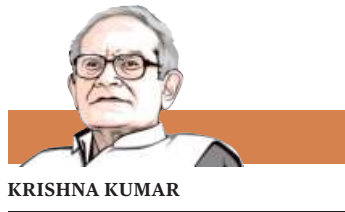


Truth, technology and the teacher

Remembering Vijaya Mulay means admitting how wrong India has gone on the issue of technology



KRISHNA KUMAR

Vijaya Mulay, who died last month at the age of 98, was an icon of educational technology. She was a pioneer of animated films for children. Her short film, 'Ek, Anek Aur Ekta', continues to be an Internet hit many decades after it was made in National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT)'s newly set up unit on educational technology, which she led for many years. She chaired the National Focus Group which drafted the policy on technology included in the National Curriculum Framework (NCF), 2005.

Some members were unhappy that a filmmaker was leading a group that covered the use of computers in education. Mulay's own vision of educational technology offered no exception to the general rule that technology must promote plurality of use and creative endeavour. That is not the direction that educational technology took in India. She often warned against schools and colleges becoming graveyards of equipment. In an age when schools are perceived as hostage markets, remembering Mulay means admitting how terribly and expensively wrong our system has gone on the issue of technology – and not just technology.

Teachers at the margins

That admission, however, is hardly a tribute to her. Nor is it a tribute to the India that she, like many others of her generation, symbolised. India was an ongoing invention, and you were part of it. The India she signified and carried with her everywhere told you to find new ways to relate to old problems. Togetherness meant that you will not dominate, no matter how much you know. Technology was supposed to enable people to solve their own problems and feel that they could manage the machine on their own. For Mulay, the danger of educational technology leading to centralised decision-making was as great as the attraction that it would bring life into classrooms. How to avoid the risk of making the teacher feel marginal and dependent was the



MEGARA GOPAL

key challenge for policy.

The fight between the machine and the teacher is an unequal one. Instead of being together, they have been placed in a state of conflict. At the moment, teachers are at the losing end. They are told to use a range of new gadgets and material to improve teaching. Smart classes are equipped with industrially manufactured lessons and tests. All that the teacher has to do is to facilitate the delivery of these pre-planned lessons. To add to this loss of intellectual autonomy and dignity, surveillance gadgetry is being applied to monitor teachers, to assess what they are doing in the classroom.

From the other end too, namely that of children and their parents, the teacher faces impossible challenges on a daily basis. At a recent conference I met several teachers discussing the difficulties they face when children bring information they have accessed through the Internet or through an app. A teacher from Haryana talked about a child bringing an image with a well-written description of a nuclear test India conducted 3,000 years ago. The teacher asked, how should I explain to this Class VI child that this information cannot be true? She was aware, she said, that information of this kind has political value as it conveys, and also enhances, a certain kind of patriotism. She said many children in her class were convinced that the information was correct. Moreover, they believed that many of the things she told them during her lessons were doubtful although they were aware that for passing the monthly tests, they should write whatever the teacher had told them.

At a young age, these children had developed the capacity to maintain two separate repertoires of knowledge: one for personal conviction and the other for doing well at school.

A double-edged sword

In this new technological environment, it is easy to forget everything Mulay said and ignore her warnings. The dominant tendency today is to perceive technology as a source of all solutions, not as an aid. The biggest hurdle to reforms in education today is the marginalisation of teachers. They have been at the receiving end of one move after another. They had no choice but to follow whatever they were told to do. Regimented and compliant they always were; being repeatedly told to shift gears has made them cynical. This is a far cry from how Mulay defined the purpose of using educational technology. The National Focus Group paper written under her leadership explained how the latest communication technology was a double-edged sword. While it had the potential to enable common causes to create new communities, it also enabled globally dominant corporate power to discourage intellectual autonomy. To survive with sanity in the new technological environment, our children "must know that nothing is value-free (not even Donald Duck)." Learning at school must promote "a sense of discernment", and this is no easy aim to pursue in the prevailing technological environment.

Mulay lived for nearly a century, yet her passing away makes one feel as if we have lost a robust, young voice we urgently need. To keep her

memory alive, we must ask why our system of education has failed to benefit from new technologies of storage and communication of knowledge. Many people may not agree with my assessment and insist that our record of using technology – radio, television, computer, Internet – for improving education is not bad. I might have agreed if I were not a frequent listener of Gyan Vani. The programmes it offers to students enrolled in distance education courses are mostly just as wooden as the lectures they would have heard at a college or university. Mulay had warned against precisely this tendency of using technology for replicating and magnifying entrenched systemic weaknesses.

What knowledge means

Mulay was neither revolutionary nor radical. She worked inside systems and softened people committed to hard lines and tough remedies. One of her extraordinary attempts at persuasion was to join French film director Louis Malle in writing to Indira Gandhi to convince her that she must watch his films. They were banned in India because they were critical and hurt national pride.

As a bridge between the world of films and education, Mulay set a silent example of persistence in her belief that schools could be softened. Had she been directly asked how, she would have said, by working with teachers, giving them status and the experience of taking decisions. Few people today might agree with her. Contempt for school teachers and suspicion in their competence are widespread, and not merely in the bureaucracy. The so-called aspirational middle class has little patience for the teacher. Its demands from children are as ruthless as the parents' determination to hound the principal and her staff. They perceive themselves as consumers, and they will go to any length to get the best value. They trust the drill master at the coaching institute because he delivers what he promises. Knowledge brought to life through technology is irrelevant in this scenario. So is its value as truth. What matters is its instrumental value, to let you get on to the next stage of the entrance process.

Krishna Kumar is a former director of the NCERT

The importance of being neighbourly

India is subtly adding four new elements in the policy matrix



RAJIV BHATIA

The Modi government has acted swiftly to pursue its foreign policy priorities. Focused on strengthening India's place in the world, it has begun by shoring up the country's position in the immediate neighbourhood. This message emanated from Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visits to the Maldives and Sri Lanka, and External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar's trip to Bhutan.

Ties with South Asian neighbours were a priority even earlier, as seen in the invitation extended to SAARC leaders to attend Mr. Modi's swearing-in ceremony in 2014. After that there were some difficulties. India's relations with Pakistan soured, while China continued to expand its footprint in Nepal, the Maldives, Sri Lanka and Pakistan. However, India's cooperation with Bangladesh, Bhutan, Afghanistan and Myanmar showed tangible progress. As a result, attention was consciously shifted from SAARC to BIMSTEC, thereby giving an eastward shift to India's neighbourhood policy. In 2016, BIMSTEC leaders were invited to the BRICS summit in Goa. BIMSTEC leaders also attended Mr. Modi's swearing-in last month.

Three visits

A week thereafter, Mr. Jaishankar was in Bhutan holding comprehensive discussions with his counterpart and the Prime Minister. He also met King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck. The visit was perhaps meant to assess the current thinking in Thimphu about Chinese overtures to open diplomatic relations and the border issue before Mr. Modi's meeting with President Xi Jinping at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit.

Mr. Modi's visit to the Maldives was astutely designed to showcase that a dramatic turnaround has taken place in India-Maldives relations. Former Maldivian President Abdulla Yameen gave a blatantly pro-China tilt to his foreign policy. The result was that Mr. Modi had to wait until Mr. Yameen's ouster before he could visit the Maldives in November 2018. Working in concert, the two governments have succeeded in deepening mutual understanding. While visiting India in December 2018, President Ibrahim Solih was still somewhat cautious as he spoke of balancing friends, old and new. But by the time Mr. Modi landed in the Maldives last

week, Male had become more receptive. The President and the Majlis speaker reiterated the Maldives' commitment to its 'India first policy'. The Majlis invited Mr. Modi to deliver a special address. The President conferred the nation's highest honour on Mr. Modi.

This visit demonstrated how India has begun to implement recent decisions to extend ample financial assistance, move ahead with projects to be funded through a new \$800 million Line of Credit, and focus on people-centric welfare measures in accordance with the priorities of the Maldives. This is in sharp contrast with China's approach of extending massive loans for mega infrastructure projects that end up in debt traps. Mr. Modi hit all the right buttons, highlighting India's resolve to assist the Maldives in every possible manner. He identified countering terrorism, addressing climate change, and promoting an integrated and balanced Indo-Pacific as the key challenges for the region.

Mr. Modi's visit to Colombo was prudent. It conveyed India's solidarity with Sri Lanka as the latter struggles to overcome the overwhelming effects of the Easter Sunday attacks. Mr. Modi held discussions with all the main actors: the President, the Prime Minister, the Leader of Opposition, and Tamil leaders. President Maithripala Sirisena reflected the nation's wish as he publicly thanked Mr. Modi for a productive visit.

Policy essence

New Delhi has clearly indicated that the neighbourhood will continue to be a priority, but four subtle elements are being introduced in the policy matrix. First, without always insisting on reciprocity, India may get into a proactive mode and adopt measures "to incentivise cooperation in the neighbourhood", as Mr. Jaishankar put it. Second, India will prefer to work on quick impact projects that bring socio-economic benefits to the people. Third, recognising its "limited capabilities", as Foreign Secretary Vijay Gokhale disclosed, New Delhi would have no objection in forging a trilateral development partnership, involving India and Japan in a neighbouring country. Fourth, SAARC's drawbacks have caused India's conscious shift to BIMSTEC. Mr. Jaishankar explained that India sees a mix of "energy, mindset and possibility" in the latter grouping. The government is moving in the right direction. It could also consider bringing the Maldives into BIMSTEC, at least as an observer. Finally, Mr. Jaishankar should visit other neighbours soon, particularly Bangladesh and Myanmar.

Rajiv Bhatia is Distinguished Fellow, Gateway House, and a former Ambassador

SINGLE FILE

Saving childhoods

Steps India could take to eliminate child labour

DAGMAR WALTER



S. R. RAGHUNATHAN

On World Day Against Child Labour (June 12) in 2017, India ratified two core conventions of the International Labour Organization on child labour. It now has to double its efforts to ensure that the benefit of those conventions reach the most vulnerable children.

Although comprehensive data on child labour are not available for India, as per the 2011 Census, in the age group 5-14 years, 10.1 million of 259.6 million constituted working children. Even though there was a decline in the number of working children to 3.9% in 2011 from 5% in 2001, the decline rate is grossly insufficient to meet target 8.7 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which is to end child labour in all forms by 2025. India therefore needs to embark on new and innovative approaches in its fight against child labour.

The ratification of the core conventions on child labour gives rise to a range of priorities such as strengthening policy and legislative enforcement, and building the capacities of government, workers' and employers' organisations as well as other partners at national, State and community levels. It is worthy of mention that India had taken important steps to eliminate child labour even before ratifying these conventions. In addition, there are a few more important steps that the country can take in this direction.

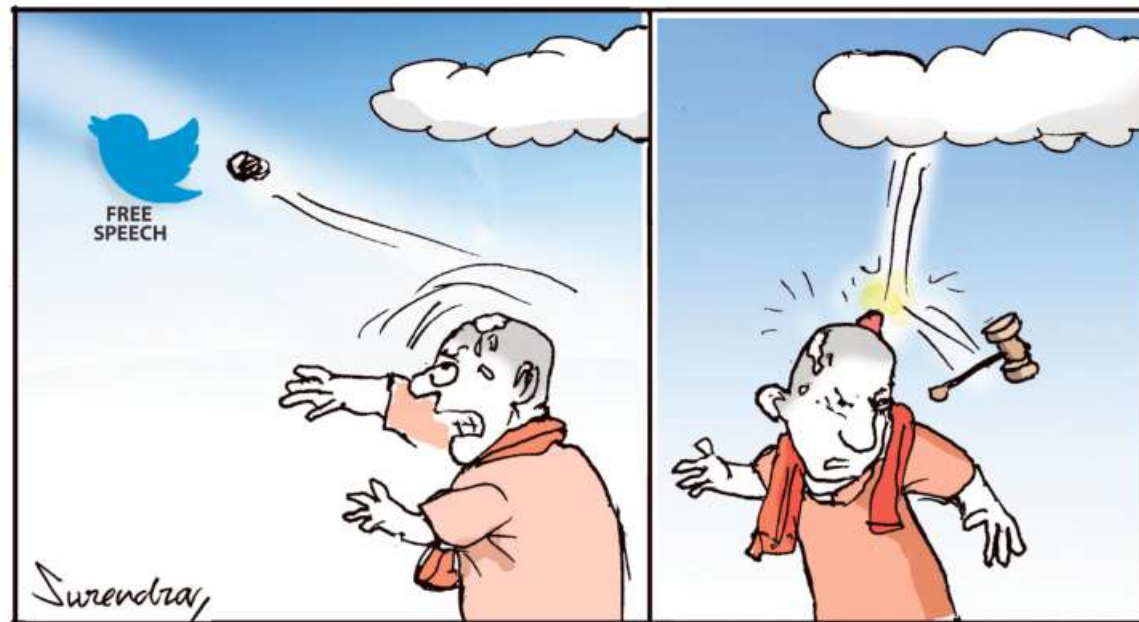
India should invest in enhancing its body of knowledge on child labour, emphasising quantitative information. While there are many common factors across the spectrum, each sector and each demographical segment will have its own set of factors and drivers that push children into the labour market. These have to be addressed. Such factors and drivers can only be identified and analysed through proper research, surveys and assessments.

Eliminating child labour is firmly placed within Goal 8 of the SDGs. A stronger nexus between the discourse on SDGs and the discourse on eliminating child labour can take the advantage of complementarities and synergies of a wide range of actors engaged in both areas of work.

The growing interest of the private sector is a great opportunity that has to be further utilised, particularly to leverage key influencers in domestic and multinational supply chains. It is also a matter of competitive advantage for multinationals to ensure that child labour is effectively eliminated in their supply chains. A sector-wide culture of child labour-free businesses has to be nurtured.

As the world of work is transforming and new actors are emerging, one cannot underestimate the importance of creating a sound and vibrant platform to bring together these actors. The fight against child labour is not just the responsibility of one, it is the responsibility of all.

Dagmar Walter is Director, ILO Decent Work Technical Support Team for South Asia and Country Office for India



DATA POINT

Women's work woes

There are far fewer women than men in the workforce across States. Data show that only 22% of the country's female population is part of the workforce, as opposed to 71.2% of the male population. Women earn far less than men do.

By Sravya C. and Varun B. Krishnan

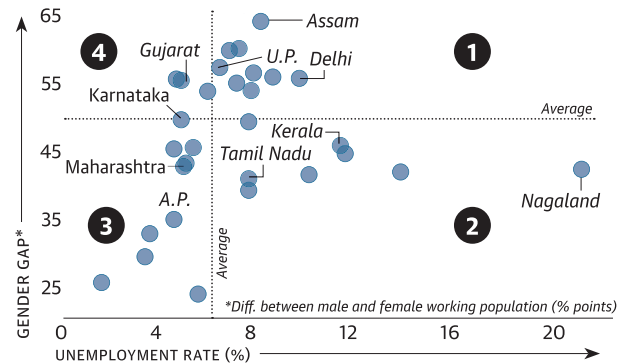
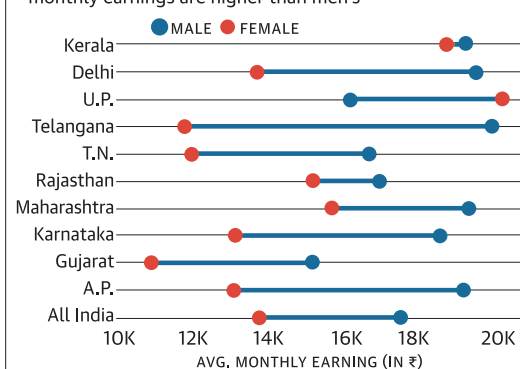
Fewer women on the job

The gap between the number of men and women at work is highest in Assam and Bihar and lowest in Himachal Pradesh, followed by Meghalaya and Chhattisgarh. In the chart on the right, the numbers represent the following:

1. In these States (Uttar Pradesh, Assam, Delhi), the unemployment rate and the gender gap are higher than average
2. Here, the unemployment rate is high and the gender gap is lower than average (T.N., Kerala)
3. Unemployment and gender gap are low (A.P.)
4. Unemployment is low, gender gap is high (Gujarat)

Wage gap

In most States, salaried women earn far less than men. Uttar Pradesh is an exception where women's monthly earnings are higher than men's



Across jobs

Whether it is a salaried job or casual labour, women earn less than men. In casual labour, the difference is more pronounced – men earn 1.5 times more than women do

Period	Salaried male	Salaried female	Casual work (M)	Casual work (F)
July-Sept 2017	16,602.39	13,208.56	264.52	169.08
Oct-Dec 2017	17,230.89	14,192.37	273.87	173.42
Jan-Mar 2018	17,663.49	13,976.27	280.09	176.88
Apr-June 2018	17,697.78	13,890.27	290.99	181.65

Average earnings (in ₹)

Source: PLFS report 2017-18

FROM The Hindu. ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO JUNE 12, 1969

Centre against hasty decision on Telengana

The Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, had consultations with her Cabinet colleagues this evening [June 11, New Delhi] on the Telengana issue. No definite line of action seems to have emerged from these consultations at which Ministers of State from Andhra – Mr. K. Raghuramaiah, Mr. B. S. Murthy and Dr. K. L. Rao – participated by special invitation. The only indication available after the meeting of the Cabinet was that the Centre would not take any hasty decision. There is a feeling that no decision may be taken until after the return of the Prime Minister from her Japanese tour in the third week of this month. At to-day's meeting, Mr. Y. B. Chavan, Home Minister, is reported to have given the impressions he had gained from his fact-finding mission to Hyderabad last week-end. The consensus is understood to be in favour of finding a solution within the framework of a united Andhra Pradesh with the concrete assurance that the people of Telengana would have voice in the administration and all other walks of life.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JUNE 12, 1919.

Mysore Economic Conference.

Since last year the question of making the Mysore Economic Conference permanent received great attention both from the officials and non-officials and opinions varied considerably on the question. At the birthday session last year the matter was discussed but His Highness the Maharaja announced that it would be made permanent in one form or another, the details of the constitution being left to the conference itself. Since then at various committee meetings the matter was discussed but arrived at no decision. The Government instead of committing to any scheme formulated certain proposals as basis for reorganisation of the constitution of the conference. These proposals were discussed the whole of to-day [June 11].

CONCEPTUAL

Budget-maximising model

ECONOMICS

This refers to an economic model which tries to depict the typical behaviour of bureaucrats who work for the government. A government bureaucrat, according to this model, will constantly try to expand the amount of money and other resources that are under his control. The greater the amount of resources under his control, the greater the chances of him wielding power over people who are dependent on these resources. The budget-maximising model of bureaucratic behaviour was first proposed by American economist William Niskanen in the 1968 paper, "The peculiar economics of bureaucracy".

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Tamil Isai Sangam museum in Chennai

<http://bit.ly/chenmaimuseum>