Development matters, but so does identity Forging the steel frame

Disturbing a federal system that protects the complexity of human identities could pave the way for conflict



RAJEEV BHARGAVA

It is sometimes claimed that once ordinary people benefit from economic development, they automatically set aside issues related to their identity. Such a view was found not only in materialist theories that gave explanatory primacy in human life to economic factors but also among leaders of social and political movements. Nehru, for instance, is believed to have assumed that as India makes economic progress, religious identity would matter less and communal conflict would disappear. It seems that the government's claim on Jammu and Kashmir shares the same premise. Give Kashmiris an economic package, prospects of more jobs, better healthcare, high-quality consumption goods and they will forget their specific identity and assimilate peacefully with the rest of India. 'Development' shall trump identity.

Cultural and ethical framework

Identity is much misused and abused. We misunderstand it, misconstrue its significance, maliciously politicise it but it refuses to go away. Why? Undeniably, we are biological creatures with basic material needs. But we are also expressive creatures, image-builders, story-makers, concept-inventors, and so live in a world saturated with images, representations, myths, stories, and philosophies. Over thousands of years, multiple imaginary worlds have been fashioned, each of which is the collective possession of different societies. These imagined narratives shape our material needs, making them complex, elaborate and distinct. All humans do not have the same food and sartorial preferences. They design their dwellings differently. They even use their bodies and tongues differently to communicate with one another. In short, our material needs, suffused with imagination and saturated with concepts, are

Moreover, we have developed non-biological needs and dispositions. We reflect on the world and on ourselves. We develop a sense of who we are. We have implicit or explicit but it won't matter if it is removed.

filled with intricacy and nuance.



answers to the question: who am I? This is partly answered by our culturally mediated material needs: we are, for example, what we eat and do not eat. But equally important for this answer is an ethic that distinguishes the good from the bad, right from wrong, what is worth striving for and what is not. With the help of this, we get a sense of where we stand in this world and what stand we take on it. In short, we are also defined by our specific stand on what happens to us after we die, and, say, on our position on the place of women in society.

So we cannot live a proper life without a framework of culture and ethic – the source of meaning and worth in our lives. Nor without other people with whom we share this framework, without a community. If this identity-endowing, cultural and ethical framework is so crucial to each one of us, then how can economic development alone satisfy us? This unsubstitutable need for selfhood will not disappear just because one's biological needs are fulfilled.

So, not only are identity-related needs extremely important, but these needs are satisfied by a particular socio-culturally informed ethical framework. Why not any such framework? Good question, but one that has a rather simple response: we are born into a specific framework, are initiated into it in our childhood, and before long, it makes us who we are. It provides humans with features that define them. These form the core that remains relatively constant, even as everything around changes. Moreover, these constitutive features matter more than anything else. A wart on the body may be permanent,

But take away fish from Bengali cuisine and all hell will break loose. Tagore's songs in middle class Bengali homes have the same status. The same is true of the worship of Murugan to many Tamils; the relic of Muhammad in Hazratbal to Kashmiri Muslims; the Kamakhya temple to the Assamese. These specific, enduring, valuable beliefs and practices are identity-constituting, anchoring people in the world, making them feel at home, giving them succour.

All this is true. But it is equally true that identity-related issues invoke fear. They are prone to being abused. They can even become dangerous. How so? This happens when the relatively enduring character of identity begins to be viewed as immutable and incontestable, and derived from a single, permanent source. An identity is then seen as defining us categorically, once and for all, in an allor-nothing manner, like something inscribed in our DNA. Anything that disturbs or threatens the structure of our socio-cultural 'DNA' unhinges and enflames us, forcing us to die for it or even to kill.

Identities in flux

These conclusions about the nature of identity are troublesome but not ineluctable. First, because, although our identity-constituting beliefs, feelings, values are given in childhood, as we become self-reflexive, we frequently begin to question, revise and even reject them. They must endure but don't have to be immutable. Second, as we grow, we enter different groups, begin participating in more than one socio-cultural framework, develop multiple identities. These identities move in and out of focus depending upon context. It is doubtful if human beings will flourish, perhaps even survive, if they were entrenched exclusively within one framework, bound to one single, permanently embedded identity. Third, each of these identities is itself derived from multiple sources. Consider J&K. Three thousand years ago, like the rest of the north-western region that now includes Pakistan and Afghanistan, Kashmiri culture was Vedic. It then probably acquired a layer from Greek settlers and definitively from the teachings of Buddha. By the middle of the 1st millennium CE, it imbibed a strong strain of Shaivism. Later highly syncretic Sufi currents entered and still later, large chunks from modern Islam. Kashmiri identity is a palimpsest that unfolds like a peeled onion, layer by layer. It would be absurd to reduce it simplistically to monoliths like 'Hindu' or 'Islamic'. These are useful simplifications in ideological or political battles but half-truths, even lies. The core of Kashmiri identity is a complex compound, flowing from multiple sources, not reducible to a simple, single element. What's more, this is true of every regional identity in India, of Indian identity in general, indeed, of every group identity in the world.

What is the political implication of these observations? Modern socioeconomic conditions require states to take care not only of people's material welfare but also their identities. But these conditions also foster ethno-nationalisms that insist on one state for every monocultural identity. Deep down this is a lie, because it defies the intricacies of human cultures. So, is there a viable modern political system that protects the complexity of human identities and mitigates their rough, violent edges? There is. A decent federal system that allows a great deal of political autonomy to distinct cultural groups, protects important common (national) interests and enables fruitful encounter of regional cultures does that. Disturbing this federal arrangement for the sake of a simplistic idea of unity is not a smart thing to do. At worse, it paves the way for prolonged conflict that endangers development. Paradoxically, then, we might well be undercutting development in the very name of development.

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The 60-year-old Mussoorie Academy deserves some credit for producing officers who have contributed to nation-building



AMITABHA BHATTACHARYA

The Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration was simply called the Academy of Administration when it was set up in 1959 in Mussoorie. It signalled a resolve to systematically train members of the higher civil services in order to equip them to be the change agents of a resurgent India. The two All-India Services, the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) and the Indian Police Service, instituted earlier under a specific provision of the Constitution, as also other Services attracted some of the finest minds from the university system. The IAS motto, 'Yogah Karmasu Kaushalam (proficiency in action is yoga)', and the Academy song, 'Hao Dharomete Dheer, Hao Karomete Bir (Be firm in your faith, courageous in action)', symbolised the nation's expectation from them. The majestic Himalayan peaks viewed from the campus constantly reminded the recruits to strive for strength, rectitude and excellence.

The Academy introduced in 1960 a common Foundation Course (FC) in order to "instil a shared understanding of government and build camaraderie among the civil services". It is the professional training institution for the IAS, and continues to conduct an FC for various All-India and Central Services.

Keeping with the times

In the last six decades, there have been transformational changes in the country. There have also been failures and inadequacies. Consequently, to meet with the myriad challenges, the civil servants have also had to constantly upgrade themselves. How is the Academy coping with the changing times?

Fortunately, the Academy has been steered in critical junctures by sagacious administrators such as A.N. Jha, P.S. Appu, B.N. Yugandhar and N.C. Saxena. While the content and methodology of training have changed to meet the demands of time, the pattern introduced in 1969 - of district training being sandwiched between institutional exposures at the Academy – has remained broadly unaltered. On successful completion, IAS trainees are now awarded an M.A. degree in Public Management by the Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. Besides, the Academy also conducts mid-career training programmes for officers, in keeping with their varying job requirements from policy implementation towards policy formulation. The Academy now houses five national research centres on rural studies, disaster

management, gender, public systems management, and leadership development and competency assessment. Pursuant to the Kargil Review Committee recommendations, a joint civil-military programme on national security was introduced in 2001.

Some limitations

Even the best of training has its limitations. Nevertheless, the Academy has been engaging itself steadfastly with this onerous task. However, how much of its effort gets reflected in the performance of officers remains a moot question. The correlation between the training imparted in Mussoorie and the quality of public services in the heat and dust of Indian polity should be unquestionable. Second, there has been no serious attempt to record the experiences of the trainees/officers at the field/secretariat levels and publish them in scholarly journals, enabling others to benefit from such exposures. The Academy journal, The Administrator, does not seem to have any discernible impact on the academic discourse on the various facets of our governance. Are the days of scholar-administrators gone? Third, what have been the outputs of the five national centres? How does such research inform the training curriculum? Has the Academy realised its potential to emerge as the main think tank for civil service reforms?

Civil servants are aware that the public sometimes resent the bureaucracy, often for valid reasons. Politicians criticise the bureaucracy as blocking the course of development. These days, Ministers are not always willing to accept responsibility for their own decisions. The reputation of officers is being unduly tarnished all the time. Shouldn't the Academy help build a national consensus on these contentious issues?

The challenge lies in how civil servants maintain their integrity and efficiency while serving in a system that deals with power play and corruption. Fortunately, there are umpteen instances of civil servants playing their role neutrally and resolutely. Idealism as a virtue may be on the wane, but has not vanished altogether.

In defending and expanding the constitutional values and in adhering to the spirit of various progressive legislation, the IAS and other Services have played a significant role in nation-building. Despite our 'uncertain glory', if one looks at the trajectory of independent India and compares it with that of our immediate neighbours, our higher bureaucracy appears to be a defining difference. The Academy in Mussoorie deserves some credit for that.

Amitabha Bhattacharya is a retired IAS officer who had worked in the private sector and with the UNDP

A minor win for India at WTO

The trade body ruled that renewable energy incentives offered by U.S. were discriminatory

ARMIN ROSENCRANZ & ADITYA VORA

In a welcome judgment for India, a World Trade Organization (WTO) panel in June accepted its claim in a dispute concerning U.S. regulations on domestic content requirement in the production of renewable energy. This was also significant as New Delhi had earlier lost a similar dispute over

its own domestic content require-Though ments. Washington since challenged the ruling, in the light of the Donald Trump administration's allegations against the WTO, it is important to discern the reasoning adopted by the organisation in

reaching its conclu-The dispute revolved around certain States in the U.S. that give incentives to local producers in the form of tax rebates, refunds and credits when they produce renewable energy using locally manufactured products. Article III of the WTO's General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) requires that countries do not provide less favourable treatment to 'like products' originating from other nations. For instance, a solar photovoltaic cell manufactured in the U.S. should be liable to the same amount

the world. But how does the WTO determine whether an item is a 'like product'? The organisation's criteria pertains to the product's end use, composition, substitutability, consumer preferences and tariff classifications.

of tax as one made anywhere else in

Disputing the causal link

In this case, the U.S. conceded that the import from India was a 'like product'. What it disputed was the causal link between the incentives provided by the respective States and its effect on the Indian goods. For instance, the U.S. argued that the figures quoted by India showing a growth in the number of solar photovoltaic (PV) systems installed in Washington State between 2005 and $2015\ do\ not\ support\ its\ assertion\ that$ additional incentives by themselves have induced the wide-scale adoption of locally made renewable energy products.

However, the WTO panel rejected this argument, stating instead that Washington State's additional incentive accords an advantage on the use

> of local products not available for 'like imported products'. India, the panel held, was not required to prove factually that the rise in the production of PV systems was caused by a rise in the production of upstream local products at the cost of 'like-imported products'.

The 'mere incentivisation' of only the lo-

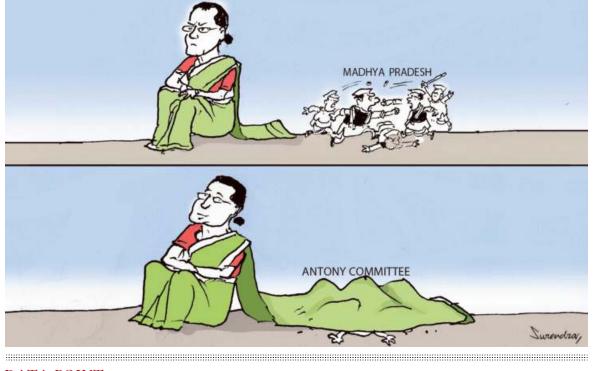
cal products was sufficient to make a prima facie case that Washington State's additional incentive affected the sale, purchase, transportation, distribution or use of the relevant products, the panel said.

Solar module exports to U.S.

The ruling is also important considering that the U.S. imported 44% of the Indian solar module exports in the 2018-2019 period.

We believe that this dispute could have been easily avoided had the two countries settled their differences beforehand. This is especially so because there are various other disputes pending between the countries at the WTO involving the export promotion scheme brought in by India and the imposition of excess customs duty on steel and aluminium by the U.S. New Delhi claims that its export promotion schemes are in consonance with its developing country status while Washington has cited 'national security' as the reason for the imposition of the duty.

Armin Rosencranz is a professor of law at Jindal Global Law School in Sonipat, Haryana, from which Aditya Vora is a recent



DATA POINT

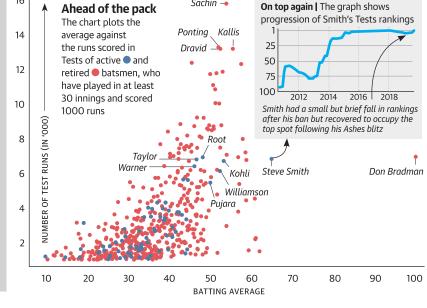
A cut above the best

With 671 runs in five innings in the ongoing Ashes Tour, Australia's Steve Smith has made a cracking return to Test cricket. The tour in England is Smith's first Test Series after the 12-month ban following the ball-tampering incident in South Africa. By raising his average to close to 65, higher than other batsmen in Test history, except Don Bradman, Smith has established himself as the best among his peers **Bv Sumant Sen**

Where Smith stands

The chart shows the Z-scores of Test averages of players who have played at least 30 innings and scored 1000 runs. A Z-score is a measure of how many standard deviations away from the mean score is a player's batting average. The higher the Z-score, the more impressive the player

Source: ESPNcricinfo, Reliance ICC rankings



100 Wagar Younis Using the mean and standard deviations of the batting averages of all the 533 players, the Z-scores were calculated using the formula: batting average of a player minus mean / standard deviation Don Bradmar Steve Smith Adam Voges .00 -2.59 -2.17 -1.76 -1.35 -0.93 -0.52 -0.11 0.30 0.72 1.13 1.54 1.96 2.37 2.78 3.20 3.61 4.02 4.43 4.85 5.26 5.67 6.09 6.50 Z-SCORES

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FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO SEPTEMBER 10, 1969

Roots of corruption (From an Editorial)

The latest report of the Central Vigilance Commission says that "the temptation to resort to corrupt practices seems to be rather strong even at the senior official levels of the Ministries of Defence, Finance, Departments of Railways, Posts and Telegraphs and Foreign Trade and Supply" and that such practices at the lower level are in a sense endemic in the Railways and the Postal departments. Among those dismissed for official misdemeanour are listed for instance a lieutenant commander, a Barrack and Store officer, an income-tax officer and one Deputy Director of Postal Services, besides a host of other gazetted and non-gazetted officers. That the itching palm is as old as man himself cannot be an excuse for condoning the growing lapses. On the contrary, it should be deemed a forceful reason why a special watch against corruption is necessary. The institution of the Lok Pal and Lokayukta may prove to be only a half-measure. Many of the State Governments are unwilling to appoint their own Lok Pals. Some State Governments have been arguing that these offices are quite unnecessary because Ministers can be hauled up for their failings before the legislature of which they are members, while complaints against officials could be submitted to the appropriate Ministers. But what is happening in Kerala exposes the weakness of this argument. That cases of corruption have been increasing is sufficient proof that the cure does not lie in merely reforming existing grievance procedures.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO SEPT. 10, 1919.

Our Rule in India and Egypt.

An I.C.S. writes in the "Daily Herald": - The subsidence of public interest in India pari passu with the subsidence of the recent riots, is an illuminating instance of the manner in which an imperial people looks upon its responsibility for the government of subject races, even when their total exceeds three hundred millions. It may sound paradoxical, but without the first of the causes of Indian unrest is the practical absence of public opinion, not merely among Indians, but among Anglo-Indians. Why is there practically no public opinion? Because they are practically no instruments for its creation and public opinion does not occur by spontaneous generation. The absence of public opinion is most glaring and notorious within the Government of India itself.