



## Gender justice

Poor women are even more disadvantaged as supplicants before powerful men

Nearly seven years after the Nirbhaya tragedy shocked India and the world at large, a 19-year-old, who was allegedly raped in 2017 by a local MLA in Uttar Pradesh's Unnao district, is battling for her life. Hooked to a ventilator, the girl's latest trauma began on Sunday. She was travelling by car with two aunts and a lawyer from Unnao to Rae Bareilly when a truck with a "blackened number plate" rammed into the vehicle. Whether it is an accident or not is now a subject matter of official investigation, but India has had a history of rogue trucks silencing those questioning the system. Since 2017, it's been a long, difficult road to justice for the family. Two years ago, the girl had gone to Kuldeep Singh Sengar, a four-time BJP legislator from Bangermau, for a job. The teenager accused him of sexually assaulting her, but the family's cry for help went unheard till April 2018, when Sengar was arrested, days after the girl threatened to immolate herself outside Uttar Pradesh (U.P.) Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's residence in Lucknow. In the meantime, her father was arrested in an arms case and died in police custody. Helpless in the face of such brazen show of power, the family wrote to the Chief Justice of India on July 12, alleging grave danger from the accused. Ranjan Gogoi got to know of the letter only on July 30 and expressed displeasure about the delay.

The family did not get any relief from State government agencies, which appear to have been complicit in the cover-up, with the MLA belonging to the ruling party. The BJP has come under pressure from the Opposition to expel Sengar. In the Unnao case, muscle, money power and the right political alignment weighed heavily against the girl. As for crimes against women, U.P. has a high rate, not least because many are reported, unlike in some other States. According to National Crime Records Bureau figures, released in 2016 - the last time data were uploaded - of the 38,947 cases of rape reported, the second highest was from U.P. (4,816). As for all crimes against women, Uttar Pradesh reported 14.5% (49,262 out of 3,38,954 cases) of the total. The Supreme Court has ruled that five cases relating to the issue will be transferred from U.P. to Delhi, and ordered the State government to pay a ₹25 lakh compensation to the family. This may bring some relief, even though justice has been inordinately delayed. Despite the increased focus on women's rights, nothing changes on the ground. Till such crimes continue with impunity and patriarchal mindsets don't change, as a diverse and plural society, India would have failed the girl, and every woman.

## Fed's insurance policy

The rate cut is aimed at insuring against global risks to favourable U.S. economic outlook

The U.S. Federal Reserve on Wednesday announced its first reduction in the funds rate since 2008, a move that was widely expected. Elaborating on the Federal Open Market Committee's rationale in deciding policy action, Chairman Jerome Powell was emphatic that the aim was to provide a measure of insurance, especially given that the outlook for the U.S. economy remains favourable. The quarter percentage point interest rate cut, he said, was designed to support economic growth by ensuring that confidence was kept intact and "intended to insure against downside risks from weak global growth and trade policy uncertainty." In the space of less than three quarters, the Fed has pivoted from talking of further rate increases, to being on hold, to finally cutting interest rates as a global economic slowdown is exacerbated by trade tensions unleashed by U.S. President Donald Trump's aggressively insular approach to trade ties. The U.S. economy, which expanded by 2.9% in 2018 and posted a 3.1% expansion in the first quarter, slowed to a 2.1% pace in the second quarter, with the ongoing trade war with China blamed for a manufacturing slowdown as well as a decline in business investment. Just last week, the IMF pared its forecast for global growth in 2019 by 0.1 percentage point to 3.2%, warning that "risks to the forecast are mainly to the downside". The IMF cautioned that further trade tensions could dent sentiment and slow investment, a theme that Mr. Powell too referred to, when he said the rate cut was intended "to help offset the effects these factors are currently having on the economy."

The Fed Chairman, however, finds himself in an unenviable situation with the rate reduction satisfying neither the sharply critical President who appointed him in 2018, nor the markets where investors fretted that Mr. Powell had failed to signal the start of a protracted easing cycle. A fair part of the problem appears to be of his own making as the central bank chief muddled his messaging, speaking at one point during the post policy press conference of a "somewhat more accommodative stance", and at another emphasising that the move was not the start of a long series of rate cuts. Central bankers at the best of times have a delicate balancing act to perform to ensure that policies to support growth do not lead to a dilution of focus on price stability. In the Fed's case, Chairman Powell is clearly concerned that with inflation in the U.S. stubbornly refusing to move toward the central bank's 2% objective, there is a risk that persistent global disinflationary pressures could at some point feed into the domestic economy, undermining its efforts to spur wage and price gains. For the RBI, the Fed's move signals that, for now at least, it can stay on its accommodative path in the confidence that U.S. investors seeking rate arbitrage may hit the pause button on plans to head home.

# Marking Tipu's legacy to foster historical temper

Developing an understanding of our conflictual pasts, and not retribution, is the way to deal with 'historical wounds'



JANAKI NAIR

On a recent visit to the University of Leicester, I had the opportunity of visiting the newly established memorial to Britain's controversial King Richard III, the last of the Plantagenet Kings, and also the last British King to die in battle in the War of Roses against the Tudors. Richard III (r. 1483-1485) also has the distinction of being the only British King whose remains, found under a parking lot in Leicester close to the Cathedral, were identified by mitochondrial DNA in 2012.

In 2015, he was reburied in the Leicester Cathedral, under a simple yet beautiful gravestone, unadorned except for a coat of arms in pietra dura. The 'rediscovery' of his remains became the basis of a controversy that was finally settled in court, and the city of Leicester has been the beneficiary, raking in money from tourists who wish to discover for themselves the legacy of this controversial King.

### Shakespeare's portrait

Why controversial? Richard III's ascent to the throne, after his brother's children were declared illegitimate, has been under a cloud: did he 'disappear' his brother's son? Shakespeare, loyal to his Tudor masters (the victors of the Battle of Bosworth) fostered the portrait of Richard III as a malevolent ruler in his celebrated play of the same name, from the very first scene.

Shakespeare's Richard III is wracked by self-hate and doubt, ("I am determined to prove a villain") and invites the harshest words from others: like "foul defacer of God's handiwork"; "hell's black intelligencer"; "carnal cur"; "bloody dog"; and "bloody wretch". Richard III was not spared the ignominy of being described as a hideously deformed,

"foul bunch-back'd toad" though we now know he only had a 'crooked' spine. But it is what the Leicester Cathedral has done to this legacy that has interested me the most: the display called for a contemporary reconciliation with the conflicting aspects of the memory of this King, emphasising the necessity of commemorating a brave and remarkable soldier, despite many popular memories to the contrary. Richard III is no unblemished hero, and there is no attempt to varnish that legacy.

The previous Karnataka government had introduced a 'Tipu Jayanti', which was scrapped by the recently sworn-in Yediyurappa regime in one of its first actions in power. I wish the previous regime had installed a 'Museum to Our Conflictual Pasts', which would allow all visitors to come to terms with the most controversial figure of Mysore history, Tipu Sultan. Such a museum would have allowed both those who malign his memory and those who celebrate it to learn how to come to terms with historical controversies - and the Indian past is replete with many such examples. Tipu Sultan for long emblematised the valiant struggle of Mysore against the British and, like Richard III, was the only one to die on the battlefield (all others were defeated by, collaborated or made their peace with, the emerging British power).

Over the last few decades in Karnataka, there has been a steady inflation of shrill debates about Tipu's legacy. There are of course those who focus on his undoubted virtues, as the first early modern ruler to put in place a form of *etatism* in the absence of a social class which could undertake radical economic change; whose lust for knowledge bequeathed to us a marvellous library of books; whose spectacular military successes stunned the British, and whose technological inventions - particularly the rocket - were pilaged by the West; whose penchant for restless innovation made him try his hand at transformations that would only much later



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bear fruit (for instance his experiments with silk production and his interest in large scale irrigation). The list is endless.

There is equally the memory, particularly in South Canara, Kodagu and Malabar, of Tipu's real and imagined excesses: his zeal for conversion; his massacre of populations he considered hostile; and his introduction of Persian as the state language at the expense of Kannada.

### Reading multiple sources

Our 'Museum of Conflictual Pasts' would not stage Tipu's brief and embattled rule (17 years) as something requiring condemnation or celebration, but present it as an opportunity to develop a historical temper, a new sense of the past. It would urge the visitor, and especially the young visitor, to think historically: to read a variety of conflicting sources - including the words of the man himself - from the vantage point of his times. The museum would make the visitor ask why colonial accounts of this indefatigable foe, which necessarily cast him as a tyrant and a villain, enjoy such an enduring influence up to the present day; or to ask why the early

19th century Jain historian, Devachandra, saw Tipu and Haider Ali (his father) as just one moment in a long Mysore past peppered with desecrations, thefts, and destructions - particularly of Jain temples. Visitors could come to understand why Tipu supported some non-Muslim religious people and institutions and not others and why one temple was attacked but another, located 700 metres away, was left alone, as in Kodungallur Kerala. They could equally ask why he commandeered some Muslim communities and not others - the Navayat traders of Bhatkal recalled, in the richly textured *kaifiyats* collected by Colin Mackenzie and magnificently annotated by M.M. Kalburgi, that they were made to perform Tipu's government work under duress.

Visitors to the museum could ask why the Dewan of Mysore, Purnaiah, when asked by the British in June 1799 about who they should install after Tipu's defeat, replied that the memory of the Wodeyars had all but been forgotten, and then went on to serve the British faithfully as a placeholder for Krishnaraja Wodeyar III. What does the rich symbolism of Tipu's court - his obsessive use of the tig-

er stripe for instance - and indeed his adoption of Persian as the official language tell us about the quest for legitimacy? Moreover, was the religious zeal of Tipu, the son of a usurper, politically pioneering since his kingship had to be seen as deriving directly from god (hence *Khodadadi* - or god-given - *sarkar*)?

Why is it that indisputable facts - such as Tipu's protection of Sringeri Math following the Maratha attack in 1791, and his continued donations to the place - equally serve as testimony to his 'secularism' and as an example of his political chicanery?

**Coming to terms with the past** Tipu Sultan, in short, provides us with mind-boggling opportunities to fulfil one of the most urgent tasks of our times: to help people, and young people in particular, to come to terms with India's many conflictual pasts, to teach people that understanding and appreciation, rather than revenge or retribution, are the ways in which we may deal with real and perceived 'historical wounds'.

Karnataka's pasts offer limitless possibilities for such instruction, and for refashioning the relationship between history and memory. Such a 'Museum of Our Conflictual Pasts' will help us to deal with the inconveniences of the past, and perhaps heal and reconcile, instead of staging afresh the battles of history.

In a gigantic edifice dedicated to the memory of the 'Battle of the Nations', the city of Leipzig commemorates the successful battle involving 6,00,000 people in 1813 against Napoleonic forces. The adjoining museum, however, acknowledges the many achievements of Napoleon, and is free of the vituperative celebrations of victors. We too must find the resources to develop a historical temper that acknowledges the inconvenient truths of our past.

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# Finding the data on missing girls

The figure quoted by the government fails to completely take into consideration deliveries in private hospitals



SABU M. GEORGE

Female foeticide continues to increase at an alarming rate, as per the Sample Registration System (SRS) data released in July for the period 2015-2017. The sex ratio at birth (SRB) has been dropping continuously since Census 2011, coming down from 909 girls per thousand boys in 2013 to 896 girls in 2017, to quote the yearly Statistical Reports. In the 2014-2016 period, of the 21 large States, only two - Kerala and Chhattisgarh - had an SRB of above 950 girls per 1000 boys. Thus at present, at least 5% of girls are 'eliminated' before they are born, despite the promises of the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao scheme.

Taking into consideration the SRS estimates, the Niti Aayog acknowledged the seriousness of the problem in its latest report. However, despite all the officially acknowledged facts, Women and Child Development Minister Smriti Irani claimed in the Lok Sabha that SRB has improved from 923 to 931 girls. She was quoting data

from the Health Management Information System (HMIS), a fundamentally flawed source that largely considers home deliveries and births in government institutions. Data from the HMIS are incomplete and not representative of the country as a whole as births happening in private institutions are under-reported. The HMIS report itself acknowledges that based on the estimated number of births, the number of reported births is much less in both the years considered - 2015-16 and 2018-19.

### Points of delivery

The differences among the three points of delivery become evident when SRB is calculated using data from National Family Health Survey-4 (NFHS-4). Of the 2.5 lakh reported births in the 2010-2014 period, the distribution of births at home, government hospitals and private hospitals was 21%, 52% and 27% respectively and the corresponding SRB figures were 969, 930 and 851.

Thus, private hospitals had a disproportionate excess of male children births, which the HMIS sample excludes. It is to be noted here that sources in the Niti Aayog confirmed that they did consider HMIS data but found after statistical examination that it was unre-



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liable and therefore used SRS.

Further, even when we only consider institutional deliveries in government hospitals, the SRB is falling. The worst regional SRB for government sector was for Northern India (885 girls per thousand boys). The picture was somewhat better for Central India (926) and Southern India (940) while the performance of Eastern India (965) and Western India (959) was even better.

In the Northeast, where the government is the dominant health-care provider, the government sector SRB rivaled that of the private sector (both are 900).

For too long, institutional births have been the goal of the government. That data for the private sector are more skewed has not been articulated in the NFHS re-

ports or adequately dealt with by the Health Ministry. For two decades, in visits to hospitals, particularly private, too often we observed more male children even when the total number of births were small in number. So, we used NFHS 4 data to quantify this bias. It is criminal to use public funds to privilege boy births and facilitate discrimination against girls right from birth. However, for years, in the special neonatal care units (SNCU) set up by the government, there was an excess of about 8% male children in several States.

Regrettably, the government has prioritised an expansion of SNCUs rather than deal with the issue of the 'missing girls'. Protecting the integrity of birth statistics will help the people, governments and health professionals to focus on ameliorating the known gender gaps at birth rather than be complacent with dubious claims.

### Bias over first-born child

An analysis of the NFHS-4 data also revealed a bias when it comes to the first-born child - the SRB among first-born children was 927, meaning that 2.5% of first-born girls are eliminated before birth. This was not the case historically.

Our field visits to various parts of India in the past five years, par-

ticularly in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, where one in every three Indians is born, revealed a massive expansion of ultrasound clinics even in remote corners. And in the absence of a stringent implementation of the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act (PCPNDT Act), practically anyone who wants to determine the sex of the foetus was able to get it done illegally. We are disappointed that the Central Supervisory Board established under the PCPNDT Act has not met for over one-and-a-half years. It should have ideally met at least thrice during this period. We hope the new Health Minister restores the regularity of the meetings.

The Supreme Court has been continuously reminding medical associations since 2002 of their obligation to follow the law, its latest reminder being the formidable 92-page judgment against the Federation of Obstetrics and Gynecological Societies of India (FOGSI) earlier this year. The Indian Medical Association (IMA) has to ensure that private hospitals don't profit from discrimination against girls before birth.

Sabu M. George has been a researcher on girl children for 34 years

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

### A wake-up call?

The death of billionaire entrepreneur and the founder of Café Coffee Day, V.G. Siddhartha, is extremely saddening. The market capitalisation of the company has taken a nosedive in the last few days, which would force the creditors to take a serious haircut. Had he been part of the U.S. system, there is a very high chance that he would have found a way to deal with the creditors and, most importantly, he would have been alive. His death just shows how nascent the corporate debt markets are in India, and how private equity firms operate in the country. Access to capital

markets is key for entrepreneurship and for businesses to thrive and grow. Hence, this should be a wake-up call for the government to see that capital is made available to the firms with good growth prospects, if it is serious about making India's GDP reach \$5 trillion and beyond (Front page, "Siddhartha cremated in family estate," August 1). VARAD SESHADRI, Sunnyvale, California, U.S.

**Criminalising talaq** Marriage is a civil contract and criminalising what is obviously a civil issue is a step in the wrong direction. The Centre's logic that the

Triple Talaaq Bill will act as deterrent to the abhorrent practice of instant talaaq is hard to digest. However, the fact that Muslims take recourse to this detested form of divorce, even after the 2017 Supreme Court verdict, is a worrying development and one cannot but share the government's concerns over this. Religion should not be a factor when it comes to the irresponsible desertion of spouses and children. Herein lies the need for a common divorce law, which the Bill fails to address (Editorial, "Beyond talaaq," August 1).

ABDUL ASSIS P.A., Thrissur, Kerala

■ Rather than addressing a social issue, the passage of the Triple Talaaq Bill through both the Houses of Parliament gives rise to questions. The government's reasoning that it was giving effect to the Supreme Court verdict declaring it unconstitutional is absurd, considering that the Bharatiya Janata Party was opposed to the same court's verdict when it came to allowing entry to women in the Sabarimala shrine. The Centre's claim that it is a step towards gender justice also sounds false. The Act may not be of much benefit as it expects the victim or someone from her family, in most cases women who

come from the poorest sections of the society, to take up the issue against her husband with the concerned authority.

A.G. RAJMOHAN, Anantapur

### Unnao case

The Unnao case appears to be a tragedy from the medieval ages - a poor girl is raped by the local strongman, the state machinery doesn't help and even the judiciary fails to protect her family. (Front page, "SC takes note of complaint by rape survivor's family," August 1). Instead, her alleged tormentors keep openly threatening her and get her family members and

witnesses in the case eliminated. This is a fit occasion for the Supreme Court to step in. A thorough inquiry must be held under its aegis, all culprits arrested immediately and the trial conducted on a day-to-day basis. The victim and her family must be provided strong security. Let people like her tormentors know that rule of law does prevail. In this regard, the fact that the CBI has taken over investigation in the case surely comes as a welcome development.

HARJAS BAINS, Bassi Pathana, Punjab

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