



The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

EASING POVERTY

2019 Economics Nobel affirms value of evidence-based policy-making in addressing intractable problems

ON MONDAY, THE Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences awarded the 2019 Nobel Prize in Economics to Abhijit Banerjee, Esther Duflo and Michael Kremer for their “experimental approach to alleviating global poverty”, which, it said, has had a clear impact on policies to fight poverty around the world. Among the things that make this moment special is the fact that Banerjee becomes the second Indian to have received the Nobel prize in Economics, and Duflo is only the second woman to have been awarded after Elinor Ostrom in 2009.

Banerjee and Duflo co-founded the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab, which has helped popularise Randomised Control Trials (RCT), a technique of exploration which draws from medical research to examine the impact of policy interventions on individual behaviour through controlled trials. It involves selecting two sets of individuals at random, one of the two is then exposed to a policy intervention. The experiment examines the impact of such interventions, often over long periods of time, to gauge the impact of policy, and whether it justifies the costs associated with it. Drawing on these field experiments to understand the lives of poor, they have examined government interventions to see what works and what doesn't in developing countries. For instance, they found that it was possible to dramatically increase the quality of education in urban India, at a relatively reasonable cost, through remedial education and computer assisted learning programmes. The results of another experiment suggested that multi-topic medical training of informal healthcare providers may offer an effective short-run strategy for improved health care, while another found that most businesses funded by microfinance firms tended not to grow. Banerjee, who has been in favour of shifting to cash transfers, has in the past argued for a universal basic income architecture.

Though RCTs have become widespread in recent times, some are sceptical about over-relying on them. Angus Deaton, who won the 2015 Nobel prize in economics, noted that while RCTs can play a role in building scientific knowledge, they can only do so as part of a cumulative programme. “Small scale, demonstration RCTs are not capable of telling us what would happen if these policies were implemented to scale”, he noted. But, despite the conditional nature of these studies, it is difficult to deny that policy interventions require better understanding to ensure efficient outcomes, especially in countries with limited state capacity and resources. In India, where billions are poured in the name of the poor, often without proper understanding of what works and what doesn't, and where there is little faith in evidence-based policy-making, such research can be enormously valuable in informing public debate.

NO ZERO SUM

India needs to view Nepal-China intimacies with equanimity, work on repairing its own relationships in the neighbourhood

PRESIDENT XI JINPING'S visit to Nepal after the Mamallapuram meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi underlines starkly the challenges India faces in its relationship with China, with Nepal, and more generally, with China's deep-pocketed outreach in the entire neighbourhood. In fact, Xi's visit to India was sandwiched between receiving Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan, and his Nepal visit. If Delhi has been disturbed at the signals from these engagements around the Mamallapuram summit, it has managed to hide it well. It cannot but know that, as far as Nepal is concerned, the problems are largely self-inflicted.

Xi was the first Chinese President to land in Kathmandu in over two decades, and the visit acknowledged the closeness between the two countries from the last decade, but more so, since 2015. That was when Nepal Communist Party leader Kharga Prasad Oli took office as prime minister. His first term, which lasted barely a year, was dominated by a crippling blockade of the Nepal border at Birgunj from the Indian side. China stepped in at the time to provide fuel and other essentials. Oli was quick to strengthen Nepal's relations with its northern neighbour. He was ousted from office within a year, but much to India's surprise, returned even stronger in an election in early 2018. Modi's three visits, and agreements for more infrastructure projects, including a rail line from Kathmandu to Raxaul at the border, have clearly not persuaded landlocked Nepal that the only friend it needs in the neighbourhood is India.

Xi's generous assistance to Nepal of USD 495 million was of a piece with the style with which China makes friends with India's neighbours. There is to be a feasibility study on a trans-Himalayan train link between the two countries, and a road link from Kathmandu to Kerung, on Nepal's border with Tibet, as part of the Belt and Road Initiative. Both connections will increase Nepal's access to the Chinese economy. To the extent that this pushes up the possibility of Chinese goods flooding India through Nepal, Delhi should be concerned. But it must also come to terms with the reality that there can be no zero sum games in foreign policy. Viewing relations with neighbouring countries only through the prism of India's security has its limits. As the region's largest economy, India needs to find better ways to make friends with its neighbours, and retain these friendships.

MARTIN'S LAMENT

Scorsese criticises superhero films, points to a trend: The story comes second to VFX

THE LATEST RE-IMAGINING of a classic superhero character, *Joker*, is heavily inspired by a Martin Scorsese classic, *The Kings of Comedy* (1983). Scorsese, one of the most successful and respected directors today, though, has scant regard for films based on comic books, especially the “summer blockbusters” that Marvel and DC churn out every year. He has remarked that these films were “not cinema”, blamed them for turning the theatre into an “amusement park” and said they were “invading” the public imagination, crowding out art that explores human complexity.

While Scorsese's lament has, predictably, caused much chagrin among superhero movie producers and fans, it is worth taking his criticism seriously. The audiovisual is arguably the most widely-consumed and accessible form of public art. It shapes public conversations and opens up worlds. Unidimensional characters, and fairly formulaic plots have come to dominate the big screen in the US, as have remakes. Original writing — the story — seems to be coming in second to VFX extravaganzas for an attention-deficit audience. And while the case has been made that the plethora of choice allows all forms of cinema to find their audience, big distributors for big films crowd out other films. Scorsese's point, really, is that character-driven cinema need not be pushed to the sidelines.

In his polemic against the superhero, Scorsese did make a confession: He wasn't able to watch all the important films in the genre. If he had, perhaps he would have realised that over the last two decades, these films, too, have evolved. The generation that watched the first *Spiderman* (2002), is now looking for its characters to grow. Or, maybe Scorsese is right, it's time for new stories, and for the security blanket of childhood comforts to be relegated to nostalgia. In the end, though, Samuel Jackson, a staple in superhero movies who has also worked with Scorsese, put it best: “Everybody's got an opinion, so I mean it's okay. Ain't going to stop nobody from making movies.”

An economics for the poor

Banerjee, Duflo and Kremer introduced a paradigm shift in approach to alleviating poverty



HIMANSHU

THE NOBEL Prize in Economics for 2019 has been awarded to Abhijit Banerjee, Esther Duflo and Michael Kremer for “their experimental approach to alleviating global poverty”. The approach, popularly known as Randomised Control Trial (RCT), has been the buzzword among development economists for almost two decades. Banerjee, Duflo and Kremer have used this technique (inspired by the use of RCTs in medical science) to test the effect of small interventions on individual behaviour.

Most of these interventions carried out under the aegis of Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL), co-founded by Banerjee and Duflo, in Africa and Asia, have produced evidence on the response to a particular intervention by the poor using these randomised trials. The approach basically examines the impact of these micro interventions by treating one set of individuals/households and comparing the outcome with another set of individuals/households, which are similar in all other respects but have not been treated with the intervention. India has been among the biggest laboratories of these experiments with several experiments on diverse themes such as literacy, nutrition, health, micro-finance and so on.

The RCT approach has its share of supporters as well as critics. While it has enunciated a large number of development economists for its simplicity, where inferences on what works or not are drawn from field experiments, it has also been criticised for reducing the study of poverty to small interventions unconnected to the lived experiences of the poor. The discomfort among many established scholars is that this fashionable trend has made the historical, institutional and social structures of the persistence of poverty less relevant to understanding why the poor continue to remain poor. Others have picked holes in the methodology. However, it has not deterred development economists from using this ap-

proach for designing experiments and conducting them to understand how the lives of poor people change as a result of these micro interventions. There have been questions about whether the results can be replicated in different societies, as well as on the ethics of some of the experiments, which have been conducted in collaboration with participating governments. It is also worth pointing out that the method is as good as the range of interventions that can be undertaken.

While critics may have been unfair to RCTs in some respects while correctly pointing out the pitfalls in an RCT-based approach, there is no denying that all the three scholars have contributed a great deal to putting poverty and development economics back on the agenda of economics. Newer methods and approaches are necessary for the discipline struggling to find relevance in an increasingly complex world, which is as much defined by the microeconomics of small interventions as well as the macroeconomics of development such as government policy and structures of production. As Angus Deaton (Nobel Prize winner of 2015) says: “RCTs can play a role in building scientific knowledge and useful predictions but they can only do so as part of a cumulative programme, combining with other methods, including conceptual and theoretical development, to discover not ‘what works’, but ‘why things work’”.

RCT has become almost like a movement, encouraging many young economists (sometimes called “randomists”) to visit rural areas and observe the lives of the poor. It may not have had any credible and long lasting impact on the lives of researchers and the population studied, but the fact that so many young economists are immersing themselves in the lives of the poor and trying to understand poverty is itself an achievement. More so at a time when economics has often been criticised for being far removed from reality.

The other achievement, although not

necessarily for the better, has been the attempt to give scientific colour to the discipline of economics through the use of evidence generated from these experiments. It certainly has convinced many governments to use facts and evidence in policy prescriptions and induced a degree of caution while introducing new interventions. Even in India, there is evidence of RCTs contributing to improvements in financial management and flow of funds for various government programmes including in the field of education.

While it would have been good if RCTs could predict the effects of demonetisation on the lives of the poor, it is also a reality that most such decisions are not contingent on evidence based on hard facts but on the whims and fancies of the government of the day. Despite the tentative nature of much of this evidence, there is no denying that policy interventions do require better facts and evidence for efficient outcomes. This is true not only for evidence generated by RCTs, but also data generated by our statistical systems including the National Sample Survey (NSS).

Incidentally, both Kremer and Banerjee did their PhD work at Harvard University. Banerjee had completed his MA in economics from the Centre for Economic Studies and Planning (CESP), JNU, before proceeding to Harvard for doctoral studies. Banerjee supervised Duflo's doctoral work at MIT. While both Banerjee and Duflo remain engaged with research in India, Kremer was one of the first to use these experimental methods and look at micro-interventions to examine their impact on poverty. The Nobel recognition will hopefully encourage more rigorous work on some of the long-standing problems of development economics, including on poverty and social mobility. Hopefully, it will spur our own government to take data and evidence more seriously.

The writer teaches economics at JNU

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KAUSHIK BASU

LAST NIGHT OUR son, Karna, his wife and grandson dropped in for dinner. While chatting, conversation drifted to the Economics Nobel Prize this year, and we did some guessing and gossiping about who might get it. Karna predicted it would go to Abhijit Banerjee, Esther Duflo and Michael Kremer. We all agreed that would be a fantastic choice. The only question was, they are so young (58 years, 46 years and 54 years, respectively), would this happen this year would we have to wait for a few more years.

It is so rare to get the Nobel prediction right that when I got woken up this morning by journalists calling to get my reaction and learned that the prize has just been announced and it has gone to exactly the three names we talked about the previous evening, I was thrilled.

This is a richly-deserved award. The prize has been given for their work on randomised control trials used in the broad area of poverty eradication and policies for better health and education. Research done by Abhijit, Esther and Michael has transformed the way development economics is practised nowadays, not just in United States, where they are based, and India and France, where Abhijit and Esther are from, but the world over. The Poverty Action Lab that they founded is active all over the world, from Asia and Africa to Latin America.

Let me give you a sample of some of their work which I have used elsewhere. It had long been suspected that there is a connection between the better provision of local

TIME FOR INDIA TO CELEBRATE

It is important to use Nobel to harness the best of science, reasoning to policymaking

public goods and the local government having women leaders. But we had no idea which way the causality runs. Is it that more progressive villages elect women, or that women leaders are more effective as policymakers and facilitate the better provision of public goods? Esther Duflo, along with Raghav Chattopadhyay, did an outstanding study of India's decision to reserve some of the leadership of local governments — village panchayats — for women. Since the choice of which seats are to be reserved for women is done by lottery in India, since 1993, following a constitutional amendment, this turned out to be a perfect setting for studying how the election of women leaders could affect economic well-being in the locality. By studying a massive data set from West Bengal and Rajasthan, they proved that the provision of local public goods, like water supply, improves in statistically significant ways in villages where women are elected to lead.

Likewise, Michael Kremer's research, done with Ted Miguel, on what de-worming in schools in Kenya could do for child health and absenteeism of school students was quite remarkable. By doing a massive randomised controlled study, they showed that benefits of deworming could be staggering, way beyond the costs of such an intervention. There are many similar and important findings recorded in the book by Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo, *Poor Economics: A Radical Rethinking of the Way to Fight Global Poverty*. It should be mentioned here that quite

apart from the field for which the three of them got the Nobel, they have made important contributions to other areas of economics. Michael Kremer's research on O-rings, which uses an analogy from the disaster that occurred when the space shuttle, Challenger, crashed in 1986, to explain poverty traps was pioneering. It is a model that I have used in my own work. Abhijit Banerjee's work on the mathematics of herd behavior, which he did as a PhD student at Harvard University, is an outstanding piece of research.

Congratulations to all three of them. All three are great economists but also wonderful people with genuine commitment to do their bit for a better world. It is worth pointing out here that since I chair the jury for the Infosys Prize in the Social Sciences, I feel very happy personally that two of the Nobel Prize winners this year won the Infosys Prize even earlier — Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo.

With Abhijit having studied at Kolkata's South Point School, Presidency College and then at JNU in Delhi, India should be proud of his achievement and remind itself of the importance of science and scientific thinking. With the slowdown in India's economic growth it is important for us to use this prize not just for celebration but to harness the best of science and careful reasoning to policymaking.

The writer is C Marks Professor at Cornell University and former chief economist and senior vice president, World Bank



OCTOBER 15, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

MILL STRIKE OFF
WORKERS OF THE Ayodhya Textile Mill decided to call off their 110-day-old strike from the morning of October 15 following an agreement with the owner of the mill, the National Textile Corporation. Out of 24,000 striking workers of five textile mills in the national capital, about 3,100 belong to the Ayodhya mill. The remaining workers are employed in three mills of the DCM group and one mill of the Birlas. The action committee of the textile unions, which has been leading the agitation, said that the indefinite strike will continue in all the four mills till the managements accept its demands.

CASTEISM CHARGES
PRIME MINISTER CHARAN Singh denied casteism charges levelled against him by Congress (I) and Janata leaders and said they themselves were perpetuating the division of society on the basis of birth. How could they accuse him of casteism when they preached a system which could not be got rid of except by change of religion, Singh asked while inaugurating the election campaign of the Lok Dal in Kaithal, Haryana. The PM offered to retire from politics if Indira Gandhi and the Janata Party leader, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, accepted his thesis that only those would be allowed to enter government service who married outside their “biradari”.

STOP IMMIGRANTS
THE MINISTER OF State at the London home office, Timothy Raison, is visiting India, Bangladesh and Pakistan, this week to study how best he can control the inflow into Britain of those who claim that they have a right to come and stay here permanently as British citizens. Last week, at the Conservative Party annual convention at Blackpool, immigration became an emotive issue — the rightwingers vehemently demanded immediate stoppage of immigrants, especially South Asians, into Britain. They demanded that the “small” island of Britain be not overwhelmed by immigrants and that jobs be available to “our own people” only.

15 THE IDEAS PAGE

Turning away from Mahatma

Those who denigrate his legacy today must answer: Is it possible to imagine India without Gandhi?



ADOOR GOPALAKRISHNAN

THIS YEAR, ON January 30 — the day commemorating Mahatma Gandhi's assassination — a group of people led by a woman stood before a large cut-out of Gandhiji. The woman was wielding an air pistol which she aimed at the image and shot at point-blank range — reminiscent of the original assassination by Nathuram Vinayak Godse. Then, each one in the group followed suit. This was followed by an announcement that the performance would be an annual event.

Watching the unbelievable video clip of this event, that was making the rounds all over the country, my heart broke. My naive mind started imagining that the culprits would be caught red-handed and put in jail for the extreme act of disrespect and defilement to the Father of the Nation.

Some of us in Thiruvananthapuram got together in front of the government secretariat later and held a meeting to seek pardon from Bapuji for our compatriots' vandalistic expression of ingratitude and desecration, graphically caught on camera, and, circulated for everyone's consumption.

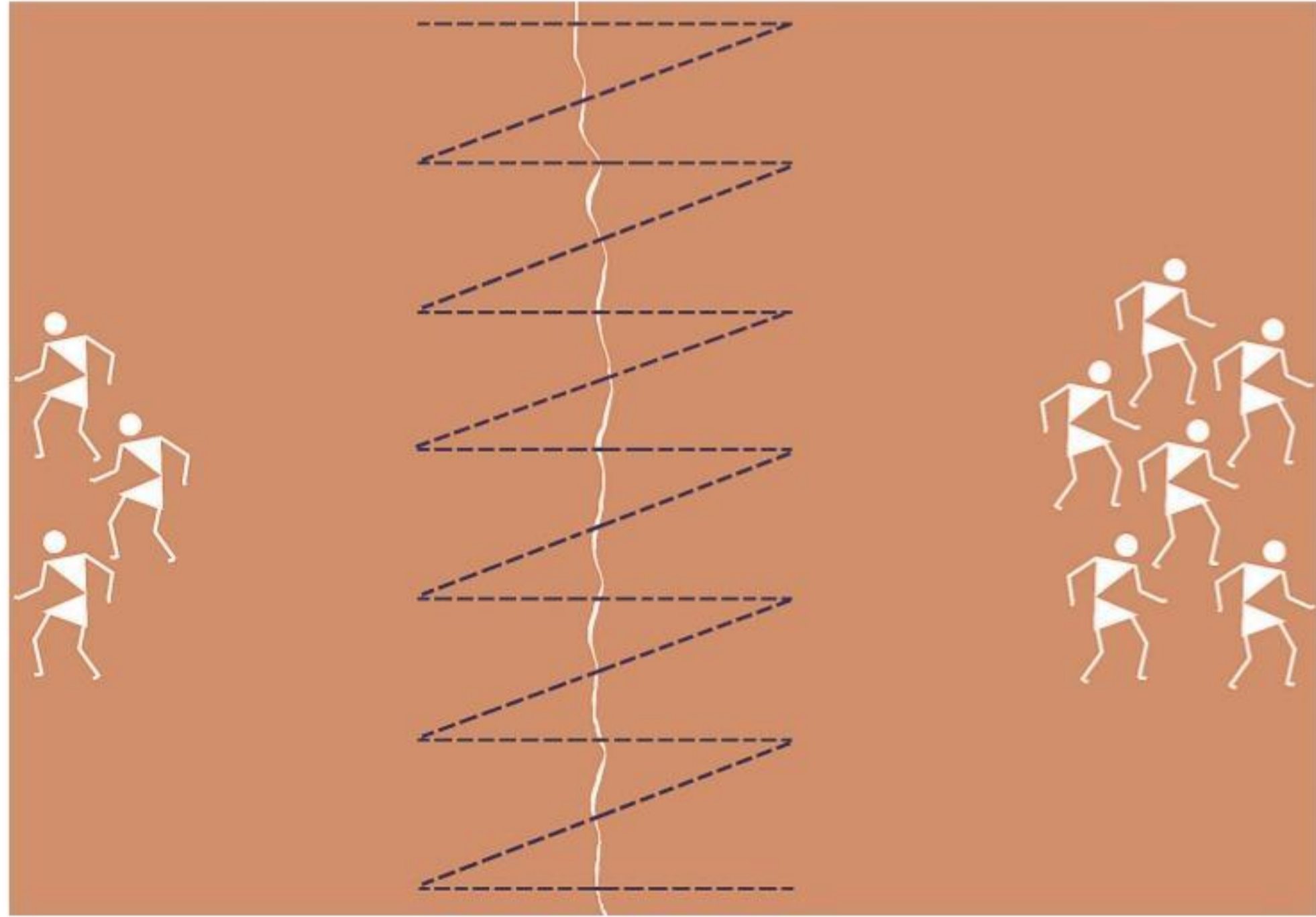
Sadly, we were very wrong to believe that people who share such radical beliefs might recognise the error of their ways: Another woman with similar radical beliefs was elected to the Lok Sabha with an astounding margin.

No one would have imagined that Gandhiji could, one day, become an object of malice and hatred in a country that he fought and died for: This has to be seen against the 150th birth anniversary of Gandhi being commemorated across the world with installation of his statues in city squares and streets being named after him.

Is our memory so short? Is it possible for us to think about an India without Gandhiji's spiritual guidance? The Indian independence movement he spearheaded and fought for had no precedent in history. It assumed especially epic proportions as it was fought with the weapons of non-violence and non-cooperation against a mighty empire like the British Raj. Gandhiji could garner the support and involvement of every proud, thinking Indian in his struggle. Freedom from colonisation was the birthright of each and every citizen of India, he had declared.

He lived a life of such absolute austerity and honesty, that anyone who watched could only learn and be inspired. Gandhiji used to say that his life is his message — and there was no duality about what he professed and practised. His autobiography, *My Experiments with Truth*, is a testament to how an introverted person overcame inhibitions and how honesty and adherence to personal values moulded him into an individual unafraid to fight for causes — whether for a community or for his country.

Animosities and hatred had no place in his mind. In every difficult confrontation with the British, and even when caught in the midst of religious fanatics with a propensity towards violence, he would resort to satyagraha to cleanse his conscience of any un-



C R Sasikumar

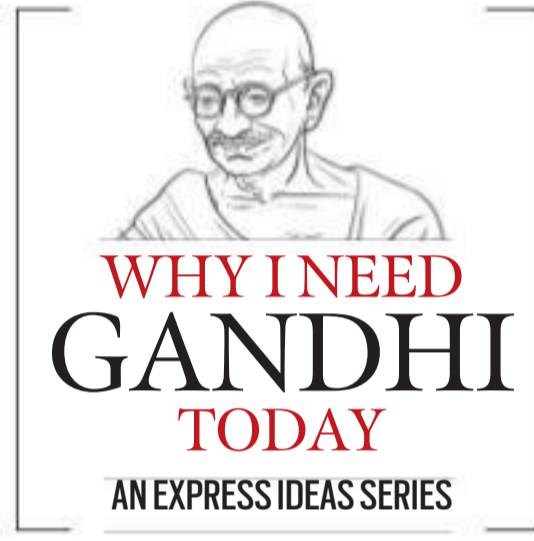
truth and anger.

A devout Hindu, he always believed in cordial co-existence with other religions. He used to assert that he was a Hindu, Muslim and Christian all at once. He took lessons from Christianity and Islam and also from faiths closer home like Sikhism, Jainism and Buddhism. He never saw these religions as inimical to his pursuit of sanatana dharma. He was the essential Indian.

Gandhiji's favourite Hindu god was Ram, but I think he was also highly influenced by Lord Krishna, who was an adept statesman and had great tact in solving complex worldly problems: Gandhiji's personality was a unique combination of both these puranic *purushas*. Otherwise, he could not have negotiated so effectively with the British for so long till we achieved freedom. One need only study the stance Gandhiji took regarding the participation of Indians in World War I. The British did not keep their promise that once the War was over, India's claim for independence would be considered. Undeterred, he went on to ensure an overwhelming Indian participation in World War II as a tactical means of bargain. This time, after the War was over, the British had to relent and active parleys started.

It should be remembered that the prefix of "Mahatma" was bestowed on him by no less a personality than Rabindranath Tagore. On his visit to Santiniketan, when Gandhiji addressed Tagore as Gurudev, Tagore in turn addressed him as Mahatma. Gandhiji became Mahatma thereafter for the whole country and the rest of the world.

The Indian National Congress and Gandhiji, along with his close associates — Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabhbhai Patel, B R Ambedkar, Abul Kalam Azad, Subhas Chandra Bose and a host of other leaders — instilled into every Indian the thirst for freedom and the willingness to sacrifice. The strongest-willed and, occasionally, even stubborn among them, was Gandhiji. But he was also the most soft-spoken and un-



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derstanding. He spoke in Gujarati, Hindi and English depending on the region where he was speaking. His language was simple and direct, and its appeal always deep and clear.

Gandhiji's life and teachings attracted many admirers — world leaders such as Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King Jr, among many others. Without winning a Nobel, he became the apostle of peace and harmony among people of various faiths and pursuits.

Gandhiji firmly believed that in independent India, democracy should be practised from the grass roots. Gram panchayats were his dream. Men and women who represented the voters, he believed, should be leaders of immaculate character and should serve the people with devotion and selflessness.

Self-reliance was the great mantra he wanted every Indian to practise. For instance, he could make yarn from cotton on a charkha and the yarn could go in for weaving after that for making regular clothes. Every village should become self-sufficient in producing food, clothing and shelter using materials available in its locality, he believed. He asserted that Nature can give what we need, but it cannot feed our greed.

It seemed as if he had a simple solution to every complex problem. While he always preferred our hands to be engaged in producing things, he was never averse to mechanisation that eased and assisted human labour. When the stitching machine was introduced by Singer company, he duly termed it "the most useful machine man has invented".

The great humanistic philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi is forever. Becoming blind to his contributions does not augur well for humanity and India, in particular. The legacy of this great son of India is for us to celebrate and feel proud of, not denigrate.

The writer, a filmmaker, studied at Gandhigram Rural Institute, Tamil Nadu

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Chinese society is full of goodwill to India and hopes to see India achieve peaceful development. They should expand their friendly collaboration." — GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA

Xi's security diplomacy

India needs to pay close attention to deepening of Nepal-China cooperation



RAJA-MANDALA BY C RAJA MOHAN

PRESIDENT XI Jinping's brief but significant visit to Kathmandu was defined by the determination to accelerate the development of an ambitious trans-Himalayan corridor between China's Tibet and Nepal. While Delhi will debate the issues generated by China Nepal Economic Corridor for some time to come, it also needs to pay attention to an equally important dimension of China-Nepal relationship — the deepening of bilateral security cooperation. We are not referring to military and defence exchanges but to the expanding engagement between the police forces, intelligence agencies, border management organisations and law-enforcement authorities of the two nations. China's interest in "security diplomacy" as separate from "defence diplomacy" is not limited to Nepal.

Security diplomacy has emerged as a major element of China's international relations in all geographies. The globalisation and digitalisation of the Chinese economy, the growing movement of people across Chinese borders and expanding capital and human assets beyond borders have made law enforcement cooperation with the rest of the world a major priority for China. The range of issues involved in security diplomacy include tracking down fugitives from Beijing's anti-corruption campaign, criminals seeking safe haven in other countries, countering terrorism, preventing drug trafficking, assisting Chinese citizens and tourists abroad, and reining in political dissidents active in other countries. In the case of neighbours, security diplomacy takes on an added dimension, given the dynamic interaction between internal political stability and the situation across the frontiers.

The importance China attaches to security diplomacy is reflected in the fact that four of the 20 documents signed in Kathmandu relate to law enforcement. These agreements touched on border management, supply of border security equipment, mutual legal assistance, and collaboration between Nepal's Attorney General and China's "Supreme People's Procurator" (or the prosecutor general).

Xi's emphasis on internal security was evident in his remarks to Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli: "Anyone attempting to split China in any part of the country will end in crushed bodies and shattered bones," Xi said, according to official Chinese media. He also warned other countries against interfering in the internal affairs of China. The context of the remarks is easy to see. The protests in Hong Kong that have taken a violent turn in recent days are testing Beijing's patience. The Chinese Communist Party is angry with attempts in the US to link trade negotiations with the situation in Hong Kong. But there might be a more specific reason, Tibet, for Xi to choose Kathmandu for making the harsh remarks.

Nepal's northern border with China is entirely with Tibet, and Beijing sees security cooperation with Kathmandu as critical in controlling the movement of people across

this frontier. Nepal, which was once hospitable to Tibetan refugees fleeing China, now extends full support to Beijing's law enforcement agencies in tracking and deporting them. Nepal's security cooperation has become intense ever since trouble broke out in Tibet in the early years of this century. Growing bonhomie between China and Nepal's political leaders has provided a more permissive environment for this cooperation on Tibet. In recent years, Chinese security agencies have apparently gained effective access to border areas on the Nepali side in dealing with Tibetan exiles and have every reason to be pleased with Kathmandu's support.

As the joint statement issued after Xi's talks in Kathmandu put it, the two sides agreed to "respect and accommodate each other's concerns and core interests". Nepal "reiterated its firm commitment to One-China policy" and acknowledged that Tibetan matters "are China's internal affairs". Kathmandu also promised not to allow "any anti-China activities on its soil". China, in turn, declared, its firm support to Nepal in upholding the country's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, and its firm support and respect to Nepal's social system and development path, independently chosen in the light of Nepal's national conditions. The statement also signalled satisfaction at the signing of the "Treaty on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters and expressed hope for an early conclusion of the Treaty on Extradition." China, in turn, has promised to enhance the capacities of Nepal's law enforcement agencies.

Strengthening internal security in China's far flung provinces with significant religious and ethnic minorities has always been a major political priority for the People's Republic of China in dealing with its neighbouring countries. Trouble within or across the borders of Xinjiang, Tibet and Yunnan has meant greater cooperation with the neighbouring states. In the case of Xinjiang, the focus is on the three Central Asian states (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan) as well as Pakistan and Afghanistan that share a border with the province. Securing the Tibetan frontier has been an integral part of China's difficult political engagement with India and an increasingly productive cooperation with Nepal. Collaboration with Myanmar is central to China's security management of the Yunnan province.

Massive modernisation of its internal administrative structures, significant investments in new technologies, and an effective integration of law enforcement into China's foreign policy have transformed China's pursuit of security diplomacy. It is by no means limited to neighbours and is now spread across all geographies — from developed countries in North America and Europe to the developing world in Asia and Africa. China is also participating in the development of new international rules on law enforcement, shaping the discourse on issues at hand, and seeking leadership positions in multilateral organisations dealing with law enforcement. Like the other great powers that preceded it, China sees security diplomacy and law enforcement cooperation as important tools of statecraft.

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Babasaheb's warning

In politics, hero-worship is a path to degradation and eventual dictatorship



SOLI J SORABJEE

BHIMRAO RAMJI Ambedkar, affectionately known as Babasaheb Ambedkar, was the main architect of our Constitution. The task of framing free India's Constitution was formidable. The first meeting of the Constituent Assembly for this purpose was held on December 6, 1946. Ambedkar was elected on August 29, 1947 as the chairman of the drafting committee. He was insistent that the guarantees of fundamental rights be expressly incorporated in the Constitution and that remedies for their enforcement be easily accessible and expeditious. With that in view, draft Article 25, corresponding to the current Article 32 was incorporated. According to Ambedkar, "If I was asked to name any particular article in this Constitution as the most important — an article without which this Constitution would be a nullity — I could not refer to any other article except this one. It is the very soul of the Constitution and the very heart of it".

Ambedkar's prescription for the successful working of the Constitution was that there must be no glaring inequalities and that there must be neither an oppressed class nor a suppressed class. He believed that unless the moral values of a Constitution are upheld, grandiloquent words will not protect the freedom and democratic values of people. He attached great importance to constitutional morality in the working of the Constitution which meant "a paramount reverence for the forms of the Constitution, enforcing obedience to authority acting un-

der and within these forms, yet combined with the habit of open speech, of action subject only to definite legal control, and unrestrained censure of those very authorities as to all their public acts". According to Ambedkar, constitutional morality is "not a natural sentiment. It had to be cultivated. We must realise that our people have yet to learn it".

On the concluding day of the Constituent Assembly, November 26, 1949, Ambedkar expressed his misgivings about the successful functioning of democracy in our country in these memorable words: "A thought comes to my mind: What would happen to her democratic constitution? Will she be able to maintain it or will she lose it again? When there was no way left for constitutional methods for achieving economic and social objectives, there was a great deal of justification for unconstitutional methods. But where constitutional methods are open, there can be no justification for these unconstitutional methods. These methods are nothing but the grammar of anarchy and the sooner they are abandoned, the better for us". The grammar of anarchy is still prevalent and Ambedkar's hope that it would be abandoned has not fructified.

Hero worship is endemic in our country and personality cult flourishes. There is nothing wrong in admiring our leaders as heroes, but the risk is that in the process, the tendency is to entrust such persons with vast powers and uncritically accept the ex-

ercise of these powers, without insisting on accountability, which is a sine qua non of any genuine democracy.

Ambedkar was aware of these lurking dangers. He underlined the importance of observing caution which John Stuart Mill had uttered to all who are interested in the maintenance of democracy, namely, not "to lay their liberties at the feet of even a great man, or to trust him with powers which enable him to subvert their institutions". There is nothing wrong in being grateful to great men who have rendered life-long service to the country. But there are limits to gratefulness.

Ambedkar emphasised that this caution is far more necessary in the case of India. For in India, bhakti, or what may be called the path of devotion or hero-worship, plays a part in politics, unequalled in magnitude by the part it plays in the politics of any other country. Bhakti, in religion, may be a road to the salvation of the soul. But in politics, Bhakti or hero-worship, is a sure road to degradation and to eventual dictatorship.

On the last day of the Constituent Assembly, Ambedkar pointed out the perils of a "life of contradictions" in these memorable words: "On January 26, 1950, we are going to enter into a life of contradictions. In politics, we will have equality and in social and economic life we will have inequality. In politics we will be recognising the principle of one-man one-vote and one-vote one-value. In our social and economic life,

we shall by reason of our social and economic structure, continue to deny the principle of one-man one-value. How long shall we continue to deny equality in our social and economic life? If we continue to deny it for long, we will do so only by putting our political democracy in peril. We must remove this contradiction at the earliest possible moment else those who suffer from inequality will blow up the structure of political democracy which this Assembly has so laboriously built up".

The anguished questions posed by Ambedkar continue to haunt us. Equality and banishment of discrimination, the abolition of untouchability and the inhuman practices associated with it were uppermost in Ambedkar's mind. How could it be otherwise? He knew and had suffered the hurt and humiliation of being an untouchable and was painfully conscious of the sufferings of those who were outcastes on account of their "untouchability". Social justice, which is the signature tune of our Constitution, still eludes us. Political leaders, so-called intellectuals, eminent journalists do not observe constitutional morality. But, the struggle for social justice must continue with determination. Its achievement will be the best tribute we can pay to one of the greatest sons of India, Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar.

The writer is former Attorney General for India

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

IDENTITY AND PROOF

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Where do I belong?' (IE, October 14). I tried for six years to open a bank account for my domestic help, a young man of 30. Somehow the system operates like a game of snakes and ladders. When you are sure you have nearly made it, you fall down and start again. I have won the game finally and Anil, my domestic help inside of a meager Rs 14,000 in his account, feels like a crorepati. I think his journey to find a legal identity is about to end. Hopefully.

Abhimanyu K, New Delhi

NOT ON BOARD

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'In his company' (IE, October 14). It is not shocking to learn about findings of the CS Gender 3000 Report. Barring a few big names such as Kiran Ramzumdar Shaw, Anu Aga, Renuka Ramnath and Kalpana Morparia there are hardly any women on boards or in the top management team in Indian companies. Indian women have broken glass ceilings. We surely can take a leaf out of Sweden, Italy, France or Norway.

Bal Govind, Noida

TIME FOR RESEARCH

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Time to TOP up' (IE, October 14). Increase in food pro-

LETTER OF THE WEEK AWARD

To encourage quality reader intervention, The Indian Express offers the Letter of the Week award. The letter adjudged the best for the week is published every Saturday. Letters may be e-mailed to editpage@expressindia.com or sent to The Indian Express, B-1/B, Sector 10, Noida-UP 201301. Letter writers should mention their postal address and phone number.

THE WINNER RECEIVES SELECT EXPRESS PUBLICATIONS

cessing capacities and value addition in the tomato, onion and potato has been advanced as the most promising solution to high price fluctuations. But the food processing industry has quality requirements that require farmers to adhere to certain standards. Agricultural policy need to address such issues.

Sudip Kumar Dey, Kolkata

TELLING NUMBERS

After a clean spell, how Delhi's air is getting worse now

SHIVAMPATEL
NEW DELHI, OCTOBER 14

AS DIWALI and winter approach, the air quality in Delhi has started to deteriorate. The average air quality index (AQI) moved into the 'Poor' zone on Thursday (October 10), and worsened progressively every day until Sunday — before improving marginally on Monday. The situation is not expected to get better this week.

The reason for the worsening of the air was the accumulation of pollutants after the burning of Ravan effigies on Dussehra on Tuesday, and a change in the wind direction, which brought in pollutants from Punjab and Haryana in the north-west, where the seasonal burning of crop residue is under way.

It ended a happy spell of three months, during which the air quality in the city oscillated between 'Satisfactory' and 'Moderate'. In September, the highest AQI recorded was 173, which is considered 'Moderate'; the lowest was 60, which is 'Satisfactory'. The average AQI for the whole month was 98, in the 'Satisfactory' range — this is the lowest AQI the capital has had in the month of September since 2015.

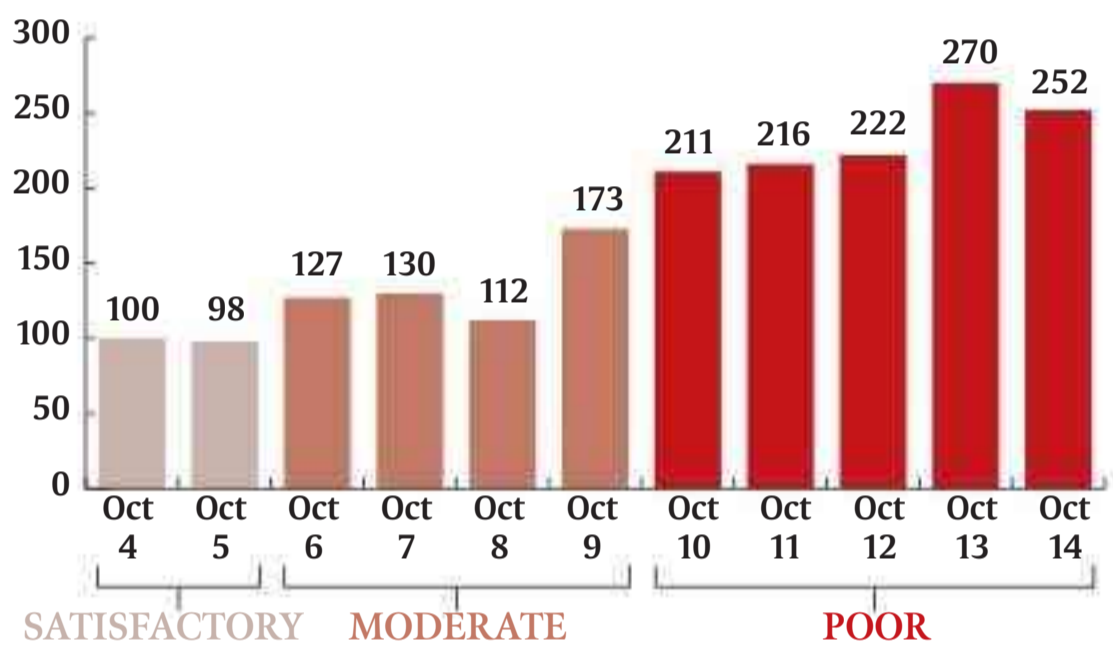


The seasonal burning of farm stubble is currently under way in Punjab and Haryana, impacting air quality in Delhi. Express Archive

The contribution from stubble burning to Delhi's air in the form of particulate matter of 2.5 micrometres (PM2.5) started around Friday, and has increased since. Its share in the overall pollution increased from 1% on Friday to 8% on Monday.

The capital's AQI is forecast to touch the higher end of the 'Poor' category on Tuesday at 297 — just four points less than the 'Very poor' air quality band. Further deterioration could start from the fourth week of October, with the burning of firecrackers around Diwali contributing to the bad air.

AQI IN DELHI, LAST 10 DAYS



TIP FOR READING LIST

FOR THE LOVE OF TEA

HENRIETTA LOVELL, the author of *Infused: Adventures in Tea*, is the founder of London-based Rare Tea Company, a boutique tea business that sells a small, exclusive range of teas that it sources directly from tea gardens across the world. As the title of Lovell's book and its review in *The New York Times* suggests, she hates tea bags — a dislike that she announces in her Twitter bio: "Always loose, never baggy."



into a love of loose leaves. It's a highly personal, partisan account rather than an objective treatise on tea in general. It's my story of tea, not the story of tea. I want to tell you about the really good stuff that fuels me, and the places it takes me. There is so much I long to share, you could think of this book as an unburdening of my loves."

The many short chapters in the 256-page book are named after important places in the author's journey. There are Meghalaya and Sikkim in that list, and also Sri Lanka and Nepal — but neither Darjeeling nor Assam.

In the preface of *Infused*, Lovell pitches it directly: "This is the story of my adventures in tea. I hope to seduce you, a little,

SIMPLY PUT QUESTION & ANSWER

Breaking down Laureates' work

What is the argument of Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo for moving away from the 'big questions' on poverty? What is the winners' new 'experiment-based approach' that the prize has recognised?

UDIT MISRA
NEW DELHI, OCTOBER 14

THE 2019 Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel has been awarded jointly to Abhijit Banerjee, Esther Duflo and Michael Kremer "for their experimental approach to alleviating global poverty". The award carries a purse of 9 million Swedish krona (about Rs 6.5 crore) to be shared among the three winners.

When asked what she would do with the "considerable" prize money given that most of her work is on alleviating poverty, Duflo recalled Marie Curie, who had bought a gram of radium with the prize money from her first Nobel (in Physics in 1903): "We will discuss and decide what our 'gram of radium' is."

Like Curie, who won the 1903 Nobel with her husband Pierre, Duflo is married to Banerjee, with whom she shares the honour in part. They have been collaborating for long, and in 2011 wrote the book *Poor Economics: Rethinking Poverty & The Ways to End it Together*. The couple are at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology; Kremer is at Harvard University.

Why have Banerjee, Duflo, and Kremer won the Nobel Prize?

"The research conducted by this year's Laureates has considerably improved our ability to fight global poverty," the Nobel citation says. "Their new experiment-based approach has transformed development economics."

In *Poor Economics*, Banerjee and Duflo bemoaned how the debates on poverty "tend to be fixated on the 'big questions': What is the ultimate cause of poverty? How much faith should we place in free markets? Is democracy good for the poor? Does foreign aid have a role to play? And so on".

Banerjee, Duflo and Kremer, who have been working together since the mid 1990s, are different in that they do not get stuck with the "big questions". Instead, they break down a problem, study its different aspects, conduct various experiments and, based on such "evidence", decide what needs to be done.

Thus, instead of looking for the silver bullet to prop up the 700 million people globally who still live in extreme poverty, they look at the various dimensions of poverty — poor health, inadequate education, etc. They then drill down further on



Nobel Laureates Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo at The Indian Express office in New Delhi on January 15, 2015. Ravi Kanojia/Express Archive

each of these components. Within poor health, for instance, they look at nutrition, provisioning of medicines, and vaccination, etc. Within vaccinations, they try to ascertain "what works" and "why".

As Duflo said immediately after the announcement: "People have reduced the poor to caricatures without understanding the roots of their problems. (We decided) let's try to unpack the problem and analyse each component scientifically and rigorously."

How does this approach work in practice?

"The lack of a grand universal answer might sound vaguely disappointing, but in fact it is exactly what a policy maker should want to know — not that there are a million ways that the poor are trapped but that there are a few key factors that create the trap, and that alleviating those particular problems could set them free and point them toward a virtuous cycle of increasing wealth and investment," Banerjee and Duflo said in *Poor Economics*.

Breaking down the poverty problem and focussing on the smaller issues such as "how best to fix diarrhea or dengue" yielded some very surprising results.

For instance, it is often believed that many poor countries (like India) do not have the resources to adequately provide education,

and that this resource crunch is the reason why school-going children do not learn more. But their field experiments showed that lack of resources is not the primary problem.

In fact, studies showed that neither providing more textbooks nor free school meals improved learning outcomes. Instead, as was brought out in schools in Mumbai and Vadodara, the biggest problem is that

teaching is not sufficiently adapted to the pupils' needs. In other words, providing teaching assistants to the weakest students was a far more effective way of improving education in the short to medium term.

Similarly, on tackling teacher absenteeism, what worked better was to employ them on short-term contracts (which could

be extended if they showed good results) instead of having fewer students per "permanent" teacher, in order to reduce the burden on teachers and incentivise them to teach.

And what is their "new experiment-based" approach?

The "new, powerful tool" employed by the Laureates is the use of Randomised Control Trials (or RCTs). So if one wanted to understand whether providing a mobile vaccination van and/or a sack of grains would incentivise villagers to vaccinate their kids, then under an RCT, village households would be divided into four groups.

Group A would be provided with a mobile vaccination van facility, Group B would be given a sack of foodgrains, Group C would get both, and Group D would get neither. Households would be chosen at random to ensure there was no bias, and that any difference in vaccination levels was essentially because of the "intervention".

Group D is called the "control" group while others are called "treatment" groups. Such an experiment would not only show whether a policy initiative works, but would also provide a measure of the difference it brings about.

It would also show what happens when more than one initiatives are combined. This would help policymakers to have the evidence before they choose a policy.

Is there a flip side to RCTs?

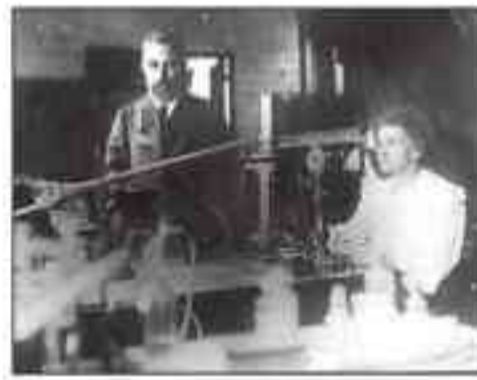
The use of RCTs as the provider of "hard" and incontrovertible evidence has been questioned by many leading economists — none more so than Angus Deaton, the winner of the Economics Nobel in 2015, who said "randomisation does not equalise two groups", and warned against over-reliance on RCTs to frame policies.

While randomly assigning people or households makes it likely that the groups are equivalent, randomisation "cannot guarantee" it. That's because one group may perform differently from the other, not because of the "treatment" that it has been given, but because it has more women or more educated people in it.

More fundamentally, RCTs do not guarantee if something that worked in Kerala will work in Bihar, or if something that worked for a small group will also work at scale.

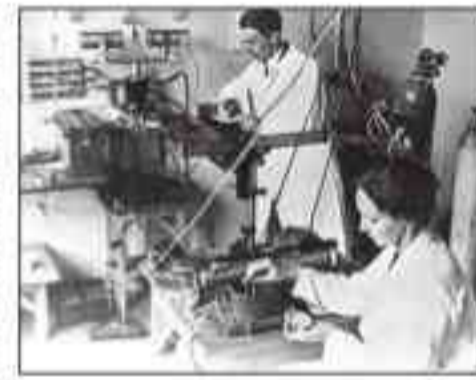
This Nobel, albeit indirectly, for RCTs will likely stoke this debate again.

OTHER MARRIED LAUREATE COUPLES



Marie & Pierre Curie
Nobel Prize in Physics, 1903

IN 1895, the year Marie and Pierre married, Henri Becquerel discovered that minerals containing uranium emitted a strong radiation. In 1898, Marie and Pierre Curie discovered two new elements — polonium and radium. In 1903, Becquerel won the Nobel for his discovery of spontaneous radioactivity, along with the Curies for their supporting researches on the radiation phenomena.



Irene Joliot-Curie & Frédéric Joliot
Nobel Prize in Chemistry, 1935

IRÈNE, DAUGHTER of Marie and Pierre Curie, and Joliot married in 1926, when they were working at the Curies' Radium Institute. The couple researched both individually and together, in particular on the projection of nuclei, which was an essential step in the discovery of neutron and positron. They were awarded the Nobel for discovering artificial radioactivity.



Gerty & Carl Cori
Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine, 1947

GERTY AND Carl Cori went through medical school together, graduated, married, and emigrated from Vienna to Buffalo as anti-Semitism rose in Europe. In the US, they collaborated in most of their research on how hormones and enzymes cooperate. After 30 years of team work, they were awarded the Medicine Prize for research on glycogen and glucose metabolism.



Gunnar Myrdal
Prize in Economic Sciences, 1974

ALVA MYRDAL, social scientists, are the only wife/husband team to win two awards in different disciplines. Gunnar and Friedrich August von Hayek won for their analysis of interrelations between economic, social and political processes. Alva was recognised for her work countering nuclear proliferation.



May-Britt & Edvard Moser
Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine, 2014

MAY-BRITT and her then husband Edvard were awarded the Medicine Prize for their discovery of our "inner GPS". In a podcast, Edvard Moser talked about their long collaboration and the importance of their different personalities. In 2016, the Mosers announced they were divorcing. They shared the Nobel Prize with John O'Keefe.

Source: nobelprize.org

Bench strength, validity of law: Why land acquisition matter is back in SC

APURVA VISHWANATH
NEW DELHI, OCTOBER 14

ON TUESDAY, a five-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court will begin hearing a case to clarify the interpretation of the law on land acquisition, specifically the provision related to compensation awarded to land owners. Two three-judge Bench rulings delivered by the apex court in 2014 and 2018 on the same issue differed in their interpretations, prompting the court to refer the matter to a larger Bench.

The scheduled hearing will decide the legality of several cases of land acquisition that took place across the country before 2009. The matter also raises significant questions on judicial discipline, and how judgments of the court are applied while deciding subsequent cases on similar issues.

What is the provision of the law in question?

The issue involves Section 24(2) of the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and

Resettlement Act, 2013, which replaced the colonial 1894 land acquisition law.

The provision says that in cases where acquisition proceedings were initiated under the 1894 law and compensation had been determined, the proceedings would lapse if the state did not take possession of the land for five years, and also had not paid compensation to the landowner.

Once the proceedings lapse under the old law, the acquisition process would be initiated again under the new law, allowing the owner to get a higher compensation.

The term "paid" needed interpretation — and since it placed the responsibility on the government, cases were filed before courts soon after the law was implemented.

What did the two conflicting judgments say?

In 2014, in the first such case involving the interpretation of the new law, a three-judge Bench comprising Justices RM Lodha, Madan Lokur and Kurian Joseph in *Pune Municipal Authority v Harakchand Misirimal Solanki* said that the state depositing the compensation in its own treasury cannot be

equated with the landowners being "paid".

In exceptional circumstances, where the landowner refuses the compensation, the sum can be deposited with the court, but a deposit in its own treasury would not suffice.

This ruling was followed as precedent by High Courts in several cases, and was affirmed by the apex court itself in 2016.

However, in February 2018, a three-judge Bench comprising Justices Arun Mishra, Adarsh Goel and Mohan Shantanagoudar while dealing with a similar issue, ruled in *Indore Development Authority v Shailendra* that in cases where the landowner had refused compensation, depositing it with the treasury was sufficient, and the state was not obligated to deposit it with the court.

The court also said that the only consequence of not depositing the compensation with the court "at the most in appropriate cases may be of a higher rate of interest on compensation", and not lapse of acquisition.

In doing so, the court also invalidated the settled law on the issue — the 2014 judgment by another three-judge Bench on the same issue — and declared it "per incuriam".

The two senior judges formed the majority in the 2018 verdict; Justice Shantanagoudar dissented.

Why was a referral to a larger Bench made?

Days after the 2018 verdict was pronounced, another three-judge Bench comprising Justices Lokur, Joseph (both of whom were part of the 2014 verdict that was invalidated), and Deepak Gupta noticed the inconsistency and stayed all cases relating to this provision of the land acquisition Act in High Courts across the country until the question of law was settled.

It also asked "other Benches of the Supreme Court" to not take up the issue until it was decided by a larger Bench.

Justice Joseph in oral observations made in the court strongly criticised the 2018 ruling, and said that the verdict had deviated from "virgin principles" of the institution in declaring a verdict of equal Bench strength as *per incuriam*.

Subsequently, separate Benches headed by Justices Goel and Mishra referred the case to then Chief Justice of India Dipak Misra re-

questing him to set up a larger Bench.

What is the problem with an ruling being invalidated?

The controversy stemmed from not only the fact that the 2014 ruling was declared *per incuriam*, but also because it was done so by a Bench of equal strength. In common law, a judgment of the court is used as the basis or precedent for determining future cases.

A ruling of the Supreme Court is binding on all High Courts, and a ruling of the Supreme Court by Benches of larger or equal strength is binding on other Benches of the court.

A three-judge Bench cannot hold a decision by another three-judge Bench to be *per incuriam*, but can only ask for consideration by a larger Bench if it disagrees with the precedent.

Similarly, a Bench cannot ask other Benches to not follow a judgment.

Since the Supreme Court sits in Benches of two or three (unlike in the US where all justices of the Supreme Court sit together for hearing every case), the prac-

tice of following precedent ensures consistency and certainty in law. Hence, larger Bench rulings are preferred to make sure that the law laid down by the court is predictable as far as possible.

And what does it mean for a case to be declared per incuriam?

"Incuria" is Latin for "carelessness", and when a judgment is declared *per incuriam*, it means that the case was wrongly decided, mostly because the judges were ill-informed about the applicable law. A judgment can also be declared *per incuriam* if it has materially deviated from earlier precedents.

A judgment that is *per incuriam* has no legal force or validity and does not have to be counted as a precedent.

Justice Shantanagoudar in his dissent agreed with the interpretation of the law with Justices Mishra and Goel who wrote the majority opinion, but declined to declare the 2014 ruling *per incuriam*. He said that the ruling had considered all aspects of the law, but since it was the first decision on the provision, had taken a different view.