

Lessons from *Dadagiri*

Sourav Ganguly gets a new platform to walk his leadership talk



HUMAN FACTOR

SHYAMAL MAJUMDAR

Eleven years after his retirement from international cricket, Sourav Ganguly is set to begin another important innings in his spectacular career. Ganguly has of course downplayed his role as the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) president, saying no job in Indian cricket is more difficult than being the captain.

That might be true, but what one of India's finest cricket captains is trying to do here is known in corporate lexicon as expectation management.

Taking charge of the BCCI is a formidable task, and Ganguly wants to make it clear that no one should expect miracles from him especially when he has just 10 months to implement his administrative skills before he goes to a three-year cooling-off period as per BCCI's constitution. Like all shrewd leaders, he is drawing a line on expectations from him and the new team of BCCI office-bearers.

The BCCI is indeed facing a formidable task of regaining its bargaining power with the International Cricket Council (ICC). It's unlikely, however, that the BCCI with Ganguly as the boss will go down without fighting. That's because the former India captain has already given enough evidence of his calibre in team-building skills and ability to think big that helped turn

Team India into a combative unit. More importantly, criticism was a leitmotif throughout his 12-year-long international career, but he took it chin up — first as player and then as captain.

Ganguly has been a prolific speaker at some of India's premier management schools and has written a book, *A Century Is Not Enough*. Both give insights into his leadership vision that has relevance in corporate life, too.

Nurturing talent

Spotting talent is important, but the leader's job just begins there. Ganguly not only spotted talent in youngsters, he backed them to the hilt. At an IIM, Calcutta lecture, Ganguly said once a leader is convinced about someone's class, he should allow him to blossom by removing his fear of failure. Ganguly revealed how he backed Harbhajan Singh in 2001, when the selectors wanted to drop him. "I believed in throwing the younger players at the deep end.

The better ones did handle themselves, swam their way and beat the odds. I had backed Harbhajan because I saw a spark in him", he said. The spinner justified the faith by almost single-handedly winning a series against Australia.

The trust factor

Every leader has to take harsh decisions but the team members must believe that they are purely for professional reasons. So, every time he had to drop a player, Ganguly would explain the circumstances in details to the player concerned before discussing the matter with the selection committee. A player knew exactly why the captain has taken the decision and believed he can make a comeback if his performance improves. In short, a leader has to create an atmosphere where personal equations do not matter in professional matters. Shane Warne and Steve Waugh had no love lost between them personally, but that did not prevent them from collaborating on the cricket field for Australia.

Strategic vision

Ganguly wanted to change the perception of the Indian team being tigers only at home. In his book, Ganguly writes, "The day I became captain I told myself

this age-old policy (of spinners being preferred) had to change. I wanted to build a bank of fit and strong fast bowlers and create a new template. I said, within the subcontinent, the emphasis will be on spinners. But outside, pacers will have to assume primary responsibility for picking 20 wickets."

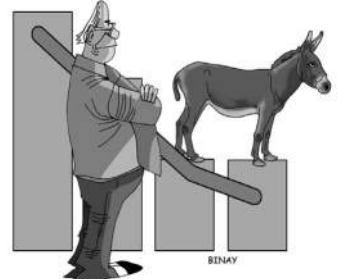
The new template — a team with a killer instinct overseas — did pay off, as India notched up several memorable victories under his leadership.

Self-belief

Ganguly once referred to a conversation he had with West Indies great Gordon Greenidge. Every time he opened the innings against the likes of Dennis Lillee, Graeme Pollock etc, Greenidge erased the slip cordon from his mind. That's because the moment he became conscious of the four slip fielders, he would invariably nick one to them. That was Greenidge's way of overcoming fear. That anecdote from one of the world's most successful opening batsmen, said Ganguly, taught him to believe that he would succeed every time he walked into a cricket field. A leader can't be tentative and must be confident that he would deliver results, come what may.

CHINESE WHISPERS

Donkey tales



A fascinating finding of the preliminary 20th Livestock Census is the sharp decline in the number of donkeys. India's donkey population has gone down precipitously, at almost 62 per cent, between 2012 and 2019. Beyond the joke, the falling donkey population also points to the growing mechanisation of small transport in the country. The number of horses and ponies, which till some decades ago were some of the prime modes of transport in several small towns and cities across India, has also seen an almost 46 per cent drop between 2012 and 2019. Interestingly, UP has seen the biggest fall in the donkey population, at 72 per cent, among all states, the Census showed.

Four-horse race in Kerala Congress



The Kerala unit of the Congress is facing a problem of plenty. There are at least four leaders who are nursing chief ministerial ambitions. The list includes a senior leader who has the ears of former party president Rahul Gandhi (pictured). The state has the largest number of Congress MPs in the current Lok Sabha and is crucial to the political relevance of the grand old party. Party sources say the support of the cadre and backing of the influential Nair community will determine the chances of the aspirants. And also the word of a former Union minister who is close to 10 Janpath.

Red herrings galore

The down-and-out Opposition has put up a subdued campaign against the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the run-up to the Uttar Pradesh Assembly by-elections in 11 seats. Staring at defeat, the Opposition Benches have started using red herrings to preempt finger-pointing after the polls. Samajwadi Party (SP) President Akhilesh Yadav has put the ball in the Election Commission's (EC's) court by urging it to conduct "free and fair" elections. He alleged that some BJP leaders were threatening voters and even Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath had been talking about teaching the Opposition a lesson. Yadav said the people of UP were with the SP; it was up to the EC to ensure that the polls are not rigged.

The unending tale of 'onion tears'

Geographical diversification, development of early warning systems and promotion of substitutes will go a long way in mitigating the next onion crisis



RAMESH CHAND & RAKA SAXENA

The onion price shock has hit the country once again. This is the third price shock in the last 10 years. Onions, which were sold at approximately ₹10 per kg in the wholesale market and at about ₹20 per kg in the retail market during May and June, have crossed ₹35 per kg in wholesale and ₹60 per kg in retail in most markets in the country. Inter-year price volatility and intra-year abnormal price spread in any crop hurt both producers as well as consumers, besides the economy. Given that, it is important to understand the causes of abnormal price fluctuations and look at workable options to address the same.

The recurrent price shock reveals an interesting change in the behaviour of Indian consumers. Before discussing that, it is important to look at the trends in production and the availability of onions in the country. Onions have been the fastest growing crop in recent times. It recorded annual growth of about 10 per cent during 2004-05 to 2018-19 as domestic production increased from 6.43 million tonne to 23.49 million

tonne. The per capita availability, net of exports, has risen from 5.15 kg in 2004-05 to 15.7 kg in 2018-19 — a more than threefold increase. The other food item that followed onions in terms of per capita consumption in the country is edible oil. Surely, Indians are fast moving towards spicy and oily food, much against the public policy goal to promote nutritive food.

It is actually astonishing that despite such increase in per capita availability of onion, a small decline in its availability causes a big jump in its price. This points to a change in the consumption behaviour of the average Indian and the absence of mechanisms to adapt to this change. Though onion is not a staple food item — it is used primarily in preparing gravy and salads — its demand reveals considerable rigidity to any downward adjustment. It appears that consumers are willing to shell out three to four times the normal price of this commodity rather than go without it. Social pressure — of not being seen consuming onion in lesser quantities because of the price rise — seems to be discouraging households from reducing onion intake.

The trigger and main reason for the abnormal increase in onion prices in recent weeks is a decline in its production. Maharashtra is the biggest onion-producing state and the price leader. Due to the drought-like situation in some parts of the state, onions were sown on a much smaller area in the state in the last rabi season. This caused a 9.11 per cent decline in the annual onion production in the state. Because of this, NAFED went for record procurement of onion after



The trigger for the abnormal increase in onion prices is a decline in its production

the harvest of the rabi crop in the month of June to be able to deal with the eventuality of a price rise in the lean months of September to November. The second crop of onion, grown in the kharif season, was damaged because of excessive rain and flood in onion-growing areas of Maharashtra. The expectation of lower crop fuelled the price hike.

Like earlier years that got a similar price shock, the Centre has responded by imposing stock limits for traders and a ban on onion export. The first step is meant to check hoarding and the second is aimed to divert the produce from the export to the domestic market. The decision has come under criticism from some quarters that did not look at the price situation in its totality.

With regard to trade in food items, India and most other countries follow a policy of strategic liberalisation rather than free trade. This policy responds to production shortfall by liberalising import and restricting export. The opposite is done in the case of bumper pro-

duction — restrictions on imports and push to exports.

In line with this policy, the country often imposed bans on the import of agri/food commodities to protect producers against low prices, though it came at a cost to consumers. The present situation justifies protection to consumers as onion prices increased three times in a short period of three months since June. The current prices represent a big gain for farmers who wanted to sell their rabi crop of onion in the lean months. The export ban will not hurt producers if the restrictions are removed when farmers start bringing their fresh harvest of kharif onion to the market in November or when prices come back to the normal level.

The recurring price cycle and the emerging demand and supply scenario related to onions provide useful insights into managing future price volatility. One, rigidity against downward movement in onion demand requires steady supply throughout the year. However,

INSIGHT

Faltering on speed limits



JYOTI MUKUL

As one turned left onto National Highway 8 near Subroto Park in Delhi while driving towards Gurugram, one noticed vehicles had started slowing down. It is an accident prone, under construction stretch. In the darkness of the evening, the blinding light from a flashlight forced a three-wheeler driver to a halt. A Delhi Transport Department enforcement wing official jumped in front and tried grabbing the driver by his collar.

The flashlight is a tool to stop vehicles that violate traffic rules. This happens every evening and highlights the crude ways often employed by law enforcing agencies that can endanger the lives of people they are trying to protect.

On the other side of the capital, the Delhi Traffic Police has decided to suspend 150,000 challans, or penalty notices, issued to those found to over-speed on National Highway 24 in September. That is because the cameras installed on that route were configured to issue challans to vehicles travelling over 60 kilometre per hour (kmph) though the signage put up by the Public Works Department said the permissible speed limit on the Delhi-Meerut Expressway was 70 kmph. So now the cameras will be reconfigured to give the citizens taking that route an unambiguous rule to follow. Meanwhile, those who have already paid up are feeling cheated.



One newspaper report quoted a National Highways Authority of India official as saying that roads designed for speed of 120 kmph shouldn't have speed limit of 50 kmph, the official speed limit on most Delhi roads. This leads to the question as to why spend money on building expressways when travelling on them does not ensure speed or reduced journey time. Perhaps for this reason, the Delhi-Gurgaon Expressway has capped vehicle speed at 80 kmph.

Nevertheless, there can't be any quibbling over the fact that Indian drivers need to be reined in through stringent provisions of the Motor Vehicles Act. According to the dashboard of the ministry of road transport and highways, some 147,913 people died in road accidents across the country in 2017, with a national average of 11 deaths for every 100,000 population that year. In Delhi, this figure is lower at 7 deaths, while for Tamil Nadu, the red zone of dangerous driving, it is as high as 23.

Despite the compelling argument of putting the fear of law in citizens, it is also a fact that systems are not designed to handle the consequences. The two

instances cited here expose the inadequacies of law enforcing agencies. It is not that they lag in technology. E-challans, for instance, are generated without human intervention. Images — either caught on cameras installed along the road or through speed guns stationed in police vehicles — are generated through a SIM card and then challans are issued.

These challans can be checked online, either on the website of city traffic police or on echallan.parivahan.gov.in, which has a cheeky tagline of One Nation One Challan — as if a challan is not a penalty but an award.

Once issued, these challans can be paid online but on September 30, for instance, about a kilometre long queue was seen at the Delhi Traffic Police headquarters at Todapur since its computer network had collapsed across the city and violators had lined up to pay their penalty manually. The State Bank of India's payment gateway could not take the sudden increase in traffic, so to speak.

Elsewhere in the country, the enforcement might not be so stringent but speeding within city limits can be an issue given the state of the roads. Jumping signals or not wearing helmets or talking on mobile phones are rampant in those regions. Overloading and driving of defective vehicles could be more prominent violations on highways.

The amended and more stringent Motor Vehicles Act came into effect on September 1. Some states decided not to notify it but a majority of the states have implemented it. However, as the Delhi experience brings out, a mere change of law cannot ensure seamless implementation. The size of the country's population ensures that violation, penalty and enforcement are of a scale that renders implementation difficult. This only means that all the systems and processes need strengthening — not as an afterthought but even before the rules are put down — for voluntary and effective enforcement.

LETTERS

Act before it's too late

The collapse of PMC Bank has once again brought the issue of effective regulation of banks into focus. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is entrusted with the responsibility of regulation of banks. Hence, the RBI cannot escape being questioned whenever a bank regulated by it fails. With a spate of banking scams recently, the feeling is getting stronger that the RBI should own up to its failure in regulating banks and make its regulatory mechanism more robust so as to detect frauds early.

But the larger question of how to suitably compensate the hapless victims of bank frauds remains unanswered. From a common man's point of view, the government of India and the RBI need to collaborate and find a solution. The RBI on its part must do all it can to gather early warning signals of a fraud and carry out pre-emptive strike before it is too late. The reputation of both the RBI and the government is at stake and it is up to them to save the common man from the predators.

Sanjeev Kumar Singh Jabalpur

End dual regulation

This refers to "SC to hear plea to protect PMC customers tomorrow" (October 17). I feel the system of dual regulation of urban cooperative banks (UCBs) must end. They must be regulated by the central bank. The control of management, administration, personnel by the state/central registrar of societies must end. The central registrar as a government department is too closely linked to the dominant political group/management and allegedly creates impediments in the smooth functioning of banks. Half-way houses like the proposed board of management will not work.

Second, it is time that the deposit



insurance cover be increased to cover deposits up to ₹10 lakh, with the depositor and the UCB sharing the cost of the increased premiums. Third, the largest UCBs should be legally enabled in due course, to be converted into private banks while the smaller ones become small finance banks. Consistently poorly performing UCBs need to be closed down. Fourth, interest rates on deposits should be related to returns on assets and operational costs.

It is time the interests of depositors, who are often pensioners, salaried persons and small businessmen, are rigorously protected. In the name of cooperative banking, "politically managed", dilapidated, scam ridden entities should not be allowed to exist. If they call themselves banks and perform functions of banks, they should be fully regulated and supervised as banks.

Arun Pasricha New Delhi

Bajaj's trump card

This refers to "E-scooters: Bajaj makes first move" (October 17). Bajaj Auto was a front-runner in the scooter seg-

ment till the late nineties. Kudos to them for coming out with an electric variant of a two-wheeler well ahead of schedule. The icing on the cake is that it named the variant Chetak, an iconic scooter brand, which the company built decades back. It still has a nostalgic feeling, especially, among the people in their 40s and 50s. Since pricing is a critical component for any product — and the e-scooter is not an exception — it is good to know Rajiv Bajaj is patient enough to not stress on his bottom line from day one of the product's launch.

Since greener fuel and clean energy is the future, patience is key and gradually, once the market accepts this technology and becomes part of the ecosystem, there will not be any looking back for Mr Bajaj or any other competitor who forays into this segment. We all know that the first mover advantage is a huge advantage to have for any manufacturer and that is where Mr Bajaj has played his trump card well. Now the big task for the government is to provide the necessary infrastructure for such vehicles to run on the roads smoothly. The hard work of Bajaj Auto should not go vain.

Bal Govind Noida

Letters can be mailed, faxed or e-mailed to: The Editor, Business Standard, Nehru House, 4 Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg, New Delhi 110 002. Fax: (011) 23720201. E-mail: letters@bsmail.in. All letters must have a postal address and telephone number.

HAMBONE





The politics of surrender

Why our institutions and politicians aren't protective of individual freedom and the rule of law

In 1995, in a rare instance of internal indiscipline, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Gujarat split. The dispute was obviously over who would lead and who would get what ministry, even if the arguments were couched in more principled terms. The factions were led by Keshubhai Patel and Shankarsinh Vaghela. It was this squabble that began a series of events that ultimately led the then prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee to install as chief minister the man who currently leads India.

In that period, the BJP had names for the two rival factions. Those rebel legislators who left with Vaghela, in classic Indian fashion en masse to be locked up at a resort in Khajuraho, were called Khajuriyas. Those who remained, happy to serve the existing order, were called Hajuriyas. This word refers to someone who says "ji huzoor" to everything, unable and unwilling to assert independence. In English, it is someone who kowtows. The interesting thing is that Hajuriya was not used as a term of condescension any more than Khajuriya was. It was understood and accepted that to be around power meant necessarily to surrender one's independence. To thump the table

enthusiastically at the master's every pronouncement, even before he had finished.

This is not new or recent to our culture: Total capitulation has always been demanded. European travellers have recorded that India's Mughal emperors insisted on the *kurnish*, the bending of the torso forward and the triple salute, raising the cupped palm from floor to forehead (familiar to us through some old Bollywood movies). This action was symbolic of letting go of one's dignity. Akbar did not find this satisfactory and required full prostration. Many high Mughal traditions were Persian and it is likely that this was the same salute that got Alexander the Great into trouble after he vanquished Darius.

He introduced it in his court and the bending, bowing and curtsying that still happen in the presence of kings and queens across Europe's kingdoms are a direct result of it. Called *proskynesis* in Greek, the Persian custom left the Macedonians and Greeks in the army appalled because they did not accept the idea of a divine king. They felt it was not only their right but their obligation to assert their individualism and their equality. In contrast, it is the



AAKAR PATEL

tradition, the convention and indeed the culture that the Indian folds before power. In Gujarati the word "chaatu", literally meaning a lick-spit, is a term of everyday usage and can be used easily even among friends. The Hindi word "chamcha" has no parallel in European languages: Sidekick is not the same thing.

In the period of Akbar, it was only a tiny section of the Sunni *ulema* who for theological reasons resisted the deification of the ruler. This information comes to us only because it is described by the court chronicler Badauni in his unofficial diary. All the others capitulated willingly.

Among Hindus, the acceptance of divinity in the living is conventional. Other than pure selfish interest, there is no real reason to take a position that might be viewed in the least by the authority as antagonistic. Especially on something that might affect us directly. This is important to internalise when one is trying to understand the pusillanimity of the Supreme Court on the matter of the Emergency. Similar motives run through the recent refusal by several current justices who have fled from defending the rights of citizens. It will explain generally why Indian institutions are supine in the time of a strong leader.

It is unfair to see this purely through the perspective of the state and its institutions. We should accept that also. Even in adversarial politics, this surrender to the powerful leader is made manifest through the constant defections that haemorrhage opposition parties. Ours is a democratic polity, which is based on a mercenary culture, where there is neither qualm at reversing a long-held principle, nor any real penalty. The voter is also a part of the system and will accept and endorse the reality after the defection.

There is, of course, no real ideology in such a polity and the division of people into such categories as Conservative and Right is meaningless. Standing up for principle — or indeed for anything — is difficult in a part of the world where prostration is demanded. The core aspects of constitutionalism — freedom, individual rights, a non-intrusive state and the rule of law — can be and will be sacrificed at this altar quite easily. Even civil society and business leaders will fall in line because there will be punishment forthcoming for those who are seen to resist. And it will be accepted because that is the way things are. It is important we examine what is happening around us from this point of view because otherwise there will be bewilderment at the chasm between what should be happening and what is.

Finally, how did that rebellion referred to at the start against the Gujarat tyranny end? Of the 100 or so people who began the passage to Khajuraho initially, a few slipped away at the first stop. Others needed help: The wife of Babubhai Bokhria (today still a Cabinet minister in Gujarat) arrived to rescue him and he left with her. Only 50 were left by the time the destination arrived and in due course all of them became reconciled to the reality of power.

The nutrition crisis

Politicians and the PDS are failing India's children

Much concern has rightly been expressed about India's rank on the Global Hunger Index, which was released this week as part of an annual exercise by two well-known international non-governmental organisations (NGOs). India was ranked 102 out of 117 countries, indicating that only 15 countries covered did worse than India in terms of the spread and intensity of hunger. Broadly, it has been noted that India was ranked 95th in 2010, so it appears to have slipped down the ladder. The index is composed of several indicators, including child wasting (the proportion of children who are too underweight for their height), child stunting (the proportion who appear too short for their age), child mortality, and under-nourishment. It is possible that overall ranks on such indices are sensitive to minor changes in the weighting or methodology. But even the individual trends for the index's components make for disturbing reading. Those on wasting in particular are disturbing: The report says the numbers rose from 16.5 per cent of children prior to 2012 to over 20 per cent in the years since 2014. What is worth noting in particular here is that these numbers are broadly in line with other indicators of wasting from sources such as the National Family Health Survey. And the UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) report on the State of the World's Children, released this week, had almost identical concerns, arguing that 35 per cent of Indian children suffer from stunting, 17 per cent from wasting, and 33 per cent are underweight. That India is performing exceptionally badly is clear from the fact that all its neighbours are doing better than it on the Hunger Index.

Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh once called malnutrition a "national shame" but it is unfortunate that, in spite of successive governments' efforts in multiple directions to address this issue, sufficient progress has not been made. Part of the reason for poor nutrition may have been problems related to sanitation, such as are being targeted by the Swachh Bharat Mission. But the report points out that open defecation is still being practised with unfortunate effects for nutrition. But even basic diet issues have not yet been sorted out, in spite of more than two decades of consistent economic growth. The Hunger Report says that over 90 per cent of children between six months and two years are not fed a "minimally acceptable diet". The UNICEF report says 40 per cent of children are anaemic, and only 40 per cent of children, teenagers, or mothers consume dairy products at least once a week. This comes at a time when milk production has grown 6 per cent annually, and the most recent animal census shows an increase in the number of milk-providing cows.

The Indian state must go back to the basics, and address the question of food distribution. The existing public distribution system, which has become more than anything else a form of support for farmers in certain areas who wish to grow wheat and rice, must be reformed. It is a distribution system, not merely a procurement system. The focus must now be on ensuring that vulnerable Indians, particularly children, get access to a nutritious and balanced diet. There is no point having granaries overflowing with procured wheat and rice if children in UP schools are receiving just *haldi* and rice for their mid-day meal. Ensuring the distribution of hot cooked food, of vegetables and proteins, in mid-day meal would be a good starting point to address the hunger issue.

Guarding the financial system

Govt, RBI must work on improving supervision

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Shaktikanta Das is reported to have been questioned by the central bank's board members about frauds in the banking system. The central bank needs to answer a lot of such questions after the latest scam involving Punjab & Maharashtra Co-operative (PMC) Bank. The management of the bank was manipulating records for years, but the wrongdoing came to light only after the bank on its own disclosed the matter to the regulator. Regrettably, PMC is not an isolated incident where the RBI failed to live up to expectations. The deficiency in oversight is also evident from the current state of the Indian financial system. The fact that the RBI had to issue a statement assuring the public that the banking system is safe shows that the credibility of the system has been somewhat dented. The financial system functions on trust and it is incumbent on the RBI and other financial regulators to make sure that the system works smoothly. A lack of trust in the system can affect financial intermediation, impeding the flow of savings to the productive sectors of the economy.

To minimise financial stability risks, the government and the banking regulator would have to work at multiple levels. For one, it is important to see to it that financial institutions adhere to the best governance standards. To ensure this, the regulator itself will have to build adequate institutional capacity. It is possible that there will be some rogue elements who would want to game the system, but the regulator should be in a position to nab them in time — sadly, it has been found wanting on this in several cases. Clearly, the RBI needs to improve its audit processes for both banks and non-banking financial companies. Failure on this count can put the entire financial system at risk.

Further, despite all the regulatory safeguards, some financial institutions would still fail in a functioning market economy. Thus, India needs a framework to handle the insolvency of financial institutions. As reported by this newspaper on Thursday, the government is reviewing the Financial Resolution and Deposit Insurance Bill. The Bill was withdrawn in August last year, owing to concerns about the "bail-in" clause. Recent developments in the financial sector have provided a good opportunity to come up with a comprehensive framework, as India clearly does not yet have a robust enough financial system to protect the common man's savings. The government is also reported to be reviewing insurance cover for bank deposits. This is an important aspect and it is worth debating whether depositors should be made to take a hit at all in the case of a bank failure. In a banking system dominated by the public sector, the possibility of bank failures in the private sector and a potential hit for depositors can shift deposits to state-run banks. This would bode ill for the financial system and will increase financial stability risks. The present condition in the financial sector has exposed plenty of weaknesses in the system, which needs urgent attention. A strong and stable financial system is a necessary condition for higher sustainable growth.

Water needs trans-disciplinary governance

It is inadequately recognised that water is India's most important sector in the infrastructure space. Even less understood is that water is the most unreformed of them all. Absence of reforms could not only jeopardise lives and livelihoods of millions but also seriously undermine India's growth. Ever since independence, water governance has suffered from hydro-schizophrenia: Where the left hand of drinking water does not know what the right hand of irrigation is doing and the right toe of surface water does not know what the left foot of groundwater is up to!

There are countless instances where a source of drinking water has run dry because farmers started using the same aquifer to irrigate water-intensive crops. Rivers are increasingly drying up because of over-exploitation of groundwater, which supplies inflows into the river after the monsoon is over. River flow and quality also suffer because of destruction of catchment areas. And floods have become more frequent because natural drainage lines for excess water are blocked or encroached upon.

Each of these water challenges can be traced to the way we have divided water into silos and the complete absence of any meaningful dialogue across divisions impacting water. They also arise because we have not understood that water is multi-dimensional and, therefore, demands trans-disciplinarity in governance. The two apex water organisations are the Central Water Commission (CWC), responsible for surface water and the Central Ground Water Board (CGWB), dealing in groundwater, with analogous arrangements in each state. Not only have these organisations functioned unreformed since inception, they have also worked largely independently of, and often at cross-purposes with, each other.

Tragically, although groundwater now provides more than two-thirds of India's water, the more it has grown in significance, the weaker groundwater departments have become at the Centre and in the states. What is worse, surface water is handled mainly by civil engineers and groundwater by hydrogeologists, completely overlooking the fact that effective man-

agement of water requires professionals from many other disciplines. Despite India's avowed commitment to rejuvenating its rivers, revered by the people of this country, we have never had a single river ecologist or ecological economist in any department handling water anywhere in India. Despite the overwhelming fact that agriculture takes up most of India's water, monopolised by water-guzzling rice, wheat and sugarcane, we have not ever had even one agronomist within the water bureaucracy. While it is abundantly clear that the best work in water has happened wherever communities have been mobilised, whether in groundwater management or command area development, water departments have never included social mobilisers. Nor have governments built institutionalised partnerships with those outside government, who could provide them the necessary intellectual and social capital, be they civil society, academia or corporate India.

It is with these considerations in mind that the Government of India committee for restructuring the CWC and CGWB, which I chaired in 2015-16, suggested a radically new architecture of water governance in India. We proposed that the CWC and CGWB be merged and their capacities greatly expanded to form a brand new National Water Commission (NWC). Such an NWC would enable: One, trans-disciplinarity into water governance; and three, building a novel architecture of enduring partnerships with key stakeholders outside government, that would withstand the passing whims and fancies of changing bureaucrats and politicians. The report was very well received within government and outside, with the Ministry of Water Resources, Niti Aayog and the Prime Minister's Office all giving it strong endorsement. India's leading social science journal *Economic & Political Weekly* devoted an entire issue to an exhaustive and critical discussion of the report. However, concrete action on the report by government is still awaited.

The formation of the Jal Shakti ministry is an important first step in the direction of overcoming hydro-schizophrenia, bringing together the irrigation and drinking water departments within one ministry.



WATER: REFORM OR PERISH

MIHIR SHAH

When the sword replaced the sacred thread



BOOK REVIEW

SAI MANISH

J.S. Grewal's book titled *Guru Gobind Singh: Master of the White Hawk* details the life and times of Sikhism's last guru. The book is a scholarly account with references to multiple sources to describe the same events encapsulating the life of Guru Gobind Singh. For those (including many young Sikhs) who revere the last Sikh guru for his martial skills and as founder of the warrior community known as Khalsa, Mr Grewal's book is of

immense value to understand other little-known facets of Guru Gobind Singh's life.

One of the biggest achievements of Mr Grewal's book is its vivid description of the literary achievements in the court of Guru Gobind Singh. He writes, "Guru Gobind Singh emerged as a great patron of literature. In some cases, the Guru himself invited poets to join his court. Some poets were uncomfortable at the Mughal court due to the religious attitude of Aurangzeb. There was no safer place than the Anandpur of Guru Gobind Singh for poets who were either oppressed or had fallen out of favour or were simply looking for a location to sell their wares."

The book extensively details works of the Sikh faith produced during the last guru's time. Much of the focus is on the *Dasam Granth* — a compilation of not just Guru Gobind Singh's own works but also many poets who thronged his court. It has

heavy spiritual and philosophical undertones dealing with the meaning of god, purpose of existence, human equality and religious conduct. The author also explains how the *Dasam Granth* is an invocation of the martial spirit and not just philosophical or religious treatises. One of the compositions lucidly explained by the author and believed to have been written by Guru Gobind Singh himself invokes Durga — the goddess of destruction. It details the epic battle of Durga with the demon-king Mahikhasur and how her victory to help Indra regain his throne was the use of "physical force sanctified in a righteous war." There is also a special emphasis on the *Bachittar Natak* — a 14-chapter composition written by the last Sikh guru, which forms an integral part of the *Dasam Granth*.

Mr Grewal describes the sixth chapter of *Bachittar Natak* as the "most important

for Guru Gobind Singh's conception of his mission." The book mentions that the realisation of his spiritual purpose dawned on Guru Gobind Singh after meditating in the Sapt-sring mountains (present day Hemkunt Sahib in Uttarakhand). After his spiritual awakening the guru proclaims, "Anyone who calls me the Supreme Lord shall fall into the pit of hell. Call me his slave and make no mistake in this matter. The divine guru has sent me for the sake of *dharam*, to spread *dharam* everywhere and to destroy the wicked enemies."

While literary pursuits form a memorable part of Mr Grewal's book, it also captures the diplomacy and political skills of Guru Gobind Singh — especially after he founded the Khalsa. The book details the many battles of Guru Gobind Singh with the hill kings of the Punjab region and his confrontations with Aurangzeb's commanders. Aurangzeb was the Mughal

emperor who had beheaded Guru Gobind Singh's father for resisting his religious agenda. The book details the events leading to Guru Gobind Singh and the starved Sikhs being forced out of Anandpur by the hill kings supported by Mughals. It depicts the guru's desire to negotiate with Aurangzeb and his proximity to Bahadur Shah — the last Mughal emperor. Mr Grewal doesn't shed light on attempts made by Guru Gobind Singh to establish a Khalsa Raj in the Punjab region after he retired to Nanded (in present day Maharashtra) following failed negotiations with Bahadur Shah. But then the mission was led by his commander Banda Singh Bahadur; and any emphasis on that would have taken away from the book's pure focus on the last Sikh guru.

Perhaps the most exciting part of this scholarly book is the chapter titled "The Baisakhi of 1699" which details the day Guru Gobind Singh formed the Khalsa. Every Sikh (and those interested in the religion) would probably know this by heart. But Mr Grewal's meticulous

research and extensive cross referencing to multiple sources makes it a delight to read for anyone interested in understanding the formation of the Khalsa and the spiritual moorings of this warrior clan. Mr Grewal while quoting another scholar describing the Khalsa Panth writes, "Hindus and Turks were opposed to each other. Whenever a critical situation developed in their affairs, God sent an avatar to redress the balance between the wicked and the saintly. Turks became overwhelmingly powerful and Hindu dharma was on the verge of extinction. The Khalsa Panth was created to uproot the Turks. To this end, Guru Gobind Singh has been sent to the world. The sacred thread was replaced by the sword."

GURU GOBIND SINGH: Master of the White Hawk

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