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B S SHARMA

ADVERTISEMENT MANAGER

KAMAL G FANIBANDA

GENERAL MANAGER & PUBLISHER

K VIJAYAKUMAR

EDITORIAL

edit@epw.in

CIRCULATION

circulation@epw.in

ADVERTISING

advertisement@epw.in

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320-321, A TO Z INDUSTRIAL ESTATE
GANPATRAO KADAM MARG, LOWER PAREL

MUMBAI 400 013

PHONE: (022) 4063 8282

FAX: (022) 2493 4515

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EPW Research Foundation, established in 1993, conducts research on financial and macro-economic issues in India.

DIRECTOR

J DENNIS RAJAKUMAR

C 212, AKURLI INDUSTRIAL ESTATE

KANDIVALI (EAST), MUMBAI 400 010

PHONES: (022) 2887 3038/41

FAX: (022) 2887 3038

epwrf@epwrf.in

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More, Not Less of Politics

It is argued that the armed forces should not “dabble” in politics (“Politicising the Military,” EPW, 19 September 2015). It is believed that this is the way to ensure civilian control over the military and avert a military takeover. Yet, the armed forces exercise veto power over withdrawal of troops from “Disturbed Areas” and removal of Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA). This is military rule in areas considered to constitute India, and confirms that “war is continuation of politics.” Besides, the politics of the rulers dominates the armed forces. The soldiers sent to Naga areas in the 1950s had racial overtones to their campaign which was seen as a way to ward off China. In Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), for decades, the largely non-Muslim force deployed against the Muslims of J&K turned into a laboratory for Hindu communalisation. That the Babri Masjid demolition campaign coincided with military suppression in J&K cannot be missed. All this is politics.

So the question is not of “politicization,” rather it is why a modern republic is stuck to an antiquated system inherited from the colonial masters which creates a two “glass system,” one for officers and another for soldiers. Persons below the officer rank (PBOR) comprise nearly 98% of the ex-servicemen. While the officers’ complaint finds its way into the media, not least because they are “People Like Us,” there is disquiet and outrage at the PBOR raising their own set of demands. From 2 to 6 August, an organisation, the Voice of All-India Ex-Servicemen Society (VESS), sat on a parallel agitation insisting that the interests of the PBORS and commissioned officers are different. Their complaint was that the pension for jawans is calculated as per government rules on a pro rata basis because the jawans do not meet the service precondition of 33 years. Thus, they receive only 40% of the pension they claim they ought to get, because it is in the very nature of their job that they have to retire after 17 years between 35 and 40, in order to keep the *fauj* young. The relationship carries on post-retirement and hierarchies continue to matter.

Even more startling, they spoke about discrimination and exploitation of the jawans. Their charter of demands for the dharna contains significant issues:

The untouchability and ghetto system practiced by all armed forces ancillary services to be abolished, e g, AWHO [Army Welfare Housing Organisation] projects have separate enclaves for Officers and PBORS, even though cost of the dwellings are same for both. Elimination of sewadari system from Army. Soldiers are for fighting wars—not domestic servants.

Re-structuring and modernising forces in professional manner by removing colonial discrimination by their roots, in similar ways of modern forces similar lines of American Army. Discrimination prevalent in armed forces should be eliminated in all its form. Forces have become VVIP racism hubs with almost every facility being reserved for officers, including toilets.

Reducing corruption in armed forces, by creating a platform wherein corrupt practices can be reported by PBOR without fear of retribution—Similar to Whistle Blower Protection Act.

The charter of demands, thus, draws attention to the undemocratic practices which prevail in the armed forces of the Union. Significantly, the officer-rank divide is visible among central para-military forces too (“Retired Paramilitary Men Divided over OROP,” Rakesh Ahuja, *Hindustan Times*, 30 September).

We can believe that the armed forces need a disciplined force, so commands must be obeyed. We may even believe that keeping the force depoliticised is important to ward off the threat of a military putsch. But when deep fault lines have appeared, it is better to take the bull by the horns and move for democratisation and reform of the armed forces, and the rules which govern them. In other words, we need more politics, not less. Need more of left and democratic engagement with the armed forces of the union, as was the practice up to the early 1950s.

Gautam Navlakha

NEW DELHI

Eating Meat

This is with reference to “Will Eat Anything That Moves’: Meat Cultures in Globalising India” (EPW, 26 September 2015). While I agree with the gist of the argument put forward by the authors that it makes sense for animal advocates to distance themselves from rhetoric that leans

towards communalism and the exploitation of animals, I have some reservations regarding certain other aspects of the article. For one, it seems to me that the authors are speaking only of a middle and upper-middle class group based in Central and North India. Non-vegetarianism has been prevalent in most parts of India and among the economically poor, especially because it is cheaper to buy and preserve meat than fresh vegetables. Meat is consumed by the lower and middle classes for meeting protein requirements. In the Indian context, the vegetarian equivalent would be dal, which is actually almost equally priced with the cheapest meat in the market. For the lower and middle classes consuming meat is not about modernity, it is an age-old practice and it is about survival. Then there is the matter of cuisine. In certain kinds of cuisine, especially in southern states like Kerala, the customary practice while preparing daily meals is that vegetarian food is prepared with a number of curries, whereas if the meal is non-vegetarian then a smaller number of items has to be prepared. Therefore, for meat-eating families in the long run it is easier, less time-consuming and more economical to prepare meat/fish dishes.

Teena Antony

BENGALURU

Concern for NMML

We, university teachers, research scholars, students and concerned academics who have used the resources of the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML), commend the outgoing director Mahesh Rangarajan for his outstanding work at this institution over the last four years. He belongs to that breed of institutional heads who function as great facilitators. They allow a diverse range of people with a plurality of perspectives to inhabit a space of academic research and intellectual exchange, expand the resources available to them, and give them full scope to rework disciplinary boundaries. As the Director of NMML, Mahesh Rangarajan was easily accessible to all. His was a rare, hands-on yet self-effacing leadership, which revitalised NMML's connection with university

teachers and young scholars and opened up its activities to a wider public.

At the outset, a widespread, and sometimes deliberate misconception has to be corrected. It is unjustified to assume that if a research institution is named after a particular individual—in this case Jawaharlal Nehru—the entire body of research and public activity around it is meant only to preserve his legacy. NMML's collections and activities are not limited to Nehru's legacy: in fact, the collection of papers, letters and interviews preserved there embraces an array of distinguished personalities across the spectrum of public life. Acquisitions stepped up rapidly over the last four years to include eminent figures such as the mathematician and historian D D Kosambi, scholar Amrita Rangasami, the Hindi journalist Ved Pratap Vaidik, the Hindi novelist and dramatist Upendranath "Ashk," scientists such as Yash Pal, the naturalist M Krishnan, diplomats such as Rikhi Jaipal, Rashid Ali Bey and Subimal Dutt, the industrialist Rahul Bajaj, economists such as S Guhan and Arun Bose, and the literary scholar and activist G N Devy.

The lecture series, organised with clockwork efficiency by NMML staff over the last four years, has invited scholars to reflect on the dramatic changes taking place around us. There is a vibrant Hindi series, "Samaj, Itihas aur Sahitya"; young scholars have presented impressive research under "Histories of the North-East, New Perspectives" and "Interrogating Social Justice"; and the "Cities in History" lectures have tapped interest in the urban as a vital site for democratic transformation. Finally, the library today stands thoroughly updated, a pleasure to read and work in.

We recognise that the bid to control and regulate the autonomy of cultural and political institutions, to substitute one kind

of orthodoxy for another, can emerge from different sites of power. An independent-minded academy must justify itself by professional protocols. At the same time, it is also being called upon to find innovative ways to engage with the production and use of history taking place at other sites. These are histories in which the minorities, lower castes, "tribals" and marginalised border communities find distinctive ways of evoking their experience. However, there are also other histories, increasingly strengthened by the power of institutional and social hierarchy, which seek to embed a narrative of majoritarian triumphalism in our educational system and cultural institutions. This is a narrative that excludes diversity and dissent and violates the constitutional right of citizens to representation in these forums, irrespective of class, caste, religion or political affiliation.

We strongly feel that NMML should not be paralysed by one such bid just when its activities are establishing a stronger connection between professional academic life and wider discourses about history and society.

We call upon all concerned citizens to urge executive bodies of autonomous cultural and academic institutions, such as NMML, to protect the space for democratic discussion, dissent and minority views at these sites which exist for the exchange of ideas. Equally, those who are appointed to run these institutions must have independent standing and sound credentials in their field and be given the room to work creatively while keeping their intellectual and professional dignity intact.

Ravi Ahuja, Rustom Bharucha, Partha Chatterjee, Tapati Guha-Thakurta, Sudipta Kaviraj, Udaya Kumar, Anil Naurya, Francesca Orsini, Sumit Sarkar, Sambuddha Sen, Rajeswari Sunderrajan, Thomas Metcalf and more than 200 others.

Web Exclusives

The following articles have been published in the past week in the Web Exclusives section of the EPW website. They have not been published in the print edition.

- (1) Changes in Electronic Waste Management: From E-Waste (Management & Handling) Rules 2011 to Draft E-Waste Management Rules 2015 — *Kalyan Bhaskar*
- (2) Waste Is Yours and Mine: Citizenship in Garbage Bin — *Francesco Obino*
- (3) Of Cows, Muslims, and the Right to Religious Difference: Remembering Gandhi in an Era of Escalating Communal Violence in India — *G Arunima*
- (4) Ahimsa at Odds: Individual Ethics, Structural Violence and India — *KS Jacob*
- (5) Privatising Healthcare in Rajasthan — *Narendra Gupta and Chhaya Pachauli*

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320-321, A to Z Industrial Estate

Ganpatrao Kadam Marg,

Lower Parel,

Mumbai 400 013, India

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EPW welcomes original research papers in any of the social sciences.

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- Articles accepted for publication can take up to six to eight months from date of acceptance to appear in the EPW. Papers with immediate relevance for policy would be considered for early publication. Please note that this is a matter of editorial judgment.

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Ganpatrao Kadam Marg,

Lower Parel, Mumbai 400 013, India

Email: edit@epw.in, epw.mumbai@gmail.com