

THE PERSON who convinced me to do a PhD in economics was Abhijit Banerjee of MIT, when I worked with him on one of the first randomised controlled trials in the field of economics in the late 1990s. During my PhD, I had the good fortune to work closely with several exceptional scholars. Jonathan Morduch, William Easterly, Andrew Schotter and the legendary William Baumol — each have made a lasting impression on my worldview and philosophy of life. I did not, however, see enough women faculty around. I was surrounded by extremely smart and driven people, but mostly men. You think that you are gender-blind, but in reality, one begins to internalise the highly unequal world of the economics profession. Reality kicks hardest when, as a young economics faculty, you choose to also become a mother. There is so little support forthcoming that you have to put up a fight almost every step of the way. I think this is why most women economists at the top are battle hardened (given the survivor bias!). I firmly believe that we need many more women in the field of economics — but this will only begin to happen when we equalise all the costs (explicit and implicit) for men and women in the profession.

It is crucial for young girls to have female mentors because research shows that it encourages them to persevere ahead, despite difficulties. I have been teaching at the Indian School of Business for the last 15 years, and sometimes in lighter moments the male students have remarked that I am too tough on them, but "nicer" to the female students during class participation which is an integral part of the MBA training. It is an early

More women is good economics — economists

training for future leadership role, and therefore, I like to encourage the women to speak up.

It is important, first of all, to remember that there are no silver bullets in economic development. But a massive amount of evidence from the experimentation of three decades in micro-finance has shown that women can be agents of change in the economy and larger society. It makes good economic and social sense to target women for development of micro-entrepreneurship. Economic empowerment of women through small financial instruments (loans, savings, insurance) can have long-term impact on their well-being and the well-being of their children in particular. My own research shows that women borrowers are more empowered in their health-seeking behaviour than other women in similar conditions. There is also research which shows the strong demonstration effect that working women have on school retention rate of girl students. So there is empirical evidence that helps in designing policy intervention to combat patriarchy, while we continue to research newer pathways.

I do not see women as equal participants in India's growth today. This is why I think that human capital of women is one of our most under-exploited potentials. We are locked in a bad equilibrium which is also unfortunately, a very stable equilibrium. To get out of this, we will need policy shocks. These can take the form of legislation (tax incentives, women's reservations, maternity benefits, required board directorships etc.) and concerted government policy efforts aimed at reducing the cost of economic participation by women (safer workplaces, public trans-



Esther Duflo and Abhijit Banerjee won the Nobel Prize in Economics. AP

port, well-lit streets, targeted policing, scholarships, hospital protocols targeting women patients, awareness programmes etc.). But the larger problem cannot be addressed by governments alone. For instance, one of my research papers shows that despite similarity in costs across genders, nearly 49 per cent of women patients are missing from our apex public hospitals. This shows the gross neglect and discrimination in health-seeking within our society. The malaise runs deep and will require small social revolutions in many spheres. This is where I derive comfort in the fact that several states (Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Goa, Sikkim) and sectors (banking, aviation etc.) within our own country lead the way towards gender parity, and provide a blueprint for others to follow. We don't necessarily need to look towards the Scandinavians for inspiration.

One of my simplest studies, yet most powerful in implication, documents the significant rise of women voters in India. The study shows that increase in female voter participation was not an outcome of any concerted policy of the government or the Election Commission of India, but a "silent revolution" of self-empowerment. This trend has only become stronger in the last two decades with better connectivity and out-of-state election policing etc. Yet, at a more fundamental level, we know that a significant number of women "electors" are missing — this is partly because they are not registered on the electoral rolls but partly because these women do not exist in our society. They are missing from our society because many die at birth, many die in infancy, many die in adolescence, very many die in childbirth (maternal mortality), many die due to lack of access to quality healthcare in older age groups etc. So the electoral outcomes only reflect the preferences (will) of those who survive. Therefore to make our democracy more representative, we have to ensure that more and more women survive in our society.

in Economics despite my doubts regarding the RCT approach to poverty reduction. Beyond methodological concerns (external validity etc.), RCTs are great to measure impacts of specific interventions. If the objective, however, are policies for poverty reduction, then evidence from India and China strongly reaffirm the power of structural reforms and economic growth. In many cases, the small tweaks that RCTs carefully measure (e.g. extra teachers, meals, cameras etc., in schools to raise overall performance) keep us from considering more fundamental structural reforms (like privatisation of schools, for instance) which are important policy counterfactuals. Yet, the prize to Esther Duflo especially is being celebrated because, as a recent CGD (Center For Global Development) blog noted, "...feels like a win for women and for dual career couples struggling to balance work and family in a profession that has historically been dominated by older men whose wives were at home warming their slippers and typing up their lecture notes."

I am excited by this year's Nobel award

Eventually, we must aspire towards equality in opportunity which is much more important than equality in outcomes. Every society must struggle to create equal opportunities for its women citizens. Only then can we compare the outcomes and know whether men and women have distinct preferences and interests or are there innate differences in their abilities. This holds true for economies as well as for prestige careers of economists.

Ravi is Director of Research at Brookings India and teaches economics at the Indian School of Business Fifth **COLUMN TAVLEEN SINGH** Twitter@tavleen_singh

A deluded campaign

THERE IS no genteel way to say this so I am going to spit it out: menacing hyper-nationalism does not win elections. It was menacing hypernationalism that defined the BIP's election campaigns in Maharashtra and Harvana and voters rejected it. The BJP may well form governments again in both these states but the truth is that in this seeming victory lies hidden a warning that Narendra Modi would do well to heed. The warning is that even a prime minister who has just won a second term must never start thinking of himself as invincible. Delusions of invincibility have been sadly much too evident ever since that second term began and they became manifest in a very ugly way during the recent election campaign.

As someone who has supported Modi openly in this column, I was horrified to hear him virtually charge his political opponents with treason for opposing the removal of Article 370. Ask them, he said often, if they would dare bring it back. Sharad Pawar answered correctly that it made no difference to the people of Maharashtra whether this Article was there or not since destitute farmers from his state were not exactly ready to race off to buy land in the Kashmir Valley. The menace in the Prime Minister's speeches was amplified by his faithful fellow traveller Amit Shah who gives that word a whole new dimension.

When I asked ordinary people in Maharashtra what they thought of the removal of Article 370, the general response was puzzlement that I should even be asking them this question. Most people seemed unsure what difference it made to their lives and usually, after pausing to think about it, they would remind me that jobs were being lost in the auto industry and banks were failing and it was these things that worried them most. I did not get a chance to travel in Haryana this time but am willing to bet that voters in that state were as unconcerned about Article 370 as voters in Maharashtra. And yet, this was all that the BJP's campaign had to offer. This was mixed with some very nasty hyper-nationalistic rhetoric that singled out Muslims as the only 'infiltrators' who were not welcome in India. Unsurprisingly, this got noticed all the way in Washington when a congressional committee met to discuss human rights in South Asia.

Speaking of which, has anyone in the Prime Minister's Office noticed that it was only human rights violations in Kashmir that appeared to come up for discussion? Nothing about Balochistan, nothing about the human rights of Shias and Ahmediyas in the Islamic Republic. Our diplomats seem to be doing a really bad job of explaining to the world why the Kashmir Valley continues to be incommunicado and in a state of semi-curfew so many weeks after Article 370 was removed. On the domestic front, the situation is if anything even more worrying because if there is a strategy to win the peace in Kashmir it is being kept very secret. The Prime Minister tweeted proudly last week about how 'the people of J&K have been able to exercise their democratic rights with exceptional enthusiasm, as seen in the historic turnout of 98% that too without

violence or disturbance.' These were village-level elections but it is no small achievement that they should have been held. What will matter much more to the world is whether there will be 'exceptional enthusiasm' when elections are held to the legislative Assembly. The removal of Article 370 has internationalised our Kashmir problem dramatically, so the world will be watching whenever these elections are held. It is hard to say when or how but what can be said is that if the BJP campaign is imbued with menacing hyper-nationalism, the chances of winning the peace in Kashmir will become much harder. And yet, the peace has to be won, and it has to be won soon, so instead of weaponizing the abolition of Article 370 it might be a good idea to start explaining to ordinary Kashmiris exactly how it is that they will benefit from losing their special status and losing even their status as a state in the Union of India.

In Maharashtra and Haryana there would have been much more support for the BJP if there had been more talk in the campaign of steps being taken to reverse the economic slowdown. It is beginning to hurt ordinary people now because when jobs are lost instead of being created, everyone can see that there is cause for concern. On this day that we celebrate the goddess of prosperity, it is appropriate to remind the Prime Minister that unless signs of prosperity begin to become evident soon, he could start discovering how quickly delusions of invincibility begin to fade. Meanwhile, a very Happy Diwali to all of you.

inside **TRACK COOMIKAPOOR**

SOME UP, SOME DOWN

IS NATIONAL Security Advisor Ajit Doval

up or down in the Modi-2 regime? On one hand, with Amit Shah as Home Minister, Doval's wings automatically get clipped in internal security matters. When Rajnath Singh was home minister, Doval held forth freely at North Block meetings. But with Shah as boss there is less scope for interventions. At times, when Doval issues instructions to the IB chief or other agency heads, he is informed that they have to first check with Shah. On the other hand, there is physical evidence that Doval's clout is expanding in other areas. For instance, earlier he occupied just one floor of Sardar Patel Bhawan as his personal office. Now Doval, raised to the rank of Cabinet minister, has taken over most of the building for the National Security Council (NSC) Secretariat, which has expanded noticeably. There are even three deputy NSAs and the building entrance has got a facelift. Most importantly, the rules of business were re-framed this month so that the NSC can generate Cabinet notes and act like a full government department.

OM, THANK GOODNESS

Defence Minister Rainath Singh sent word to the Indian ambassador in France that he wanted a pandit to be present when he landed in Bordeaux for the formal ceremony of officially handing over the first of the 36 Rafale jets manufactured for the Indian Air Force. The French authorities, alerted that a *puja* would be performed on the runway, made discrete inquiries as to what the procedure entailed. At the Dassault Aviation Centre, Rajnath carried out the rituals of a shastra puja, the ceremony for worshipping weapons. He offered a coconut and flowers, while a lemon was placed under the aircraft wheel. Singh put kum kum on his finger to inscribe the auspicious figure 'Om' on the jet. The French witnessing the ceremony, including the Minister for Armed Forces, top army brass and senior officials of Dassault, heaved a sigh of relief. They had been informed that traditionally Indians inscribe a swastika during a puja. The swastika is an unhappy symbol for France since it evokes memories of Nazi occupation of the country during World War II.

ADVICE NOT WANTED

Veteran journalist Ashok Malik's field of expertise is the media. His last job in fact was as press secretary to the President. But in his new position as "policy advisor" in the Ministry of External Affairs, he has reportedly been told not to offer advice on the media. The External Publicity Division is possessive about its turf, even if its efforts for positive coverage on Kashmir in the foreign press have fallen rather short.

PREVENTIVE STRIKE

The recent BCCI elections demonstrated that this is yet another sphere in which Amit Shah holds sway. However, it was not Shah alone who rooted for Sourav Ganguly over Brijesh Patel for the president's post. Along with MoS Finance Anurag Thakur, Assam minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, who controls the seven votes from the Northeast states, and Congressman Rajiv Shukla, who is influential with the Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Hyderabad cricket boards, also backed Ganguly. While the common surmise is that Shah coveted a winning face for his party in the Bengal Assembly polls, the BJP president realises that Bengal's cautious *dada* has a history of keeping on the right side of all political parties, whether the TMC, CPI(M) or Congress, and is unlikely to throw his lot solely with the BJP. The common target of the new BCCI members from different camps is Vinod Rai, till last week head of the BCCI's Committee of Administrators (CoA). The cricket bosses who lost control of the most lucrative sport in the country for over three years had announced to all and sundry that they would settle scores by investigating some of the financial transactions of the CoA. Forewarned, the Supreme Court, while permitting the elected office-bearers to take charge, scuttled attempts for a potential witch-hunt against predecessors by inserting two safeguard clauses. No proceedings against the CoA members is possible without court clearance and legal expenses will be borne by the BCCI.

WAITING FOR COOK

The Garvi Gujarat building, the new Gujarat Bhavan in Delhi inaugurated by PM Modi on September 2, has won plaudits and publicity. But the Bhavan, located on the prestigious Akbar Road, still awaits a resident cook. It is not easy to persuade a skilled Gujarati cook to move to Delhi, since cooks find the cost of living much cheaper in their home state and they prefer the familiar surroundings. The Gujarat authorities put out tenders for an agency to run the kitchen. The tender has finally been awarded, now everyone is waiting for the cook.

ity and there were fears expressed that

democracy was in danger. That he was

populist, authoritarian and majoritar-

ian. Of course, being the BJP, the accusa-

tion of fascism was never far behind —

The recent elections show that Indian

democracy is alive and well and kicking.

Just a few days ago, exit polls were

showing a landslide for BJP. The party

had talked about Article 370 in both

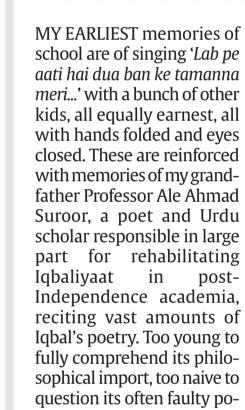
Well, I have to disappoint everyone.

to say nothing of the H word.

history HEADLINE **RAKHSHANDA JALIL**



In Iqbal's words



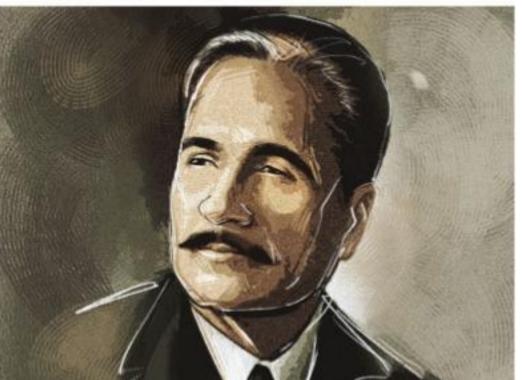
pinnings, it was the sheer musicality of the words that held me in thrall.

litical and ideological under-

When Abba recited 'O Ghafil Afghan', 'Jang-e Yarmooq ka eik Waqeya', 'Naya Shivala', 'Haqiqat-e Husn', 'Gibril-o Iblis' or 'Rohila' in his sonorous voice, he was not simply pouring honey in my ears but also laying the foundation of what would become an enduring love for the eclecticism and Catholicism of

It was only years later that I began to read Igbal (1877-1938) with the intention of understanding his poetry and locating him in the context of his time and age. Marking a radical departure from the moralists of the previous generation, Iqbal (revered as 'Allama' meaning 'scholar') was exhorting the masses to rise against the colonial masters in poems such as 'Punjab ke Dehqaan Se' and 'Farman-e Khuda'. Forsaking the home-spun wisdom of previous generations of didactic Urdu poets, drawing upon the best resources of a liberal western education, making an impassioned call for a marriage between faith and modernity, he was addressing the Muslims, in particular, to negotiate the choppy waters of a new century and forge a new identity.

Iqbal graduated from the prestigious Government College, Lahore in 1899, worked as a lecturer in philosophy at the same college, went on to study philosophy at Trinity College, Cambridge and in Heidelberg and Munich in Germany and



also took the Bar-at-Law from 1905-1908. He returned to teach for two years before quitting government service altogether, earned no more than a modest livelihood as a lawyer and chose to devote himself entirely to reading and writing. Given his trenchant criticism of the imperial government, he surprisingly enough accepted a Knighthood in 1922. In 1927, he was elected to the Punjab Legislative Council. The philosophical essence of his writings is distilled in a series of six (somewhat dense) lectures delivered during 1928-29 at the universities in Aligarh, Hyderabad and Madras entitled 'Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam'. In 1931, he attended the Round Table Conference in London as a member of the Indian Muslim delegation led by the Aga Khan.

Questioning western enlightenment and English materialism on philosophical and religious grounds, acutely aware of the social undercurrents that conflicted the Muslim intelligentsia, no longer content with the crumbs of lowly employment in the colonial administration or even tokens of recognition and appreciation from the imperial government, Iqbal wanted nothing short of an Islamic Renaissance. In soul-stirring verses, he exhorted the Indian Muslim to hearken back to a glorious past, to listen to voices from Islam's history and heed the call of their faith.

While in his early poetry he spoke of a

united and free India where Hindus and Muslims could co-exist, this syncretism gave way to a somewhat woolly Unitarianism

Individualism. The *Tarana-e-*Hind written in 1904 was followed by the *Tarana-e-Milli* in 1910 showing the progression from Hindi hain hum watan hai Hindostan hamara (We are the people of Hind and Hindustan is our homeland) to Muslim hain hum watan hai sara jahan hamara (We are Muslims and our homeland is the whole world). Two decades later, in his Presidential Address to the Muslim League meeting

of 1930 in Allahabad, he propounded the idea of a separate homeland for the Muslims but his notion of pan-Islamism remained muddled compared to, say, Jamaluddin Afghani, a man he admired for his insight into the history of Muslim thought. His idea of the supra-nationalism of Islam transcended manmade borders (what he called 'this accursed nationalism' in a new year's radio address on January 1, 1938.) to embrace the 'brotherhood of man'. Unable to reconcile the differences between East and West much less Reason and Faith, unable also to bolster his undoubtedly superlative poetry with a cogent ideology, Iqbal was at his best when he spoke out against injustice and inequality or in his lyrical descriptions of natural beauty and the Indian tradition of pluralism.

Iqbal's romantic nationalism underwent a change in the light of influences as diverse as Friedrich Nietzsche and Henri Bergson and Karl Marx, producing what Suroor has called the 'New Testament of Urdu Poetry'. In collection after collection — from Baal-e-Jibreel (1935) to Zarb-e-Kaleem (1936) to Armaghan-e-Hijaz(1938) — he shows the limitless possibilities of human endeavour. In an India lurching towards a dangerous extremism, Iqbal's poetry is illustrative of the pitfalls of excessive devotion to a cause, any cause.

Jalil is a Delhi-based author, translator and literary historian

Beware the voter



POLITICAL LANGUAGE follows its own logic. Congress won five general elections in a row in the first 20 years of parliamentary elections, had an overwhelming majority in both Houses of Parliament, and won most states in the first three elections. No one then thought of the tyranny of majoritarianism or that democracy was in danger. When Indira Gandhi won in 1971, no one said she was a populist, or majoritarian or that she was authoritarian (until they

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found out in 1975).

No local matter was addressed. In Maharashtra, a Bharat Ratna honour for V D Savarkar was given more promi-Narendra Modi won a second majornence than recent floods. Haryana has a

states.

car industry in doldrums but did not get a mention.

Certain things are clear. Never take the voters for granted. Voters know not only how to use their vote but also how to lie to pollsters.

There was a report of a BJP neta telling voters that his party had put a chip in the EVM which told them who had voted for which party. The Election Commission was going to examine him but it is not the first time this has been said. Maneka Gandhi said something similar during the general election. Either the voters do not believe what they are told or they are not afraid of the consequences of exercising their democratic rights. It is obvious that such talk does not enhance a party's reputation with voters.

In Haryana, the BJP has fallen short of what was expected of its team, let alone what was being claimed by exit polls. It has lost its majority and the Congress has 31 seats and the Jannayak Janta Party (JJP) of Dushyant Chautala has won10 seats.

The miracle in Maharashtra is of course the tenacity and success of Sharad Pawar. He stuck to local issues as he is deeply rooted in the state and the region to which he belongs. We see old names being resilient — Bhupinder Singh Hooda, of course, and now there is a third generation Chautala winning seats. Manohar Lal Khattar is a newcomer to Haryana as well as to electoral politics. He failed when the case of Ram Rahim blew up and his followers broke the law with impunity. Khattar may have forgotten but the local people have

The biggest surprise is the comeback for the Congress. Ever since the general election, it has been in serious crisis. It has lost its young president and got an older one back. Still, its performance shows that there is life in the Grand Old

Party. As for the BJP, it has to take local issues and local voters more seriously.