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## Lack of clear policy leads to silence on the Baloch front

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OPINION

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The reference to Balochistan in the prime minister’s 2016 Independence Day speech triggered speculation over possible Indian support for the Baloch cause. But the debate on Balochistan did not last long as it was driven by a few cryptic statements of the prime minister and died a natural death without further inputs from the government.

Why did the government fail to sustain public interest? The Bangladeshi experience is instructive in this regard. East Pakistan bordered upon West Bengal, one of the most populous states of India that was well-represented in the Parliament, bureaucracy, media, and intelligentsia. Partition did not completely disrupt ties between East Pakistan and West Bengal. The elite among the partition refugees from East Pakistan were influential within India. And there was a significant Hindu population in East Pakistan that was among the Pakistani army’s primary targets. When Pakistan unleashed a genocide targeting Bengalis, West Bengal played an important role in raising the issue across the world and hosted the liberation movement as well as refugees.

Balochistan does not share a border with India. Both the pre-1947 Baloch Muslim settlers and post-1947 non-Muslim Baloch refugees are small in numbers and have assimilated with related groups in northern and western India. Unlike the Bengalis from East Pakistan, the people of Baloch origin do not enjoy any clout in India. Moreover, there is hardly any awareness about Balochistan in India except that it is occasionally associated with temples such as Lasbela’s Hinglaj Mata. Our history textbooks focus entirely on Sindh and



Hinglaj Mata

(West) Punjab ignoring Balochistan, whose history goes back to Mehrgarh that predates the Indus Valley Civilisation. Also, the Indian intelligentsia and media are divided. One section is more concerned about human rights violations in distant countries than in nearby Balochistan. The other con-

flates the desirability and feasibility of Baloch independence and is, therefore, wildly enthusiastic about the Baloch cause. In contrast, the Bangladeshi liberation movement received widespread support cutting across ideological divides.

Given the lack of awareness about Balochistan, the divisions within the Indian intelligentsia and media, and the minuscule Baloch population in India, it is difficult to mobilise public opinion in favour of the Baloch cause. The difficulty is compounded by the absence of a clear government policy on Balochistan. In fact, the government has not even adopted a uniform spelling for Balochistan in its communications.

To facilitate public debate, the government has to first identify the parameters for evaluating the desirability of intervening in Balochistan. While we should not allow the short run calculus to be muddled by misplaced hopes of better ties with Pakistan (and China), we should not be over-optimistic about the long-term prospects either. We should not intervene under the illusion that an independent Balochistan will necessarily embrace secular democracy or provide India with preferential access to its mineral wealth and overland access to Afghanistan and Central Asia.

The Bangladeshi experience is sobering. The secular liberation movement lost ground to religious extremists and the army, who supported insurgencies and cross-border terrorism targeting India. Also, until recently, Bangladesh did not provide India with access to the North-east. (In the meantime, China, which supported Pakistan in 1971, emerged as a major trade partner and defence supplier to Bangladesh.)

India’s Balochistan policy should be governed by an assessment of the country’s long-term interests and its capability to intervene meaningfully in favour of the Baloch people, who are divided across three countries and are led by a fragmented leadership. The Baloch issue should not be used as a bargaining chip or quick-fix to India’s Pakistan problem because that will both harm the Baloch people and reduce India’s bargaining power vis-à-vis Pakistan.

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POETS AND PROPHETS AREN’T  
SUBJECT TO COPYRIGHT LAWS

JUGGLING ACT

Jug Suraiya

Writer, columnist and author of several books



Not for the proud man apart  
From the raging moon I write  
On these spindrift pages  
Nor for the towering dead  
With their nightingales and psalms  
But for the lovers, their arms  
Round the griefs of the ages,  
Who pay no praise or wages  
Nor heed my craft or art

~Dylan Thomas

In the film *Il Postino*, the village postman gives the girl he loves a poem he passes off as his own, though it has been written by Pablo Neruda, living in exile in the small Italian community. When Neruda berates the postman, the young man replies: “Just because you wrote the poem, that doesn’t mean it belongs to you. Poetry belongs to those who need it.”

Patent attorneys may be scandalised by such a

express what cannot be said yet cannot be left unsaid, the wordless lyricists whom the world calls spiritual masters?

“Please go from here. Go away and don’t listen to me,” J Krishnamurti would exhort the disciples who flocked to hear him speak. Like Borges, or the fictive Italian postman, Krishnamurti knew that what he had to say had no meaning—unless others took it away from him and made it into their own, each according to their individual needs.

Kierkegaard would have approved wholeheartedly. For the Danish philosopher, truth was subjectivity. To the extent you absorbed, or internalised, someone else’s teachings, you expropriated what was taught, taking from it what you needed.

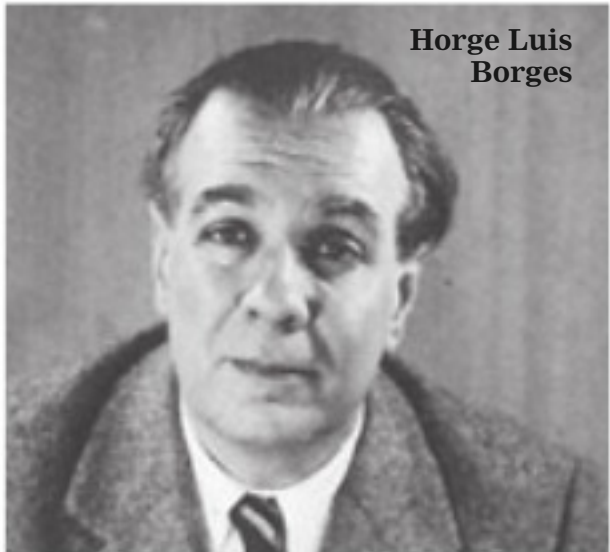
Could this lead to a perverse solipsism, based on a deliberate misunderstanding of another’s words, as happened in the case of the Nazi takeover of Nietzschean philosophy?

It could, certainly. But the Nazi who was true to himself—in the Kierkegaardian sense, if such an impossibility were possible—could not hold Nietzsche, or even Hitler, responsible for his Nazism, no more than the true Buddhist would hold Buddha responsible for his Buddhism.

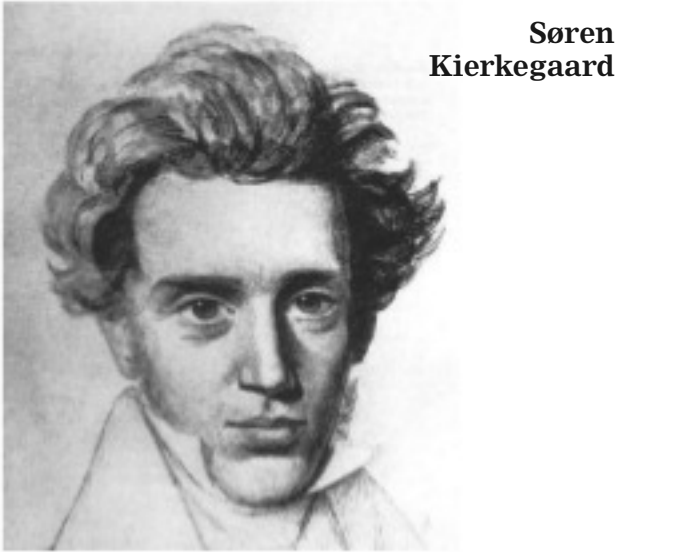
There is of course a cosmological world of difference between Nazism and Buddhism, or any spiritual discipline. Fascism is premised on the principle of an idolised Führer demanding obedi-



Pablo Neruda



Jorge Luis  
Borges



Søren  
Kierkegaard



Friedrich  
Nietzsche

Who does ‘own’ poetry? The person who creates it? Or those who make it a part of the living air, a common legacy with which to give utterance to voiceless longings? To whom does the fragrance of the rose belong? The flower, or the passing traveller enraptured by its scent?

laissez-faire interpretation of copyright laws. But by his response, the postman reveals that he might have a greater insight into the nature and ownership of poetry than the poet himself.

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As a struggling writer in Buenos Aires, Borges would enter workingmen’s bars and slip unsigned copies of his writings into the pockets of jackets hanging by the door. Nor would he hang about outside, to see what fate befell his clandestine literary offerings.

Borges had realised what too few writers do. That what a writer writes lives, if at all, not on a page, but on the sheet of silence that is another’s mind. If this is true of poets and writers, who must deal with the clumsy pen-and-ink limitations of their craft, how much more so for those who

ence. Spiritualism, including the verbalised variety called poetry, is premised on the universality of autonomy.

He who claims to follow me does not follow me, said the Zen master, for a follower presumes a followed, and both are illusory. By the same token, that which says it is the Tao is not the Tao. The Italian postman might add the postscript: This poem does not belong to the poet, or to me, but to all the countless lovers, through all the ages, who ever have need of it.

What of the poetry of pure consciousness that lies behind the words of a Christ, a Nanak, a Mahavir, a Mohammed? Can that unwritable poetry, which begins where words end, belong only to them and their followers, or to all who choose to make it their own?

The village postman wouldn’t bother to reply to that. He’d knock and leave on the doorstep for us to discover; postcards from the edge, with no address of sender or recipient, both of whom are one, and everyone.

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OPINION

J S Rajput

Former director of the NCERT



When Textbooks Fill Coffers  
And Kill Joy of Learning

Textbooks are the pivot of modern-day education systems. Preparing textbooks requires scholars, academics, and teachers familiar with child psychology and the process of growing up, stage-wise requirements of the learning ladder and, also the expectations of the testing agencies. Authors must also be well-versed in the ever-changing pedagogy, issues like curriculum load, burden of the bag, and all that snatches the joys of childhood and adolescence from the children. No author of a textbook can ignore the given: “It is the supreme art of a teacher to awaken joy in creative expression and knowledge!” Textbooks can be prepared only through cumulative inputs and combined efforts of experts.

Textbooks at national level are prepared by the NCERT through a very well-evolved process. These books receive widespread appreciation, and acceptance. State government agencies normally develop their own textbooks incorporating local elements of curriculum, and keeping the NCERT books as the model for guidance. Things are, however, not as simple and linear as there are private publishers, private schools, commercial considerations, unscrupulous practices and nexus among the corrupt. Often, state governments approve privately published textual materials after ‘scrutiny’. CBSE-affiliated schools have the liberty of using books of their choice up to Class VIII; private publishers and schools are pretty pleased about it. Recently, the CBSE ordered the use of NCERT books in its affiliated schools in all classes. Protests followed and, once again, it is practically status quo ante.

What happens in India is, indeed, a global phenomenon. Eminent physicist Richard Feynman, Nobel laureate of 1965, once became a member of the State Curriculum Commission of California that was supposed to vet the quality of textbooks. He wrote a chapter, ‘Judging Books by Their Covers’, which describes how the “experts” had evaluated the book that was not ready but its cover page was indeed submitted to beat the submission deadline. In this chapter, Feynman wrote: “As a rule, however, state agencies don’t want legitimate evaluations of textbooks that publishers submit for adoption, because the agencies are allied with the publishers. The adoption proceedings staged by these agencies are not designed to help school districts, protect students or to serve the interests of taxpayers. Rather, they are designed to serve the interests of the publishers, to generate approvals and certifications for the publisher’s books, and to help sell these books to local schools.” Without any substantial changes, it could be a statement from one of State Textbook Approval Agency of India.

In India, private schools enjoy unfettered power, as even the most powerful and resourceful go to them for admission of their wards. Often schools compete among themselves in prescribing additional textbooks, supplementary books, support books, even answers to exercises contained in textbooks. That results in avoidable burden on children. Schools blame it on tough competition ahead to get into prestigious professional institutes, or to get admission in institutions abroad. In all this the bare basics of developing professionally-sound textbooks are lost. The quest for better textbooks must continue. Einstein once said, “Reading, after a certain age, diverts the mind from its creative pursuits”. This could be an enlightening input for textbook developers. He once told a firm believer in rote-memory that there was no need to get the whole book by heart. It is enough for you to know where you can get information. Such considerations could help develop new textbooks, free from obsolescence, incorporating the new and necessary, igniting creativity and, permitting children “learning to learn”.

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CBSE ordered the use of NCERT books in its schools. Protests followed; now it is practically status quo ante.

India Must Act on Pakistani Plans to Make Gilgit-Baltistan the Fifth Province

SECURITY SCAN

Maj. Gen. (Retd) G D Bakshi

War veteran and strategic analyst



Track two talks with Pakistan is fast becoming a profitable cottage industry in this country. This peace talks lobby felt that our surgical strike and fire assaults that had chastised Pakistan last year was just a brave flash in the pan and we could now return to the track two dialogue in a business-as-usual mould. It mattered little to them that Pakistan’s ISI had simply switched tactics and was now using Islamic State fronts, and local Maoists and criminals to sabotage our 1,20,000-km rail network. In November last year, 150 Indians were killed and 200 wounded in a serious act of rail sabotage in Kanpur. This was virtually equivalent of another Mumbai 26/11. It was sought to be buried under the carpet. Three MPs recently reached Islamabad to signal all was well once more. Possibly Uncle Sam had given the nudge and nod, and the doves were straining to fly to Islamabad

in droves. Setting the stage were activists such as Gurmehar Kaur who informed us with a flourish of cards that not Pakistan but war had killed her father. It was time to make peace and the only way to establish it was to gift the Valley to Pakistan on a platter! The Ramjas College fracas now makes much more sense in hindsight.

In 1998, Prime Minister Vajpayee and members of his Cabinet had ridden the peace bus to Lahore. It was a grand gesture like Neville Chamberlain’s (the British PM who had returned to England from Berlin crowing “Peace in our times”). A year later the Second World War had started). In our case, the Kargil War started just six months later in May 1999. Pakistanis have developed back-stabbing into a fine art. The Americans push us into peace talks and the Pakistanis enjoy humiliating us. Even as our Parliamentarians were popping the champagne in Islamabad, the Pa-



Stone-pelters in Kashmir

kistani Minister for Inter-Provincial Co-ordination grandly announced to Geo TV that a committee headed by Foreign Affairs Advisor Sartaj Ajiz had recommended that Gilgit-Baltistan be incorporated as the fifth State of Pakistan (in addition to Punjab, Pashtunkhwa, Sindh and POK). The Pak Constitution, he said, would be duly amended soon. It was a highly premeditated and outrageous provocation—a virtual slap in the face and a brazen attempt to turn de-facto occupation of Indian territory into de-jure ownership. Our Parlia-

mentarians should have flown back the very next day to register our protest. All that we got were rather feeble and anaemic statements from our foreign ministry. It had the air of déjà vu. In the 1950s, China had simply gone ahead and built the Aksai-Chin highway through Indian territory. It took us nearly three years to even find out that such a road had been built in our area. In 2016, China announced the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor with great fanfare and has built the road alignments through Indian territory. Both China and Paki-

Should Pakistan declare Gilgit-Baltistan its fifth state, India must abrogate Article 370 of the Constitution to begin with. We have allowed J&K’s extended communal riot to go on under the rubric of ‘freedom struggle’ and ‘free speech’

stan held Indian sovereignty over J&K in utter contempt. All we can manage in return is anaemic whimpers of futile protest.

Pakistan claims J&K is a disputed territory. Gilgit-Baltistan is part of J&K and Pakistan never tires of saying the case of J&K is before the UN Security Council. Yet it can unilaterally alter the status of Gilgit-Baltistan. Does it consider India such a weak and pusillanimous state? The onus of asserting and restoring our sovereignty over POK and Gilgit-Baltistan is squarely on India. China is using Pakistan to keep India bullied, cowed down and wholly preoccupied in South Asia. If things go on in this fashion, India will be left with little option but to deal militarily with a Pakistan, whose asymmetric adventurism and provocations scale new heights each passing month.

Meanwhile, defence and modernisation of the armed forces seem to be slipping dangerously in our list of priorities. State politics of Goa take precedence over national security and a sensitive portfolio like defence is left to be tenemented by a part-time defence minister who is burdened with a crucial portfolio like Finance. The unfortunate impression given out is that national de-

fence is among our lowest priority. As a percentile of the GDP, our defence budget has fallen to 1.6 per cent. This drift in defence could have serious long-term consequences. In 1962, our political elite had reached the firm conclusion that wars could just not happen anymore. After the disaster of 1962, we have had to fight three major conventional wars in 1965, 1971 and 1999. If despite this, we refuse to learn lessons and prepare ourselves for the possibilities of conflict, we will have no one to blame but ourselves.

Should Pakistan declare Gilgit-Baltistan its fifth state, India must abrogate Article 370 of the Constitution to begin with. The problem in J&K is primarily rabidly communal. It has been an extended communal riot with terrorist violence, ethnic cleansing and arson of secular schools. We have allowed it to go on under the rubric of a ‘freedom struggle’ and now ‘free speech’ for seven decades. It was a tragic mistake to thin out troops from South Kashmir and move them to the borders under the pressure of human rights enthusiasts and votaries of a ‘political solution’. We must check this dangerous drift in matters of national security.

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