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EDITORIAL

Memories and images of Uttarakhand are still fresh in our minds. The government of the state has declared 9 September as Himalaya Diwas to ‘address livelihood issues in the Himalayan region and work towards its conservation’. But to what avail? We are in the midst of another severe calamity, this time in Kashmir. We have to introspect and accept that we are equally responsible for ‘natural’ disasters in which many thousands lose their lives and livelihoods.

The photo essay in this issue is a reminder of what man-made brutality has done to a forgotten region of this country—the north-east. Some might find the images uncomfortable; but reality can often be harsh, as it is here where ethnic and insurgent violence have been almost integral to life over decades.

Much of this and more is failure of governance, and a few of the papers in this issue deal with it in some way or another.

How do you understand democracy in the context of the Maoist movement when governments have declared it as the ‘most serious threat to Indian democracy’? This is the question Ajay Mehra negotiates in his paper. He traces the movement from its beginnings, and one is left wondering at the rhetoric spewed by various governments that have achieved little else except ‘bred rebellion and provided the Maoists’ their foot soldiers’. India’s democracy is also under scrutiny in Ajay Dandekar’s paper on the denotified tribes of India. Despite the fact that the 1871 enactment declaring a large number of communities as ‘criminal tribes’ was overturned, even today the question of their rights as citizens needs a closer look.

Social policy is at the heart of three papers. In a thought-provoking piece, Dipankar Gupta writes that ‘threshold markers’, be they for determining the number of BPL families in India, to cite just one example, are knee-jerk reactions that can distract us from much-needed rigorous social policy that should instead

consider a population undivided by such markers. Using two examples, Vinay Sitapati argues that while power and legitimacy are part of the judicial system, what is absent is the crucial factor of *judicial impact*—the de facto effort of the court to make sure that judgements are implemented at the ground level if judicial power and independence are not to remain toothless. Across the world, as Rainuka Dagar shows, police organisations have come to recognise the need to introduce reforms to better respond to and protect citizens, especially women, minorities and migrants. Taking the case of registered NGOs, called *Saanjh Kendras*, her paper gives insights into how accountable and legitimate policing can be achieved.

It is a truism that culture is deeply embedded in our lives. Poile Sengupta defines theatre as performance; and performance can be seen in everyday life around us—from classrooms to law courts. In Indian philosophical thought, life itself is compared to a *nataka*, or play. Would Poile Sengupta see performance in democracy and governance? Maybe. The difference perhaps being the absence of the playwright.

Axel Michaels regards Hinduism as defined by pluralism and diversity. He breaks it down by differentiating between three religions and four forms of rituals within Hinduism, and argues that many follow more than one path of religiosity. He does not, unlike some, glorify this complex institution.

Geeti Sen's long association with Nepal is brought out beautifully in her paper. As we turn the pages, the imagery of Hindu and Buddhist iconography is quite magical.

Finally, Uma Das Gupta connects us to a facet of Tagore that is less talked about, but what he himself considered his life's work—his grassroots efforts for an alternate education that culminated in Visva-Bharati. Archival photographs complement her interesting essay.

Festivals and celebrations are upon us, but let us remember those who have lost their lives and the huge loss of livestock, agriculture and property. One can only hope that this time lessons are learnt and steps taken to ensure such tragedies are not repeated in future.



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