear. And then, there is the practical question of how a man can provide a subsistence allowance while he is imprisoned. It has been argued by the Bill's proponents that dowry harassment and cruelty towards wives are treated as criminal offences even while the marriage subsists. It is a patently wrong comparison, as those acts involve violence and cruelty and are rightly treated as criminal offences. The same cannot be said of a man invoking a prohibited form of divorce. The BJP projects the passage of the Bill as a historic milestone in the quest for gender justice. Such a claim will be valid only if there is a non-sectarian law that addresses abandonment and desertion of spouses as a common problem instead of focusing on a practice, which is no more legally valid, among Muslims.

Logged out

Brazil must recognise that the Amazon rainforest is a universal treasure

It is a matter of global concern that deforestation in the Amazon rainforest in Brazil is increasing rapidly since January, when Jair Bolsonaro took office as President. Satellite images show that about 4,200 sq km of forests have been destroyed up to July 24 under the new government. While most nations tend to view their land and forests through the narrow prism of short-term economic gain, climate science data show that they play a larger environmental role. The Amazon basin, spread across millions of hectares in multiple countries, hosts massive sinks of sequestered carbon, and the forests are a key factor in regulating monsoon systems. The rainforests harbour rich biodiversity and about 400 known indigenous groups whose presence has prevented commercial interests from overrunning the lands. Much of the Amazon has survived, despite relentless pressure to convert forests into farmlands, pastures and gold mines, and to build roads. That fragile legacy is now imperilled, as Mr. Bolsonaro has spoken in favour of "reasonable" exploitation of these lands. Although the forest code has not been changed, his comments have emboldened illegal expansion into forests. Armed gold-hunting gangs have reached tribal areas and the leader of one tribe has been murdered in Amapa in an incursion. These are depressing developments, and the Brazilian leader's criticism of satellite data and denial of the violence are not convincing at all.

As the custodian of forests in about 5 million sq km of Amazon land, Brazil has everything to gain by engaging with the international community on meeting the opportunity cost of leaving the Amazon undisturbed. Mr. Bolsonaro lost a valuable opportunity to seek higher funding for forest protection by refusing to host the annual convention of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change this year, but he has been wise not to exit the Paris Agreement. Abandoning that pact would jeopardise Brazil's access to the important European Union market. Globally, there is tremendous momentum to save the Amazon forests. Brazil must welcome initiatives such as the billion-dollar Amazon Fund backed by Norway and Germany, which has been operating for over a decade, instead of trying to shut them down. Remedial funding, accounting for the value of environmental services, is the most productive approach, because forest removal has not helped agriculture everywhere due to soil and other factors. One estimate by the World Bank some years ago noted that 15 million hectares had been abandoned due to degradation. Brazil's President must recognise that rainforests are universal treasures, and the rights of indigenous communities to their lands are inalienable. The international community must use diplomacy to convince Mr. Bolsonaro that no other formulation is acceptable.

In hate crime fight, a voice still feeble

Taking the cue from the U.S., the Indian Parliament needs to recognise hate killings as an act of terror



HARSH MANDER

At a time when India is reeling under hate lynching, it is sobering to remember that it took the United States Senate 100 years to approve a bill to make lynching a federal crime. Over 200 anti-lynching bills were introduced in the U.S. Congress since 1918, but all were voted down until the Justice for Victims of Lynching Act of 2018 introduced by three Senators of African-American descent including Kamala Harris was approved unanimously in the winter of 2018.

The U.S. bill describes lynching as "the ultimate expression of racism in the United States". Senator Cory Booker said the bill recognised lynching for what it is: "a bias-motivated act of terror". When will Parliament here recognise, similarly, that lynching is "a bias-motivated act of terror" and "the ultimate expression of communal hatred in India"?

Tool of fear

Some may dispute this description, citing the relatively small numbers of such mob crimes. They miss the point that hate lynching is designed as an act to terrorise an entire community. The number of lynch murders in the U.S. mentioned in the bill averages around 55 annually, but despite these small numbers, these performative acts of violence succeeded in instilling intense fear among all African-Americans for decades.

The same purpose is being served by lynching in India; again performative acts of hate violence, but now using modern technology, video-graphing of mob lynching, widely circulating these images through social media, and

celebrating these as acts of nationalist valour. These have similarly instilled a pervasive sense of everyday normalised fear in the hearts of every Indian from the targeted minority community. It is this which indeed makes lynching an ultimate act of terror.

The Supreme Court of India recently asked the Union government and all the major States to explain what action has been taken to prevent these growing incidents of lynching, including passing a special law to instil a sense of fear for law amongst vigilantes and mobsters. Kunwar Danish Ali, a first term Bahujan Samaj Party MP from Amroha, raised the same question in Parliament, describing mob lynching as "an assault on democracy". His inquiry was met with noisy disruptions, but he got no answer.

Significant statutes

The Uttar Pradesh Law Commission (UPLC) earlier last month took the initiative, unprompted by the Uttar Pradesh government, to recommend a draft anti-lynching law. It commends a law which closely follows in almost every major detail the first law against lynching passed in this country, a remarkable ordinance introduced by the Manipur government late last year, indeed the most significant statute against religious hate crimes in the country.

A noteworthy observation in the text of the United States bill is that it records that at least 4,742 people were lynched in the U.S. between 1882 and 1968, but 99% of all perpetrators remain unpunished. It is significant to remember that the first anti-lynching legislation proposed as far back as in 1918 in the U.S. targeted state officials for failing to provide equal protection under the laws to anyone victimised by a mob. Impunity characterises lynching in India as well. Addressing this squarely, both the Manipur statute and the UPLC draft create a new crime of dereliction of duty by police offi-



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cial, holding a police officer guilty of this crime if he or she "omits to exercise lawful authority vested in them under law, without reasonable cause, and thereby fails to prevent lynching". Dereliction also includes the failure to provide protection to a victim of lynching; failure to act upon apprehended lynching; and refusing to record any information relating to the commission of lynching. This crime carries the penalty of one to three years and a fine. The UPLC goes further to include also a new crime of dereliction of duty by District Magistrates.

The creation of this new crime was also the key recommendation of the Prevention of Communal & Targeted Violence (Access to Justice and Reparations) Bill, proposed by the National Advisory Council of the erstwhile United Progressive Alliance government (full disclosure: Farah Naqvi and I were co-convenors of the working group which drafted this proposed bill, which however was never even introduced in Parliament). We were convinced that it is only the creation of such a crime that will compel public officials to perform their duty with fairness, in conformity with their constitutional and legal duties, to ensure equal protection to all persons, regardless of their faith and caste.

Some recommendations

Both the Manipur law and UPLC recommendations also lay down elaborate duties of police officials in the event of lynching. These include taking all reasonable steps to prevent any act of lynching including its incitement and commis-

sion; to that end making all possible efforts to identify instances of dissemination of offensive material or any other means employed in order to incite or promote lynching of a particular person or group of persons; and making all possible efforts to prevent the creation of a hostile environment against a person or group of persons.

Both sensitively and expansively lay down official duties to protect victims and witnesses. They state that a victim shall have the right to reasonable, accurate, and timely notice of any court proceeding and shall be entitled to be heard at any proceeding in respect of bail, discharge, release, parole, conviction or sentence of an accused, and to file written submissions on conviction, acquittal or sentencing. They also explicitly require the Superintendent of Police to inform the victim in writing of the progress in the investigation. The victim shall have the right to receive a copy of any statement of the witness recorded during investigation or inquiry and a copy of all statements and documents.

Where the UPLC goes further than the Manipur statute is in laying down the right to compensation. It places the duty squarely on the Chief Secretary to provide compensation to victims of lynching within 30 days of the incident. It states that while computing compensation, the State government must give due regard to bodily, psychological and material injuries and loss of earnings, including loss of opportunity of employment and education, expenses incurred on account of legal and medical assistance. It also lays down a floor of ₹25 lakh in case lynching causes death.

The Congress government of Madhya Pradesh has announced its resolve to pass legal provisions against lynching. It chooses curiously to not do this by an anti-lynching law, but instead by amendments to the Madhya Pradesh Cow Progeny Slaughter Pre-

vention Act 2004 (which would effectively limit its scope only to cow-related lynching, and not lynching triggered by other charges).

Its proposed amendments do not include any provisions to punish dereliction of duty, protect victim rights or secure compensation. All that it proposes is punishment for any act by a mob which indulges in violence in the name of cow vigilantism from six months to three years of imprisonment and a fine. It is unclear what deterrence such amendments would instil, since existing laws contain much greater punishments for murder and aggravated attacks. In its present form, it appears a weak, half-hearted and poorly thought-out measure. The Ashok Gehlot-led government in Rajasthan has also tabled an anti-lynching bill. This prescribes higher punishments, investigation by senior police officers, and mandatory compensation but not the critical elements of dereliction of duty or victim rights. Without these, they will make little difference on the ground.

Home Minister Amit Shah now heads a committee to propose action against lynching. The question remains: do we expect Mr. Shah, or indeed Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath to propose a law against lynching which punishes public officials who fail in their duties, protects victims and witnesses, and ensures comprehensive reparation, as proposed by the UPLC and provided in the Manipur statute?

"Someone is finally recognising our pain," said the great-granddaughter of Anthony Crawford, an African American, who was lynched in 1916. I wonder how long survivors of lynching who lost their loved ones to merciless mob hate in India will have to wait for a government which will recognise their pain.

Harsh Mander is a human rights worker, writer and teacher

Fortifying the Africa outreach

There is a disconnect between India's developmental assistance to and economic engagement with the continent



MAHESH SACHDEV

This week two important Indian dignitaries began their respective visits to Africa. President Ram Nath Kovind commenced his seven-day state visit to Benin, Gambia and Guinea-Conakry (July 28 to August 3) and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh arrived in Maputo on a three-day visit (July 28 to July 30) to Mozambique. The simultaneity of the two visits may be a coincidence, but it also indicates enhanced priority to Africa. This should be welcomed.

Economic links

During the past five years, Indian leaders have paid 29 visits to African countries. Forty-one African leaders participated in the last India-Africa Forum Summit in 2015, where India agreed to provide concessional credit worth \$10 billion during the next five years. By 2017, India had cumulatively extended 152 Lines of Credit worth \$8 billion to 44 African countries. India has also unilaterally provided free access to its market for the exports of 33 least developed African countries. These sizeable ef-

forts are also noteworthy for being countercyclical: India escalated its commitments to Africa in an era of low-commodity prices when most other partners, including China, have scaled back theirs.

India has substantive economic engagement with Africa. Its trade with Africa totalled \$63.3 billion in 2018-19. India was ranked the third largest trading partner of Africa having edged past the United States during the year. The figures for Indians' investments (estimated at \$50 billion) and Indian diaspora (approximately three million) are a bit imprecise but are also substantive when put in the continental perspective. Although these statistics are impressive, they are well below the potential for India-Africa economic synergy and are often dwarfed by the corresponding Chinese data.

There seems to be a conspicuous disconnect between Indian developmental assistance to and India's economic engagement with Africa. The time has now come to integrate these two axes for a more comprehensive and sustainable engagement. It would also facilitate aided pilot projects being scaled up seamlessly into commercially viable joint ventures.

Any objective cost-benefit analysis of India's development assistance to Africa is unlikely to impress. From the demand to



remove the statues of Mahatma Gandhi in Ghana to the travails of Indian investors in Africa, from occasional demonisation of the long-standing Indian community to the non-recognition of Indian academic degrees, India's large developmental footprint in Africa does not produce commensurate empathy. India's aid being unconditional, the recipients often take it as an entitlement.

But India is neither a rich country nor has its hands been tainted by a history of slavery, colonisation and the exploitation of Africa. In fact, it is a developing country with similar domestic challenges of poverty, infrastructure deficit and underdevelopment. India's funds committed and seats in our prestigious academic institutions offered to Africa are at the expense of the tax-paying Indians. India's aid to Africa should be reciprocated by acknowledgement and quid pro quo in terms of goodwill (beyond the easy-flowing official rhetoric), and institutional preference. India cannot simply be a

cash cow for Africa, particularly when its own economy is slowing down.

Steps forward

We need to ask ourselves these: for all the development billions spent, how many mega-projects did Indian companies get and how many natural resources does India have access to in Africa? We should reorient our developmental profile to be more economically productive.

To this end, a number of steps can be considered: First, we need to take direct control of our development programme instead of handing our funds to intermediaries such as the African Union, the African Development Bank Group and the Techno-Economic Approach for Africa-India Movement (TEAM 9), whose priorities are often different from India's. To make an impact, our aid should be disbursed bilaterally and aligned with national priorities of the recipient state, which should be a substantial stakeholder and co-investor in schemes and projects from initiation to operation.

Second, India's development assistance should prefer the countries with its substantial interests, both existing and potential. For instance, Nigeria, South Africa, Egypt, Ghana, Angola and Algeria are India's top six trading partners in Africa, accounting for nearly

two-thirds of its trade and half its exports to the continent; yet, they do not figure commensurately in India's developmental pecking order. India's own needs for raw materials, commodities and markets should be factored in its aid calculus. Third, we ought to prefer aiding countries which are willing to help us – from access to their natural resources to using our generics. Fourth, the aided project selected should be compatible with local requirements. They should be cost-effective, scalable, future ready and commercially replicable. Fifth, for greater transparency, India should prefer its public sector to implement the aid projects. Sixth, the Indian Head of Mission in the recipient African state must be an integral part of the aid stream including project selection, co-ordination and implementation. Apart from empowering our diplomacy, this would ensure better harmonisation between our aid and economic objectives.

Finally, the aforementioned should not distract us from our duty to provide the needed humanitarian assistance to Africa: to be rendered promptly and with sensitivity, but without noise.

Mahesh Sachdev was the Indian High Commissioner to Nigeria and the Ambassador to Algeria. He is the author of 'Nigeria: A Business Manual'

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.

An entrepreneur dies
V.G. Siddhartha's journey, from being a management trainee at a firm to owning India's largest retail coffee chain, was phenomenal (Front page, "Coffee Day's Siddhartha goes missing," July 31). People of Karnataka's Malnad region fondly remember him as he expanded the market for the coffee grown there. Further, he provided employment to thousands of youngsters. His entrepreneurial flair, vision and humility would inspire budding entrepreneurs.

MITHUN H.N.,
Chikkamangalur

■ I fully agree with the story, "It is not easy to do business in India" (Business page, July 31). For a General

Practitioner like me, running a clinic in an urban area requires several regulatory permissions. To begin with, we need to obtain a Corporation Trade Licence, then get a private medical establishment licence, then a clearance from the Pollution Control Board for waste disposal, then get commercial electricity and water connections and so on. We also have to bribe the local officials. Governments have failed to make transparent the process to start an enterprise.

Dr. MOHAN,
Bengaluru

Call for justice

While the entire nation is praying for a speedy recovery of the Unnao rape survivor, we are also

outraged at the manner in which the case, where a ruling party MLA is an accused, has been handled by the Yogi Adityanath government. Questions have been raised about whether the truck-car collision was an accident or a conspiracy to eliminate the survivor and others. Factors like the smudging of the truck's registration plate have only strengthened such suspicions. What is even more disturbing is that her family members were pressurised to withdraw the case. That the Bharatiya Janata Party has not expelled the legislator, Kuldeep Sengar, speaks volumes about the clout he still enjoys. This is a fit case for a Supreme Court-monitored investigation ("Protest over

Unnao accident rocks LS," July 31).

S.K. CHOUDHURY,
Bengaluru

Remembering icons

The Yediyurappa government's first 'momentous' decision has been to cancel Tipu Jayanti. While there is a case for cancellation of the many 'jayantis' celebrated with a holiday, which cause an enormous loss of productive work hours, it looks blatantly unfair and communal to single out Tipu, who heroically fought against the British rule ("Yediyurappa govt. scraps Tipu Jayanti," July 31). Nonetheless, holidays associated with many of these jayantis, whose sole aim seems to be to appease

certain sections, can be cancelled. There can be a token one-hour event to remember the great men and then we can return to the more important nation-building activities.

K.M. SRINIVASA GOWD,
Bengaluru

Triple Talaq Bill

With the Triple Talaq Bill clearing the final hurdle, the Narendra Modi government can heave a sigh of relief. It has finally managed to criminalise instant divorce – a practice prevalent mostly among the poorer sections of the Muslim society ("Triple

Talaq Bill sails through Rajya Sabha," July 31). However, to vindicate its stand that it is really a well-wisher of the minority community, the government should enact with equal alacrity, laws to deal with mob lynchings. Further, the need of the hour is also to take stock of the stark educational and economic backwardness among the minorities and their dismal representation in government and private services.

MOHAMMAD ABDUL HAKEEM,
Hyderabad

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CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

UPI stands for Unified Payment Interface – not United Payment Interface as the front-page story on Truecaller bot (July 31, 2019, some editions) said.

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The perils of being a woman and a Muslim

Problematic narratives about Muslims make the present moment in Sri Lanka politics dangerous



NIYANTHINI KADIRGAMAR

As Sri Lanka struggles to bring itself together three months after the deadly Easter Sunday attacks, the country's Muslims continue to face constant scrutiny, with the security apparatus and reactionary forces turning their violent gaze on them.

The enhanced surveillance across the country since the bombings has disrupted the educational and economic life of Muslims. Chauvinist groups have repeatedly called for boycott of Muslim businesses and trade, even though Muslim communities have unequivocally condemned the Easter blasts attributed to a local hard-line Islamist group.

Sri Lanka's Muslim minority, constituting about 10% of the island's population, has faced several bouts of violence in the past. The LTTE evicted the Muslims en masse from the north in 1990 and carried out massacres against them in the east. In the years following the civil war, hate and violence have largely originated from Sinhala-Buddhist chauvinists, often led by influential saffron-robed monks. Over the last decade, Sinhala-Buddhist majoritarianism has primarily targeted Muslims, whereas previously Tamils earned their ire.

Targeting Muslim women

In this context, there is an urgent need to resist efforts to alienate the Muslim community. Of greater concern is the systematic targeting of Muslim women through attempts to regulate their attire and mobility, in the name of security, as was seen in a circular of the Ministry of Public Administration. Discrimination began to manifest in every corner of the island following the blasts, as accounts by Muslim women at a recent forum on coexistence, in Jaffna, showed. They spoke of harassment in markets, government offices and hospitals, and their insights challenged reductive, patronising readings of "the plight of Muslim women".

These women pointed to a larger and deeper ideological attack unleashed on them. The onslaught had originated from different sources:



the global Islamophobic narrative, Sinhala-Buddhist majoritarian assertions, glaring economic rivalry and control of women's bodies.

The dialogue in Jaffna, which included religious leaders and progressive activists from across the country, helped identify the central challenge of confronting the powerful ideological attack on Muslims and the need to bust the many Islamophobic and misogynistic myths that would heighten discrimination.

While there appears to be a gradual softening of security measures, the myths built around "dangerous" Muslims continue to circulate. Almost no conversation is had without the mention of the "burqa", a term that is unfamiliar even among Muslims in Sri Lanka. Apart from claiming the attire to be a security threat, the attire is dissected for its suitability in terms of colour, material and shape, with men asking whether it was imposed or worn out of free will.

It is the construction of the Muslim woman as the subject of a supposed 'security concern' after the Easter attacks that is giving explicit, racialised speech a new level of permissibility. Engaging only with the objects of attack, like the burqa, or the halal certification trade, or Muslim personal law will not suffice in confronting the centres of power deploying this ideological assault.

The prevailing discourse about Muslims, who are widely perceived as prosperous and upwardly mobile, is related to Sri Lanka politics drifting towards right-wing xenophobia, exploiting the growing discontent among people due to the government's failure to revive the economy to benefit the majority and establish

democratic governance. The starkest manifestation of this is seen in the resurgent campaigns of Sinhala-Buddhist chauvinist forces that enjoyed tacit support by the previous Rajapaksa regime. They have again gained ground, with an obvious agenda of constructing Muslims as the new enemy for the 'Sinhala nation'. Again, they turn to Sinhala women implanting fears about threats to their reproductive ability, and thereby to the Sinhala race.

Spreading fabricated stories of forced sterilisation, making contorted claims about a declining Sinhala population and flagging unsubstantiated statistics on religious conversions – all unfailingly use a gendered discourse, focusing on Sinhala women's bodies. Such an attempt at consolidating a pure Sinhala Buddhist identity will repress not only Muslims and other minorities, but also those seen as dissidents within the Sinhala majority community.

With presidential elections expected this year, it is the contest for state power and those political forces seeking to gain electorally by riding on the anti-Muslim rhetoric that will likely intensify the attacks in the months to come. In this interregnum of forming new alliances, regressive Tamil and Hindu nationalist forces too will likely fuel protests against Muslims to gain political points.

Complicity of liberals, the Left

It is not just the supporters of the Rajapaksa camp who are being swept by the troubling anti-Muslim sentiments. The complicity of liberal and Left groups in abetting the discourse makes an alternative politics a challenging task. Influenced by the global

discourse on Islamophobia and 'burka' bans in the West, these groups support similar reactions at home.

Invariably, Muslim women are made the pretext for any urgent calls for liberal reform of Muslim religious practices, laws, attire, educational institutions and curriculum in the post-Easter attacks scenario. There is little reflection on the discursive constructions of saving the 'oppressed Muslim woman' and how it might lead to more repression.

The underlying focus on women enables the ideological attack on Muslims to permeate via misogynistic forces deep into society. Even the male Muslim leadership prohibited women from attending Tarawih prayers in mosques this year, and responded mutely to face veil bans.

If chauvinist forces are attempting to demonise the entire Muslim community, Left and liberal actors are engaged in inculcating the Muslim citizen worthy of acceptance by Sri Lanka society. Liberals adopt a language of tolerance, where differences are permissible, only as long as they are acceptable to the mainstream and adhere to majoritarian governance. Their preferred image of a 'good' Muslim is one that is synonymous with elite middle-class Muslims, favouring a return to a romanticised past before the influence of 'Arabisation'. The liberals claim Muslim religion and lifestyle were Sri Lanka before working-class migrants returned from the Gulf. The classist liberal discourse attempts to alienate some Muslims while embracing others as Sri Lankans.

Convergence of different problematic narratives about Muslims is what makes the present moment in Sri Lanka politics dangerous and slippery. Muslim women are resisting these attacks by defying the restrictions placed on their mobility and confronting the myths being spread about their community. However, Muslims alone cannot take on the ideological onslaught. Only a collective struggle by progressive sections of society confronting the Sinhala Buddhist chauvinist, global Islamophobic and misogynistic narratives building against Muslims can prevent the country from heading in the direction of a disastrous, possibly fascist, path.

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Transforming livelihoods through farm ponds

Ponds can be an effective tool for rainwater harvesting



NIRMALYA CHOUDHURY & SACHIN TIWALE

With an increased variability of monsoons and rapidly depleting groundwater tables, large parts of India are reeling under water stress. A number of peninsular regions like Bundelkhand, Vidarbha and Marathwada have been facing recurring drought-like situations. Given the enormity of the crisis, at a recent NITI Aayog meeting, Prime Minister Narendra Modi explicated the need to implement innovative water management measures, stressing particularly the importance of rainwater harvesting both at the household and community levels. Here, one intervention that has been tried out in various States, and perhaps needs to be taken up on a bigger scale, is the construction of farm ponds.

Farm ponds can be cost-effective structures that transform rural livelihoods. They can help enhance water control, contribute to agriculture intensification and boost farm incomes. However, this is possible only if they act as rainwater harvesting structures and not as intermediate storage points for an increased extraction of groundwater or diversion of canal water. The latter will cause greater groundwater depletion and inequitable water distribution.

In a recent study on farm ponds in Jharkhand and West Bengal, we found that they aided in superior water control through the harvesting not just of rainfall but also of surface run-off and subsurface flows. Some of them functioned exclusively as recharge points, contributing to groundwater replenishment. They also helped in providing supplemental irrigation in the kharif season and an enhanced irrigation coverage in rabi. The yield of paddy, the most important crop in kharif, stabilised, thus contributing to greater food security.

Retention of water

Farm ponds retained water for 8-10 months of the year; thus farmers could enhance cropping intensity and crop diversification within and across seasons. The area used to cultivate vegetables and other commercial crops also increased. Further, figures indicated that the ponds were also a financially viable proposition, with a fairly high Internal Rate of Return, of about 19%, over 15 years.

However, in parts of peninsular India, the idea of a farm pond as an *in-situ* rainwater harvesting structure has taken a complete U-turn. Here, some of them are benefiting farmers at an individual level, but not contributing to water conservation and recharge. They are being used as intermediate storage points, accelerating groundwater depletion and increasing evaporation losses as the groundwater is brought to the surface and stored in relatively shallow structures.

Need for inlet, outlet provisions

In Maharashtra, the State government is promoting farm ponds under a flagship programme that aims to dig over one lakh structures by offering a subsidy of up to ₹50,000 per farmer. However, most of them are being constructed without inlet and outlet provisions and their walls are raised above the ground level by only a few feet. They cannot arrest the excess run-off as there is no inlet, and therefore they cannot be used effectively for rainwater harvesting. Further, farmers line them at the bottom with plastic, restricting seepage and converting the ponds into intermediate storage points.

Such farm ponds have an adverse impact on the water tables and accelerate water loss. The usual practice here is to lift water from a dug well and/or a borewell, store it in the pond and then draw it once again to irrigate the fields, often using micro-irrigation. While offering secure irrigation facility, this intensifies competition for extraction of groundwater from the aquifer, which is a common pool resource.

In such cases, in the command area of the irrigation project, farmers fill up their farm ponds first when the canal is in rotation and then take it from the pond to the field. This can impede circulation of water.

During canal rotation, the aquifer will get recharged because of the return flow of water coming from the irrigated fields. This return flow benefits all, as most of the farmers access water through wells in this command. But if canals fill up the farm ponds first, it restricts their benefits only to the pond owners and, in the long term, reduces the overall return flow at the system level.

Overall, farm ponds can act as effective harvesting structures and also yield healthy financial returns. But if they are promoted merely for on-farm storage of groundwater and canal water, they could accelerate, rather than reduce, the water crisis in the countryside.

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Cauldron of sexual misconduct

So often do Indians encounter the horrific act in their consciousness that it has escaped their conscience

MADHURIKA SANKAR

As India boldly leaps into space and proudly increases its tiger population, feats deserving praise, foreign investors leave this increasingly disturbing landscape of cultural hegemony and faux-nationalistic fervour. I am drawn to understanding the connection, if it exists, between the current economic and sociopolitical landscape in India and the violence against women. Naysayers will argue that the sharp rise in statistics of violence against children in the last decade. As a young woman, she is in the most unsafe country in the world, according to a recent Thomson Reuters Foundation survey, which recorded around 40,000 rapes a year. She is subject to the routine threats of honour killing and trafficking. As a widow or single mother, she is ostracised in a patriarchal society. Indian women do the most unpaid domestic work of any country globally, next to Kazakhstan. The insensitivity, reluctance, and hostility of the police, legal and medical fraternity, coupled with the fact that most assaulters are known to the victim, creates an increasingly intimidating environment in which to move forward with justice. Courts in the country are severely backlogged.



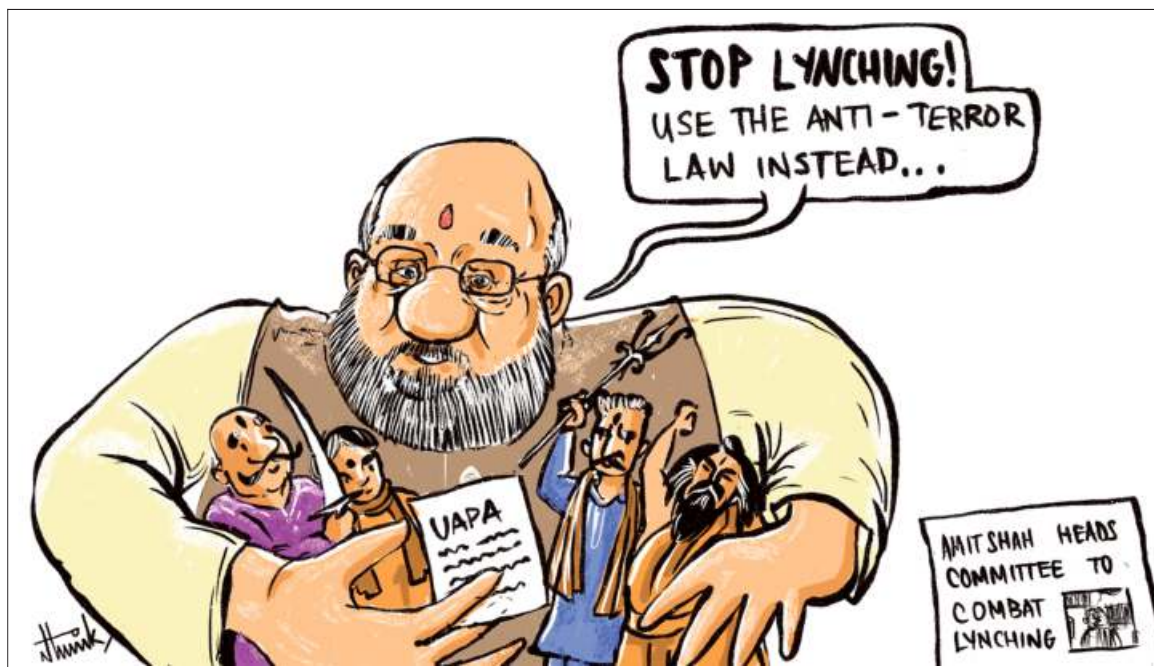
ical environment, one that pivots itself on the narratives of India's ancient texts and scriptures to exorcise women, that brings about their subjugation, for selfish gain.

Cycle of violence

There is violence even before birth of a girl child. India has one of the highest incidences of female foeticide. Then, as a young child, a girl is part of an incontrovertible landscape where there has been a 336% rise in sexual crimes against children in the last decade. As a young woman, she is in the most unsafe country in the world, according to a recent Thomson Reuters Foundation survey, which recorded around 40,000 rapes a year. She is subject to the routine threats of honour killing and trafficking. As a widow or single mother, she is ostracised in a patriarchal society. Indian women do the most unpaid domestic work of any country globally, next to Kazakhstan. The insensitivity, reluctance, and hostility of the police, legal and medical fraternity, coupled with the fact that most assaulters are known to the victim, creates an increasingly intimidating environment in which to move forward with justice. Courts in the country are severely backlogged.

The worst narrative is perhaps what psychologists refer to as a kind of 'emotional contagion' for the rapist, where he sees others committing the crime and has become injured to it, thus, taking the leap towards crime. Similarly, we as a nation, have perhaps become injured by contagion, to sexual crimes against women. So often do we encounter the horrific act in our consciousness that it has escaped our conscience. Imparting healthy sex education in schools, providing means by which socially and emotionally marginalised men are given the opportunity to be identified and rehabilitate themselves, is paramount, before it leads to further tragedy.

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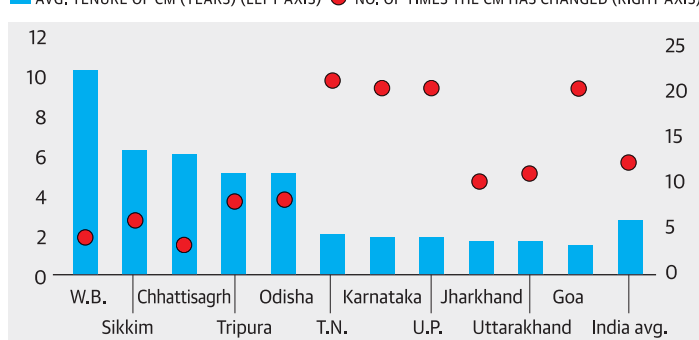
DATA POINT

Power equations

The BJP's B.S. Yediyurappa recently passed a floor test to become Chief Minister of Karnataka. The southern State has a relatively low average tenure for CMs (close to two years), as several of them didn't complete their terms. **Sumant Sen & Varun B. Krishnan** take a look at State-wise CM tenures since 1977

Stability factor

The average tenure for a Chief Minister in West Bengal is over 10 years, the highest among all States. Goa had the lowest average tenure of 1.5 years for a CM. The graph shows the tenure data for only outlier States



Tamil Nadu: CMs have changed in T.N. the highest no. of times due to imposition of President's rule in multiple instances, frequent shifts of power due to high anti-incumbency and a stand-in CM being sworn in because of legal troubles of the incumbent

Karnataka: CMs have changed 20 times in the period

West Bengal: The CPI(M) ruled West Bengal for over 30 years with just two CMs

Longest reigns

With five full terms in power, Pawan Kumar Chamling, former Sikkim CM, has been the longest-serving Chief Minister of a State since Independence. Jyoti Basu of West Bengal held the Chief Minister's post for 23 years

Chief Minister	State	Party	Cumulative years as CM
Pawan Kumar Chamling	Sikkim	SDF	24
Jyoti Basu	West Bengal	CPI(M)	23
Gegong Apang [*]	Arunachal	Congress	23
Lal Thanhawla	Mizoram	Congress	22
Manik Sarkar	Tripura	CPI(M)	20
Naveen Patnaik	Odisha	BJD	19
Okram Ibobi Singh	Manipur	Congress	15
Raman Singh	Chhattisgarh	BJP	15
Sheila Dikshit	Delhi	Congress	15
Tarun Gogoi	Assam	Congress	15

SDF: Sikkim Democratic Front, CPI(M): Communist Party of India (Marxist), BJP: Bharatiya Janata Party ^{*}Apang served as CM of Arunachal Pradesh for 19 years as part of the Congress and four more years as leader of the Arunachal Congress, a party he formed

No CM at the helm

Jammu and Kashmir has recorded the highest cumulative period of President's rule or Governor's rule since 1977. The table lists the top five States with the most months without elected governments

State	Cumulative months of President's rule/Governor's rule
J&K	109
Punjab	83
Assam	35
Uttar Pradesh	33
Manipur	28

The Hindu

FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO AUGUST 1, 1969

Bengal policemen storm Assembly

Three thousand angry policemen in uniform, carrying the body of a constable who had been killed while on duty in a clash at Basanti in 24-Parganas, to-day [July 31] stormed the West Bengal Assembly which was in session, smashed furniture and beat up the members. They also gheraoed Mr. Jyoti Basu, Deputy Chief Minister who is in charge of Police portfolio, for over an hour demanding justice in the case of their colleague who, they said, had died at the hands of political elements. Mr. Basu expressed concern at the death of their colleague, but rebuked them for their disorderly behaviour. He took them around the Assembly premises and showed them the vandalism committed by them in their moment of anger. Mr. Basu succeeded in pacifying the demonstrators and their leader shook hands with him. The policemen later left the Assembly premises with the body of their colleague to the burning ghat. The policeman had been reportedly killed on Tuesday in a clash with the workers of the Socialist Unity Centre.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO AUGUST 1, 1919.

On Communal Representation.

In to-day's sitting of the Joint Committee [in London on July 28] Lord Southborough replying to Mr. Bennett said, he was of opinion that Bombay was probably ahead of other Provinces with regard to the franchise of women. Evidence was divided with regard to whether elections in Madras were entirely governed by caste considerations. He concluded that one of the reasons of the trouble in Madras was that a considerable body of intelligent political thought which was springing up found itself bumping up against Brahmins. Replying to Lord Sydenham, Lord Southborough said that, if they were to provide a constitution with an absolutely free hand, he would scout the principle of communal representation. He agreed that the non-Brahmins were not a homogenous community. Indian Christians were given three seats because they had no chance of election. There was a great deal to be said for Indian Christians, because they were more likely to break down caste restrictions than any other body. The Franchise Committee thought the proper way to deal with Indian Christians was to give them some representation so that they could make their views known.