



Today's Thought

The secret of genius is to carry the spirit of the child into old age, which means never losing your enthusiasm. Aldous Huxley.

Looking back to 2012, 2014 elections Polls under a different Govt

What will make the coming Parliamentary elections unique in a sense is the fact that after years, Manipur will see Lok Sabha elections under a non-Congress Government. This will also be the first time in 15 years that the State will see a Lok Sabha election when Imphal is under a BJP led Government. No wonder all eyes are on the BJP and its choice of candidates in the two Parliamentary seats. What will also make the coming elections different from the earlier ones is the point that the vote this time may not be as polarised as the ones witnessed earlier. Remember under what political climate Parliamentary election was held here in 2014 and more specifically when Assembly election was held in 2012 and earlier in 2007. Deeply polarised vote this was what the State witnessed and one can recall the days when Chief Minister of Nagaland Nephru Rio canvassed here while he was still with the NPF back in 2012. In fact so polarised was the vote that diametrically opposing stands used to unite the people on either side of the hills and the valley. This was what was deeply disturbing and coming again to the days of 2012, when Rio turned out to be one of the star campaigners, the calling card was something which seemed to pitch the people of the hills against the people of the valley. This deeply reflected the divide between the Nagas of Manipur and the Meiteis in the valley. The core issue obviously was Nagalim or Greater Nagaland. Today, the NPF is still very much there in the Outer Parliamentary Constituency, and it will be interesting to see how it plays its card this time round.

This time one can expect leaders of NPF from neighbouring Nagaland coming to pitch for their candidate in the Outer Parliamentary Constituency and with the BJP and the Congress also set to field their own candidate in the said Constituency, it will be interesting to see how the campaigning turns out to be. The issue still stands, pending a final solution to the Indo-Naga peace talks, but whether this will pitch one set of people against the other is something which only time will tell. Five years is a pretty long time and while the political outlook on either side may not have changed at all, here is hoping that no political party drums up the issue with an eye on the vote. The coming days will say whether political parties are ready not to play politics on a sensitive issue just to garner some votes. Let a climate be created in such a way the coming Lok Sabha elections offer the best opportunity to the people to bridge whatever divide there may have been and walk shoulder to shoulder. This will make the coming Lok Sabha election all the more meaningful and give all more belief and hope in the greatest definition of democracy. This is what electing leaders should be all about.

Science News

Pests and the plant defenses against them drive diversity in tropical rainforests

Mar 17: Researchers have been baffled by tropical rainforest diversity for over a century; 650 different tree species can exist in an area covering two football fields, yet similar species never grow next to each other. It seems like it's good to be different than your neighbors, but why?

To grow in a tropical rainforest is to engage in constant warfare. Plants battle for resources, such as sunlight, water and minerals. Similar tree species compete for resources in the same ways, so they may inhibit each other's growth.

Plants also battle against herbivore pests. Related trees share the same pests and diseases -- if one gets it, the infestation can spread. Scientists have asked, "What is the primary driver in tropical forest diversity-competition for resources, or herbivore pests?"

For the first time, University of Utah biologists compared the two mechanisms in a single study.

The team analyzed how neighboring trees influence the growth and survival of nine coexisting species of the tree genus Inga in the Panama rainforest.

They compared tree traits for resource acquisition, anti-herbivore defenses and the herbivores that live on the plants.

They found that neighboring trees were basically the same in terms of acquiring resources, but had very different defenses and herbivores.

Indeed, the defensive traits and shared pests impacted growth and survival, while resource acquisition traits had no effect on the plants' success.

These findings indicate that anything impacting pest populations, such as climate change or habitat fragmentation, will have an impact on the health of the rainforest. "Working in these hyper-diverse tropical rainforests makes it abundantly clear just how complex the web of interacting species really is.

No species or individual lives in isolation. At all levels within the food chain species are competing with one another for precious resources and contributing a huge amount of their energy to defending themselves from the barrage of enemies they face, said Dale Forrester, doctoral candidate in the School of Biological Sciences at the University of Utah and lead author of the study.

"We are excited about this study because it highlights some of the important ways these antagonistic interactions might influence tropical diversity."

AGENCIES

An abhorrent and unjust device: On death penalty

Suhrith Parthasarathy



On March 5, a three-judge bench of the Supreme Court delivered verdicts in three different death penalty cases. In two of those the court entirely exonerated the suspects, while in the third it not only found the accused guilty of murder, but also deserving of capital punishment. Individually read, the judgments typify the deep penological confusion that pervades India's criminal justice system. Collectively, the cases demonstrate how arbitrary the death penalty is, how its application is mired by a belief in conflicting values, and how the fundamental requirement of precision in criminal law has been replaced by a rhetorical cry for avenging crime by invoking the "collective conscience" of society.

Conjecture and farce In the first of the cases, Digamber Vaishnav v. State of Chhattisgarh, two persons were convicted of murdering five women and were sentenced to death in 2014. A year later, the Chhattisgarh High Court affirmed these sentences. But the chief testimony, which formed the backbone of the prosecution's case, was that of a nine-year-old child, who was, shockingly, not even an eye-witness to the crime. This, the court therefore ruled, was effectively a conviction premised on surmise and conjecture.

Ankush Maruti Shinde v. State of Maharashtra, the second of the cases, saw a gut-wrenching series of events being reduced to macabre farce. In 2006, a trial court found six persons guilty of rape and murder and sentenced each of them to death. A year later, the Bombay High Court confirmed the finding of guilt, but commuted the sentences imposed on three of the individuals to life imprisonment. However, in 2009, the Supreme Court not only dismissed the appeals filed by those sentenced to death, but also, astonishingly, enhanced the penalties of the three persons whose sentences had been commuted by ordering that they too be punished with death. In doing so, the court relied on a 1996 verdict, in Ravji v. State of Rajasthan, where it had ruled that in determining whether to award the death penalty "it is the nature and gravity of the crime" alone that demand consideration. Although in May 2009, the Supreme Court had declared its earlier ruling in Ravji incorrect, by holding that even in those cases where the crime is brutal and heinous the criminal's antecedents, including his economic and social background, must have a bearing on the award of the sentence, it took until October last year for the court to recall its order sentencing the six persons to death.

During this time, as the court records, "The accused remained under constant stress and in the perpetual fear of death." What is more, one of them, who was later found to be a juvenile at the time when the alleged crime was committed, was kept in solitary confinement. He was not allowed to meet any of the other prisoners and was only allowed an occasional meeting with his mother. For their troubles — for having spent more than a decade on death row despite having committed no crime — the bench ordered that the state pay each of them a sum of ₹5 lakh. But while the court was quick

to apportion blame on the prosecution, it didn't so much as mention its own errors and its own proclivity to mirror the mentality of a mob.

A 'rarest of rare' case Yet, we might have been forgiven for thinking that the court's experience in hearing Digamber Vaishnav and, especially, Ankush Maruti Shinde may have made it more circumspect in upholding death sentences. After all, if these decisions had shown us anything, it was that the judicial process is far from inerrant. But the collective conscience of society, represented through the court's capital punishment jurisprudence, it appears, is still alive and kicking. For in the third of the cases, in Khushwinder Singh v. State of Punjab, it not only affirmed the conviction of the accused, on charges of murdering six members of a family, but also gave its imprimatur to the award of the death penalty. The murders, the judgment holds, were "diabolical and dastardly" and the case fell into the "rarest of rare" categories where "there is no alternative punishment suitable, except the death sentence".

The rarest of rare doctrine has its origins in Bachan Singh v. State of Punjab (1980). There, the court declared Section 302 of the Indian Penal Code, which prescribes the death penalty for murder, as constitutionally valid, but bounded its limits by holding that the punishment can only be prescribed in the rarest of rare cases. Since then, the court has repeatedly cautioned that capital punishment ought to only be decreed when the state can clearly establish that a convict is incapable of being reformed and rehabilitated. But, in Khushwinder Singh, the court does not place on record any such piece of evidence that the state was called on to produce. Indeed, the court does not so much as attempt to answer whether the accused was, in fact, capable of reformation or not. Instead, it merely endorses the death sentence by holding that there simply were no mitigating circumstances warranting an alter-

native penalty.

Victims of the system That capital punishment serves no legitimate penological purpose is by now abundantly clear. There's almost no empirical evidence available showing that the death penalty actually deters crime. If anything, independent studies have repeatedly shown the converse to be true. In the U.S., for instance, States that employ capital punishment have had drastically higher rates of homicide in comparison with those States where the death penalty is no longer engaged. In India, evidence also points to a disproportionate application of the sentence, with the most economically and socially marginalised amongst us suffering the most. The Death Penalty India Report (DPIR), released on May 6, 2016, by Project 39A of the National Law University, Delhi, for example, shows that 74% of prisoners on death row, at the time of the study, were economically vulnerable, and 63% were either the primary or sole earners in their families. More than 60% of those sentenced to death had not completed their secondary school education, and 23% had never attended school, a factor which as the report states, "points to the alienation that they would experience from the legal process, in terms of the extent to which they are able to understand the case against them and engage with the criminal justice system." Just as distressingly, 76% of those sentenced to death belonged to backward classes and religious minorities, including all 12 female prisoners.

In the face of this invidiously prejudiced application, the retention of capital punishment utterly undermines the country's moral foundations. Over the course of the last decade, the Supreme Court may well have expanded the rights of death row prisoners: delays by the President in disposing of mercy petitions now constitute a valid ground for commutation; review petitions filed by death row convicts now have to be mandatorily heard in open court. But as the judgments delivered on March 5 reveal, the very preservation of the death penalty creates iniquitous results. Cases such as Ankush Maruti Shinde, where the accused, as the judgment records, were very poor labourers, "nomadic tribes coming from the lower strata of the society," ought to make it evident that the death penalty is an abhorrent and unjust device.

Not only are wholly irrational criteria applied to arrive at dangerously irreversible decisions, the law's application is made all the more sinister by invariably imposing these standards on the most vulnerable members of society. The Constitution promises to every person equality before the law. But capital punishment renders this pledge hollow. It legalises a form of violence, and it closes down, as Judith Butler wrote, expounding Jacques Derrida, "the distinction between justice and vengeance," where "justice becomes the moralised form that vengeance assumes."

Courtesy : The Hindu Suhrith Parthasarathy is an advocate practising at the Madras High Court

Nothing much but a feeling

-YOUNG THOUGHTS- Birkarnelzelzit Thiyam



At the starting of my YouTube channel, I was throwing my attention to every comment that's dropped under my videos leading me to the questions where "why am I not happy even while doing what I want to do?" Most of the people are falling just to impress for they expect the other to fall with them or catch them. And when those expectations just remain as a mere dream, they start blaming the other and questioning their level of understanding for them. I know most of us have gone or is going through a very bad relationship, all relationships

are made with choices. There is no wrong in taking the best option even while you are in the game, never ever get ruined with a bad relationship, break up if it's needed. There was a point of time

every-day. Experiences have proven loud and clear that what seems to be very difficult turns so easy right after knowing it for how to work with. Trust me, how bad the problem seems like, never stop believing in the simplest solution, for always try solving a problem in the simplest and the lightest way. To make it easier, always try fighting your enemy with the lightest weapon, always try explaining before exploding.

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'Insider/ Outsider — Belonging and Unbelonging in North-East India' review: Displacement diaries

Abdus Salam

Last month, rampaging mobs, agitated over the State government's proposal to 'discuss' the issue of granting Permanent Resident Certificates to six non-tribal communities in Arunachal Pradesh, laid siege to the Assembly building in Itanagar. Overnight violence and the deaths of three protesters sent the plan into deep freeze. In adjoining Assam, an insistent Supreme Court, in early February, asked for the July deadline for finalisation of the National Register of Citizens to be met irrespective of a general election in the intervening months.

The fate of 3.6 million people, of around four million who were left out of the list and have filed claims for inclusion of their names, hangs in the balance. From NRC to PRC, the insider-outsider dialectic in the Northeast is as old as its hills.

The rage on occasion is turned inward, violently as in Itanagar and when Meiteis protesting against the extension of the ceasefire with the NSCN (I-M) to Manipur set the Assembly afire in 2001, or in slow burn, as in Assam's Brahmaputra Valley over the Centre's bid to enact the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill in favour of 'persecuted minorities' from

Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan. But oftentimes the rage is directed against peoples perceived as the non-indigene. The editors of Insider/ Outsider — Belonging and Unbelonging in North-East India offered a wide interpretive canvas to its contributors but the anthology is, at its core, an exposition of how the son-of-the-soil syndrome bedevils the region.

Trauma twice-lived For communities such as the Hindu Sylhetis, the trauma of displacement and dispossession was twice-lived, first on account of Partition and then owing to the pogroms carried out by Khasi ultra-chauvinists.

For the Assamese elite that grew up in the macro-State of which Shillong was capital, the descent to Guwahati after the carving out of Meghalaya was more benign, leaving nostalgia intact. For the 'mainlander', acceptance was hard to win, even if — as an author did — one married into the local commu-

nity. For others still, such as the Chakmas, inclusion remains a will-o'-the-wisp in two States. The pieces have a Shillong skew, with 11 of the 16 referencing the 'Scotland of the East'; perhaps the urgency of bringing out the volume while the tailwinds of NRC-citizenship Bill still blow dictated such a selection.

Yet as account after account illustrates the crumbling of the hill town's cosmopolitanism in pursuit of constitutional protectionism, the horror of the dkhar's (non-tribals') realisation that 'the ground they stood on wasn't theirs enough' hits home. Insider/ Outsider holds a mirror to a Northeast increasingly seeking a warmer embrace in the wider India, retelling what must be retold: do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

Courtesy The Hindu Insider/ Outsider: Belonging and Unbelonging in North-East India; Edited by Preeti Gill & Samrat Choudhary, Amaryllis.

Breaking the chains of violence

Arlene J Schar and Dr David Leffler



Image source : Google Image

In the words of New Zealand's Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, today is "one of New Zealand's darkest days." In the aftermath of today's terrorism, 49 are left dead and at least 20 seriously injured by a calculated attack against two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand. The 70 page manifesto posted online by one of the perpetrators espouses white supremacist views and inspiration from current and past leaders, citing the names of other individuals who have taken part in shootings throughout history to justify their "assault on civilization."

Prime minister Jacinda Ardern states, "These are people that I would describe as having extremist views, that have absolutely no place in New Zealand and in fact have no place in the world." As a civilization, how have we come to this?

So far, our way of addressing terrorist attacks has been to capture the perpetrators and administer justice, which unfortunately does nothing to bring back the victims whose lives have been taken. We have grown so accustomed to terrorist attacks that we have resigned ourselves to a feeling of inevitability that they will occur.

The practical components of IDT are the non-religious Transcendental Meditation (TM) and the more advanced TM-Sidhi programs. When large groups of experts practice these programs together, a powerful field effect of coherence and peace is generated that spills over into the surrounding population. Extensive scientific research has repeatedly confirmed measurable decreases in war deaths, terrorism, and crime when IDT is utilized.

Due to this research the non-profit organization Global Union of Scientists for Peace (GUSP) advocates this simple and cost-effective approach for reducing social stress (see: https://www.gusp.org/global-peace-summit).

Invincible Defense Technology is Cost-Effective For about the cost of a few modern fighter jets, any military could establish a group of warriors trained in this advanced IDT approach.

nally be broken.

Nothing Else has Worked: At this critical juncture of our history, it is not only enough for governments and militaries to take preventative action; it is up to each of us as individuals to examine our own values and honestly assess whether we are promoting peace and tolerance or fostering hatred in our everyday speech and actions. As individuals, we can each embrace the tenets of Transcendental Meditation and set aside twenty minutes twice a day to practice the techniques that will ultimately shift our culture from hate to love.

It is up to each one of us to now take responsibility for the world we have created by together consciously creating a world without terrorism. Arlene J. Schar has served as Dr. Leffler's Executive Assistant at the Center for Advanced Military Science (CAMS) (http://www.StrongMilitary.org since 2015. She has edited and co-authored many of Dr. Leffler's articles.

Dr. David Leffler served as an Associate of the Proteus Management Group at the Center for Strategic Leadership, US Army War College. Currently, he serves as the Executive Director at CAMS.