



THE TIMES OF INDIA

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Unlock Potential

Recent economic data call for a new wave of reforms which focus on factor markets

TOI Editorials

Economic data coming in over the last few weeks has not been encouraging. Multiple indicators suggest that consumption has been losing momentum. This has far reaching implications as consumption is the mainstay of the economy – around 56% to 58% of gross domestic product is generated by private consumption. GDP data for the period between September and December showed that private consumption growth had slowed down sequentially. The trend, according to RBI, was indicative of a deceleration in consumption for the third consecutive quarter.

Since then, other indicators have suggested that the situation has not improved. Popular high frequency indicators such as passenger vehicle sales lost steam over the last six months. In 2018-19, passenger vehicle sales grew by a mere 2.7%. The situation is not much better in other areas such as consumer durables. The upshot is that Central Statistics Office marginally marked down its advance estimate of growth for 2018-19 to 7%. What could be the likely reasons for this slowdown? One reason could be the low generation of jobs in the economy. CMIE's data showed that unemployment in March was 6.7%, a rather high level by conventional Indian standards.

Urban employment in particular fell sharply in March. This is bound to have an adverse impact on consumption. Rural situation isn't much better. Months of food deflation mean that farmers have less to spend, which perhaps showed up in lacklustre sales of consumer non-durables, among other things. Monsoon forecasts suggest that risks remain high. Overall the story told by different indicators has a common thread: a loss of economic momentum. Major political parties are indeed aware of this problem. However, their solutions seem to lay a disproportionate emphasis on introducing new welfare methods. These are unlikely to solve the problem.

Median age of the Indian population is little less than 30. The only durable solution in this backdrop is the creation of an economic environment which encourages entrepreneurial spirit. Most of the new jobs cannot be generated by government. They have to come from the private sector. This can happen only if economic policies at the level of both Centre and states are consistent in terms of encouraging entrepreneurship. This in turn calls for a new set of coordinated reforms in factor markets. To underline, the next wave of economic reforms needs to focus on land, labour and credit markets. Unlocking their potential is the key to sustained double digit growth.

THE ECONOMIC TIMES

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Condemn the Terror Strikes In Sri Lanka

Wake up to the dangers of religious hatred

ET Editorials

We stand with the people of Sri Lanka in condemning the terrorist attacks that have killed more than 200 people and injured more than twice as many, and support the government of India's offer of solidarity and support. That churches were targeted on the day of Easter Sunday when Christians commemorate the resurrection of Christ on the third day of his crucifixion shows that the purpose of the attack was to target Christians. Bomb blasts at luxury hotels show the intent to hurt foreign tourists. The attack must be understood as one designed to attack Christians, foreigners and the Sri Lankan economy, in which tourism plays a vital part. While the police have not named any organisation as being involved, it has confirmed the use of suicide bombers, indicating the involvement of fanatic conviction of the kind shown by religious extremists and the Tamil Tigers.

Christians are less than 8% of Sri Lanka's population, mostly Tamils, Sinhalese and those of the animist Veddas who had been converted by the Portuguese, with a sprinkling of Portuguese-origin Burghers. Christians have been active in politics, but not as a group pressing for any particular Christian cause. The terrorist targeting of Christian, therefore, would appear to have a non-national context, apart from challenging the authority of the Sri Lankan state. In any case, this gruesome attack speaks of the mindless violence some are capable of committing, driven by hatred towards other human beings simply because they are grouped as a religion different from the haters' own faith. To Indians, who have been growing inured to religion-based animosity as a common currency of politics, the Sri Lankan violence comes as a timely reminder of where such politics would lead the country to. This is not where we want to go.

Religions are trans-national. As is religion-based hatred. However, so also trans-national is the message of fraternity that transcends divisions based on whatever identity that ultimately underpins faith, science and the quest for affirming our humanity. That should guide us, not schism.

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Welcome Move for Resource Efficiency

ET Editorials

Sustained economic growth, central to eradicating poverty and lifting living standards, calls for increased use of resources: biomass, fossil fuels, metals and non-metallic minerals. Sustained growth of 8% till 2030 will push up per capita resource consumption from 5.6 tonnes now to 9.6 tonnes, even as resources turn less easily available and extraction degrades the environment. The toll this will take on public health and balance of payments drives the government's move to formulate a resource efficiency policy.

The proposed policy draws on three years of study and analysis of resource use and aims to minimise primary resource consumption by prolonging the length of material use and reducing waste. The studies and the recently published reference report by TERI strongly suggest adoption of a lifecycle approach to resources.

India has a low recycling rate, 20-25% compared to 50% in developed countries. The report calls for a body for resource efficiency, similar to the Bureau of Energy Efficiency, to inform all policy with resource efficiency and iron out conflicts with this goal in extant policies and programmes. Economic and marketbased instruments as well as regulatory ones are recommended, including leveraging public procurement. Non-energy minerals get primary focus.

This might seem a good starting point, given that steel, aluminum, construction, electric vehicles are involved, focussing on a single class of resources seems suboptimal. A shift to renewable energy and electricity as automotive power will, for example, shift the demand to lighter materials. A multi-pronged, inter-sectoral approach seems inevitable. India will need to embrace sustainability of consumption as well. Gandhi it was who said the earth can meet everyone's need, but not greed.

बिज़नेस स्टैंडर्ड

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कल्याणकारी एजेंडे को कैसे दिया जाए आकार

मिहिर शर्मा

देश की राजनीति में व्याप्त कल्याणकारी प्रतिस्पर्धा की आलोचना करना आम बात है। गत वर्ष के अंत में कुछ राज्यों के विधानसभा चुनाव आयोजित किए गए थे। कांग्रेस ने बकाया कृषि ऋण माफ करने का वादा किया था और उसे चुनाव में जीत मिली थी। मौजूदा आम चुनाव में सत्ताधारी भाजपा को उम्मीद है कि उसने अंतरिम बजट में किसानों को प्रत्यक्ष राशि अंतरण की जो घोषणा की है, उसका उसे फायदा मिलेगा। कांग्रेस ने न्यूनतम आय गारंटी योजना का ऐलान किया है जिसका दायरा अधिक है मगर उस पर अमल कठिन। राज्यों के दल इस मामले में और उदार रहे हैं। यह बात राजनेताओं की नजर से चूकी नहीं होगी कि तेलंगाना राष्ट्र समिति, जिसे विधानसभा चुनावों में जबरदस्त जीत मिली, वह सबसे अधिक कल्याण योजनाएं चलाती है।

प्रतिस्पर्धी कल्याण के खिलाफ दलीलें जगजाहिर हैं। इनके लिए संसाधन जुटाना आसान नहीं और इनकी भरपाई करों के माध्यम से ही होगी या फिर उधार लेकर। यानी यह मुद्रास्फीति को प्रभावित करेगा। प्रत्यक्ष कर अपेक्षाकृत कमजोर है। इसलिए कर में इजाफा करना कठिन है। अगर कर व्यवस्था में सुधार के बिना ऐसा किया गया तो कर वंचना को प्रोत्साहन मिलेगा और पूंजी दूसरी जगह जाएगी। इससे बतौर उत्पादक भारत की स्थिति कमजोर बनी रहेगी। यह बात लंबी अवधि में देश के कामगारों को परेशान करती है क्योंकि कंपनियों की स्थापना नहीं होती। देश का सार्वजनिक ऋण कागज पर अपेक्षाकृत कम है पर देनदारी बढ़ रही है। इससे भविष्य में संकट हो सकता है। बढ़ता हुआ ऋण निजी निवेश में कमी की वजह बनेगा। इसका असर वृद्धि और रोजगार पर पड़ेगा। ऊंची मुद्रास्फीति भी निवेश को हतोत्साहित करती है। राज्य के स्तर पर प्रतिस्पर्धी लोक कल्याण देश के संघीय ढांचे को नुकसान पहुंचाता है क्योंकि राज्य इस बात पर सवाल उठाने लगते हैं कि वे केंद्र को कितना पैसा दे रहे हैं और बदले में उन्हें क्या मिल रहा है और सीधे बाजार तक पहुंच बनाने की राह में क्या बाधा है?

बहरहाल, लोकतांत्रिक राजनीति की अपनी गति होती है। यह समझना भी आवश्यक है कि भारत ने अकारण लोकल्याणकारी युग में प्रवेश नहीं किया है बल्कि समावेशी विकास न कर पाने में विफलता इसकी वजह रही है। बिना रोजगार वाले विकास को गैर समावेशी वृद्धि करार दिया जा सकता है। यह दिक्कतदेह स्थिति है। ऐसा इसलिए कि रोजगार तलाश करने वालों की फौज राजनेताओं के लिए अहम मतदाता वर्ग है। उनको संतुष्ट करने के लिए सरकार की वेतन बिल बढ़ाते जाने की चाह स्वाभाविक है। आय के सुरक्षित होने और निरंतर बढ़ने के भरोसे के अभाव में मतदाता आगे आकर उनकी आय की रक्षा करे और उसे बढ़ाए। तमाम अध्ययन हैं जो यह दिखाते हैं कि व्यक्तिगत कदम और भविष्य की आय किस प्रकार आर्थिक नीति के संदर्भ में लोगों की राजनीतिक प्राथमिकता में तब्दीली लाते हैं। अगर भारत में मतदाता यह मानते रहे हैं कि मानव पूंजी अथवा महत्वाकांक्षा और भविष्य की आय की संभाव्यता के बीच कोई संबंध नहीं है तो फिर वे शायद ही ऐसे रिश्ते पर यकीन करने वाले आर्थिक विचार के पक्ष में मतदान करें। 2019 में कोई राजनेता यह नहीं कहेगा कि जवाबदेह आर्थिक नीति आय सुरक्षा मुहैया कराएगी। इसलिए कि पिछले एक दशक में दोनों पक्षों को जवाबदेह आर्थिक नीति लागू करने का मौका मिला है और इस पूरी अवधि के दौरान भारत में रोजगार बिल्कुल नहीं बढ़े।

क्या भारत मंदी के चक्र का शिकार है? समावेशी विकास की कमी के कारण लोककल्याण का दबाव बढ़ा है। जबकि यह समावेशी विकास की भविष्य की संभावनाओं को भी नुकसान पहुंचाता है। ऐसे में यह गतिरोध बरकरार रहने की संभावना है। परंतु इससे निकलने की एक राह भी है। यह इस बात पर भी निर्भर करता है कि हाल के वर्षों में समावेशी विकास की नाकामी को स्वीकार किया जाए। इसके साथ ही मौजूदा राजनीति में लोककल्याण की आवश्यकता को भी समझा जाए। आवश्यकता यह भी है कि कल्याण योजनाओं को समझदारी से तैयार किया जाए। ऐसा करने से भविष्य के लिए मानव संसाधन और आय सुरक्षा तैयार करने में भी सहायता मिलेगी। यह सुनिश्चित करना होगा कि कल्याण योजनाओं को ऐसे तैयार किया जाए कि देश की श्रम शक्ति की संभावित उत्पादकता में इजाफा हो सके। इससे बढ़े हुए व्यय के नकारात्मक वृहद आर्थिक प्रभाव को कम करने में भी सहायता मिलेगी।

यह भी तय नहीं है कि आय समर्थन योजना बेहतर है या नहीं। परंतु कम से कम यह व्यय क्षमता में सुधार लाने का काम करेगी। इससे मानव संसाधन तैयार करने, तलाश की लागत कम करने और श्रम बाजार में समता लाने में भी सहायता मिलेगी। अगर सरकार स्वास्थ्य एवं मूलभूत शिक्षा पर व्यय बढ़ाएगी तो कहीं अधिक बेहतर होगा। इन नीतिगत प्राथमिकताओं के क्रियान्वयन के लिए आवश्यक सरकारी मशीनरी पर भी खर्च किया जाना चाहिए। सार्वभौमिक स्वास्थ्य सुविधा उत्पादकता बढ़ाएगी। यह काम सस्ती दर पर नहीं किया जा सकता है क्योंकि सरकार को निजी सेवाप्रदाताओं के काम पर करीबी निगाह रखनी होती है अथवा उसे अपने ही स्वास्थ्यकर्मियों को भुगतान करना होता है। प्राथमिक शिक्षा में नतीजों पर अधिक ध्यान देने की आवश्यकता है। शिक्षा का अधिकार अधिनियम इस दिशा में उचित हल साबित नहीं हुआ और वह दीर्घावधि में कारगर साबित नहीं होगा। वयस्क प्रशिक्षण, ऑनलाइन शिक्षा आदि पर ध्यान देने की आवश्यकता है। अगर सुधार को लेकर राजनीतिक सहमति के संकेत नहीं नजर आ रहे हैं या जवाबदेह आर्थिक नीति नहीं बनती दिख रही है। हमें यह समझना होगा कि यह बीते दशक में या उससे पहले भी आय में वृद्धि और आय सुरक्षा मुहैया न करा पाने का दुष्परिणाम है। इस नाकामी पर विलाप करने के बजाय अब वक्त आ गया है कि हम यह सवाल उठाएं कि लोककल्याण के एजेंडे को कैसे आकार दिया जाए।

अंतरिक्ष में मजबूत होते कदम

डॉ. विमल कश्यप



विगत दिनों भारत ने अंतरिक्ष के क्षेत्र में दो नये कीर्तिमान स्थापित किए। भारत ने अंतरिक्ष में 300 किमी. दूर पृथ्वी की निचली कक्षा में विचरण कर रहे अपने ही सेटेलाइट को एंटी-सेटेलाइट मिसाइल से मार गिराया। इसरो और डी.आर.डी.ओ. के इस संयुक्त अभियान "मिशन शक्ति" ने पूरे विश्व को आश्चर्यचकित कर दिया। दूसरी ओर भारत ने दुश्मन देशों के राडार एवं सैनिक गतिविधियों पर नजर रखने के लिए "इंटेलीजेंस उपग्रह "एमिसैट" का सफल प्रक्षेपण किया है।

स्पष्ट हो कि, भारत दोतरफा सैनिक खतरों का सामना कर रहा है, इसे देखते हुए "एमिसैट" के प्रक्षेपण को काफी महत्वपूर्ण माना जा रहा है। "एमिसैट" न सिर्फ दुश्मन देशों की गतिविधियों पर नजर रखेगा बल्कि बेहतर स्वदेशी "इंटरसेप्टर"(एंटी-मिसाइल) तकनीक विकसित करने में भी निर्णायक साबित होगा। इसमें कोई संदेह नहीं है कि, भारत का अंतरिक्ष कार्यक्रम पहले से ही काफी विकसित अवस्था में है, पर मजबूत राजनैतिक इच्छाशक्ति ने भारत को अमेरिका, रूस व चीन की श्रेणी में लाकर खड़ा कर दिया है। भारत अंतरिक्ष की अपनी क्षमता और उद्देश्य को अब साफ-साफ प्रोजेक्ट कर रहा है, जो भारत के स्पेस कार्यक्रम में एक बड़े बदलाव के रूप में देखा जा रहा है। इसके साथ ही ऐसा पहली बार हो रहा है, जब अमेरिकी लॉन्चिंग स्टेशन "केनेडी स्पेस सेंटर" की तरह ही भारत ने भी अब "श्री हरिकोटा" में आम नागरिकों के लिए सेटेलाइट लॉन्चिंग को देखने की व्यवस्था की है। भारत अपने अंतरिक्ष कार्यक्रम को राष्ट्रीय गौरव से जोड़ कर तो देखता ही था अब राष्ट्रीय सुरक्षा भी उसके स्पेस एजेंडे में महत्वपूर्ण रूप से शामिल हो गई है। एंटी-सेटेलाइट परीक्षण ने एक ओर भारत को अंतरिक्ष के क्षेत्र में एक महाशक्ति के रूप में स्थापित किया है, तो दूसरी ओर अन्य महाशक्तियों के एकाधिकार को भी चुनौती दी है। चीन की बात करें तो उसकी महत्वाकांक्षा न सिर्फ भारत बल्कि अमेरिका और रूस के लिए भी एक सिरदर्द है। अगर एशिया महाद्वीप की बात की जाए तो, चीन और भारत आज अंतरिक्ष के क्षेत्र में नई महाशक्ति के रूप में उभरे हैं। अगर स्टार्स वॉर-अमेरिका और पूर्व सोवियत संघ के संदर्भ में देखा जाता था तो भविष्य में स्टार्स वॉर- भारत और चीन के संदर्भ में देखा जाएगा। हालांकि, चीन के विपरीत, भारत अंतरिक्ष के शांतिपूर्ण एवं मानव कल्याण के हित में प्रयोग का पक्षधर रहा है। चीन ने 2001 में जब 865 किमी. ऊंचाई पर एक निष्क्रिय सेटेलाइट को निशाना बनाया तो भारत की सामरिक सुरक्षा पर एक गंभीर खतरा उत्पन्न हो गया था। उपग्रह किसी भी देश की संचार-व्यवस्था के अभिन्न अंग होते हैं। पृथ्वी की निचली कक्षा में ही "टेलिकम्युनिकेशंस सेटेलाइट" और "इंटरनेशनल स्पेस स्टेशन" भी परिक्रमा कर रहे होते हैं। अगर इन उपग्रहों को किसी भी प्रकार का खतरा उत्पन्न होता है, तो देश गतिहीन हो जाएगा। एंटी-सेटेलाइट मिसाइल टेस्ट से भारत ने जवाबी क्षमता हासिल कर ली है, जिससे एशिया महाद्वीप में शक्ति-संतुलन बना रहेगा। एंटी-सेटेलाइट मिसाइल टेस्ट के द्वारा भारत ने एक प्रकार का "मिनिमम क्रेडिबल डेटरेन्स" की क्षमता प्राप्त कर ली है। भारत ने यह स्पष्ट संदेश दिया है कि वह भविष्य की लड़ाइयों (फ्यूचर वारफेयर) के लिए तकनीकी रूप से तैयार है। भारत जब 2021-22 तक मानव-युक्त अभियान अंतरिक्ष में भेजेगा तब वह वास्तविक अर्थ में अंतरिक्ष की महाशक्ति के रूप स्थापित हो जाएगा। इस टेस्ट के बाद अमेरिका, रूस एवं चीन ने बेहद

संतुलित प्रतिक्रिया दी है। चीन ने जहां शांति का रवैया अपनाने की बात कही तो रूस ने भारत के तकनीकी क्षमता की प्रशंसा की है। इसके विपरीत, अमेरिका ने भारत को स्पेस में बढ़ते कूड़ा-करकट के प्रति आगाह किया है।

भारत ने इस टेस्ट को करने के बाद भी, 1961 की “आउटर स्पेस संधि” का पूर्ण रूप से पालन किया है। भविष्य में अंतरिक्ष के सैनिक उपयोग की संभावनाओं से इनकार नहीं किया जा सकता है। सभी महाशक्तियों ने भविष्य की चुनौतियों को ध्यान में रखते हुए एक “स्पेस कमांड” की स्थापना की है, जो अंतरिक्ष की सामरिक चुनौतियों से निपटने में एक महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका निभाता है। एशियाई सुरक्षा के दृष्टिकोण से देखा जाए तो चीन द्वारा 1964 में किया गया परमाणु परीक्षण, भारत द्वारा 1914 और 1998 में किया गया परमाणु परीक्षण एक निर्णायक कदम था। भारत द्वारा एंटी-सैटेलाइट क्षमता हासिल करना इसी श्रेणी में ही एक अहम कदम है। जिस तरह से युद्ध तकनीक पर आधारित होते जा रहे हैं, उससे साफ है कि भविष्य में पारम्परिक युद्ध का महत्व कम होता जाएगा। भविष्य के युद्ध “स्पेस” और “साइबर” क्षेत्रों में लड़े जाएंगे।



Date: 20-04-19

The justice and his report

Rajinder Sachar, a life-long socialist, showed the true picture of Indian Muslims

Prem Singh, [The author teaches Hindi at Delhi University and is president of Socialist Party (India)]

Today (20 April 2019) is the first death anniversary of Justice Rajindar Sachar – a socialist visionary, a Justice par excellence, a true secular and democrat, an unrelenting human rights and civil liberties champion and a wonderful person having complete faith in human goodness. While paying her tribute to him on his demise, Seema Mustafa rightly said, ‘Our finest has gone’. I personally feel a great sense of loss without him, particularly in my political activities. He was so very involved in the affairs of Socialist Party (India) which he and senior socialist leaders like Surendra Mohan, Bhai Vaidya, Pannalal Surana, Prof. Keshav Jadhav formed in 2011 along with several young socialists. He used to have this hope and belief that the old glory of the Socialist Party and the original spirit of the movement/ideology will thrive once again in the realm of Indian politics. Of course, in order to replace the present corporate capitalist order. I often wondered about his optimism and used to ask him that if people around him did not respond adequately to his appeals, how could he hope that public in general would support his party and candidates? To that he only used to give an innocent smile, without a slightest sign of pessimism. His smile always kept us in a positive frame of mind and that is what we miss badly without him around us.

In the later period of his life, Justice Sachar was mainly known for the Sachar Committee Report. The Sachar Committee, headed by Justice Rajindar Sachar, was constituted in 2005 by the then Prime Minister of India Dr. Manmohan Singh with the aim to prepare a report about social, economic and educational status of the Muslim community in the country. The Committee’s 403 page report was presented in the Lok Sabha on 30 November 2006. The findings and recommendations of the report immediately became

a topic of sharp debate in political, social and intellectual circles. The report was considered to be a mirror which showed the true picture of the Muslim community throughout India. Consequently, it received praise from a large part of intelligentsia as well as from political parties. Although there were some dissenting voices too about the findings, recommendations and methodology of the report, it was well received by most people. After the publication of the Report, many adverse reactions were made. An assassination plan was also reported. When this disclosure was published in the Indian Express, I wrote a letter to the Manmohan Singh government requesting it to provide protection to Justice Sachar. But the government did not pay heed to my request although the same government wanted to give him Padam Bhushan in lieu of the Report, which Justice Sachar humbly refused.

The report, known as 'Sachar Committee Report, brought for the first time attention to the ever growing economic inequality and social insecurity and alienation of Muslims in India since Independence. It found, on basis of official data, that the Muslim population, estimated at over 138 million in 2001, were under-represented in the civil service, police, military and in politics. Muslims were more likely to be poor, illiterate, unhealthy and to have trouble with the law in comparison to the other Indians. Thus the myth of 'Muslim appeasement' was thoroughly exposed and the report became a focus of debate and controversy among scholars and political parties/leaders. Justice Sachar's activities, including this Report, were guided by the perspective of socialist ideology and the socialist movement of India. First and foremost, he was a staunch Lohian socialist.

Then there started a race among various political parties to make promises in their manifestoes to implement the recommendations of the Sachar Committee Report. The only exception was BJP which, in fact, opposed the report vehemently. But the secular parties kept repeating their promises through manifestos and rhetoric. However, when one reviews the progress of the report carried out by the central and the state governments, particularly the implementation aspect of its recommendations, the picture appears to be quite dismal.

The Report states that the minorities, especially the Muslims, have been the ignored factor in all Central Governments. Amongst the various recommendations, the Prime Minister's High Level Committee Report had recommended the establishment of Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC) as an instrument to prevent discrimination against minorities in the private sector like housing and employment. It was an important point since courts cannot interfere in cases of discrimination in private sector. This recommendation has been inexcusably sidelined and has remained in cold storage. The EOC can be set up by the state governments without taking permission from the Central government. A very urgent recommendation of the Report dealt with the unfairness of divisions of electoral constituencies which results in lesser number of Muslims in the legislature to which they are broadly entitled, based on the population. This anomaly arises from the irrational demarcation of seats in the legislature.

In U.P. there is abundant potential for substantial number of Muslims to win seats. As per the Report, to address this, the delimitation of constituencies in a fair manner is essential. But on the contrary the constituencies with substantial number of Muslims have been reserved for S.C., and constituencies with substantial number of S.C. voters are unreserved. This is unfair to both Muslims and S.C. electorate. The Committee had hoped that it would receive the attention of the Government immediately because the Delimitation Commission was at that time engaged in this exercise and evidently any suggestion or any exercise to be done by it had to be undertaken during the current term of the then Delimitation Commission. But, the Committee's suggestion was ignored during the delimitation.

But now, as far as the Muslim minority is concerned, politics has taken a different turn after the advent of Narendra Modi on the national scene. As a result to that no political party has mentioned the recommendations of the Sachar Committee in its manifesto during Lok Sabha elections 2019. Justice Sachar wanted to live on till this election. But unfortunately his health did not permit him to fulfill his desire. If he had been alive today, he would have felt very upset about this development.



Date: 20-04-19

A dialogue with our fragile past

The world needs to look differently at its historical memory and the cultural heritage which embodies it

Ramin Jahanbegloo is Director, Mahatma Gandhi Centre for Peace, Jindal Global University, Sonipat

It is only after our heritage is destroyed, in natural disasters and conflicts, that we realise how fragile historical memory is — even for a globalised period of history like ours. The large fire that broke out in Paris on Monday and which consumed a part of the Cathedral of Notre-Dame, is a grim reminder that centuries of heritage can be destroyed in minutes. Of course the French people can rebuild the physical structure and in this enterprise they will be certainly supported by the vast wealth of Europe, America and others, made possible by centuries of industrialisation and capital accumulation. But rebuilding the Notre-Dame de Paris does not mean that we can necessarily renew its original spirit — of blocks of sandstones which narrate their own geological and social history.

Undoubtedly, for over 800 years, the cathedral has been the driving force behind the eternal return of Paris as the 'Heart of the World'.

Repository of history

As a powerful spiritual symbol of Christian faith, it counts many treasures, such as the crown of thorns, which are believed to have been placed on Jesus Christ's head. Joan of Arc was beatified in the cathedral in 1909, after her execution for heresy in 1431. And, for more than three centuries, Notre-Dame has stood as a symbol of political change in France. During the French Revolution, its treasures were plundered. However, as seen in the famous painting of Jacques-Louis David, Napoleon Bonaparte crowned himself emperor of France at Notre-Dame in 1804. Other famous political ceremonies of the 20th and 21st centuries in France, such as the liberation of Paris from Nazi occupation in 1944, the farewell to Charles de Gaulle in 1970, and a requiem mass in tribute to François Mitterrand in 1996, took place in the Notre-Dame Cathedral.

Last but not least, for nearly nine centuries, Notre-Dame has been at the centre of French and world literature. We all remember Victor Hugo's *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame* (1831) with the cathedral as its

centre plot. Hugo's multiple references to the architecture of the Cathedral are breathtaking and stupefying.

Strangely, it is as if Hugo was present at the fire, when he described flames in the cathedral (when Quasimodo uses fire and stones to attack Truands in order to save Esmerelda): "All eyes were raised to the top of the church. They beheld there an extraordinary sight. On the crest of the highest gallery, higher than the central rose window, there was a great flame rising between the two towers with whirlwinds of sparks, a vast, disordered, and furious flame, a tongue of which was borne into the smoke by the wind, from time to time."

Even for those of us who are not religious and yet believe in the cathedral as a spiritual home and a monument in glory of the human creativity, the horrific fire destroying this Gothic edifice has been a moment of tragedy and despair. Time might have been the devourer of Notre-Dame as Hugo wrote in his novel, but humanity has long been the enemy of its own heritage.

Spirit of freedom

As a matter of fact, what was important for Hugo, as for many other writers and intellectuals of his time, was the spirit of freedom represented by Notre-Dame. As he put it clearly, "There exists in this era, for thoughts written in stone, a privilege absolutely comparable to our current freedom of the press. It is the freedom of architecture." Hugo is right. To feel the spirit of Notre-Dame, as that of Paris, one needs the freedom of a flâneur. One needs to allow one's gaze to be further absorbed by the play of light upon a meaningful stone that remained alive after a catastrophe.

Without the stones of Notre-Dame, these aesthetic compasses, we would never be able to take our responsibilities in the world. If we want to be at home in this century, even at a price of living in a topsy-turvy world, we must try to take part in a dialogue with our fragile past. We need to educate our senses and to look differently at our historical memory and the cultural heritage which embodies it.

For centuries, humanity has witnessed the destruction of its historical memory, and each time a new door to our common fate is closed forever. We all believe that this should not happen anymore. But it does happen, and we cannot reconcile ourselves with it. None of us can.

However, within this horizon of despair, which manifests itself in the fragility of human history, there is a moral horizon that expresses a love of humanity in spite of its brokenness. Heritage, therefore, expresses a joy of witnessing the past despite the sadness of historical destruction. It is this joy of witnessing the past that becomes an awareness of our landscape of memory. This awareness is the strongest evidence of the victory of peaceful coexistence between the past and the present. Those who fail to see it, forget to make a prayer that one day the organ pipes of Notre-Dame of Paris will once again reverberate through the sanctuary.

Date: 20-04-19

Humanise the law

The draft Indian Forest Act must be redrawn to rid it of bureaucratic overreach

EDITORIAL



Modernising colonial era laws is a long-delayed project, but the draft Indian Forest Act, 2019 is woefully short of being a transformative piece of legislation. The original law, the Indian Forest Act, 1927, is an incongruous relic, its provisions having been drafted to suit the objectives of a colonial power that had extractive uses for forests in mind. A new law enacted should make a departure and be aimed to expand India's forests, and ensure the well-being of traditional forest-dwellers and biodiversity in these landscapes. The need is for a paradigm that encourages community-led, scientifically validated conservation. This is critical, for only 2.99% of India's geographic area is classified as very dense forest; the rest of the green cover of a total of 21.54% is nearly equally divided into open and moderately dense forest, according to the State of Forest Report 2017. The draft Bill reinforces the idea of bureaucratic control of forests, providing immunity for actions such as use of firearms by personnel to prevent an offence. The hardline policing approach is reflected in the emphasis on creating infrastructure to detain and transport the accused, and to penalise entire communities through denial of access to forests for offences by individuals. Such provisions invariably affect poor inhabitants, and run counter to the empowering and egalitarian goals that produced the Forest Rights Act.

India's forests play a key role in moderating the lives of not just the adivasis and other traditional dwellers, but everyone in the subcontinent, through their impact on the climate and monsoons. Their health can be improved only through collaboration. Any new forest law must, therefore, aim to reduce conflicts, incentivise tribals and stop diversion for non-forest uses. This can be achieved by recognising all suitable landscapes as forests and insulating them from commercial exploitation. Such an approach requires a partnership with communities on the one hand, and scientists on the other. For decades now, the Forest Department has resisted independent scientific evaluation of forest health and biodiversity conservation outcomes. In parallel, environmental policy has weakened public scrutiny of decisions on diversion of forests for destructive activities such as mining and large dam construction. Impact assessment reports have mostly been reduced to a farce, and the public hearings process has been diluted. When a new government takes over, the entire issue should go back to the drawing board. The government needs to launch a process of consultation, beginning with the State governments to ensure that a progressive law is adopted by all States, including those that have their own versions of the existing Act. The Centre must hear the voice of all stakeholders and communities, including independent scientific experts.
