

Workplace nightmares

Accept and address uncertainty to move forward

VINEET NAYAR

Dreams can turn into nightmares when you feel threatened, afraid, insecure, unappreciated or discredited. A study conducted in the US last year found that two-thirds of Americans suffer from what is called a 'workplace nightmare'. The situation is not much different in India; an ASSOCHAM study says that over 40 per cent people face workplace anxiety or depression. Workplace nightmares are triggered by job-related stress or insecurities.

The core of any nightmare is fear in the subconscious mind. Some psychologists have likened workplace nightmares to a mini Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. According to Kelly Bulkeley, a noted US-based psychologist: "Nightmares are triggered by feelings of helplessness and vulnerability, things that make us feel infantilised or reduced to child status."

Though the problem is widespread, not many people know that these nightmares can adversely affect their mental health. That's why it is important to address it.

I believe the first step is accepting that workplaces will always be uncertain and unfair. One needs to tell oneself that workplaces are like a maze, and mazes don't have straight roads. Therefore, every time you feel lost at the workplace, you need to remind yourself that this is the nature of the maze.

Once you see the workplace as a maze, you will start accepting the twists and turns, the highs and lows, irrespective of how painful they are.

Second, workplace nightmares also occur when you keep imagining what could happen. It may not have happened yet, but the worst does come to mind when you think about whether you will get a promotion or salary hike, or a posting of your choice. Since nightmares are born out of fear — the fear of remaining stuck in an unfavourable/

undesirable position — they get accentuated if the fear persists.

I believe it is futile to say that one should not be afraid or imagine the future, because few have such control. To deal with such nightmares, imagine a mountaineer who gets stuck halfway up a cliff which is 1,000 metres high; he can neither go up, nor come down. What should he do? He needs to find a secure place to spend the night, and wait for the light to show him the way.

You need to remember that time solves a lot of things. A beach looks beautiful at sunrise and sunset, but can be scary at night. If you are stuck at seashore at midnight which is dark and scary, all you need to remember is that the Sun rises every 24 hours. Having faith that the Sun will rise will help you overcome your inhibitions. Thus, the mantra I practise is "give it a night" — and it works a lot of the time.

Finally, if you are in a situation where you can anticipate that things will not go your way, you should think three steps ahead before taking any decision. Think about

what your next step would be, its possible consequences, and how you would address them. This is how you need to prepare yourself for three subsequent situations arising out of your actions. Even after answering the three questions, if you still find yourself nowhere, you need to exit the situation or the nightmares will only get worse.

India is a young country, with the aspirations of the youth driving the \$5-trillion economy dream. However, we need to help our young to deal with workplace nightmares so that we do not become a depressed nation and lose the dream. Workplace nightmares are a reality, but we can learn to get control over them and move on with our lives.

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The China factor in Sri Lanka's politics

The winner of Sri Lanka's upcoming presidential elections could change the nature of India's relationship with its neighbour



G PARTHASARATHY

India's Buddhist neighbours, Sri Lanka and Myanmar, are preparing for fresh elections in the coming months. While Sri Lanka's presidential elections are just around the corner, Myanmar's Aung San Suu Kyi is preparing to face the electorate next year. India has good relations with both Sri Lanka and Myanmar; however, both the neighbours have an intrusive and less-than-healthy Chinese presence in their countries. The Chinese take an above-normal interest in the domestic politics of both these countries.

Presidential elections are scheduled for November 16 in Sri Lanka, with the term of Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena ending the next day. Former President Mahinda Rajapakse, who was considered a 'national hero' by Sri Lanka's majority Buddhist Sinhala for winning the country's brutal ethnic conflict, was surprisingly defeated in the last presidential elections. This defeat came after the national parties — the Rightist United National Party (UNP) and the Left-wing Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) — made common cause to ensure that Maithripala Sirisena (from the SLFP) defeated his predecessor. Rajapakse was earlier a member of the SLFP.

Rajapakse's supporters allege that India was responsible for events leading to his unexpected and surprising defeat.

Sirisena, whose performance was controversial and uninspiring, has wisely decided not to seek re-election. Among the prominent candidates in the forthcoming elections is Gotabhaya Rajapakse, Sri Lanka's former defence secretary, and also the brother of Mahinda Rajapakse. The two brothers are given credit for ending the country's prolonged and bloody civil war. Rajapakse eliminated LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran and his cadres. India had reservations about the extremist tendencies of the LTTE, which was responsible for the assassination of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. Not many tears were shed when Prabhakaran was eliminated during the final assault of the Sri Lankan army.

However, both Sri Lanka as well as the Rajapakse brothers personally are under international scrutiny for serious human rights violations, especially during the last days of the country's prolonged ethnic conflict.

Nonetheless, if past precedent is followed — as is likely — Gotabhaya Rajapakse will continue to receive Chinese support.

The main opposition to Gotabhaya will come from a young minister in the current government: Sajith Premadasa, who has been nominated by the UNP. Current Prime Minister Ranil Wickramasinghe proposed his name. Premadasa's father, Ranasinghe Premadasa, was a former Sri Lankan President, assassinated by the LTTE. Ironically, President Premadasa was known to have provided weapons to the LTTE when the Indian Peace Keeping Force was in Sri Lanka.

Other candidates, like former army chief Mahesh Senanayake, will not have any significant impact on the result of the polls. Premadasa, like his father, has reached out to people during his tenure as minister in the Wickremasinghe government. He enjoys a measure of public popularity and respect and has drawn huge crowds during his election rallies.

So, was Thiruvalluvar a closet Hindutvawadi?

That notion would be laughable, given the current-day connotations to that characterisation. If anything, as Monsieur Ariel, a 19th-Century French translator of the *Thirukkural*, noted, Thiruvalluvar's exertions went beyond castes or beliefs, and embraced the "whole community of mankind".

Bottomline? Gopalkrishna Gandhi, who translated the *Thirukkural* into English — a literary distinction he shares with his grandfather, C Rajagopalachari ('Rajaji') — notes that the *Thirukkural* has remained compelling without the backing of any denominational group, religion or sect. "The non-sectarian voice speaking to humanity as a whole makes it a book for all people everywhere and for all time. It is in its universality that the book is and shall always be a book for the future," Gandhi adds. In other words, the attempts to pigeon-hole Thiruvalluvar as a Hindu, a Christian or an atheist reveal the petty small-mindedness of today's politicians.

A weekly column that helps you ask the right questions



New regime Sri Lanka's presidential polls will take place on November 16 REUTERS

New Delhi's interest remains in encouraging the Sri Lankan government to devolve adequate power for meeting the legitimate aspirations of Tamils in the northern and eastern provinces. The Modi government has also reached out with substantial assistance for the welfare of the long-forgotten "plantation Tamils", whose ancestors migrated to Sri Lanka as plantation labourers in the 19th century.

Sirisena has not exactly endeared himself either within Sri Lanka, or in India. He has been at odds with Wickramasinghe.

Naval interests

It is a well-known that after leading Sri Lanka into a debt trap, China took over control of the strategic south-western port of Hambantota, also known as the "Magampura Mahinda Rajapakse Port", which it built when

Mahinda Rajapakse was President. While the Sri Lankan government later took steps to monitor and control Chinese activities in Hambantota, the port is ideally located to refuel Chinese warships and submarines traversing across the Indian Ocean. The Chinese navy is expected to significantly augment its presence in the Indian Ocean in coming years.

China has also played a key role in the expansion of port facilities in Colombo, which earns 70 per cent of its revenues from transit fees on goods destined for India. India, Japan and Sri Lanka signed a tripartite agreement in May 2019 to develop a deep-sea container terminal in Colombo. The negotiations leading to this agreement were marked by huge controversy in which Sirisena sacked Wickramasinghe in October last year, for allegedly exceed-

ing his brief in negotiations with India on the Colombo Port. Wickramasinghe was, however, reinstated as Prime Minister in December.

Community support

Gotabhaya Rajapakse does enjoy considerable support from large sections of Sri Lanka's majority Buddhist Sinhala. Many Sinhala regard him a war hero, like his brother. The minority Tamil and Muslim communities, however, have concerns about some of his propensities. Like in certain other Buddhist countries across India's eastern neighbourhood, there are growing anti-Islamic sentiments in Sri Lanka. Rajapakse is also seen as being a threat to the freedom of press in his country. The minorities and even many sections of the Sinhala will veer towards the candidature of Sajith Premadasa, given the fact that his father enjoyed substantial political support from the majority Sinhala. While New Delhi has approached Gotabhaya, there are concerns about his stance with the Tamil community in Sri Lanka and the close ties that he and his associates have with China.

Sri Lanka is looking at India as a source of rising tourist revenues. Revenues from foreign tourists are crucial for Sri Lanka's economy. Four lakh Indian tourists visited Sri Lanka last year. But, tourist traffic has been adversely affected by the terrorist attacks on hotels and churches in the country on April 21.

New Delhi should think of fostering a regional tourism initiative for visits to Buddhist historical sites in Nepal, India, Bhutan, Myanmar, Thailand and Sri Lanka. This will, however, in the first instance, require a significant investment for improvement of tourist facilities in Bihar and elsewhere in India.

The writer is a former High Commissioner to Pakistan

5 THINGS to WATCH OUT for TODAY

■ **Prime Minister** Narendra Modi is set to inaugurate a global investors' meet in Dharamshala. Ambassadors of 16 countries and representatives of various big business houses will take part in the meet. Other ministers such as Nitin Gadkari, Piyush Goyal, Prahlad Singh Patel, and Anurag Thakur will also attend the meet.

■ **The Financial** Sector Regulatory Appointment Search Committee will interview seven shortlisted candidates for the post of the RBI Deputy Governor. The post had fallen vacant after Viral Acharya resigned in July.

■ **IndiGo and** Qatar Airways will make a "strategic" business announcement. Qatar Airways has in the past shown interest in investing in IndiGo. It was not immediately clear if the announcement is about a codeshare agreement, stake sale or partnership.

■ **Aditya Birla** Capital, Adani Transmission, Andhra Bank, Basf India, Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd, City Union Bank, DLF, Emami Paper Mills, Gammon India, GlaxoSmithKline Consumer Healthcare, Gujarat Alkalies & Chemicals, Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd, Power Grid Corporation, Sun Pharmaceutical Industries, Thomas Cook (India), Timex Group India, United Breweries and Wockhardt are scheduled to declare their financial results for the September quarter.

■ **Mercedes is** likely to launch its luxury MPV. The vehicle features a visual facelift of the V-Class and has a 2.2-litre diesel engine. It is said to be priced around ₹90 lakh.

What a 'saffronised' Thiruvalluvar says of Tamil politics

VENKY VEMBU

THE CHEAT SHEET

Who is Thiruvalluvar?

He's a celebrated ancient Tamil poet and philosopher, and the author of the *Thirukkural*, a collection of rhyming couplets. His work has been acclaimed by philosophers, theologians and literary savants around the world. Much of India, beyond the Tamil-speaking world, learnt a few of the *Thirukkural* rhymes subconsciously whenever P Chidambaram gave his Budget presentations.

How so?

It is customary for finance ministers to channel a bit of philosophy on governance while winding down their budget speeches. Chidambaram's go-to philosopher of choice on these occasions was Thiruvalluvar, whose couplets covered, among other topics, politics, economics, and governance ethics. For parliamentarians who had been listening to Chidambaram drone on for over two hours about policy minutiae, the invocation of a *kural* couplet signalled that the Budget speech was about to end:

the ripple of excitement that this triggered would wake up even slumbering MPs!

So why are we talking about Thiruvalluvar?

Because the bearded poet, who is the pride of all Tamils and who has been elevated to the status of a sage, finds himself in the crossfire of a politico-religious tug-of-war in Tamil Nadu in recent days.

What happened?

BJP leaders in Tamil Nadu recently put out an image of Thiruvalluvar in saffron robes, and have otherwise been looking to claim exclusive 'Hindu' ownership of the poet's legacy. Dravidian politicians, and those belonging to other faiths, are contesting what they call the 'appropriation' of Thiruvalluvar's literary and philosophical heritage.

Can't Thiruvalluvar's provenance be established?

Literary 'detectives' have been trying for centuries to establish just that. But there is inadequate information on everything from the poet's name to even the name of his poetic work. But it is generally be-

lieved that Thiruvalluvar, as he came to be known, lived sometime between 4th Century BCE and 6th Century CE, very likely in the Mylapore neighbourhood of current-day Chennai. As far back as in 1935, the Tamil Nadu government recognised 31 BCE as the year of Thiruvalluvar's birth.

Doesn't that timeline likely predate Christianity and Islam?

It possibly does. But it's not based on what you might call clinching scientific evidence.

Don't his writings give a clue to his identity?

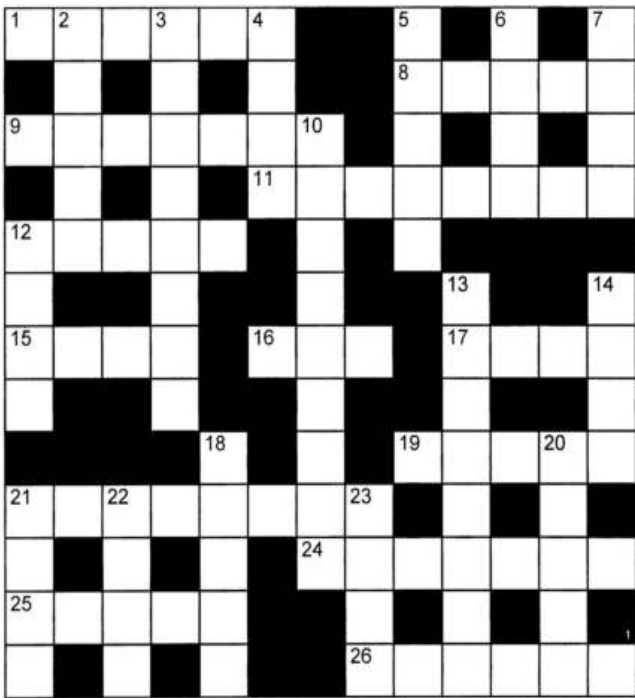
Good point. Even a superficial reading of the *kurals* es-

tablishes that Thiruvalluvar was suffused by an Indic spiritualism that sits uncomfortably with Dravidian politicians who depict him as an atheist. And the *kural*'s narrative on the status of women, as subordinate to men, fits in with the traditional Hindutva view of women: the rationalist Dravidian leader EVR 'Periyar' even trenchantly critiqued the *kurals* on that count. And when Thiruvalluvar holds forth on the 'sin' of eating meat, he sounds more like a 'gaurakshak'.



SOURCE: TWITTER

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NOT SO EASY

ACROSS

1. Frightened of races being thrown on the day (6)
8. Actually be changing sex with it (5)
9. Human nature had moon to play with (7)
11. Don't forget to be concerned with one having subs to pay (8)
12. Put to sea, but not under sail (5)
15. One gets older for a long, long time (4)
16. Put question to a newt in the country (3)
17. A bit of opera in Italian Mary failed to start (4)
19. Hangs it out with a snap of the teeth (5)
21. A way to walk out of that op (8)
24. How rare to lie in, farther back in time (7)
25. Light form makes real difference around the South (5)
26. The condition might feel wrong with a non-drinker (6)

DOWN

2. Is unable to include Haydn's first song (5)
3. Try acting to erase her version of it (8)
4. The entrance is where cross is put up (4)
5. High temperature made life very difficult inside (5)
6. In a pound I'm showing a leg (4)
7. Begin, but don't finish, with an asterisk (4)
10. Ruin a test Dave devised (9)
12. Ongoing TV drama may be seen in a bar (4)
13. Iron glove with nut at leg to adjust (8)
14. Treat one as a sweetheart to a brewers mix (4)
18. A scintilla of initial satisfaction, and one can leave car (5)
20. It may relieve one at work to have a magic formula (5)
21. Go one behind another to make things smooth (4)
22. Expel American entry in Bible part (4)
23. Prince Henry took Falstaff's first drawn hole at golf (4)