

KASHMIR
OBSERVER

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K O V I E W

Stirrings Of Political Activity

The last week witnessed stirrings of fresh political activity in Kashmir with a group of leaders headed by Altaf Bukhari calling on the Governor Girish ChanderMurmur and later also meeting the visiting foreign envoys which included the US ambassador to India Kenneth I Juster. In talks with LG, Bukhari sought restoration of statehood, exclusive rights for locals over land and government jobs and economic packages for different sectors among other demands. Similarly, top PDP leader Muzaffar Hussain Beigh held a press conference in Jammu and took on his party leader Mehbooba Mufti for “provoking” New Delhi to downgrade J&K’s status. From both these activities, it is apparent that the statehood and the domicile status are emerging as the main demands for a small group of politicians willing to do business with New Delhi following the revocation of Article 370 on August 5.

However, they are certain to face resistance from the main regional political forces like National Conference and the PDP who are still holding their ground on the issue of J&K’s autonomy. It is still unclear what form the politics of the two parties takes once their leaders are released. Once released, these politicians could decide to unite and launch a mass movement for the reversal of the revocation of Article 370. Considering the mood in the Valley, such a movement is likely to witness an overwhelming public participation. And should this happen, the long running separatist movement in the state-turned-union territory will meld with the struggle for restoration of special rights under India’s constitution. And this can pose New Delhi its biggest challenge in Kashmir.

This is why seized of the potential implications of the release of the mainstream politicians, New Delhi seems unwilling to take any such step anytime soon. Other than three former chief ministers –Dr Farooq Abdullah, Omar Abdullah and Mehbooba Mufti - centre’s sweep in Kashmir encompasses many major politicians and civil society actors. A former MLA Engineer Rashid has been slapped with Public Safety Act. In all this, Dr Abdullah’s arrest is seen as an act of overreach. He is not only the tallest mainstream leader in J&K but also one of the senior most leaders in the country. He has always stood for the country’s cause in Kashmir and for which he has always been abhorred by separatist groups.

Meanwhile, first signs of some political activity are in evidence with Bukhari and Beigh indicating their willingness to reconcile to J&K’s post-August 5 status. But it will formally restart only when the top leaders like Dr Abdullah, Omar and Mehbooba are released and allowed to hold political meetings and talk to people.

O T H E R O P I N I O N

Ministers in Valley

Since August 5, when the government removed Jammu & Kashmir’s special status and downgraded it to a Union Territory, the people of the erstwhile state, especially in the Valley, have been cut off by an internet ban that has been relaxed just a little, and curfew-like conditions, because of restrictions imposed by the government and partly due to civil disobedience. Against this backdrop, the planned outreach by the government to J&K, through a team of 36 ministers who will visit it this week, appears to be in line with the thinking of the country’s political leadership that a new normal has been established and accepted, and that the time is now ripe to assert this.

Five ministers in this team will focus only on meeting representatives of the public in the Valley with the aim of “disseminating” to the information about the government’s policies for the newly created UT. The outreach, oddly scheduled when snowfall has caused disruptions on top of the absence of communication, may indicate the hurry in the government to start unrolling its plans for J&K.

An election will have to be called sooner than later and the BJP is clearly getting its ducks in a row.

If there is a message here, it is this — the Centre will make all the decisions and impose them, and the people of J&K, or their politicians, must not be allowed any agency. This message is not new, it has been underlined by successive regimes at the Centre. But this time, it is being rubbed in even more harshly. The top political leaders of J&K remain in detention and cut off from the rest of the country by the continuing ban on free communication. The people have no access to information from a plurality of sources to make informed decisions, or even put forth their opinions to the visiting ministers.

It is unjust that the government can send senior functionaries to J&K to meet and interact with people, even as three former chief ministers, and a host of other leaders, are locked up and unable to engage in any political activity. It is disingenuous of the government to claim normalcy and take delegations of diplomats to drive this home, but prevent Opposition leaders from visiting Kashmir.

If the aim behind removing special status, as the government claimed on August 5, is to “integrate” J&K with India, it is questionable this will be achieved by sending ministers to inform them of the decisions the Centre has taken on their behalf without involving them. What is first required in J&K is a full restoration of the fundamental rights of the people that were taken from them on August 5.

The Indian Express

Does Practice Really Make You Perfect?

Many factors, whether genetic or environmental, are always at play

CHERYL RAO | GULF NEWS

PRACTICE makes perfect,” said our parents and our teachers and everyone else who tried to get us to learn anything when we were young. In time, having practised, mostly half-heartedly, and failed miserably at learning to play the piano or get through those classical dance moves or even play a half decent game of volleyball, we gave up and explained away our lack of interest as lack of talent / flair / and whatever else we could think of in the moment.

However, decades down the line, when it came to our children, we once again spouted the adage of practice makes perfect, urging them to apply themselves to acquiring skills we thought they needed.

Practice, we said, was the most effective — nay, the sole means — to become adept at solving those foxing maths equations or hurtling over those hurdles or most anything else we thought our children should achieve in their lives!

As if to prove to them that we were in the fray with them, we tried to set an example with our everyday work life. Thus we applied ourselves diligently to the most tedious or the most exciting tasks and sure enough, we could soon add up a whole page of numbers in record time or slice, dice and chop our way through a mountain of vegetables and meat in the space of time most others would take to handle a mere fraction of the same.

We even improved on our art and letters with practice and could somehow conjure up a story within the tightest deadline where once we would beg for extensions of time. True, we were never going to be a blazing star like Jerry Siegel or Bob Kane but we were doing our little mite and getting better at it, weren’t we?



New findings

But now, just as we are about to get a trifle complacent about getting better at what we do; just as we are ready to spout personal experience to convince our offspring that they can climb any mountain they choose to if they work at it, if they practice, if they persist, here comes the bombshell!

Latest studies say that practice does not make all that much difference! Apparently, there is a lot more to it than mere practice, despite the quote (attributed to Edison) that genius is one per cent inspiration and ninety-nine per cent perspiration.

So, if you thought you were going to take up the violin at this late stage of your life and practice for some ten thousand hours and then hold a recital at Carnegie Hall, you may wind up pretty disappointed — not to mention completely exhausted!

I guess the basic dilemma we had when we were kids remains. How much do we practice before we either get good at what we do or we give up and try something else? All those other factors,

whether genetic or environmental, are also at play — but where does that leave us?

Those who like the easy way out — and of course, I am included in those numbers — would probably sit back and refuse to try because we do not have the “innate talent” or were passed over when it came to handing out “a gift” with the paint brush or the willow bat or whatever.

But there will be many who do not take that as the official last word on the value of practice. They will instead knuckle down, ignore detractors and continue to work at it and hope for the best.

For who knows, sometime soon another compelling study or result of further research may once again show that there is no substitute for hard work and sheer stick-to-it-ive-ness.

Still then, I guess the basic dilemma we had when we were kids remains. How much do we practice before we either get good at what we do or we give up and try something else?

— Cheryl Rao is a journalist based in India.

Am I Wiser Than My Grandparents?

Judging the past by the values of today can be its own kind of intolerance

PICO IYER, NEW YORK TIMES

IN Canada recently, I ran across one of the most anguished mea culpas I’ve encountered in a long time, in a piece prominently displayed in the Toronto Star. Its author, JP Laroque, confessed that in 2008, he foolishly dressed up for Halloween as someone from south of the American border, thus being guilty, all at once, unusually for his considerate homeland, of racial insensitivity, cultural appropriation and a joke in inexcusable taste. That a photo of himself wearing a sign that said, “MEXICAN!” might surface at any moment meant, even more profoundly, that he had “lived with regret ever since.”

I read the piece with care and sympathy, not least because Canada is such a model of global awareness and forward thinking. And it was hard not to feel for this gay man of biracial origin who remained haunted by his tone-deaf cruelty. But a lesser part of me couldn’t help wondering if he hadn’t committed even more egregious sins over the past 11 years (or even 11 days). I certainly have. And whether he didn’t feel that cultural mores and assumptions are always shifting, rendering what was not so exceptional in one era abhorrent in the next. Aren’t all of us at least a little more mature and discerning now than we were a decade ago, partly because we’ve been schooled by our mistakes? Before long, I was beginning to wonder whether Laroque, a writer for the TV series Slasher, wasn’t simply replacing ethnocentricity, noxious and unacceptable as it is, with chronocentrism — a term coined in 1974 to suggest among other things, prejudice against other times, rather than against other races.

One definition of an adolescent is a person who thinks that what is new is better, precisely because he has so little sense of what is old.

In certain respects — the treatment of women, say, and the LGBTQ community, as well as of what Canadians call “visible minorities” — we have. Growing up dark-skinned in England and the influential demagogue Enoch Powell predicting rivers “foaming with much blood” if people who looked like me continued to be born in his grey-skied land, I’m delighted to return to a newly-open and creative London where the average person was born in another country. My four grandparents, all born in India, came of age in a richly multicultural society, but one in which they had little chance of encountering



neighbours from Cambodia or Haiti or Ethiopia, as so many New Yorkers or Angelenos can today. Even 20 years ago, I could never have imagined that in 2008 the United States would elect a president who is a living refutation of black-and-white distinctions.

I’m less thrilled, though, when people fault Shakespeare, say, for daring, in his job as writer (and actor), to try to enter the souls of a woman, a Moor and a devil from Italy (which he does in Othello alone). I’m wary of assuming that, just because T.S. Eliot held some positions that we now find offensive, we are more “moral” or attuned to the complexities of human nature than he was. I’m glad that I live in a more diverse world than my grandparents could have imagined, but I’m not sure that means I’m wiser than they were.

Eagerness to right injustices
For a grateful immigrant like myself, the blessing of America is its freedom from the habits and constraints of the past, its eagerness to right injustices, its belief that we can do better than we did. That is part of what draws people like me here from older and more disenchanting cultures. But those who dismiss the past just because it’s past run the risk of not appreciating the fact that the past, like most of us in earlier times, was imperfectly doing its best. As more and more

of us imprison ourselves in the moment — thank you, addictive screens! — we devolve into a “presentism” that shares some of the cruelty of racism. Technology may advance along a relatively straight line, but human nature does not.

One definition of an adolescent is a person who thinks that what is new is better, precisely because he has so little sense of what is old. One definition of a grown-up is someone who appreciates how little she can be sure of or dismiss. The surest way to be in the wrong is to assume with blind conviction you’re in the right.

As I came to the climax of Laroque’s article — “I can’t expect forgiveness, now or ever” — I said a silent prayer that the writer would not be committing a sequel to his article in 2030, or even next year, berating himself for having values in 2019 that will seem woefully outdated by then. When Oscar Wilde has a character say, “Nothing is so dangerous as being too modern. One is apt to grow old-fashioned quite suddenly,” he’s writing of not just hemlines and suits, but of judgements and assumptions. That we think differently than we did does not mean that we’re better than we were.

— Pico Iyer is the author, most recently, of Autumn Light and A Beginner’s Guide to Japan.