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# OPINION --- EXPRESS

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Cover Story

# STRIKE BACK!

**Just 14 days after Pulwama terror attack, India hits back  
with another surgical strike across border**



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## Disruption is a way of life - 4 years of Modi govt

The Modi government is being credited for a host of reform programmes to attract FDI, improve ease of doing business, and rolling out of goods and services tax (GST).

All the structural changes in a vast nation do generate enormous dust but the trust factor in PM Modi has sailed the boat for NDA in the last four year of governance. There are many areas where the government's actions have improved the lives of the people or are expected to do so specially in the rural area where there is a huge farmer distress and unemployment crisis. Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led NDA government completes four years in office on 26 May 2018 and the list of achievements is a long one. The Modi government is being credited for a host of reform programmes to attract FDI, improve ease of doing business, and rolling out of goods and services tax (GST). The corruption has been curtailed by effective usage of technology and strict monitoring of programs. The various corruption laws are amended and the enforcing agencies are given discretion to nab the corrupt public servants.



**1. Demonetisation:** Government launched a major attack against black money through this drive in which Rs 500 and Rs 1000 notes were banned. This attack on the informal sector led to an expansion of market share for the formal part of the economy. Demonetisation was an exercise that gave digital payments a big boost. Even though cash has made a comeback, the demand for cash or currency is 7 per cent higher at Rs 18.25 trillion at the end of April compared to Rs 17 trillion at the beginning of November 2016, the momentum provided to digital payments is unstoppable now. It is expected to move the country from a predominantly cash oriented society to a mostly cashless one.

**2. Make in India:** A strong economy needs strong local manufacturing base. Over dependence on agriculture and service sector is unhealthy for national economic strength. This is the government's major national programme to facilitate investment, foster innovation, enhance skill development, protect intellectual property and build an infrastructure in India that would turn the country into a manufacturing hub. The focus of Make in India is on 25 sectors including automobiles, aviation, chemicals, IT & BPM, pharmaceuticals, construction, defence manufacturing, electrical machinery, food processing.

**3. GST & GDP:** PM Modi must be given credit to implement India's biggest tax structural reform by risking the popularity of his government. Off course, the first year of GST implementation has been extremely challenging for the government and government has attracted lot of ire from its traditional trading community vote bank but to Modi's credit, he struck to the task resulting in major consolidation of formal economy. It is expected that with complete roll out of GST in India, the informal economy will shrink to less than 20% of the economy. The International Monetary Fund has forecast a bullish GDP growth for India at 7.4 per cent in 2018, and a better 7.8 per cent for 2019, making India the fastest growing economy globally. India's GDP is expected to reach \$6 trillion by FY27, it will make India the fourth largest economy of the world, a dream that started in 1992 by then PM Narasimha Rao is now a reality for over billion people. India is poised to grow at over 7% in the next decade or so and it will lead to elimination of poverty and distress from the bottom pyramid of the society.

**4. Digital India:** Digitisation will have far-reaching implications for corporate, household and public sectors, besides providing a better credit delivery in the economy. Also, delivery of subsidies directly into beneficiaries bank accounts is another such measure. Digitisation is boosting financial inclusion (Jan Dhan), Aadhaar card, rising smartphone penetration (JAM, or Jan Dhan, Aadhaar, Mobile), along with GST system. PM Modi was bulldozed to power in 2014 mainly on anti-corruption and inefficient government platform, so effective usage of technology became the principle tool for Modi to transmit clean government. PM Modi has extensively focused on the digital India mode to deliver effective, clean and transparent governance and his government is likely to be a major beneficiary of the effort.

**5. Employment:** According to Labour Bureau data, despite having a healthy GDP growth, new jobs have not been created in enough numbers. In 2016-17, 4.1 lakh actual jobs were created as against the BJP's electoral promise of creating one crore jobs annually. However, recent EPFO data showed that 31 lakh jobs were created between Sept 2017 and Feb 2018. Modi led NDA government has focused on extending loans for self employment schemes popularly known as "Mudra Bank" and it is projected as the flag ship scheme of the Modi Sarkar.

—Prashant Tewari, Editor-in-Chief

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# IPL 2018: Chennai Super Kings Win their Third IPL Title

By Opinion Express

Chennai super Kings (CSK's) journey to the IPL trophy was not easy. It was all about their hard work and dedication. After winning the IPL trophy for the third time they have proved that they are the real kings forever. It's truly a dream come true.

We all know MS Dhoni as a master chaser, man who blooms in adversity, skipper who believes in emotional cryogenics and a wily strategist who not just talks of processes, systems and clinical build-ups, but creates opportunities to achieve targets thus set. His team, Chennai Super Kings (CSK), signifies his way of life. Two years in the dump and a phoenix-like rise to the top is no mean achievement. It is signature CSK, its signature Dhoni. The adversities were many. Iconic yellow jersey players had been wearing other team colours, thanks to the two-year ban imposed on CSK. Raina was captaining Gujarat and Dhoni had found and lost skipper-ship of Pune. Not all were bought back but those who were, were carefully chosen with specifics in mind. They made for the core team which orchestrated

most of the wins — Dhoni, Raina, Faf and Bravo. The new ones were added, like Harbhajan Singh from MI, to make up for the Ashwin gap. Shane Watson was assigned a specific purpose as was Rayudu in whose abilities there was faith, whichever spot he was envisaged for. Faith worked for CSK at many levels — the team's faith in their skipper, the skipper's faith in his squad, the management's faith in winnability and, last but not the least, the fans' faith in the yellow jersey. The team got only one match to play at its home ground but the fans travelled en masse to the adopted home in Pune making yellow the colour of the stands wherever the team went. This belief in the team, this trust, this loyalty is unique to CSK. The stunning fact is, none of the iconic players in CSK is from the home State and yet Dhoni is their one and only Thala and Raina their Chinna Thala!

So what is it about CSK that is so different from other teams? For one, it is a concept conceived with sustained thinking and impeccable forward planning with grey heads like Stephen Fleming and Dhoni getting together to talk cricket much in advance of the big show.

In this edition, the odds were particularly high. The team was returning from oblivion, tasked to climb out from the well of the spot fixing ignominy without being thrown off gear. To suit the new dispensation, new strategy and play capsules were conceived and executed, one of them being the shift from slow spin attack to a seaming focus. Players got compartmentalised roles and they stuck to it. The clinical approach was inserted into everyone's DNA and winnability became a uniform barometer of existence. That's why the scorn around the white hair in the team did not result in fogginess of the mind. The 30s men brought experience into competition — Faf, Watson, Dhoni, Bravo and Raina — none of them young but all of them happening, cementing the fortunes of the team along the journey, often helping stunning comebacks in death overs, dwarfing oppositions as good and sound as Sunrisers Hyderabad with professional performances. Indeed, CSK is about ultimate turnarounds that none other team has been able to fathom. A presence in nine Finals and three championship points tells you why Dhoni's team is the man among the boys.



COVER STORY

# HITS & MISSES



# As Modi govt completes four years in office, The Opinion Express brings out its report card

Prakhar Prakash Misra

**F**our years of Modi government: In the biggest election of India's history, Narendra Modi, the three-term chief minister of Gujarat stormed to power with a thumping majority for his vision for a developed India. In his first major address to the nation from the ramparts of the Red Fort on August 15, 2014, Narendra Modi announced his flagship Jan-Dhan Yojana, which to date is one of the jewels in his crown.

Others are the successful implementation of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) and the introduction of Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC). With India expected to emerge as the fastest-growing major economy again this financial year, especially after slumping to as low as 5.7% due to disruptions from structural changes, this could be a big shot in the arm of Narendra Modi ahead of the 2019 polls. From Ujjwala Yojana to Saubhagya Yojana — Narendra Modi gets full marks for his efforts, even as some targets are expected

to be missed.

As Modi completes 4 years, India Inc's thumbs up to economy; CII says GST cyclone over, reforms on track: As the BJP-led NDA government completes four years in office, industry chamber CII today said India's econo-

my is robust with GST system having settled down and reforms firmly on the right path. In a statement, CII Director General Chandrajit Banerjee said over the last four years, the government has systematically addressed major pain points for the economy such as ease of doing business, non-performing assets of banks, foreign direct investment rules, infrastructure construction and exit of failing enterprises.

**Achche din may be several years away, but PM must get full marks for trying :** Achche din may be several years away, but the NDA government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi must get full marks for trying. Four years into the government's regime, the economy is not exactly rocking. GDP has clocked in at an average of



As Modi completes 4 years, India Inc's thumbs up to economy; CII says GST cyclone over, reforms on track: As the BJP-led NDA government completes four years in office, industry chamber CII today said India's economy is robust with GST system having settled down and reforms firmly on the right path



7.3% annually between FY15 and FY18, below the 7.5% notched up in the five years prior to that. Manufacturing is muddling along, but exports are in a shambles leaving private sector investment stagnant, and few jobs on offer. The damage from demonetisation and GST is slowly coming undone, but business sentiment remains subdued.



**Sensex leaps 10,000 points! 4 winning feats that steered stock market to record highs:** In the span of last four years, Indian stock markets have fared considerably well as compared to regional Asian peers and Wall Street — the world’s largest equity markets by turnover. The benchmark equity index BSE Sensex has added about 10,000 points in the last four years breaching the key levels of 30,000 for the first time under Narendra Modi-led NDA government. The S&P BSE Sensex has gained as much as 9,970 points to 34,663 from a level of 24,693 as on 23 May 2018, before swearing-in ceremony of Narendra Modi as PM.

**Has India created enough jobs? Debate on, but this next challenge will be bigger :** While formal jobs have indeed been created, muted household income and savings macro data suggest muted quality of jobs in aggregate. “Job quality is the real issue for Indian macro and markets, manifested in the slowing growth of the middle class,” Gautam Chhaochharia, Analyst and Sanjena Dadawala, Analysts at UBS said in the report.

**4 small reforms by Modi that went unnoticed:** In 2016, the Lok Sabha repealed 1,175 of 1,827 laws that were identified as obsolete, and many other

steps were taken to make lives of common people easier. From self-attestation to doing away with birth certificate for passport to Tatkal reforms to easing I-T filing, these reforms went unnoticed in the four years of Modi-led NDA government.

**These 5 ministries get stellar score from people, and Finance is not**

**among them :** The top five ministries of the Modi government are Defence, External Affairs, New and Renewable Energy, Coal, and Road, Transport and Highways, a survey conducted by LocalCircles showed. Indians have given a stellar score to the Defence Ministry — 4.9 on the scale of 5. The government has been applauded for “taking some bold steps like the surgical strikes against Pakistan,” LocalCircles said.

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**Even after 4 years, Modi is winning hearts; Survey shows 57% Indians happy with his work :** A total of 57% Indians say that the Narendra Modi government has “either met or exceeded” their expectations in the last four years, a survey said. A majority of Indians are particularly happy with Narendra Modi’s effort in improving India’s image globally, handling of Pakistan, fighting terrorism, infrastructure development and reducing tax harassment, a survey report by LocalCircles said.

**Four ambitious targets NDA is poised to miss:** After taking over the Prime Minister’s Office in 2014, Narendra Modi shared his vision to make India an investor-friendly destination, which would subsequently lead to job creation and development. However, despite ambitious plans like Make in India, Narendra Modi, four years later, is poised to miss some targets.

Amit Shah says PM Modi works for 15-18 hours every day : BJP provided the most hardworking Prime Minister & the most popular leader in the world to the country, a PM who works for 15-18 hours a day. We are proud that this Prime Minister is a leader of BJP, says Amit Shah.

**Challenges:** Pakistan and China are the major source of worry for Modi

Modi’s international trips have always generated a buzz. In the past four years, the PM has travelled six continents: 36 foreign trips visiting 54 countries; India’s global presence is said to have become stronger ever since Prime Minister Narendra Modi came into power after 2014 general elections.

government. Kashmir policy persuaded by NDA government has yielded no results. In fact, the militancy in the state is on the rise. The hawkish approach has yielded no dividends. China has a pro Pakistan policy and Beijing is looking to mediate in the Kashmir matter. Doklam, POK, Burma, South China Sea, Dalai Lama and trade imbalance are the pending issues with practically no solu-

tion. China has practically expanded in India’s next door countries through infrastructure projects and defence cooperation; it is a great challenge for Modi led NDA government in respect to the nation security.

**Social Harmony:** The Modi government must focus on building confidence with the minority community and the SC/ST community in India. It may be a perception that the NDA government led by Narendra Modi has targeted minorities and socially deprived sections of the communities though in government defence, it is a collective effort of opposition to portray Modi sarkar to be anti minority and anti dalit to reap political benefits. The sooner this problem is addressed, the better it will be for the nation.

### Foreign Policy

Modi’s international trips have always generated a buzz. In the past four years, the PM has travelled six continents: 36 foreign trips visiting 54 countries; India’s global presence is said to have become stronger ever since Prime Minister Narendra Modi came into power after 2014 general elections. At one point, he was also criticized for his international trips. However, it has been said that in the four years of Modi as PM, India’s bilateral ties with major economies have improved.



## India and the big economies

The country most frequented by PM Modi was the United States, where he made five visits including the UN General Assembly meeting in 2014. Indo-US relations were tensed under the second UPA regime, but has certainly improved since the entry of Modi.

Defence, economic and political ties between India and the US have improved a lot since Modi. The two countries signed Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), the defence agreement pending since 2004. Pakistan remains a major policy discussion between the countries. Trump's tough talk on Pakistan has aligned the US with India's old frustration with the country.

On his trips to the United Kingdom, PM Modi met Queen Elizabeth twice, once in 2015 and recently in April this year as well as his British counterpart Theresa May. India is the third largest investor in UK, making their ties crucial. Modi recently signed memorandums for National Clean Ganga Mission, skill development and vocational programmes and an agreement between NITI Aayog and UK's Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy.

Modi also visited China, Germany and Russia four times in the past four years. Relations between India and Chi-

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Russian President Vladimir Putin and Modi met recently in an informal summit in Sochi, where PM Modi said India-Russia ties have "stood the test of time". Germany is India's biggest trade partner in the European Union, and ties have strengthened with each visit Modi paid Chancellor Angela Merkel. PM Modi also made three visits of strategic importance to France in his four years.

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na have been strained since the Doklam issue arose and these meetings have defined the two countries' relationships with each other. Modi was one of the first to congratulate Xi Jinping when he was re-elected as the president of China.

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## India's neighbours

Narendra Modi has stressed on relations with neighbouring countries ever since he took office. The prime minister paid three visits to Nepal since 2014. Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Bangladesh and Bhutan are also on the list. Modi had stressed a lot on how South Asian countries must work together for better individual economic standings. Before relations went south, Modi had also visited Pakistan and held talks with then PM Nawaz Sharif. Unfortunately, PM Nawaz Sharif with whom PM Modi had developed personal relationship reigned and the clock went back to square one. The Kashmir issue and OROP remains the burning obstacles in securing better

relationship between the two countries, the border tensions and limited hostilities are the regular feature at the LOC that Modi government has failed to reduce and eliminate from the source.

India's relations with Middle Eastern countries have soared since Modi came to power. Summits with leaders of Israel, Jordan, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Iran, Palestine and Afghanistan were held.

Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu and PM Modi showcased a fast friendship during the former's visit to India in January 2018. Modi asked Israeli companies to take advantage of the "liberalized FDI regime to make more in India". Moreover, Netanyahu had described Israel's relations with India as a "marriage made in heaven"! The Middle Eastern economies have been a priority of the Modi government since India is dependent on them for two-third of the oil imports. Many Indians migrate to the Middle East for jobs too.

Other countries PM Modi visited include Japan, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Fiji, Malaysia, Mauritius, Mexico, Mongolia, Mozambique, Netherlands, South Africa, South Korea, Spain and Sweden.

### Domestic Politics

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government has increased its electoral footprint from just eight states in 2014 to 20 in four years of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership to emerge as the strongest political force in the country.

In fact, from just being a "formidable" force in the Hindi-heartland, the NDA is now in power across the North, with the only exception in Punjab, besides being part of ruling coalitions in seven of the eight states in the North-East.

The BJP is now looking to increase its electoral and social presence in the East and the South, where the NDA has marginal presence. Party leaders believe that Modi's unwavering popularity will eventually help the NDA oust regional heavyweights, such as Mamata Banerjee and Naveen Patnaik, from their bastions, before it can increase its presence beyond the Vindhyas.

"The four years can be defined for BJP on the basis of expansion of the party both electorally and socially. Now, the BJP is the central force in national politics. The entire opposition, whether national or regional parties, is now coming together to oppose us.



**"The four years can be defined for BJP on the basis of expansion of the party both electorally and socially. Now, the BJP is the central force in national politics. The entire opposition, whether national or regional parties, is now coming together to oppose us. This is the biggest influence of the BJP on national politics,"** said a senior BJP leader, requesting anonymity.

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The increasing dominance of the BJP in national politics can be established from the fact that it has wrestled away 12 states from the Congress in the last four years, while the NDA has had 14 electoral victories since Modi came to power. The emergence of the BJP as the political powerhouse took shape at the

cost of the Congress, which has not only faced a series of electoral losses, but has seen its support base shrinking even in key states. The trigger was the historic defeat in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, wherein it recorded the lowest-ever tally with just 44 Lok Sabha members.

Apart from the recent success in Karnataka, where it formed a post-poll alliance with the Janata Dal (Secular), the Congress is left with just Punjab, Mizoram and Puducherry. "Ever since the Lok Sabha defeat, electorally it has been a difficult time for us, but the tide is turning in our favour now. All the recent Lok Sabha bypolls show that the BJP is losing its momentum and popular support," a senior Congress parliamentarian said, requesting anonymity.

With less than a year left for the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the Congress is now looking to bring together all opposition parties to form an anti-BJP coalition. The presence of top leaders of more than 15 opposition parties during the swearing-in of H.D. Kumaraswamy as the Karnataka chief minister was seen as a show of strength.

In the last lap of its five-year term, the NDA is also facing a key electoral challenge with three states— Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh— currently ruled by the BJP going to polls later this year. It will also be a test for the Congress, which is attempting to rediscover itself ahead of the 2019 Lok Sabha elections.

**(Writer is Political Editor of Opinion Express Group)**

# FROM CAKEWALK TO CONTEST

It was a landslide for BJP in 2014, but 2019 won't be the same

Research: Matthew Lillehaugen  
Text: Ryan DeVries

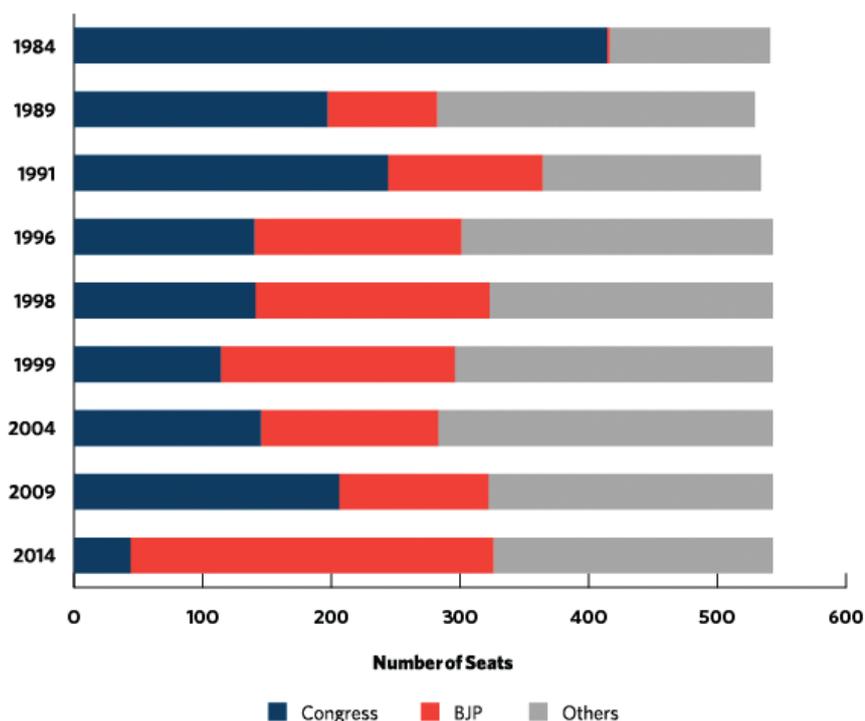
In approximately less than twelve months, Indian voters from Kanyakumari to Kashmir will go to the polls to select their next parliament. The country's 2019 general election—like previous contests—will be the largest democratic exercise in world history. More than 870 million voters will be eligible to help determine which political party or alliance will form the government and, in turn, who will serve as prime minister.

Electoral outcomes are notoriously difficult to predict in India's fragmented, hypercompetitive democracy. But one need not go out on a limb to declare that the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of Prime Minister Narendra Modi would be the front runner if the election were held today. Following the BJP's decisive 2014 mandate, many analysts confidently proclaimed that Modi would remain in power for at least two, if not three, terms. Opinion polls reveal that Modi remains highly popular after four years in office, and the BJP has managed to methodically expand its national footprint in numerous state elections since 2014. The opposition, comprised of the once-dominant Indian National Congress and a plethora of regional parties, has struggled to counter the BJP onslaught.

Yet the election's clear front-runner is far from invulnerable, despite anticipation of a BJP cakewalk in 2019. Although the intricacies of the upcoming race—such as the selection of candidates and the rhetoric of campaigns—remain unknown one year out,



## Distribution of Seats in Lok Sabha Elections, 1984-2014



Source: Author's calculations based on data from the Election Commission of India (ECI)

underlying structural conditions suggest far rockier terrain may lie ahead. In particular, four crucial objectives keep BJP strategists up at night: expanding beyond regional strongholds, recruiting new—and retaining old—coalition partners, withstanding a disappointing economic performance, and contending with fluctuations in voter mobilization. The party's performance in the 2019 election will hinge largely on its ability to address these potential vulnerabilities and the opposition's ability to exploit them.

### 2014 AND BEYOND

To understand the BJP's position today, one must recall how unusual India's 2014 election results were. Between 2004 and 2014, the Congress Party and its allies (known collectively as the United Progressive Alliance, or UPA) ran the central government in New Delhi. Although the UPA oversaw record economic growth during its first term, its second term was markedly less positive, as a slowing economy, doubts about its leadership, and an endless parade of corruption scandals badly dented the Congress-led alliance's credibility.

In an era of fractured political mandates in New Delhi, the Modi-led BJP achieved what many analysts believed was unthinkable: it won a clear, single-party majority in the lower house of the

Indian parliament (the Lok Sabha) by capturing 282 of 543 seats (see figure 1). Its political allies—members of the

**The 2014 electoral outcome was historic. No party had obtained a clear majority of Lok Sabha seats on its own since 1984 when the Congress did so after the assassination of former prime minister Indira Gandhi. 2014 was the first time a non-Congress party had achieved an outright majority by itself without the need for a large, unwieldy coalition. Meanwhile, the Congress sank to its lowest total in history—a paltry forty-four seats.**

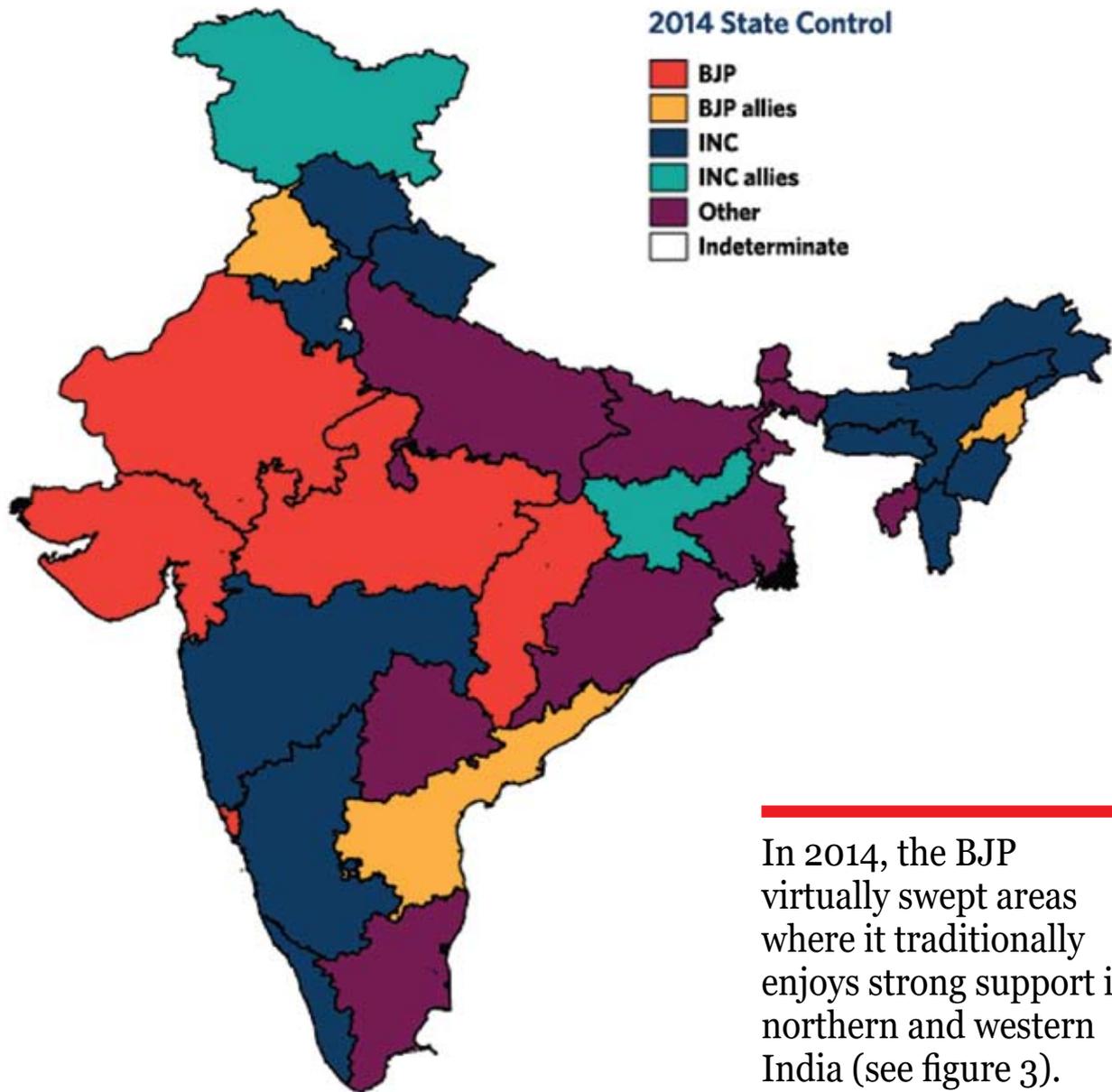
BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA)—netted another fifty-three seats. Although the BJP campaigned under the banner of “Mission 272” (a number that represents the threshold for a parliamentary majority), few Indians (even within the BJP itself) believed that the party was likely to meet, let alone surpass, this mark on its own.

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With each passing year, the national reach of the BJP has grown while the reach of the Congress has shrunk. The BJP and its allies now run twenty-one of India's twenty-nine states—home to over 70 percent of the Indian population (see figure 2). Prior to Modi's election, the NDA controlled just eight states. The BJP's gains have largely come at the expense of the Congress; whereas the latter ran thirteen states prior to the last general election, today it governs in just four. Furthermore, only two of these (Karnataka and Punjab) have substantial populations (with roughly 90 million residents between them).

The lion's share of the credit for the BJP's resurgence belongs to Modi, who remains the most popular politician in India. In May 2014, 36 percent of Indians surveyed named him as their preferred candidate for prime minister, compared to just 14 percent for Congress President Rahul Gandhi. Although Modi's rating might sound low from a comparative perspective, it is remarkably high for India's fragmented political system in which 464 parties contested the 2014 general election. While Gandhi's rating had risen to 20 percent by January 2018, Modi's popularity has remained extremely stable throughout his four years in office (hovering around 37 percent). Historically, Gandhi's rating has proven erratic, in part due to his

# BJP's Expanding footprint, 2014



twin struggles with consistency and effectiveness.

## REIMAGINING THE MAP

Pulling off an encore performance of the BJP's sweeping 2014 victory will be a tall order; to compensate for potential losses in its core areas, the party must venture into new territory. In 2014, the BJP virtually swept areas where it traditionally enjoys strong support in northern and western India (see figure 3). Just eight states—Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh—accounted for over 75 percent of the BJP's tally in parliament. Collectively, these states account for 273 seats, of which the BJP won 216 (nearly

80 percent).

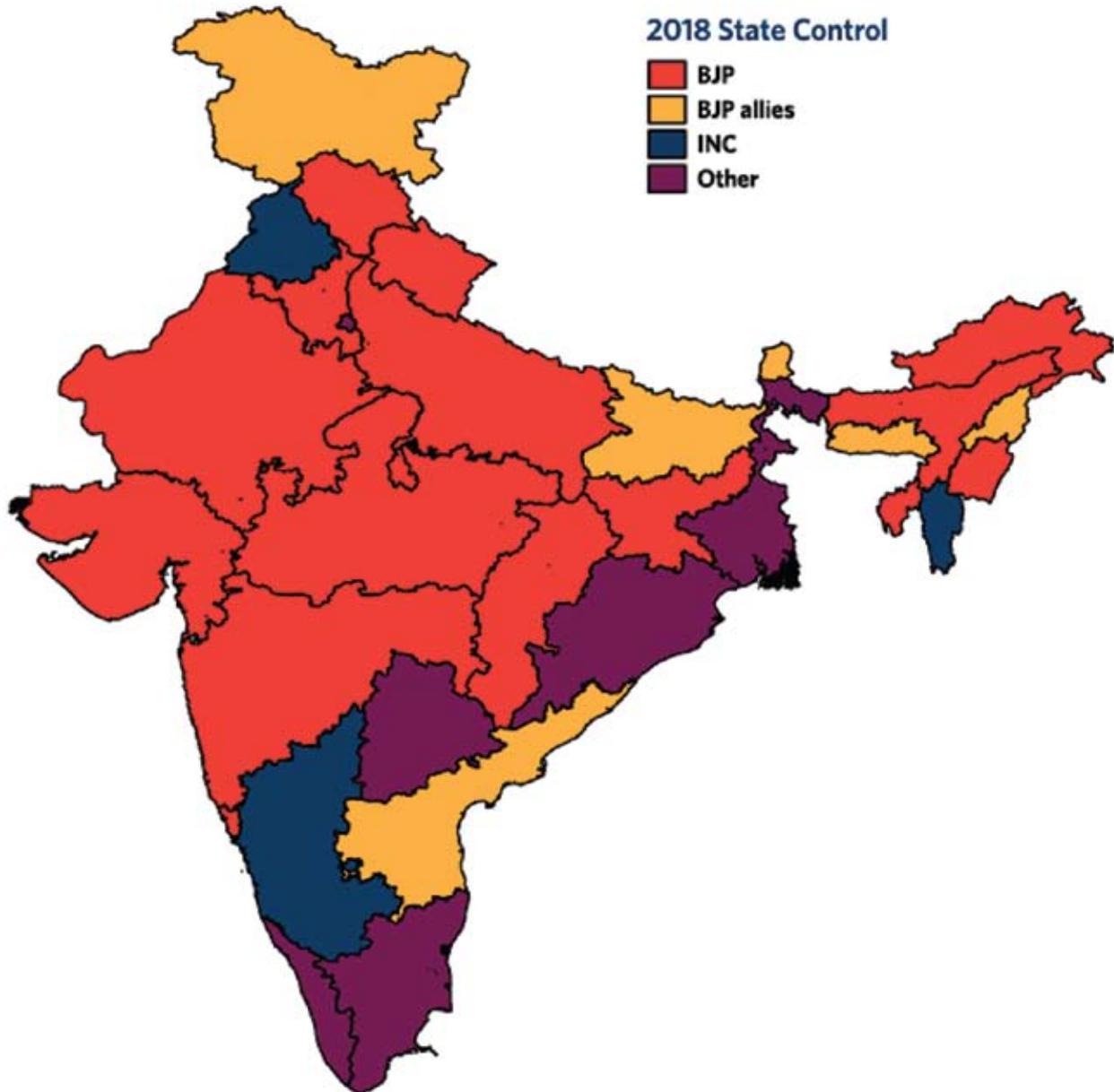
Running the table in two consecutive elections will be an uphill battle. Indian voters are legendary for their tendency to harbor anti-incumbency sentiments; research suggests that individual members of parliament (MPs) are just as likely to get thrown out of office at the end of their term as to get voted back in. There are also state-level anti-incumbency effects that have negative spillovers on national politics. Parliamentary candidates representing a given state's ruling party enjoy an electoral advantage in national elections, but only when national elections are held early in the state government's term. Once this honeymoon period is over, holding power in India's states

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In 2014, the BJP virtually swept areas where it traditionally enjoys strong support in northern and western India (see figure 3). Just eight states—Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh—accounted for over 75 percent of the BJP's tally in parliament. Collectively, these states account for 273 seats, of which the BJP won 216 (nearly 80 percent).

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# BJP's Expanding footprint, 2018



becomes a liability in general elections. This poses a problem for the BJP, which serves as the ruling party in all eight of these core states; in five of them, its governments are nearing the ends of their terms.

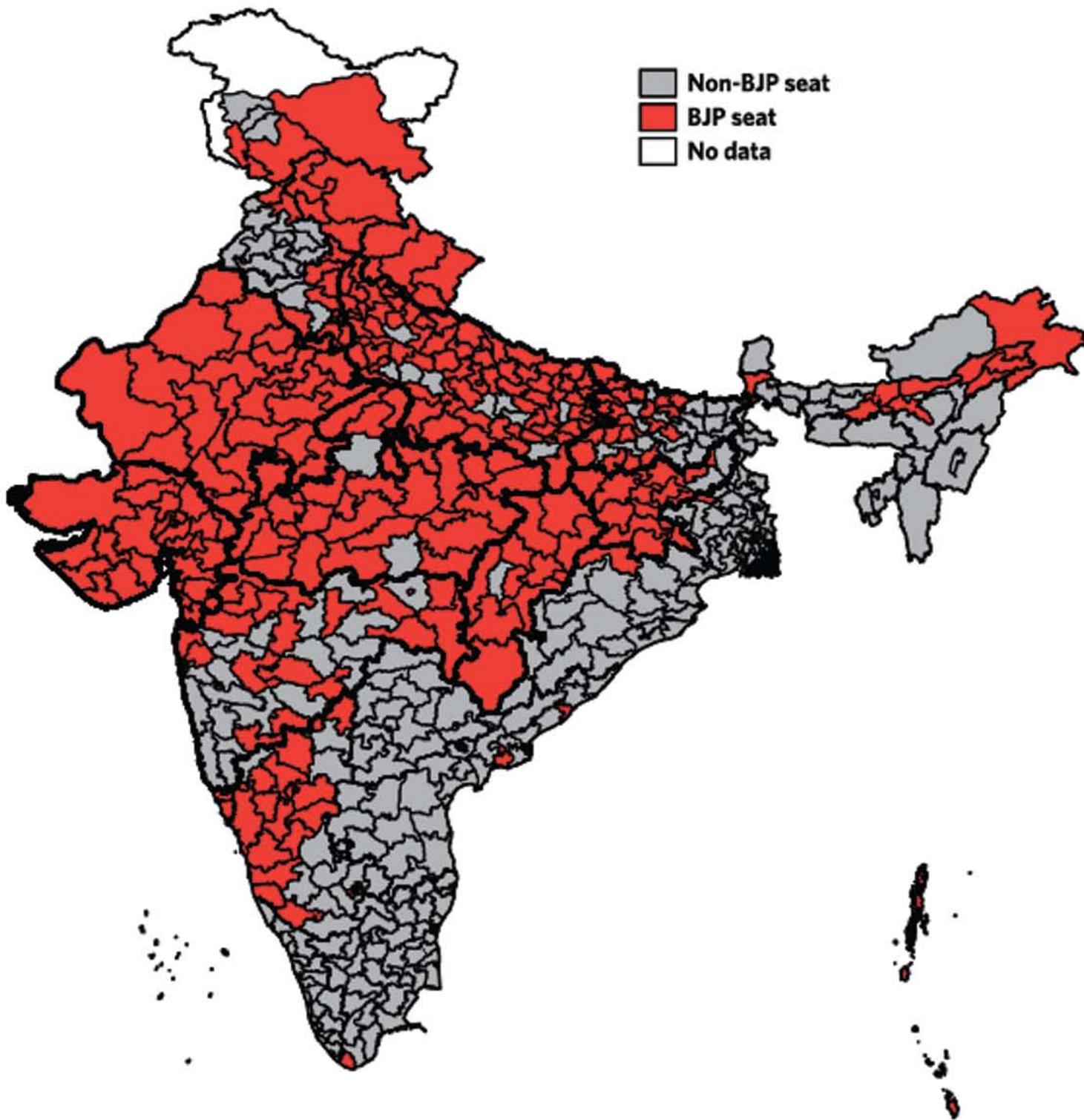
Because Modi and BJP President Amit Shah—a longtime Modi aide and a savvy campaign strategist—know engineering another sweep of these eight core states will be difficult, they have placed great importance on expanding the BJP's footprint into parts of the country where it traditionally has been weak. Hence, the BJP's painstaking devotion to breaking into India's northeast—long considered to be a bastion of the Congress and smaller regional parties. The northeast is often seen as

inconsequential to the overall electoral picture given that it accounts for just 3.7 percent of India's population. Yet the region boasts twenty-five parliamentary seats, a tempting prize for a party that covets new territory to compensate for losses likely to be sustained elsewhere. Thanks to a series of recent state-level victories, the BJP now sits in government in seven of these eight states and is building up organizational and alliance networks across the region; as a relatively new player in northeastern India, the BJP is less likely to fall prey to Indian voters' antipathy for incumbents there than in the party's traditional strongholds. Whereas the Congress retains the capacity to put up a good fight in the Hindi heartland, its stature in the

northeast has rapidly diminished.

Having established a foothold in northeastern India, the BJP now aims to increase its strength along India's eastern seaboard in major states such as Odisha, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, and West Bengal. In a fifth state, Andhra Pradesh, the BJP has worked primarily through a key alliance partner—the Telugu Desam Party (TDP). The four aforementioned states serve as a sort of firewall the BJP has struggled to penetrate in national elections. All told, these five states collectively account for 144 seats in the parliament. Each is home to one (or more) powerful parties with strong ties to linguistic, regional, and cultural identities the BJP currently lacks.

# BJP's 2014 Performance in Core States



**Source:** Author's calculations based on data from the Election Commission of India (ECI)

**Note:** The eight states that account for 75 percent of BJP seats are outlined in bold.

However, this firewall may be fracturing. In West Bengal, the BJP trails the ruling Trinamool Congress Party in terms of statewide appeal. But it views the demise of the two principal opposition forces—the Left (a coalition of left-leaning parties) and the Congress—as providing a crucial opening for it to emerge as the second-largest party. The ruling Biju Janata Dal of Odisha won twenty of twenty-one parliamentary seats in 2014, ceding just one to the BJP. But the latter won one-quarter of the vote and has subsequently performed well in municipal elections. In Tamil Nadu, the BJP is a bit player on its own but sees the potential to make inroads through alliances. Fissures within the state's ruling party, the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, have given the BJP hope that the party system might be ripe for realignment.

### COALITION DYNAMICS

Sustaining previous hard-won gains and breaking new ground in pockets of the country outside BJP strongholds, however, will require partners. On this score, the BJP's prognosis is mixed.

On the one hand, thanks to the widespread sense that the BJP has the wind at its back, the party has become the central pole around which politics in India revolves. This distinguished position once belonged to the Congress, but its recent electoral stumbles and the BJP's abundant successes have decisively changed the equation. In three recent state elections—in Goa, Manipur, and Meghalaya—the BJP failed to emerge as the single largest party. Nonetheless, thanks to its allure as an alliance partner, the BJP formed governments in all three states by winning over several smaller parties who decided to join a party gaining momentum rather than one appearing to lose it. Across states, the BJP, not the Congress, seems to be the default governing party.

Yet recent events suggest that the BJP's electoral coalition is showing signs of strain. Existing BJP allies are voicing concerns about the party's methods, raising the possibility that its electoral coalition could fracture. Two of the BJP's biggest allies, the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra and the TDP in Andhra Pradesh, have recently put the BJP on notice that they are unhappy with its "arrogant" leadership style. The Shiv Sena announced in January 2018 that it would contest the 2019 elections alone, rather than with the BJP. In March, the TDP pulled its ministers



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from the central cabinet in New Delhi to express disappointment with the Modi government's failure to help Andhra Pradesh tap additional central government funds. When the BJP refused to budge, the TDP announced its decision to formally exit the alliance. These ruptures, while not fatal or irreversible, potentially complicate the BJP's electoral arithmetic in 2019. If the BJP is successfully tarred as anti-Andhra, it would be difficult for the party to notch a pre-poll alliance with any of the major regional parties there, increasing the

likelihood that a sizeable chunk of the state's twenty-five seats would be out of the BJP's reach. In Maharashtra, provided the opposition coalition remains intact, the split with the Shiv Sena could create a three-way race.

Luckily for the BJP, the opposition remains in disarray. The Congress has been slow to rectify the organizational and leadership deficiencies laid bare in 2014. As one senior party leader has mused, the Congress has faced electoral crises before, but what it faces today is an existential crisis. While it will likely

gain seats in 2019, one Congress leader privately admitted that a triple-digit figure would be a stretch at present. Left parties have seen a precipitous decline nearly everywhere save for the state of Kerala, its last remaining stronghold. The upstart Aam Aadmi Party, which came to power in the Delhi state assembly by way of an assertive, agitational brand of politics, has struggled to extend its reach beyond the national capital. Moreover, parties opposed to the BJP have failed to coordinate and pool their votes so as to keep the BJP out of power.

There have been two notable exceptions where opposition parties have set aside their differences and forged a degree of bonhomie. The first was the 2015 state election in Bihar, where a so-called grand alliance of opposition parties joined hands to keep the BJP from winning power. The opposition alliance won a resounding victory, but this short-lived marriage of convenience ultimately ended when one party defected. More recently, in March 2018, two rival regional parties in Uttar Pradesh buried their long-standing differences to jointly defeat the BJP in a special by-election. Regional players could give the BJP a run for its money in their respective states, but doing so will require them to work cooperatively—something

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## In 2014, India was plagued by slumping growth, ballooning deficits, stalled investments, and soaring inflation—offering the BJP untold opportunities to critique the Congress Party’s mismanagement of bread-and-butter issues.

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that does not come naturally to rivals who bitterly jostle for political space. The effects of the BJP’s own alliance drama will be mitigated if the opposition proves unable or unwilling to do business together in 2019.

### ECONOMIC ANXIETY

But it is not only allies the BJP must worry about retaining; many voters who were swayed by Modi’s promise to usher in *acche din* (good times) by reenergizing the Indian economy have

also grown restive. In 2014, India was plagued by slumping growth, ballooning deficits, stalled investments, and soaring inflation—offering the BJP untold opportunities to critique the Congress Party’s mismanagement of bread-and-butter issues. Although invocations of Hindu majoritarianism also populated the BJP’s entreaties, it was the BJP’s insistence that it would rectify the declining economy that resonated across the country. Yet as economic progress under Modi has fallen short of expectations, anxieties about the lack of job creation have led to massive popular protests in state after state. While the intensity and scope of voter disaffection with India’s economy is not certain, there are signs that disquiet is rising among rural voters who decisively backed the BJP four years ago. Given that farmers account for roughly half of India’s labor force, rural economic woes raise alarm bells for every incumbent politician.

BJP strategists once believed that economic revival would be the hallmark of the 2019 campaign. Unfortunately for them, the economy has not experienced a uniform revival. Growth, while high by international standards, remains well below the country’s potential. A failure to deal quickly with a systemic banking crisis has bogged down the domestic investment cycle. Inflation, which has fallen from the double-digit levels of the tenure of the Congress, remains a risk in an election year when the pressure to spend will be elevated. Furthermore, the Modi government’s decisions to abruptly remove high-value currency notes from circulation and enact the sweeping Goods and Services Tax reform have hurt short-term growth, irrespective of their longer-term merits. More importantly, for the average Indian, job growth has been anemic. According to the Reserve Bank of India, total employment actually shrank between 2014 and 2016. While it appears that nonfarm jobs grew over this period, farming jobs declined—perhaps as a result of successive droughts.

The BJP is betting that its flagship welfare schemes might inoculate it against its patchy economic record. Criticized for having cozy links to corporate capital, Modi’s administration has doggedly tried to burnish its poorer credentials by doubling down on major welfare schemes—such as granting every household a bank account, initiating free cooking gas connections to families below the poverty line, and ensuring universal affordable housing.



These efforts notwithstanding, economic travails are especially apparent in rural India. Although once the bailiwick of the Congress, many rural voters in 2014 switched their allegiance to the BJP—a party that has historically performed better with city-dwellers. The rural shift toward the BJP could easily swing back to the Congress; for instance, available data suggests that support for the BJP alliance among farmers has declined over the past year. Indeed, recent distress in the farming sector is likely sending chills down the spines of BJP leaders. Despite Modi's promises to double agrarian incomes by 2022, agriculture remains in a state of disrepair. While the causes of this distress are largely structural, proximate factors such as the decline in the prices of several agricultural commodities and shortfalls in farm production have stimulated outrage among many rural Indians.

A clear warning shot was fired in December 2017 during elections in Gujarat, a longtime BJP bastion. Although it retained its majority in the state assembly, the BJP encountered serious rural opposition—especially in the key region of Saurashtra—where the Congress prevailed by capitalizing on caste politics and the waning fortunes of farmers. In March 2018, as many as 50,000 farmers in Maharashtra descended on the state capital of Mumbai to demand the BJP state government move swiftly to aid them. How widespread this disaffection has spread is unclear. All eyes will be on upcoming state elections in Karnataka (in May 2018) and Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan (in December 2018) to discern whether this alleged drop-off in rural locales is sustained.

### VOTER MOBILIZATION

A final concern for the BJP in 2019 is voter mobilization. In 2014, the party successfully channeled popular disaffection with the incumbent Congress Party into record voter turnout (66.4 percent). Voter turnout had previously peaked at 64 percent in 1984 and fell to between 56 and 62 percent in subsequent election cycles. As Neelanjan Sircar has pointed out, there was a strong association between the growth in voter turnout and the improved fortunes of the BJP in the 2014 election. A key source of strength came from young voters. Research has demonstrated that states with the largest increases in the share of young, first-time voters in



2014 also experienced the biggest gains in BJP vote share. With the novelty of Modi and BJP rule in New Delhi wearing thin, there is a risk that voter turnout will return to ordinary levels, reducing the BJP's enthusiasm advantage.

One key demographic the BJP believes it can energize in 2019 is women. Although they do not vote as a bloc per se, the party believes several of its welfare schemes have special resonance with women and can influence their votes. This is significant because Indian females are voting in greater numbers than ever before. In 2014, women voted at higher rates than men in sixteen of India's thirty-five states and union territories. At the state level, female turnout now regularly surpasses male turnout.

Looking ahead, the BJP's predicament is how to mobilize voters as an incumbent party. One possibility is that the party will choose to invoke the Hindu nationalist card more expressly and more intensively to rile up its base. Such a move toward polarization would become even more likely if the opposition successfully bands together to forge a common anti-BJP front. Yet such a risky strategy could turn off as many (or more) voters as it galvanizes.

### CONCLUSION

One year in advance, many details of the 2019 race remain unknown, but its structural drivers are quickly coming into view. Modi and Shah are wasting no time in recalibrating their approach to mitigate the BJP's unexpected challenges. For instance, the government's most recent budget was packed with pro-poor rhetoric and numerous sops meant to allay rural anger. As existing allies are growing wary with the BJP's modus operandi, the party's high command has stepped up its outreach to smooth frayed relations. And, concerned about waning voter enthusiasm, Modi has directed the party's elected representatives to redouble efforts to connect with constituents. In one instance, Modi is reported to have warned sitting BJP MPs that they must amass at least 300,000 followers on social media or risk losing their party tickets. The opposition is making adjustments as well. Gandhi and the once-dithering Congress appears more focused and consistent. The opposition, at least rhetorically, is embracing the need to forge a common anti-BJP front in 2019. Twelve months is an eternity in politics, but one thing has become evident: once thought to be a cakewalk for the BJP, the 2019 election is turning into a contest.

# Look who swept the floor!

Karnataka Elections 2018: Unholy alliance needs a dip in holy Ganges

Swapan Dasgupta

**W**inning the trust vote naturally involved dodgy moves. Yet, as Indira Gandhi often demonstrated, the electorate always nurtures a grudging respect for those who can beat the odds, ethics being no bar in war. If the battle, for the BJP, was all about defeating the Congress — and, by implication, the Old Establishment that is putting up a spirited resistance to Modi's dominance of Indian politics — the challenge was always worth accepting.

Last Saturday, in a terrible anti-climax, the BJP leader B S Yeddyurappa opted out of the floor test and in effect handed over the mantle of chief ministership to the leader of the third party in the Karnataka Assembly. Yeddyurappa may well live to fight another day but, for the moment, H D Kumaraswamy is the new Chief Minister of Karnataka, courtesy the Congress. In normal circumstances, this post-election battle of numbers would have been viewed as yet another disagreeable muddle, the likes of which India has experienced on innumerable occasions. It would have been interesting but hardly worth the carpet bombing coverage the country has witnessed on the news channels.

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The difference was on two counts. First, the Karnataka battle was transformed into a facet of national politics. There was a positioning game under-

way for the 2019 general election. The BJP was intent on demonstrating that its march through the whole of India is unstoppable. Having established a firm foothold in Assam and the rest of North-east India, an area where the saffron flag was a novelty in the past, the Narendra Modi-Amit Shah army was now intent on establishing its hold in southern India, Karnataka being the gateway. The Opposition, on the other hand, was anxious on two counts. First, the post-election combination of the third party and the second party is a possible template for what they hope will happen after 2019 — a grand combination of all anti-BJP forces, united by a common concern for secularism. Secondly, for the beleaguered Congress, the loss of Karnataka was too major a blow to countenance. Rather than risk being reduced to what Modi mocked as Punjab-Puducherry-Parivar and being resource-starved for 2019, the Congress would rather get a toehold at any cost, even if it involved participating in — what may turn out to be — an ATM government.

Now that the BJP failed to muster the numbers, there are bound to be questions raised. Should the party have staked a claim to form the government, knowing fully well that the other side





had more MLAs? Should it not have taken the high moral ground and opted to sit in opposition, knowing fully well that the inverted pyramid model of government formation tends to be woefully short-lived? On the other hand, why concede the battle to the enemy without at least a fight?

These questions are not unique. In 1996, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, as leader of the single largest party, was invited by the President to form a government. He accepted, despite knowing that he lacked the numbers. For a few days the BJP tried — rather amateurishly, I may add — to persuade other non-Congress parties to support Vajpayee. When it was clear it was a hopeless project, the party extracted full mileage through a dramatic resignation speech of Vajpayee, a speech that elevated his stature and was a factor in the BJP coming to power in 1998.

It is doubtful that Yeddyurappa's speech had the same effect as Vajpayee's oratory. He will no doubt be seen as a martyr by his core Lingayat controversy. But overall, the projection will be that Modi and Shah were thwarted by a determined 'secular' opposition. The BJP's defeat will become an occasion for 'secular' triumphalism, just as his victory would have generated the same elation among the Modi supporters.

How last Saturday's outcome of the confidence vote will influence political thinking in Karnataka in the next year will depend on two factors. First, how the new government will be able to cope with a fragile majority will set the tone. Secondly, much will depend on whether the BJP's argument that it sought to abide by the spirit of the Assembly election mandate is more persuasive than the claim that the BJP has to be stopped from winning another state at all cost.

From the BJP's perspective which option — being in government or opposition — was preferable? There are no clear cut answers. Winning the trust vote naturally involved dodgy moves. Yet, as Indira Gandhi often demonstrated, the electorate always nurtures a grudging respect for those who can beat the odds, ethics being no bar in war. If the battle, for the BJP, was all about defeating the Congress — and, by implication, the Old Establishment that is putting up a spirited resistance to Modi's dominance of Indian politics — the challenge was always worth accepting. The real issue is how the BJP can put the Congress in the doghouse. That is where political communication becomes all-important. In the event the JD(S)-led government is established clumsily, the BJP will have to go to town with the message that the Congress is brazen, shameless

and insatiably power hungry; that it has learnt absolutely nothing from the electoral drubbing it received; and that it is shameless enough to re-appoint former Chief Minister Siddaramaiah as Legislature Party leader. Just as much as the BJP needs to show how the spirit of the mandate for change was violated, it will have to direct its artillery fire against the Congress. The importance of the Congress lies not merely in its brand name but the fact that the party is still the rallying point for a very powerful section of the Old Establishment that wants Modi out as soon as possible. Weaken the Congress and the rest is a relative pushover.

There is little opprobrium likely to be attached to Kumaraswamy for settling for the best bargain. The JD(S) set about to win the day despite coming third and it has done so. There is little point targeting him, just as there was little point assaulting Madhu Koda, the one-man brigade who ended up as Chief Minister. The guilty party, as always, was the Congress. The Karnataka experience shows that nothing has changed. Power is the glue that keeps the Congress alive. Take it away and, hopefully, the Ganga and Cauvery will be cleaned.

***(Writer is a senior journalist and Member of Parliament, being a presidential nominee to the Rajya Sabha)***

# A scam, the deeper rot

Politician-business-banker nexus makes bank lendings prone to corruption

Kapil Sibal

**T**he daily revelations of the PNB (LOU) scam have shaken the people's confidence in the banking system. Essentially, business canaries have manipulated the banking system, bypassing protective mechanisms. The Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) circulars directed banks to connect the Swift Communications System with the Core Banking System. Failing to do so has exposed the vulnerability of our banking procedures. Collusion between bank officers and scammers has revealed that institutional corruption is rampant.

Scammers use public money to become millionaires. The public banking system in India helps them do that. Bank managers should, in principle, not be risk averse. But risks can only be justified after a proposed venture is properly scrutinised. The banker must ensure that the revenue stream during

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Scammers use public money to become millionaires. The public banking system in India helps them do that.

Bank managers should, in principle, not be risk averse.

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the course of a project is adequate to service the debt both in good and bad times. All bank advances should also be secured by adequate collateral to recover outstanding debt even if a project incurs losses.

When the economy is in an upswing mode, banks are happy to lend because they share the entrepreneur's prosper-

ity. Borrowers usually manipulate the value of the collateral to lure the bank to give large advances. Valuation reports are often tailor-made to suit the borrower's need for capital. Occasionally, bankers look the other way, aware that the valuation of the collateral is suspect. Quite often the scamster, to increase the level of his borrowings, sets up dummy companies to buy and sell products just to convince the bank of his business turnover. The underlying transactions are seldom scrutinised by the bank. In this way, public monies are fraudulently siphoned. Sometimes corrupt bankers in collusion with the borrower take a percentage of the loan amount as bribe. Discounting bills relating to letters of credit, without ensuring the genuineness of the underlying transactions, is yet another way banks are put to loss.

One of the greatest weaknesses of our banking system is the pressure that is brought to bear on managements to make advances. Government nominees



occasionally, instead of acting as watchdogs, put in a quiet word at the highest level. Those receiving advances through such manoeuvring then finance politicians and political parties. That is why attempts have been made in the past to persuade governments to nominate credible professionals as nominees on the board of banks. But these positions are used to extend patronage to those politically committed to the party in power; often party members are rewarded with these positions. Borrowers build relationships with politicians since many managers of the public sector banks also look for political patronage. This politician-business-banker nexus makes the functioning of the banking system opaque and subject to corrupt manipulation. In many instances, politicians may not be aware that in helping the borrower, the banker is

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Scams extending over several years will normally be detected if bank procedures are meticulously followed. If not, the assumption is that all officers within the system are culpable. That is not all; the internal auditors will also be presumed to be part of the cover up.

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failing to comply with the due diligence required before extending credit. There is yet another aspect that needs urgent attention. All advances made are required to be scrutinised within the bank's hierarchy, especially where the credit facilities extended are of a certain magnitude.

Scams extending over several years will normally be detected if bank procedures are meticulously followed. If not, the assumption is that all officers within the system are culpable. That is not all; the internal auditors will also be presumed to be part of the cover up. External auditors will be hard put to explain why a scam of the magnitude that we are witnessing went undetected. The RBI was also clearly not vigilant enough.



Regulatory procedures are clearly inadequate.

The extent of the PNB (LOU) scam is yet to be fully exposed. Public sector banks will now start looking at transactions of all borrowers with a fine tooth comb. This, in turn, will impact the flow of credit. An economy that is already badly bruised will suffer yet another body blow. The finance minister's optimism about GDP, in the best of times, has not been well-founded. Economic activity will start limping with yet another dismal year of economic growth. Harshad Mehta and Ketan Parekh manipulated the stock market. The repercussions of manipulating the banking system are far more serious. It will take a long time to set things right. The finance minister has already started blaming the regulators for this mess. He must find out how the Department of Financial Services discharged its supervisory obligations. Was the Bank Board Bureau merely an ornamental setup functioning in the comfort of the extraordinary perks it enjoyed? Will Vinod Rai be kind enough to apprise of the

steps taken to improve governance and new strategies devised for public sector banks? After 14 long months in that position, what steps were taken by him to liberate government-owned banks from the machinations of vested interests? Also the several audits conducted within the PNB were obviously ineffectual while the fraud was going on.

The rot runs deeper. The finance minister must acknowledge that there are structural issues that need attention. The promise of reforming the banking sector has come a cropper. Mission Indradhanush has failed miserably. The finance minister would have realised by now that mere capitalisation of the public sector banks will not overcome the endemic problem of NPAs. Absent that, I fear what we may witness will be a lot of sound and fury. In the midst of all the mayhem, the most expensive chowkidar in the world will blame the UPA and spew venom against the Congress party.

***(The writer, a senior Congress leader, is a former Union minister)***

# SPECTRUM MUDDLE

## Delhi High Court must fast-track the 2G scam appeals on daily basis to bring justice

J Gopikrishnan

**D**emanding for fast tracking in 2G cases appeal, on the very first day of hearing of CBI and ED's appeal on May 25 in Delhi High Court, the Special Public Prosecutor Tushar Mehta said the 2G Scam is a monumental scam and shame on the Nation. He was objecting to the usual delaying tactics played by some accused claiming that they have not yet received notice and some demanding for more time to reply for the notice issued on March. Now the case is heard by Justice SP Garg and he is going to retire in June and a new Judge has to hear the appeal arguments from August first week.

As rightly demanded by Tushar Mehta, the appeal of CBI and ED against the very bad judgment of trial court Judge OP Saini must be heard on daily basis. The Judiciary must take call to the undo the bad trial court judgment, which is totally against the findings of Supreme Court and Delhi High Court. It is another question, how trial Judge OP Saini arrived in such a bizarre conclusions and totally ignored the concrete proofs of money transfers between former Telecom Minister Raja's firm and his party controlled TV channel from co-accused telecom operators.

The very idea of the accused persons now acquitted is to drag the appeal process to four – five years. Such is the level of money spin in this case which I can vouch as a reporter who started tracking this humongous scam from late 2008. The more than 1500-page judgment of the trial court is totally bad in law with many errors and full of false narrative. I have read this bad Judgment of Judge OP Saini many times and it is totally against the Supreme Court Judgment cancelling all the 122 licences. It is also against the Delhi High Court's Judgment which was ratified by Division Bench and Supreme Court on the allotment of licences on dubious First-Come-First-Serve basis by Minister A.Raja.

CBI and ED in its appeal petition described Judge OP Saini's judgment



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as totally erroneous. The Judge has ignored the spirit of Prevention of Corruption Act and even went up to give clean chit to Minister A.Raja by putting blame of officers. The trial Judge has even blamed officers whom he has not yet examined. Without examining a person, how Judge blamed then PMO's top officers TKA Nair and Pulok Chatterjee. Don't know why these two officers keeping criminal silence when they were blamed by trial judge without examining them. They should have approached Delhi High Court at least to rectify this. Are they shouldering the sin committed by their boss and real boss?

Above all, the trial court Judgment

is totally against the landmark judgments Shamesher Singh Judgment and Bhajan Lal Judgments on corruption cases. The Shamesher Singh Judgment clearly says Minister is the final responsible person and not the officers. Here Judge Saini erratically put blame on officers and doubtfully gives clean chit to Raja, who is indicted by Supreme Court on many words while cancelling the 122 licences in February 2012.

Judge OP Saini has totally ignored the crucial witnesses and terms them as they have political differences with Raja. This is totally against the spirit of the Bhajan Lal judgment which says the political differences is not at all the matter and only fact of the statements only to be considered. If a person is a friend will he depose against? The cases crop up due to difference of opinion and this is a basic fact. Judiciary has only to look into the facts raised by the witness and not the other matters. I have submitted a detailed note on the errors and faults in the trial court Judgment to CBI, ED and Special Public Prosecutor as dutiful citizen of this country.

Now Enforcement Directorate (ED) is seeking data from Stock Exchange Board of India (SEBI) doubting on the prior knowledge of some accused about the controversial Judgment of Judge OP Saini. According to ED, few weeks before the Judgment, there was a huge volume of buying in the almost dead shares of certain companies owned by accused persons. It is high time to finish the probe on this regard and the agencies as well as Judiciary must fast track this probe on the fixing of cases.

The Government, CBI, ED and Special Public Prosecutor must reiterate their demands for the fast track hearing on the appeal against controversial 2G Judgment in Delhi High Court. The Delhi High Court must allot specific time for daily hearing in 2G cases and Chief Justice must take a call to bring justice in the trial court's judgment which itself looks like erroneous.

**[J Gopikrishnan is Special Correspondent with 'The Pioneer' daily]**

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# THE REFORMIST

Dr Syama Prasad Mookerjee was an accidental legendary politician with a golden heart

Prashant Tewari

**S**yama Prasad Mookerjee was among the leading intellectual academicians and educationist of his time. It is not very often that we come across a person who lives for fifty-two years and remains in politics only for fourteen years but within that short period rises to great heights and makes history. Dr Syama Prasad Mookerjee was born on 6 July 1901 in Calcutta (Now Kolkatta) and breathed his last on 23 June 1953 in captivity at Srinagar under mysterious circumstances. His lifespan and matter of death bear uncanny resemblance to his dearest disciple Pandit Deeendayal Upadhyaya.

His engagement with education was not coincidental. He came from a family of educationists. His Father, Asutosh Mookerjee, was vice chancellor of the University of Calcutta, and had earned the sobriquet "lion of Bengal". Incidentally, like his father, Mookerjee served as the youngest vice chancellor of the

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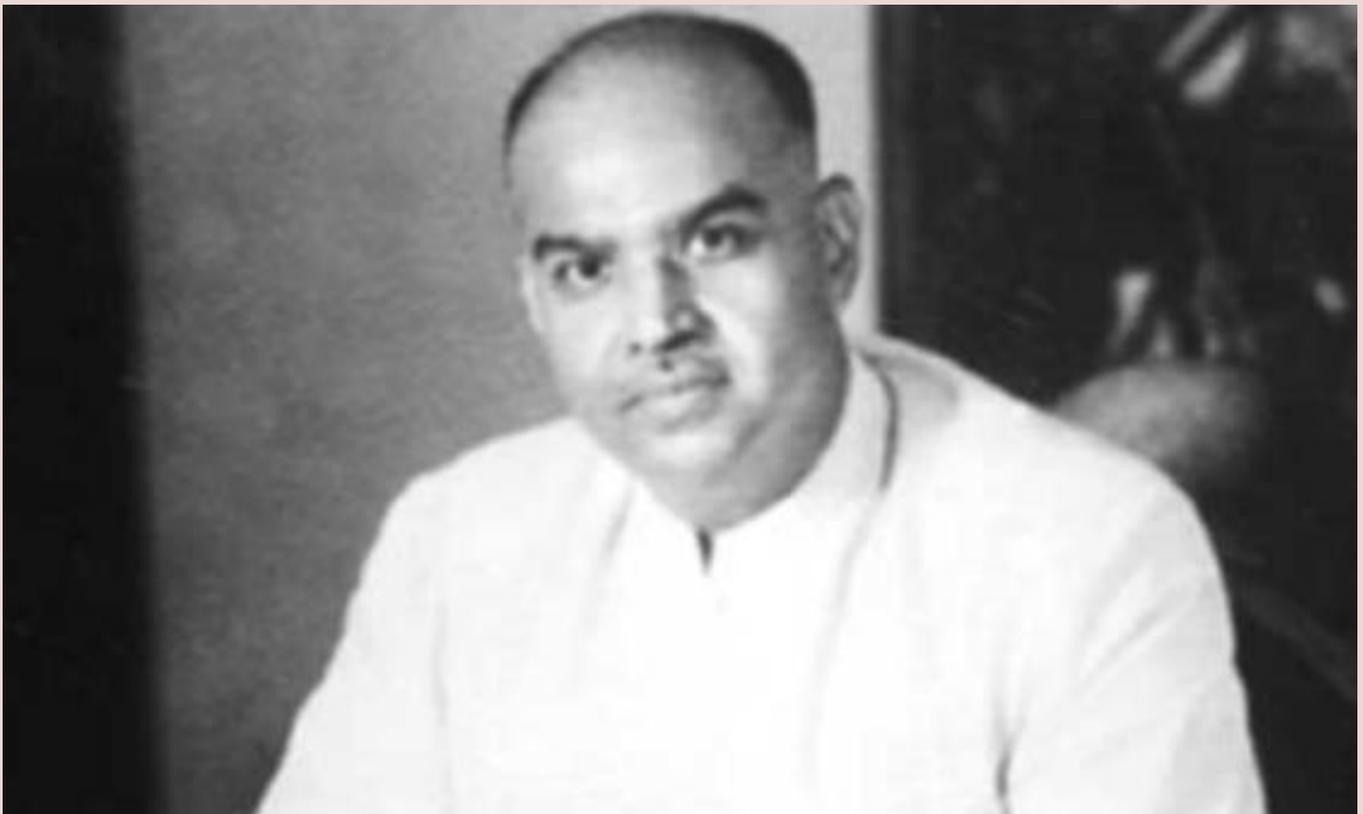
During this period, Sir Asutosh Mookerjee (1864-1924), father of Dr Syama Prasad Mookerjee, revolutionised Indian higher education by changing the character of the Indian universities from mere college affiliated academic bodies to post graduated department of teaching and research.

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university from 1934 to 1938. Mookerjee advocated reforming the Indian

education system in the light of rich Indian intellectual and cultural traditions. He did not take resource to the easy task of just critiquing the colonial education system, but as a critical insider, he provided reasons for doing so in larger Indian historical perspective and prepared a blueprint and implemented it too in his capacity as the vice chancellor.

During this period, Sir Asutosh Mookerjee (1864-1924), father of Dr Syama Prasad Mookerjee, revolutionised Indian higher education by changing the character of the Indian universities from mere college affiliated academic bodies to post graduated department of teaching and research. Sir Asutosh Mookerjee, who had multifarious talent as a lawyer, mathematician and educationalist had groomed his eldest son Rama Prasad for the legal profession and second son Syama Prasad for the field of education. After a brilliant career in the university of Calcutta and securing first position in his graduation and post graduation, Syama





At that time, the Diarchy system had recently been introduced in India by the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms (1919) and Education was one of the transferred subjects, which simply means one in which Indian had some say. In 1929, Syama Prasad disagreed with this and resigned his seat in the Council to come back as an independent candidate.

Prasad studied law to become a member of the Indian Bar in the Calcutta High Court, and there after set sail for England to become a Barrister and enter the English Bar. But Syama Prasad's principle intention of going to England was to study the working of the universities in Britain. After accomplishing what he had in mind, he returned to India to become a member of the syndicate of the University of Calcutta. At the age of twenty three, he was the youngest member of this syndicate. At that time, the Diarchy system had recently been introduced in India by the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms ( 1919 ) and Education was one of the transferred subjects, which simply means one in which Indian had some say. In 1929, Syama Prasad disagreed with this and resigned his seat in the Council to come back as an independent candidate. At this juncture in his life, he was purely concerned with education and not with politics.

Every human being is unique with multiple selves and infinite possibilities. Exceptional are those who leave

inedible imprints on history with their vision, voice and accomplishments. Syama Prasad Mookerjee was one such personality who played a pivotal role in the Indian history in the first half of the twentieth century and continues to exercise influence. In fact, the present generation must follow Dr Mookerjee life to serve the country. The challenge of present day political structure is tremendous wherein the polity is commercialized for personal gains. The thugs and loom pins has high jacked the political scene of the country, fighting popular elections for a simple person is just next to impossible. So taking clue from Dr Mookerjee life: firebrand educated person must take a pledge to cleanse the system. We need to bring merit in the political system that is grossly lacking in the present setup including the very own party that idolize Dr Mookerjee.

Historical being often get reduced to images as seen throughout human history. Mookerjee has been a victim of perception, mainly political, as his contribution in the public sphere has

been reduced to being known as the founder of Bharatiya Jana Sangh or as a crusader for Kashmir. Consequently, his contribution to domains beyond politics remains unacknowledged. A serious and vigorous consideration of his educational views and vision still eludes us and is not a part of the discussions in the mainstream education system in India even today. Mookerjee was an academician at heart who deftly donned the mantle of a politician. His discontent with the then power structures and pressures persuaded him to join active politics, which he perceived to be a potent means of changing the nation in general and its education system in particular. Dr Syama Prasad Mookerjee's principal achievements in the fields of education were during the year of his vice-chancellorship of the University of Calcutta between 1934 and 1938. Dr Mookerjee supported nationalist scholar who wished to undertake serious research in Indian history from an Indian viewpoint, he encouraged excavations, opened the first museum of In-

“ Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high:

Where knowledge is free: Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls:

Where words come out from the depth of truth:

Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection:

Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit:

Where the mind is led forward by Thee into ever widening thought and action-Into that heaven of freedom, my father, let my country awake.

dian history, culture and archaeology in the university and invited international universities to send their students to study India civilization, culture and the Sanskrit language. He promoted the languages of India. In fact, in 1937, he invited Rabindranath Tagore to deliver the convocation address in Bengali - this was the first time ever that a convocation address was delivered in Bengali in the precincts of the University of Calcutta.

Syama Prasad had to face great tragedies. His elder sister, Kamla was widowed, remarried, again widowed and died early. His father, Sir Asutosh, a guiding light in his life died prematurely at the age of sixty in 1924. Then came the worst tragedy, when his beloved wife of only eleven years, Sudha, died. Dr Mookerjee was left to take care of his four children. He remains in public life only because of the help he received

from his sister-in-law, Smt Tara Devi, wife of his elder brother Justice Rama Prasad. Post Muslim League conference in 1940, the Hindu's of Bengal being persecuted were looking for a leader who could look after their interest. Dr Mookerjee was persuaded to leave the education field and join active politics. Dr Mookerjee's activism in politics came at a difficult time. The Congress was powerful in Bengal but was always hesitant to speak for the rights of the Hindus, often bowing down to the Muslim league pressure tactics. Vinayak Damodar Veer Sarvarkar, the All India Hindu Mahasabha leader came to Bengal in August 1939 and Dr Mookerjee joined him in the Hindu Mahasabha soon. Even Gandhiji welcomed his entry in politics and suggested that somebody is required to lead Hindu's after Malaviya' Ji .. Gandhiji had great respect and admiration for Dr Mookerjee abilities. It was on Gandhi ji insistence that Nehru included Dr Mookerjee in the first union cabinet of independent India. As a minister, Dr Mookerjee was credited with several pioneering schemes namely Damodar VALLEY Corporation, fertilizer factory at Sindri, Chittaranjan Locomotive Works and Hindustan Aircraft of Bangalore. He established All India Handicraft Board, All India Handloom Board, and the Khadi and Village Industries Board were set up to supply the much needed organization and finance required by cottage and small scale industries to survive and develop. In July 1948, the Industrial Finance Corporation of India, a government sponsored institution acting as an investment banker, collecting private saving on government guarantee of repayment and distribution them in forms of advances and long term loans to industrial borrowers, was formed. Within one year in politics, Sarvarkar appointed him the president of the All India Hindu Mahasabha, this enabled him to tour entire country. Dr MOOKERJEE became all India leader. His courage, determination, organizational skills, oratorical skills and tireless work propelled him to national fame and he became rallying point for Hindus all over the country. It was in 1940 in Lahore that he addressed a rally of RSS and observed: I see in this organization the one silver lining in the cloudy sky of India. In 1950, the East Pakistan Government launched an anti Hindu program all over the East Pakistan with the intention of de-Hindusing the country. As a result, huge Hindu exodus started

in West Bengal, Assam and Tripura. Nehru wanted an agreement with Liaquat Ali led government but Dr Mookerjee was opposed to an agreement. This led to his resignation from the cabinet. Further, KASHMIR POLICY OF Pandit Nehru forced Dr Mookerjee to establish separate way in politics. Now Dr Mookerjee was leader without a party. Sri Guruji Golwalkar, Sarsanhchhalak of RSS suggested him to start a political party to be backed by RSS cadre. He finally founded Bharatiya Jan Sangh on 21 Oct 1951.

Dr Syama Prasad Mookerjee was a proud Indian and great nationalist. He was Indian by heart and advised us to keep our head erect because of the inherent power of assimilation that the Indian mind has shown itself capable of extraordinary abilities. According to Dr Mookerjee, the aim of our culture has been the complete realization of life. Nature, man and God make for life's entire knowledge and service. He had the firm belief that the cause of Indian advancement is just and righteous and standing at the foot of Himalayas and near holy rivers that have from time immemorial witnessed the mighty career of Indian civilization, which no power can crush, let us draw inspiration from the glorious past, sustain fortitude and strength to face the trials and turbulence of the present and fearlessly contribute our humble share in the rebuilding of a tree and united India of the future. Let us gather in our own voices of India's oppressed millions and proclaim in the words of our beloved poet our determination to march along the path of truth and justice and to consider no sacrifice, no preparation is great for the emancipation of our Motherland.

Dr Mookerjee and his party BJS had extremely strong view on Kashmir; "Kashmir" is an inalienable part of India and should be treated as any other state. BJS was pro Hindu and propagated ultra nationalism. Referring to Nehru's threat of crushing Jana Sangh, Dr Mookerjee said: I will crush this crushing mentality of yours. Dr Mookerjee aligned with Pandit Dogra against Sheikh Abdullah and emerged as the most vociferous speaker in the entire opposition. On the request of Pandit Dogra, on 8 May 1953, he set out on a journey by passenger train from Delhi railway station accompanied by Vaid Guru Dutt, Atal Bihari Vapayee, Tek Chand and Balraj adhok along with few media persons. He was arrested by J&K police on the grounds that he was about



to act in a manner prejudicial to public safety and peace. He was taken in preventive custody and he was kept in a isolated concrete hut in highly cramped and uncomfortable conditions. Dr Mooherjee condition worsed and sadly he died in confinement without proper medical care on 23 June 1953. Several people had sought enquiry to find out background and the conspiracy behind it. Dr Mooherjee untimely and suspicious death on the other hand took place in secret, far away from family and friends in hostile territory which was even beyond the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court of India. It is therefore natural that Dr Mooherjee family, colleagues, admirers, party men and unrelated men who took an interest in public affairs would demand an enquiry into it.

Thus, ended the life of one of the greatest sons of Mother INDIA. The party that Dr Mooherjee founded, the ideals for nation building that he set before the people and workers ultimately found their realisation in the form of commitment to protecting nationalism and to work towards realizing a great and united India. The life of Dr Mookerjee as seen through the prism of ideas of many luminaries, will enthuse generation to come with his ideas and ideals for which he made the ultimate sacrifice. The ultimate sacrifice made by Dr Mookerjee must be put to use in building the modern India. The first and the foremost thing is that we must bring merit and honesty in the public life. India is a continent with varied

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culture hence to integrate the variables, we need a person like Dr Mookerjee to demolish the barrier of caste and creed and division of languages. The public life must not be treated as a profession to build family businesses but the objective should be to serve over 1.3 billion people living in this great country. Dr Mooherjee was a strong believer in Indian cultural values like service, sacrifice and care for all, among others, and advocated the primacy of social harmony, for he saw internal conflicts as the main cause of India's plummeting fortunes. On umpteen occasions in his discourse, he stressed the need

for harmony and saw education as the main instrument of enforcing it in the country. Mookerjee's concern for education were integral to his yearning for India's independence. Free India of his dreams was an able country capable of catering to the needs of all stages of education as part of one comprehensive national system-from primary to university levels. He saw education in India holistically: gender-men and women, area-rural and urban: religion-Hindus, Muslims and Christians, of all segments from primary to higher education, and all constitutive elements of human personality-physical, mental, intellectual, rational, aesthetic, relational, moral and spiritual-as equal participants. Education to Mookerjee was the instrument for attaining independence. He had imbibed the principle that true education liberates but the liberation was not an abstract category but an ontological category that meant freedom from causes of suffering and bondages-economic, social, political and spiritual.

We must take lesson from Dr Mookerjee life and adopt values that he shared for the public life to build stronger nation. Education, merit and values must come first in public life and it is more relevant for the party that is presently ruling the country because most of the values professed by Dr Mookerjee can turn around the country in a stronger, peaceful yet powerful nation.

***(Writer is Editor-in-Chief of Opinion Express Group and member of Editorial Board of The Pioneer)***

# LABOUR AND ANTI-SEMITISM

Anti-Semitism appears to be rife in some corners of the Labour Party

**Kapil Dudakia**

**T**he astute reader of international politics would have noted that in the UK the Labour Party (socialist) has been having a torrid time of late. In particular, accusation after accusation has surfaced, both from within the Party membership as well as from those on the outside. So, what say you all are these accusations related to? And the answer in a nutshell, it's with regard to overt and covert racism against the Jewish community, and the turning of a blind eye to the anti-Semitism that appears to be rife in some corners of the Labour Party.

There has been a long-standing myth that the Labour Party in the UK is on the side of the ethnic minorities. I use the word, 'myth', because in my view and experience it has become apparent over the past several decades that maybe this perception that the Labour Party has enjoyed thus far might not be a true representation of its real under belly.

So let's start with the new leader of the Labour Party, Jeremy Corbyn. He became the unexpected leader of the Labour Party on 12th September 2015. I say unexpected since even his own MP's

did not want him, yet by a quirk of the voting methods used by the Labour Party, the vote bank politics of the Unions and the far-left dominated membership he was brought to power. The victory of Corbyn was almost like a signal to the far-left of the Party to do whatever they wanted to do. To the horror of the centrist Labour MP's, Corbyn supporters saw this as a green signal and went on a political rampage. Within a short period of time a far-left group calling itself 'Momentum' started to take over the Labour Party narrative. It was almost as if the old Labour Party had been

## Konversations with Kapil

hijacked by the far-left, and the Unions who now seemed to have been given unchecked access to do whatever they wanted to do. In effect the Labour far-left seemed to be empowered to attack anyone who stood in their way, or in the way of their leader. The pent-up venom over decades of frustration of the far-left was unleashed, and it seemed that their initial targets appeared to be their own MP's and the centre of the Party membership.

The alarm bells were not just ringing, they were exploding with the news that the old guard of the Labour Party was finished and the new comrades of

hijacked by the far-left, and the Unions who now seemed to have been given unchecked access to do whatever they

Corbyn were now in power. Labour MP's in their last-ditch stand passed a vote of no confidence in Corbyn by 172 votes to 40 following the resignation of around two-thirds of Corbyn's Shadow Cabinet. Now under any other democracy and for any other leader who had any honour and integrity, that would certainly mean walking away. However, Corbyn defied all logic in the knowledge that he had a majority of the membership votes, and the vote bank of the Unions that would keep him in place anyway. Labour MP's were no longer in any position of influence. Labour had



reached a bizarre position where the Parliamentary MP's overwhelmingly rejected Jeremy Corbyn, yet the Party membership voted him in. The Labour Party as we knew it was finished.

So by now you must be asking the question, where and how does this anti-Semitism issue arise? Well, in 2016 the Labour Party instigated what was called the Chakrabarti Inquiry. It was to investigate allegations of antisemitism and other forms of racism in the Labour Party. At that time comments made by two high-profile Labour figures, Naz Shah and Ken Livingstone had been deemed

to have been anti-Semitic in nature were therefore to be investigated. On 30 June 2016 the findings were presented stating that although antisemitism and other types of racism were not endemic within Labour, there was an "occasionally toxic atmosphere". The report was seen by most independent readers as a white wash. This became even more toxic when the British public discovered months later that the Chair of the same inquiry, Shami Chakrabarti was suddenly made the Labour appointment to the House of Lords. Marie van der Syl, vice-president of the Board of Deputies

of British Jews, called it a whitewash for peerages scandal. The tone was set, increasingly it became clear to most people that something was not quite right. The Jewish community was outraged to the core. If this was not bad enough for the Labour Party, a cross-party Select Committee on antisemitism described the Chakrabarti Inquiry as "compromised". It criticised the Labour party's handling of anti-Semitism, concluding "the failure of the Labour Party consistently to deal with anti-Semitic incidents in recent years risks lending force to allegations that elements of the La-



bour movement are institutionally anti-Semitic”.

Now to most sane people you would have thought that the writing was on the wall, and it was very clear. However, either the Leader of the Labour Party was deluded, compromised, part of the problem or just plain stupid to grasp the seriousness of the issues emerging. Whatever might the truth be, what was abundantly clear to most independent by-standers was that Labour was in trouble on the anti-Semitism issue and that it was not going to go away.

In early 2018 devastating news broke. It turns out that Jeremy Corbyn (and some other senior members of the Labour Party) were part of several Facebook groups. It also emerged that in some of the discussions taking place in these groups, there seemed to be anti-Semitic views expressed openly. In what became a farce, Corbyn’s defence was that he did not know of these views being expressed in these groups, even though he was a member. In the end the leaders of British Jewry wrote an open letter to the Labour Party and Jeremy Corbyn stating, ‘enough is enough’. Never in the history of modern day politics has the Jewish community been so outraged, and so abused, that they felt compelled to write in the bluntest fash-

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**I am reminded of the first visit by PM Modi to the UK. It was under the stewardship of the then PM, David Cameron who welcomed the Indian PM with incredible hospitality.**

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ion that they had, had enough of the rhetoric and platitudes from the Labour leader.

I have of course touched on just the tip of this messy racist iceberg. The Labour Party has hitherto ridden a wave of support from various ethnic minority groups who have seen it as a champion for equality and human rights. However, and increasingly, people are beginning to question whether this is in fact a true representation of the Labour Party now, or whether it has managed to escape close scrutiny by offloading such accusations onto the Conservative Party.

I have done a bit of digging myself

and it seems that it is not just the Jewish community that is angry with the Labour Party. I have come across many community leaders from the Hindu, Sikh and Jain communities who have also expressed serious concern and reservations about the Labour Party. When you delve a bit further you come across time and again, community leader after community leader telling you that they now perceive the Labour Party to be anti-India. In fact, they went on and stated that the impression they were getting was that Corbyn was fundamentally anti-Modi with some suggesting that he was also anti-Hindu.

I am reminded of the first visit by PM Modi to the UK. It was under the stewardship of the then PM, David Cameron who welcomed the Indian PM with incredible hospitality. I remember the huge event that took place at Wembley Stadium when PM Cameron and PM Modi were on stage together as good friends. During that visit it was remarkable how the senior figures from the Labour Party were absent at most of events taking place. It was almost as if they had gone into hiding, trying their best to avoid coming into contact with PM Modi. The people noticed this open undermining of the Indian PM by the Labour Party. It was only towards the

end of the visit that a hastily arranged meeting between the Labour leader and PM Modi took place – which I am told was a face-saving exercise for Corbyn. I am told, PM Modi gave him a few minutes only. A clear sign to the labour leadership that they cannot disrespect the biggest democracy on the planet and hope to get away with it so easily.

I asked many community leaders as to why the leader of the Labour Party had behaved in such a disgraceful fashion. Their answer was enlightening. As far as they were concerned the Labour Party was now a Party that was intertwined with the Pakistani community. Labour needed the Sunni and Kashmiri vote and could not do anything to alienate that community. In effect it seems the Labour Party had decided that harvesting the Sunni vote was more productive to them than trying to keep the votes of the other minorities. Again, one was left a bit perplexed. Surely such a strategy would be disastrous. And once again the very same leaders came back to me and said, not quite. It seems that the Labour Party had rightly concluded that the Hindu, Sikh and Jain vote was in the bag anyway, and given that these communities are not as well united and organised like the Pakistani commu-

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**When you investigate the matter further it transpires that most of the EDM (Early Day Motions in Parliament) that are negative to Israel and India tend to be led by Labour MP's. No surprise there I suppose.**

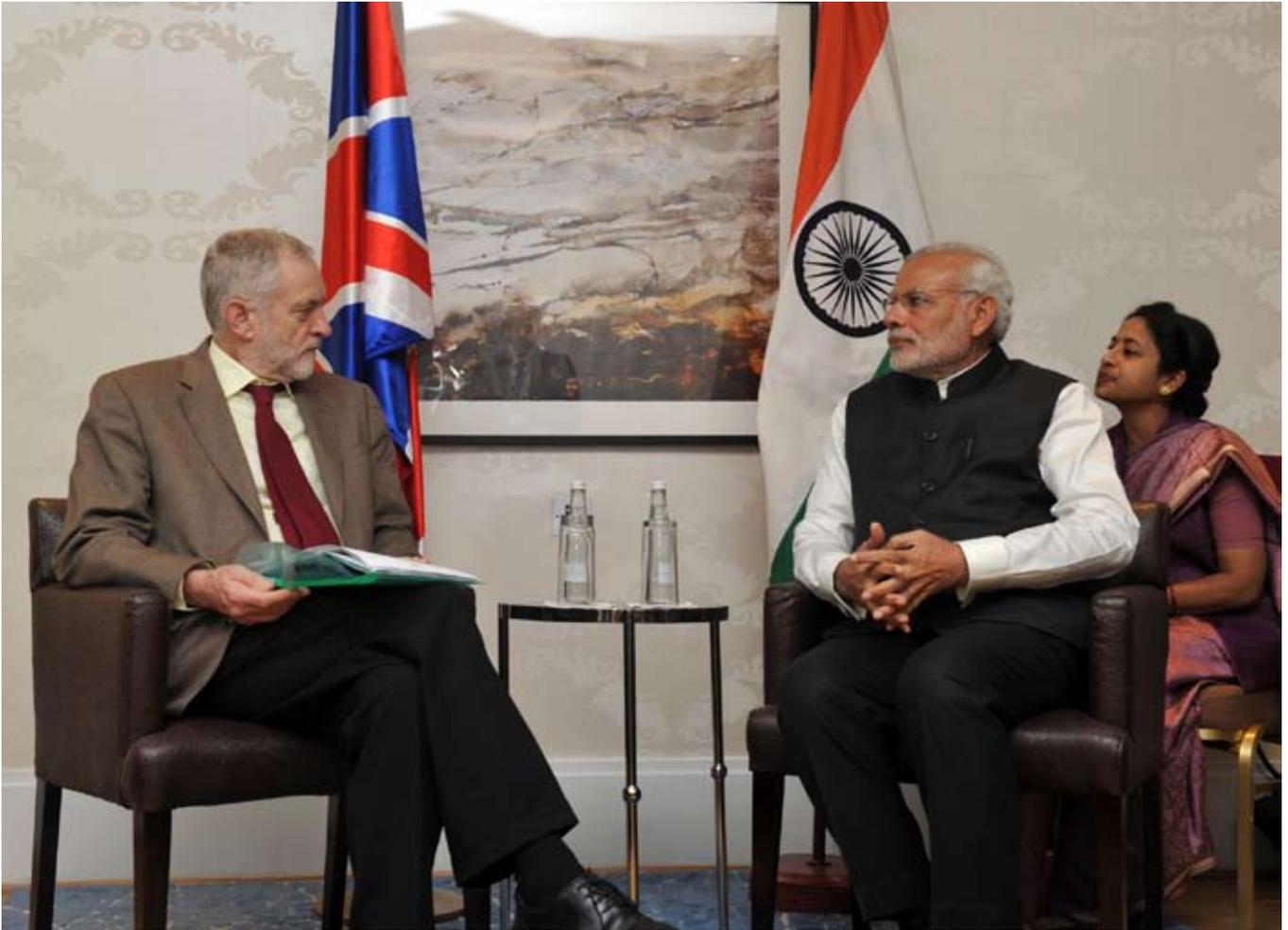
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nity, they would not be able to damage their overall votes. There is a lot of truth in that view. History showed us there is still a sizeable Hindu, Sikh and Jain vote that always goes to the labour Party. This blind allegiance means that the Labour Party can get away with disrespecting their faith, their culture and their country of origin, knowing that they groups are too brainwashed to vote for anyone else. The Jewish vote for Labour on the other hand has gone down dramatically – they know how to show

their displeasure.

When you investigate the matter further it transpires that most of the EDM (Early Day Motions in Parliament) that are negative to Israel and India tend to be led by Labour MP's. No surprise there I suppose. In fact the Labour leader, Jeremy Corbyn supported an EDM seeking a Visa ban for Shri Narendra Modi. Yes, you read that correctly. Even more startling, he wanted to ban PM Modi from the entering the UK. So readers in India, think about this seriously. You now have the leader of the Labour Party in the UK, who could potentially become the next PM of UK, who has openly sought to ban PM Modi from the UK. Add to that the fact that you still have some Indians in the UK who will blindly vote for Corbyn and Labour. I am informed that some of these very same Indians are also key advisors to PM Modi. Now how mad is that? It's almost as if the Indian PM is being advised by, and is listening to, the very people who want to undermine him and India. Folks you cannot make this up if you tried. This is ground reality and I would hope that someone in PM Modi's camp might see enlightenment and act accordingly, and quickly. If they want to know more, then I am always avail-





able to share my thoughts.

So let us move back to how the under belly of the Labour started to get exposed. The Jewish lobby is very powerful in the UK (as it is anywhere else in the world). I salute the Jewish community since they have learnt the lessons of history and have concluded, never again will they allow the racist from the far left, or the far right, to dictate the agenda and leave them in a precarious position. As soon as they raised their voice and took proactive action, we saw the fear in the Labour Party spreading. Jeremy Corbyn was forced to accept that his ideological positioning was not compatible with British society. Every media channel, including the pro-Labour media, ran the story to the end with remarkable editorials that more or less showed that Jeremy Corbyn was unfit to be a leader. We had endless apologies from him as well his senior MP's in the Shadow Cabinet. Do I think the public believed a word of it? Simple answer, it seems most of the British public don't believe a word he utters on this subject. It has become toxic to such an extent that even his own Jewish MP's like Luciana Berger stated in Parliament that anti-Semitism within the

party has become "commonplace, conspicuous and corrosive". In May of this year, in many parts of the UK we had our Local Elections to elect Councillors and Councils. The Labour Party had been stating for months that this would be a total wipe out for the Conservative Party. The reality has now hit them hard. As the results were announced, the vast majority of Labour supporters were left devastated. Their prediction of winning everything in sight was way off the mark. In the end, the Conservative Party after 8 years in Government held on to most of the Councils and the wipe out that was predicted, never materialised. The reason, the anti-Semitism row took its toll. The Jewish community showed that not only can they affect and impact elections where they are in large numbers, but their reach goes much wider and affected results across the country.

India is the emerging giant. India under PM Modi has garnered huge respect around the world. However, it has yet to take people to task when India or Indians are undermined or disrespected. PM Modi needs all the support he can get from the nation. However with that support he, and his Govern-

ment, must also deliver on some of the core issues emerging. India stands at the gateway of a glorious future. The dreams of Bharat Varsh can be achieved where each and every Indian will be respected, valued and will find a place in the nation to fulfil their aspirations. This is not a time to blink, it's time to stare your destiny in the eye and secure it.

In the words of Swami Vivekananda ji: "Arise awake and stop not until the goal is achieved."

**Twitter: @kk\_OEG**

***The writer is a seasoned businessman and a leading thought provoking writer from the UK. His command of detail and his ability to see issues and events years before they come to fruition is worthy of note. He has advised very senior politicians on a variety of issues. Being independent of thought, he does not compromise, nor does he bow to pressures to become politically correct. He understands the East, and he lives in the West. A unique grasp of perspectives that is often food for thoughts for all of us.***

# Grammy chief to step aside after furor on women

**T**he head of the Recording Academy, the professional group of musicians that administers the Grammys, said Thursday he would step aside months after an uproar over his remarks on women.

Recording Academy president and CEO Neil Portnow, whose 16-year tenure has been the longest of any chief of the body, said he would not seek an extension after his contract ends in July 2019.

A calm, bespectacled record industry executive who has put a focus on pressing for the music business's interests in Washington, Portnow was a largely uncontroversial figure until the latest Grammy Awards.

Asked by a reporter after the gala

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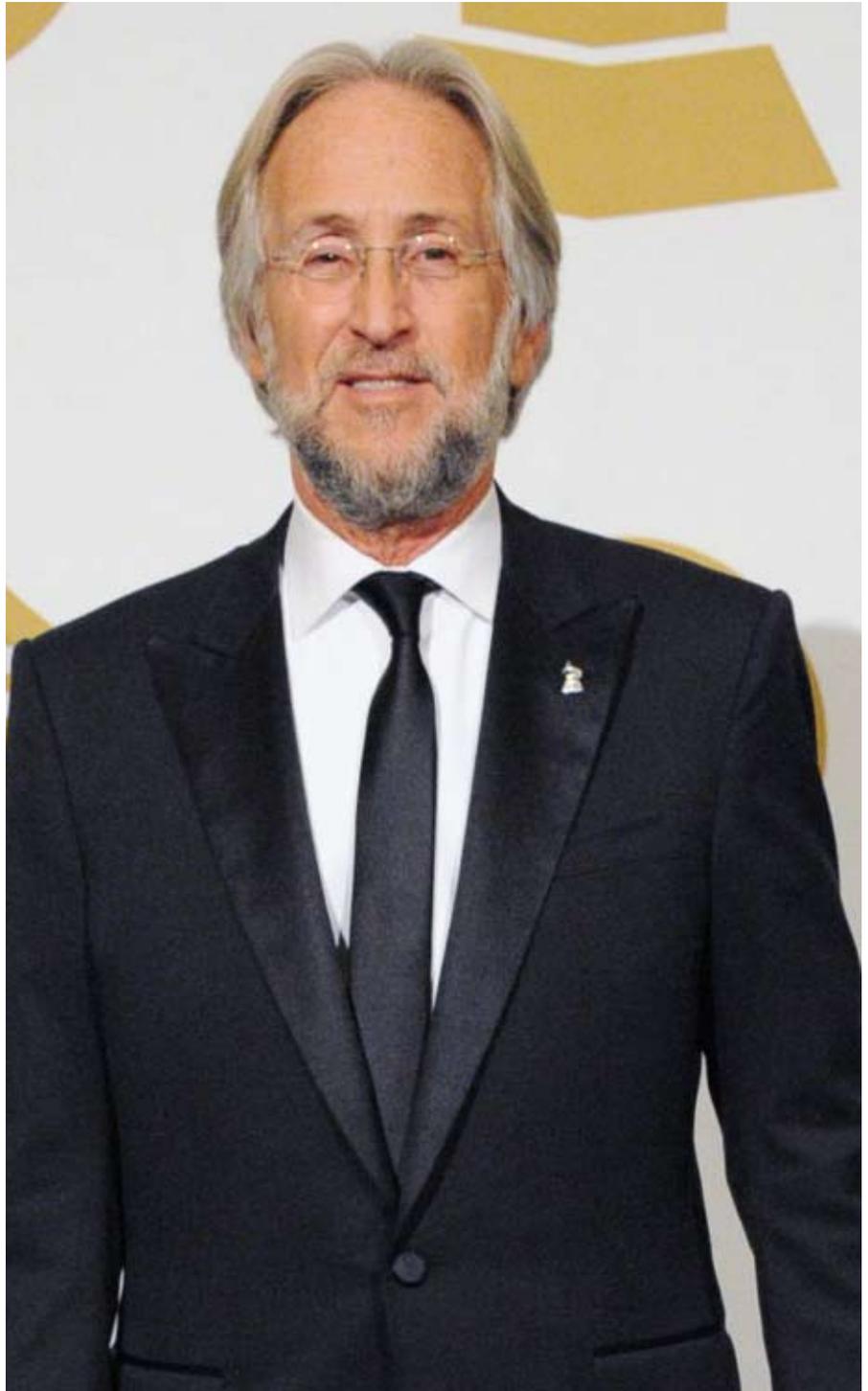
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why more women were not winning the music industry's biggest prize, Portnow said that female musicians should "step up," while also speaking of the need for more mentorship.

Top female stars including Katy Perry and Pink voiced outrage over his remarks and a group of women executives in the music business called on Portnow to step down as part of the "Time's Up" movement against gender inequality.

Portnow, in his statement, did not address the incident but said he wanted an orderly transition to choose his successor.

"The evolution of industries, institutions, and organizations is ultimately the key to their relevance, longevity and success," he said in a statement.



The spotlight on the gender imbalance came after men dominated the winners at the 60th Grammy Awards, although women -- Adele and Taylor Swift -- had won the top prize of Album of the Year the two previous years.

Portnow had nonetheless been credited with promoting racial and genre

diversity, in part by switching the Recording Academy to online balloting to ensure better representation.

For the first time, hip-hop dominated the top nominations at the latest Grammys, although funk revivalist Bruno Mars was the night's big winner. Agencies

# THE PIONEER

## How Adi Shankaracharya united a fragmented land

**T**hose who insist that history is real, and mythology false, go against the very grain of Adi Shankaracharya's non-dualist maxim: *Jagat mithya, brahma satyam*, which means the world, including measured scientific conclusions, that we experience is essentially illusory or rather, mind-dependent epistemological truths. The only mind-independent ontological truth is *brahma*, variously translated as God, soul, consciousness, language, or the infinitely expanded, eternal, unconditioned mind.

This doctrine of reducing the world to mere illusion, popularly known as *maya-vada*, enabled Shankara to do

something remarkable: unite a land with diverse communities and diverse, seemingly irreconcilable, worldviews – from the Buddhists, the Mimamsakas (old Vedic householders) and the Vedantins (the later Vedic hermits), to the Shaivas, the Vaishnavas, and the Shaktas. This is evident in his copious literary outpourings.

### Political sage

Shankara's philosophy is avowedly Vedic. Unlike Buddhists and Jains, he traced his knowledge to the Vedas and submitted to its impersonal authority, which made him a believer (*astika*). In his commentaries (*bhasya*) and mono-

graphs (*prakarana*), he repeatedly sought a formless divine (*nirguna brahman*) being the only reality, outside all binaries. This is evident in his commentary on Vedanta, the *Brahma-sutra-bhasya*, his Sanskrit poems *Vivekachudamani* and *Nirvana-shatakam* and his treatise *Atma-bodha*. Many consider this to be an acceptance of the Buddhist theme of the world being a series of disconnected transitory moments, hence amounting to nothingness (*shunya-vada*), while giving it a Vedic twist, which is why Shankara was often accused of being a disguised Buddhist (*prachanna baudha*).

But Shankara's poetry (*stotra*) also



celebrates several tangible forms of the divine (saguna brahmana) as they appear in the Puranas. He composed grand benedictions to Puranic gods: Shiva (Daksinamurti-stotra), Vishnu (Govinda-ashtaka) and Shakti (Saundarya-lahari). This makes him the first Vedic scholar, after Vyasa, overtly to link Vedic Hinduism to Puranic Hinduism, an idea further elaborated a few centuries later by other teachers of Vedanta, such as Ramanuja, Madhva, and Vallabha. Shankara even wrote on tantra, which made its presence explicitly felt around that time.

For all his talk of formlessness and nothingness, and the world being an illusion, Shankara went on to connect holy spots of India such as the 12 jyotirlingas, 18 shakti-peethas and four Vishnu-dhaams to create pilgrim routes that defined India as a single land. In his legends, he travelled from Kerala to Kashmir, from Puri in present-day Odisha to Dwarka in Gujarat, from

Shringeri in present-day Karnataka to Badari in Uttarakhand, from Kanchi in present-day Tamil Nadu to Kashi in Uttar Pradesh, along the slopes of the Himalayas, the banks of the rivers Narmada and Ganga, and along the eastern and western coasts.

Shankara then is not an ivory tower philosopher; he is a political sage, engaging with and responding to the historical context of his time. Through philosophy, poetry and pilgrimage, he attempted to bind the subcontinent of India that was constantly referred to in Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain texts as well as in the Vedic ritual of sankalpa as Jambudvipa, the continent of the jambul tree, and Bharat-varsha, the land of the Bharata kings.

### Historical context

In his commentary on the Brahma-sutra (1.3.33), Shankara observed, "One can say that there never was a universal ruler as there is none now," an acknowledgement of the fragmented nature of his society at his time, and refusing to accept the mythology of Chakravarti, or universal emperor, found in Buddhist, Jain and Hindu lore.

Most historians agree that Adi Shankaracharya lived in the 8th century CE, or 1,200 years ago, 1,300 years after the Buddha.

This period was a major cusp in Indian history – between the collapse of the Gupta Empire 1,500 years ago, and the Muslim conquest of South Asia 1,000 years ago. Harshavardhan of Kannauj had died, the Rashtrakutas held sway on either side of the river Narmada, constantly at war with the Pratiharas of the North, Palas of the East, and Chalukyas of the South. Regional languages and scripts which are now so familiar had not yet emerged. South Indian temples did not have their characteristic gopuram gateways, the Ramayana had yet to be translated into Tamil, Jayadeva had yet to write the Gita Govinda that introduced the world to Radha.

Adi Shankara, who travelled the breadth of the land, communicated through the one language that connected the intellectual elite of the land: Sanskrit.

To appreciate the spirit of this time, we must understand the fundamental tension of Indian society between the world-affirming, ritual-bound householder and world-renouncing, ritual-rejecting hermit.

### Householder vs hermit

When Alexander of Macedon attacked India in 327 BCE, the Vedic worldview favoured the householder, while the Buddhist (and Jain, and Ajivika) worldview favoured the hermit.

In Shankara's time, the Vedic worldview was split into the Mimamsaka worldview that favoured the householder, and the Vedantika worldview that favoured the hermit.

Some people argue that this shows the influence of Buddhism on Vedism, causing Hindu supremacists to bristle. What is often overlooked is the influence of Vedism on Buddhism,

for by Shankara's time, the intellectual hermit Buddha had been replaced by the more-worldly Bodhisattva, and his feminine form, Tara, who valued compassion (karuna) over wisdom (prajanya).

And while the Brahminical elite argued over the ritual ways (karma marga) of the Mimamsika and the intellectual ways (gyan marga) of the Vedantin, the storytellers (suta) of India from Vyasa to Valmiki were reshaping Hinduism dramatically with the composition of the Puranas, where the hermit Shiva was being compelled to marry the Goddess, Shakti, and Vishnu was duty-bound to take care of Lakshmi and Saraswati.

### Biography

Shankara was born to a poor Brahmin (Namboodri) family in Kerala. His

Through philosophy, poetry and pilgrimage, he attempted to bind the subcontinent of India that was constantly referred to in Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain texts as well as in the Vedic ritual of sankalpa as Jambudvipa, the continent of the jambul tree, and Bharat-varsha, the land of the Bharata kings.





father's name was Shivaguru, suggesting Shaiva roots. His father died when he was very young, and he was raised by his mother, known to us only as Aryamba (noble lady). She was a worshipper of Krishna, indicating Vaishnava roots. Despite his mother's protests, he chose to become a hermit as he favoured the prevailing Vedantik worldview to the Mimansik. His guru, Govinda Bhagavatapada, whose name suggests Vaishnava roots, who chose the hermit's life on the banks of the river Narmada, was deeply influenced by Buddhism.

From Central India, Shankara moved to Kashi where he encountered a chandala, keeper of the crematorium, the most polluted of professions in the Hindu caste hierarchy. When Shankara asked him to move aside, the chandala chastised him saying, "My body, or my soul, the form, or the formless, the limited, or the limitless?" This incident had a deep impact on Shankara, as it made him question the invalidity of the flesh proposed by the hermit tradition. Shankara was steeped in the

traditional varna-ashrama-dharma, where caste purity and pollution mattered, so his acceptance of the chandala as his guru holds special significance. The incident led him to compose the Manisha-panchakam where he looks beyond divisions that create dualities (dvaita) and affirms non-duality (advaita). Wisdom is seen here as the tool to transcend caste.

Shankara then encountered the great Mimansaka scholar Mandana Mishra at Mahismati in Bihar and convinced him of the superiority of knowledge (gyana) over ritual (karma). But then, Mandana's wife, Ubhaya Bharati, playfully challenged him to knowledge of erotics (kama-shastra). When the celibate Shankara pleaded ignorance, the lady asked him how he could claim to have understood the world without experiencing sensual pleasure and emotional intimacy. What followed is shrouded in mystery, and edited by latter-day puritans.

Shankara used his yogic powers to enter the corpse of Amaru, the king of

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Kashmir, and animate it long enough to enjoy all kinds of pleasure of the flesh.



Legend has it that it led Shankara to write erotic love poetry known as Amaru-shataka. In Kashmir then, and later in Shringeri, in present-day Karnataka, Shankara established temples to his personal deity, Sharada, who is commonly identified as Saraswati as she holds a book. However, she also holds a pot and a parrot, symbols of household and sensual life, indicating Shankara's acknowledgment of the senses, the flesh, matter itself: in other words, tantra. Shankara's association with the tantrik geometrical symbol of the divine feminine, the shree-yantra, reinforces this. Was the goddess inspired by Ubhaya Bharati, or his mother, who kept presenting householder wisdom? We can only speculate.

Shankara returned to Kerala to perform his mother's last rites on learning of her death. This was his promise to her when she finally gave him permission to become a hermit, after he survived an attack by a crocodile.

However, in Vedic tradition, having renounced household life, a hermit can-

not perform household rituals like funerals. As a hermit, Shankara had given up his role as son, and so had no obligations to the woman who was once his mother. But Shankara here displayed the spirit of a defiant revolutionary. When prevented from performing her rites in the crematorium, he carried his mother's body to the backyard of her house and performed the rituals there.

He then proceeded to travel across India, establishing his institution (matha) in the four corners of India, all the while visiting and mapping pilgrim routes. He is said to have established the various akharas of hermits who were told to use their knowledge and their physical and yogic powers to protect Hinduism. He even organised their movements across pilgrim spots and their meetings during the Kumbha mela.

Shankara died at the young age of 32 in the Himalayan region. The story goes that his father, on being given a choice by the gods, wanted a great son with a short lifespan, rather than an or-

dinary son with a long lifespan. According to legend, a child prodigy, he was supposed to die at the age of eight, but was given an extension of eight years so that he could excavate the truth of the Vedas. His commentaries and monographs were so brilliant that Vyasa, the mythical organiser of the Vedas, himself extended his life by another 16 years to spread his ideas to the world.

## Decoding Shankara

Scholars wonder if Shankara, the philosopher, who valorised knowledge, was also the Shankara who composed devotional poetry. Was the Shankara who established pilgrimages the one who also spoke the futility of mindless ritual, so beautifully expressed in Bhaja Govindam? Was he Vedic or Tantric? Was he Shaivite, Vaishnavite, or Shakta? Is he this or that, or both, or neither? Was he anti-Buddhist or a subversive pro-Buddhist? The diverse fragments of his life mirror the diverse fragmented worldviews that shaped India in his time, and continue to do so today.

The diversity of India relative to the Middle East, Europe and America is undeniable. It bewilders the world. For outsiders, it is chaotic, on the verge of collapse and division. For insiders, there is meaning underlying the madness. The outsider and insider view of India is therefore divergent.

Outsiders tend to see India's diversity in divisive terms: it is either the outcome of hierarchy (casteism, Brahminism imposed through Manusmriti), or complex postmodern arguments are used to say India did not exist, mirroring the shunya-vada of Buddhists that denies continuity. By contrast, Shankara, an insider, used the doctrine of illusion to democratise fragmented and limited worldviews: all views, all perceptions, all understanding of these words are imperfect and incomplete, but they delude us into assuming they are perfect and complete.

To understand Shankara, we need to break free from the fixed Abrahamic binary of one true God and other false gods, which even influences much of today's political and scientific discourse, and move into the Hindu, rather fluid, binary where the divine can be limited (god, without capitalisation) and limitless (God, with capitalisation), and where the relationship of form and formless divine is much like the relationship between sound and meaning without which no word can exist.

Shankara sees the world around him



as full of fragmented ephemeral limited truths, just like Buddhists. However, unlike Buddhists, he insists that they exist on a platform of an unfragmented eternal limitless truth that attributes meaning and value to existence. The former is accessible; the latter is transcendental and elusive. Life's experiences are full of limited and temporary joys and sorrows. Without a transcendental underpinning, life becomes meaningless, valueless.

Rejection of brahman, that there is something permanent and unifying within and without all of us, results in nihilism, and leads to the monastic obsession with oblivion of the self (nirvana), while acceptance of brahman enables one to enjoy the beauty of life, its colours (ranga), its juices (rasa), its emotions (bhava), its experiences (anubhava), as diverse expressions of the divine, rendered more beautiful by mortality. Hence, the importance given by Shankara to the exciting characters of Hindu mythology whose tales in the Puranas evoke Vedic truths, and anchor them to pilgrim spots across India, on the top of mountains, in caves and at confluences of rivers, an idea that would horrify a traditional Vedic ritualist.

One reason why Buddhism did not thrive in India is its avowed distancing from the arts, viewing it as temporal indulgence, in contrast to Puranic Hinduism, where the gods danced and sang to reveal wisdom. The Buddhist elite shunned rituals at Buddhist shrines that

were popular with the masses. Shankara, by contrast, realised how stories and songs connect with people and create the highway to an expanded vision of life. So he embraced Puranic temples and their rituals, which were relatively more inclusive (caste rules still prevailed), and far more artistic, and public, than the more rigid exclusivist Vedic rituals. And this played a huge role in establishing Shankara's popularity as the saviour of Hinduism.

Rather than arguing which commentary, poetry, pilgrimage, worldview, or god, is a superior or comprehensive fragment, Shankara insists that the only truth that matters is brahman, which is unreachable through reason and argument, and can only be accessed through faith, via the Vedas.

Is this real, or strategic? We cannot be sure. What we can be sure is that, with nothing superior, and everything illusory, there can be mutual respect, awareness of each other's inadequacies, and the empathy to mutually complement, or supplement, rather than substitute.

Tranquillity escapes us as long as we shun knowledge. Knowledge is acquired when we make our pilgrimage into other views – as Shankara engaged with his guru, the chandala, Ubhaya Bharati and finally his mother – and have faith in a larger transcendental mind-independent reality, the brahman.

Debate

There are many who believe that

Shankara's philosophy is for the intellectual elite, and his poetry and pilgrimage routes for the less intellectual masses. This condescending suggestion is often made by those who imagine themselves to be intellectual for they fail to see Shankara's diverse body of work as an integrated whole.

Like any ancient or medieval figure of Indian history, it is difficult to separate fact from fiction about Shankara's life. Scholars are not sure which of his literary works are authentically his, and which are attributed to him to gain legitimacy or popularity. Depending on what one cherry picks, Shankara can be turned into an incarnation of Shiva, a champion of Hinduism who drove out Buddhists, a prodigious and prolific logician and poet, a savarna casteist Hindu, or a reconciler of paradoxes.

What is most interesting is that his hagiography (exaggerated biographies), composed centuries after his birth, are often referred to as dig-vijaya, or conquests, and his encounters with philosophers such as Mandana Mishra are described in combative and triumphalist terms.

This obsession of defeating intellectuals in debates has more to do with indulging the ego than expanding knowledge. And it is highly unlikely that a Vedic philosopher would engage in such activity, for the Vedas view ego (aham) as the eclipse that blocks our view of brahma, which resides within everyone as atma.

Ego thrives on violence and violation and so chooses argument (vi-vaad) over discussion (sam-vaad). In vi-vaad, we listen not to understand but to retort, thus remaining trapped in ignorance (avidya). In sam-vaad, we listen to refine our ideas, gain knowledge (vidya). Perhaps our understanding of Shankara is contaminated by the ambitions of his not-so-intellectual fans and followers who relish the idea of domination. Sounds familiar?

But the more we argue with a bad idea, the more it entraps us. We end up as loyal opposition. It is important to let go, and seek alternate ideas. This essay is an attempt to present that alternate idea: see jagat mithya, brahma satyam (verse 20, Brahmajnanavalimala), not as a statement to invalidate experience, or establish Hindu supremacy, but as a simple framework to allow, accept and even assimilate myriad ideas, find unity in diversity, in India, and the global village.

*(Courtesy: Scroll.in)*

# CASTE AWAY

Scourge of casteism in slow retreat as more and more youth marry for love

**E**ditor's Note: As the Indian Republic turns 70, Tufail Ahmad begins a journey through the country to examine the working of democracy at the grassroots level. Inspired by the French author Alexis de Tocqueville, who toured America and wrote *Democracy in America*, the author — a former BBC journalist and now senior fellow at the Washington-based Middle East Media Research Institute — will examine how sociological realities of India and the promise of democracy interact with each other in shaping the lives of the Indian citizen. This report is the tenth in a series called "Democracy in India".

**Surat:** In this series, I try to focus on how society impacts democracy in India and in what ways democracy moulds societal modes and behaviours. The third part of the series discussed how caste

and politics collide violently in a cyclical struggle for power in Indian democracy. I noted that Jainism, Buddhism, Christianity, Sikhism, and Bhakti and Sufi movements have failed to eliminate caste, and raised the question if democracy could eradicate caste from India. There are two contrary trends in Indian democracy: While caste remains alive in politics and society, it is also giving way to more democratisation in some regions, most notably in Gujarat.

For thousands of years, India has been an unequal society whose cohesion originated from caste-based discrimination. However, democracy — as a movement of ideas and enlightenment about equality and individual rights — has been inculcating democratic and rational attitudes among youth. In some regions of India, a noticeable trend is that intercaste marriages are taking

place frequently, but those are either between youth based in cities, or between those who have studied in towns and returned to villages. In fact, cities have emerged as drivers of democratic social change in India: As part five of this series examined.

While intercaste marriages are limited in number and therefore do not show large-scale social change in most regions of India, they do show an increasing trend. The situation in Gujarat is revealing. Dr Jayesh Shah, an author and research consultant at the Centre for Culture and Development, an NGO based in Vadodara, said caste is becoming insignificant for those below 40 years of age. "But this happens at social level. Socially, there is a different situation. Politically, the situation is different: There is more caste", he observed, perhaps in an indication of caste-based



# INTER-CASTE MARRIAGES IN THE STATE OF GUJARAT

Castes		Married within caste			Married to Upper castes			Married to OBC		
		1980	2000	2010	1980	2000	2010	1980	2000	2010
Upper Castes	Patel	82.6	77.9	72.1	12.3	13.7	12.2	02.4	03.8	05.6
	Brahmin	49.6	50.4	46.8	30.3	33.7	31.8	08.0	06.0	09.2
	Baniya	63.6	59.0	57.2	21.8	23.9	22.6	11.4	07.6	12.8
	Soni	63.6	46.3	42.8	31.8	38.9	41.6	04.6	05.6	08.2
	Rajput	43.0	33.7	31.1	19.4	30.4	28.9	21.5	15.0	22.3
	Lohana	50.0	40.0	35.2	25.0	40.0	42.6	16.7	08.0	09.8
OBC	OBC	46.6	53.6	17.5	64.6	46.0	67.9	-	-	-
SC	SC	83.0	74.3	66.7	01.9	06.9	07.7	00.8	01.7	02.2
ST	ST	47.8	53.7	52.3	14.8	07.6	14.1	01.5	02.6	03.8

Data compiled by Dr Jayesh Joshi , Source: Offices of Registrar of Marriages (Gujarat) All figures are in percentage

political mobilisation in the last Gujarat Assembly elections.

Shah found that in Gujarat, there has been a rise in intercaste marriage in the past few decades. He carried out a study of official data on marriage registrations in Gujarat between 1980 and 2010. Over these decades, not even half of Brahmins in Gujarat married within Brahmin caste, with intra-Brahmin marriages declining from 49.6 percent in 1980 to 46.8 percent in 2010.

It means 53.2 percent Brahmins married outside their caste in 2010. The figure for Brahmins marrying into Other Backward Classes (OBCs) was around 8 to 9 percent for different years, while roughly two percent married someone from a Schedule Caste and about half a percent married someone from a Schedule Tribe (ST) over these decades.

Similarly, as per Shah's data, the percentage of Rajputs marrying Rajputs is declining: 43 percent in 1980, 33.7 percent in 2000 and 31.1 percent in 2010. It shows around 70 percent Rajputs in Gujarat marry outside their caste. Interestingly, at least every fifth Rajput married into OBCs, the actual figure being 22.3 percent in 2010. In 1980, the percentage of Rajputs marrying SCs was zero, but it rose to 3.3 percent in 2000 and 2.7 percent in 2010. Of the Rajputs marrying STs, the figures were 5.4 percent in 1980, which rose to 6.2 percent in 2010 (see the statistics table).

In 1980, 17 percent of SCs married outside their caste, which rose to more

than 25 percent in 2000 and further to over 33 percent in 2010. The percentage of SCs marrying upper castes was less than two percent in 1980, but rose to 6.9 percent in 2000 and further to 7.7 percent in 2010. More Patels, an upper caste, are marrying outside their caste now than they did a few decades ago. In 1980, over 17 percent Patels married outside their caste, with this figure rising to over 22 percent in 2000 and nearly 28 percent in 2010.

Since these statistics are based on marriage registrations in Gujarat, they indicate a real social change in Indian democracy. "Intercaste marriages are also happening in villages and small towns, not only in cities," Shah said, adding: "Caste had become redundant in Gujarat over past few decades, but from 2015 onward there is a political consolidation of castes. Political parties tell youths: You belong to a certain caste". He noted that there is a "dual behaviour" whereby people in Gujarat are rejecting caste socially, but accepting it politically.

A key impact of democracy is that the Indian government promotes intercaste marriages. In 2013, a scheme was introduced to give financial incentive of Rs 2.5 lakh if the marriage involved a Dalit. Many state governments offer financial incentives for intercaste marriages. On 7 May, it emerged that Maharashtra plans to bring in a law that promotes intercaste and interreligious marriages. Such efforts indicate that the constitutional values of equality

and democratic rights are entering the consciousness of the people, especially youth. Intercaste marriages would not be possible without democracy.

Whether upper castes or Dalits, no Indian youth now wants to retain caste. This is a revolution of the mind democracy is ushering in India's youth. "In next 20 years, our politicians cannot divide us on caste lines. In 20 years', in the time of my grandson, there will be no caste", Shah said. While he is right, Shah's optimism appears valid in the context of Gujarat. Elsewhere, caste remains a basis of social discrimination and a political tool, despite changes at the social level and in cities where it becomes invisible.

In Gwalior, my conscience was shaken when a Dalit youth, perturbed over my argument that democracy has led to empowerment of lower castes, shot back at me: "What empowerment you are talking about it? Our entire life is spent in our own mental struggle against ourselves, against apman (abuse) we suffered through centuries". A Khasaria (name changed), a youth who works in a government department in Gwalior, said that in offices, SCs and upper castes work together, but they sit at separate tables during lunch.

During April 2018, when I interviewed members of the Dalit community, the protests over the Supreme Court order staying automatic arrests under the SC/ST Atrocities Act were front and centre in their minds. Most interviewees were afraid to reveal their

Married to SC			Married to ST			Married to other Religious/ Other languages (States)		
1980	2000	2010	1980	2000	2010	1980	2000	2010
00.1	00.5	01.2	00.7	00.8	01.7	01.9	03.3	07.2
01.8	01.1	02.1	00.4	00.4	00.5	09.9	08.4	09.6
00.0	01.0	01.7	00.0	02.4	03.4	03.2	00.1	02.3
00.0	00.0	00.0	00.0	00.0	00.0	00.0	09.2	07.4
00.0	03.3	02.7	05.4	04.0	06.2	10.7	13.6	08.8
00.0	01.0	00.0	08.3	00.0	02.3	00.0	11.0	10.1
00.8	01.7	02.2	01.5	02.6	03.8	08.3	07.5	08.6
-	-	-	04.8	08.0	11.2	09.5	09.1	12.2
04.8	08.0	11.2	-	-	-	16.2	08.2	18.6



names, even when they were not saying anything controversial.

R Soni (name changed), who works in a government department in Gwalior, said that in Bundelkhand region of Madhya Pradesh even bank managers, who come from the most educated class of Dalits, can't rent homes in areas dominated by upper castes and have to move to "Dalit areas".

Another Dalit youth in Gwalior told me that there is no change in mansikta (psyche) of upper castes. "You enjoy the movie on Phoolan Devi in which she is undressed completely. But you engage

in violent protests against Sanjay Leela Bhansali's movie in which even an insult is missing against Padmavati." This is because Phoolan Devi was a Dalit, he said, while Padmavati was an upper caste Rajput woman. "The problem is that the upper caste educated class is not even willing to accept that there is discrimination against Dalits", he added.

An advocate in Gwalior district court noted that even lawyers are divided along caste. "I heard an upper caste advocate saying that ab swarn yug aa gaya hai (now the era of upper caste

has arrived)," he said and pointed out that there is not a single Dalit judge in any of the benches of the high court of Madhya Pradesh. "In lower courts too, not even five percent judges are from the SC/STs", he said, giving a rough estimate, and added that political parties in power approve only the names of upper caste judges for high courts and the Supreme Court.

In May, several news stories emerged which showed discrimination against Dalits. Union minister Uma Bharti found herself in the midst of controversy after she skipped a meal with Dalits and had to apologise for it. Rajnish Kumar, a Dalit villager at Lohgarh in Alighrah district, was surprised around 11 pm when Uttar Pradesh cabinet minister Suresh Rana arrived at his home unannounced with food ordered from a catering service. On 4 May, Anupama Jaiswal, the basic education minister in the Uttar Pradesh, landed in controversy for saying that ministers brave "mosquito bites" at Dalit homes.

In Jaipur, I met Dr Omprakash Siravi, director of Dr Ambedkar Studies Centre at the University of Rajasthan, and asked him to comment. "In villages, even though the food is the same, Dalits and non-Dalits sit separately to eat", he said, adding: "We will see change when Dalits are also able to eat at the home of upper castes." He also noted that educational levels among Dalits in rural areas is low and caste-based discrimination remains associated with mid-day meals at schools in rural areas across India.

Caste remains a building block of Indian society, though it is also changing: As the intercaste marriages in Gujarat reveal. Casteism remains a sobering reality even in government offices, courts and panchayats. But, positive changes can be seen too. The oppressed castes are becoming more vocal. Intercaste marriages take place in urban areas.

In some regions, in this case Gujarat, intercaste marriages are taking place in both urban and rural areas. In cities, youth do not care for each other's caste. Ideas about caste are flowing from the Indian polity into civil society. This is because political parties engage in competitive politics and remind people of their castes at election times. "After two decades or so", Shah said, "Politicians will have to surrender to civil society."

***The author is touring India to write a series on the workings of democracy. He is a senior fellow at the Middle East Media Research Institute, Washington DC.***

# LENS ‘GURU’ OF INDIAN CINEMA

PC Sreeram is considered as one of the greatest Asian cinematographers

Nithya Ramesh

‘Cheeni Kum’, ‘13B’, ‘Paa’, ‘Sham-itabh’, ‘Ki and Ka’, ‘I’, ‘Remo’, ‘O Kadhal Kanmani’, ‘Pad Man’ and many others are his achievements behind the camera are the strongest testimonials to his cinematographic brilliance than anything. He worked for more than 40 films across Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam and Kannada. In addition to his master lenswork P. C. Sreeram is also a director who has directed three films. Recently, his work on ‘Pad Man’ garnered a lot of praise and rightfully so. He became a hot star 30 years ago and still is even today for his works.



**You’ve worked on so many great movies over time. What is it that which excites you about the film industry these days?**

What excites me is a good script where I can find my imagery connections. After ‘Pad Man’ I worked on another movie called ‘Praana’ starring Nithya Menon, a single artist movie directed by VK Prakash and Resul Pookutty has tried live sync surround sound for the first time in India giving a new dimension in sound. The whole thing is a single artist film and when I was narrated the idea I jumped at the chance to shoot this movie as it was entirely new and a different concept with lot of interesting things.

When R.Balki narrated me the script of ‘Pad Man’ I wasn’t aware of the whole idea. When I was doing the film I didn’t know what it meant to me because as a gender I was away from that subject and my awareness about it was limited. I wanted to do this film as the whole concept of this movie was centred on the subject of promoting menstrual hygiene for women and was the first of its kind in the film history and it was again a completely new idea. The first 10 days of shoot was the most difficult for me as I felt that there is a story and then there is no story, it seems like a documentary film but not a documentary film. At the

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end I could see that the taboo was broken when people went and watched the film. Now it is a proud film to talk about. These whole new ideas and concepts keep me holding onto the film industry and going into the unknown as I believe that when you walk into unknown terrain it gives you a hype.

**What makes a good cinema? In terms of cinematographers, who do you like?**

The film must interest me and if something more has been contributed to the film then it subconsciously hits me. I watch films only for its content and I don’t know why that I don’t see for the cinematography in the film. Sometimes I don’t even know who are the cinematographers out there. If they have done a good job then I say he or she has done a good job and that is the way I have been a film watcher. I watch movies regularly and I don’t separate cinematography from film. I am influenced by all the great works and that is what matters to me.

**What is your approach to visualisation while shooting the film and how does it depend on scene to scene?**

Let me talk about the recent film ‘Pad Man’ that was watched all over the country and worldwide. I always thought what is going to happen to this film and how do you place it because we had to expose a gender related issue which could be sensitive. Of course, the generation has changed and everybody had their own point of view including my wife. I had gathered a lot of information about this, I even spoke to my sister and asked how did these things take place when she had to go through

the same phase. She said that it used to be exactly similar to what was shown in the movie.

A deserving and artistic example of this is one scene the same movie where me and Balki were discussing how do we go about a scene in which Akshay Kumar will be talking to Radhika Apte about the feminine issue. Initially, we were thinking more about the general look of the scene and how something might be staged in a location. I remember lot of discussions was going on with the assistants and they were all talking and suddenly every one of us agreed to set it in the corner of the room. That corner space had got light mood, art direction, the sunlight and also the script showed family's economy in the scene. You have to know the space to place it and automatically light and all the other aspects will fall in place. If you have watched 'Pad Man' you will see that in the film, the corner was very clear. So at the end of the film when you find it good or your search ends there that means we have got an answer and you have done the homework properly. All things that were shown in this movie is true. I observe being there and react to the script and put in there.

Another movie is 'Cheeni Kum' which is all about a chef and restaurant. I literally went into the whole space. The thing is you have to be there and get it into your system, and put it back into the space in which you want to create. I am not a person who says only when you study you can do it. For me just being there is enough.

**What has been your favourite camera to use? How are the camera movements motivated?**

Camera is only an equipment. Equipment is important but I don't have anything favourite as such.

Camera movements depends on the parameters such as the mood, subject, light, location and all these are of a greater intensity. I go with the flow. I see what the director sees, capture it on camera and show the same on the screen. It again depends on the what has to be shot and the answer is just everywhere you have to search for it.

**What makes you decide to work with certain directors? Do you have a special way that you like to work with a director?**

It is very simple, I fall for the script when I like it because I know that I have somebody like minded. Script is the



only thing that makes me decide to work with certain directors. For the movie 'Praana' which is yet to be released, I didn't know the director at all. Actress Nithya Menon had called and spoke to me, then I got a call from the writer of the film as well. But when I first heard the script from the director I instantly got connected to it and knew that it is

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**Camera movements depends on the parameters such as the mood, subject, light, location and all these are of a greater intensity. I go with the flow.**

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my kind of film. Only when the director thinks that the film can connect us both me and money come together.

I don't have a checklist of rules. I just have one special way of working. I am particular about the first light which comes early in the morning. The light speaks at that time and when I observe it everyday it has got so many stories to tell. I have to pitch the story into that light and if I miss the light I miss the whole plot. I do not exist there. A film needs to be shot in 48 to 60 days with lots of planning involved. Preparation planning itself takes 3 to 4 months. You cannot go beyond certain cost factors without compromising on anything for which I shoot early mornings. My first shot has to be taken at 5:30am and it

doesn't matter whoever the actors are. As a policy when they don't respect mine then they don't belong there. Akshay kumar being a man of that calibre comes to the sets at 5:15am when he is told 5:30 am. And if I say 5am then he will be on sets at 4:45am(laughs). That's the kind of discipline. And when I am shooting indoors I am not bothered about the time, I start the shoot as late as 2:30pm and go on till we wrap with the best shots. That is how I have been working all my life. If people respect light then I will be there.

**What is that you see in a script?**

Earlier for a script there used to be a lot of discussions, we had plenty of time and the economy was different. Now the cinema has completely changed to a new era. I see that the script should be exciting content-wise or if it is a commercial film then what is it in for me either economically or technically. When it comes to choosing scripts my mind is totally blank because suddenly from nowhere a script comes and there will be a spark in the script that connects me to it. It has to be new and exciting. It is not like I know the script already or if I was present when the script process was happening. To be honest it is never planned or in my mind hunting only for particular genres of film to work for. Suddenly someone says read the script and let me know, that is when thing opens up. It has to be spontaneous. That is how it has been for last 5 to 6 years when it came to choosing a script.

**What type of film would you love to work that you haven't**



**Kuruthipunal (River of Blood/ Tamil 1995):** DOP PC Sreeram with actor Kamla Hasan on shoot

**worked on yet?**

I really don't like to process my mind to think about the future films that I want to do as there is so much to learn while I am living and working in the present. I love reading books because that makes me go into a particular space of whole new world and it helps move to the next level. I am reading this book called "Taj Mahal" and I suddenly realised I have been reading history. Right now I am happy with what I have been doing. At the end everything depends upon the right kind of script that I listen to and choose. I am waiting and that is always the best to do for things to come. That is how it has been happening and it will come(smiles). Sometimes when I get films I may not like it and have to let it go for which I am ready to do.

Earlier I was doing too many ad films, as I had to balance my life economically. I was doing the maximum number of ad films in India. Now I have stopped them for the past 4 years as I found it too monotonous. It is the same thing and nothing changes. That is when I decided to take a break and start over again. May be I will discover myself in a better way than I did and if I start taking things for granted then it is not right for me. I cannot blame it as there is good money in the ads.

**Can you think of a shot, either in the last few years throughout your career, that has been particularly challenging and was very satisfying when you completed it?**

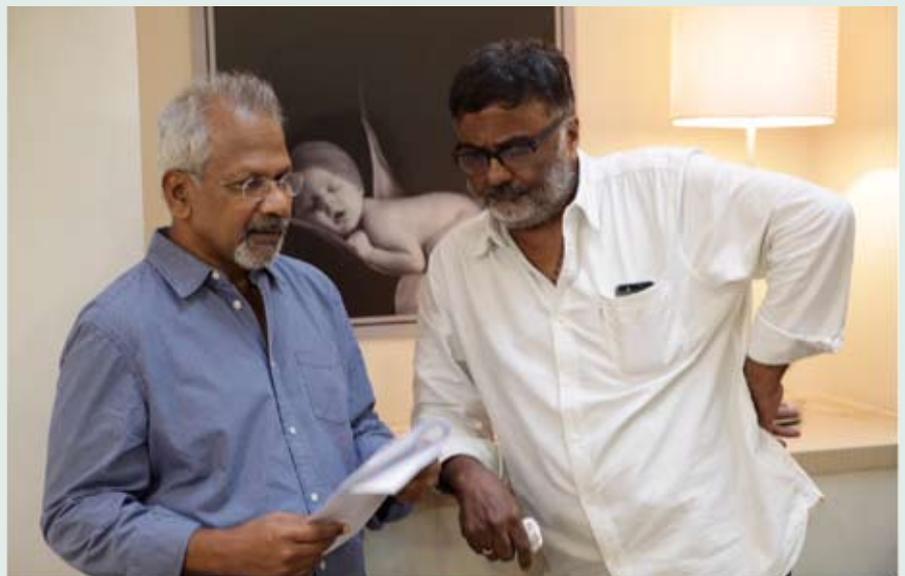
Every shot by itself is challenging. It is difficult for me to remember anything in particular because once the movie is over I forget it. But yes there would

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**Earlier I was doing too many ad films, as I had to balance my life economically. I was doing the maximum number of ad films in India. Now I have stopped them for the past 4 years as I found it too monotonous.**

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have been a lot of moments. I really don't want to think about it. They all



**O Kadhal Kanmani (Tamil/ 2015):** Director Mani Ratnam with DOP PC Sreeram discussing a scene during a shoot in a hospital

go into the past. I think the concept of looking back is losing its relevance. It is very beautiful to think about it, though sometimes, it is tiresome.

**Now is the drone era. Which film/films did you use drone and what is your approach towards it?**

Most of the scenes were shot using drone for 'Pad Man' as we were shooting in a village called Maheshwar in Madhya Pradesh. The village was very old and narrow. We could have thought of putting a track or jimmy and could have done a simple job if the location was somewhere else. It would have been difficult if we shot it that way. I don't think it was possible to use any other equipment to shoot the top angle shots in the narrow ally other than drone. When people watch the film they will not be able to find out that most of the scenes were shot using drone except for one scene at the end of the movie which is a lengthy shot as it is an easy guess. Also I used extensive drone shot for the song "aaj se teri". The drones came in handy and these drone shots gave another dimension to the whole film showing the beauty of that particular equipment. It all depends on how you use it and where you want to use it to tell a story.

**How different was your experience working with directors like R. Balki and Mani Ratnam?**

I like to work with directors who bring the best in me. There are many directors that I have worked with and had a wonderful journey, among them Balki and Mani Ratnam are popular names. I



like directors who make me feel excited about the work and to be honest they both fall on the same category. Balki's script is of different calibre and focuses on human relationships. I see what he sees. We connect well with each other.

Mani focuses much on romance genre and makes the stories intense. While we were shooting two years back for 'OK Kanmani' depending on the script me and Mani agreed to make the scenes more wild as he wanted to make it more romantic. We made the scenes look more intense and wild within the limits of the story to get another level of excitement for the script, to make the film more exciting and not to show off that I exist.

**If you were given multiple individual film which are different in some ways but they have to be shot in the same location and at same time of the day. How would you consciously think of shooting these films giving them their own visual identity?**

It can be same location and same time but at the end if the film stands

out for you that means the application has been correct. It comes out of the script and the nature of the project and just the tone of the scene. That is why you have to follow the light pattern what is called in the film. The colour palette changes, the costume changes, the backdrop changes automatically the outdoor light will change accordingly and how to capture it and make it part of the happening is what one can give a unique visual identity.

**What have you been working on recently?**

I finished shooting for 'Praana', a single artist movie starring Nithya Menon directed by VK Prasad and Oscar award winner Resul Pookutty has tried live sync surround for the first time in India. The movie will be released in August in Hindi, Malayalam, Kannada and Telugu.

I also finished shooting for a Telugu movie 'Naa Nuvve' which is a romantic comedy film starring Nandamuri Kalyan Ram and Tamannaah in the lead roles and awaiting release in May.

I have taken a gap now because last

**Mani focuses much on romance genre and makes the stories intense. While we were shooting two years back for 'OK Kanmani' depending on the script me and Mani agreed to make the scenes more wild as he wanted to make it more romantic. We made the scenes look more intense and wild within the limits of the story to get another level of excitement**

## QUICK BYTES

**Describe yourself in single line?**

The best is yet to come(smiles).

**Top 2 books on your shelf?**

"Taj Mahal" and "I am a troll".

**Something that you cannot stand?**

Not shooting the first shot of the day when the sun comes up in the morning.

**You cannot start your day without?**

I cannot start my day without reading a book.

**What do you hate the most?**

Sometimes being tolerant when it is not possible and it happens a lot.

**What are the films that you are most proud of?**

I usually don't like to go to the past. It is only provoked.

**How do you see cinematography growing in India?**

Good works will always be recognised. There are lot of new platforms coming up for cinematography. People are appreciating direction, a good light is appreciated and even good sound is appreciated. Now in India unlike before people talk if the sound of the film is beautiful and they go watch the movie just for that, they talk about a film's cinematography along with the story. That is a good thing about growing evolution of Indian cinema.

year I did three films back to back. The next schedule of films will start in June. My next movies that I am going to do depends on the script that I choose. I and Balki are working on a script which we will be doing end of this year or next year. Again it is a long way to go and too early to talk.

**Do you have any final words for the readers of OPINION EXPRESS magazine and your fans across the globe?**

Let me keep it simple and say that only your work speaks go for it and do it the right way till it comes right.

*(Writer is Bureau Chief-fashion and entertainment)*

# Priya's Power Punch

Through her avant-garde, she has created a niche for herself

**P**riya Priyadarshini aka Priya Jain has been in the business of the family which has had diversify interest in sectors like manufacturing Industry, Real Estate, hospitality, Retail & Exports. Under her vision the family business has prospered great heights. She is promoting FashionGypsy (fashiongypsy.co.in) an online platform to promote and market lifestyle brands as a marketing tool, a fable of fine design that brings the rich appeal to every lifestyle genre. Priya is inspired by the historic city of Delhi and other old beautiful cities of India. The luxury foray & social media platform adds an element of panache to everyday design.

Priya Jain belongs to a very affluent business family of Delhi, the national capital of India. Her father late DK Jain was the pioneer of Make in India story wherein he established the famous Luxor Group. Priya has diversified family business, her collection of various designs of lifestyle which fashiongypsy promotes looks at refined living of the present modern day in a new light. From fashion that you wear on your self to décor elements for your home, to tableware and travel gear and different kind of experiences in Spas, Restaurant & Hotels. It adds a luxe touch to many realms of design.

Surface ornamentation, the luxury of refined textures, an evolved color palette and an experiment with shapes and forms gives this social media platform FashionGypsy.co.in a fresh spurt of energy.

Redefining lifestyle in India and orchestrating a luxury fable the collection that includes the finest in tableware, fashion, silver, jewellery, art, home décor, hotel, spa and restaurant. The collection is a delight to experience and pride to possess.

She is a dynamic women entrepreneur with an experience in business over last 10 years. She has ability to do a multi-task jobs and willingness to take risk in business as well.

She has provided valuable vision to the various different projects research and developmental capabilities to create new products in the field of Hospitality, Education, and Real-estate. She



also contributed to promote Indian Art and Artists in India and abroad.

She has also participated in different charities and cultural events and deeply committed to be a local Indian who thinks globally. Priya Jain treats obstacles as learning experiences and opportunity to look in different directions. She has the ability to find solutions to every situation and widening her focus to tap in competitive markets.

Priya Priyadarshini is a social entrepreneur and has been promoting social causes for the upliftment of women and children. She has been associated with many NGO'S and registered charities with a quest to do development in this area in delhi and in other cities in India. Her main endeavor and goal is to remove poverty for street children and women empowerment through women enterprise and education. In the recent times she has contributed with her efforts and skills to these various causes.

• Priya Priyadarshini recently promoted a gala dinner for the charity NGO

Laksham in delhi to promote education and self awareness for street children of delhi.

• Priyadarshini is associated with helping hands in Mumbai a charity based organization which raises funds through events exhibitions etc. for the welfare of children and there needs suffering from cancer in associated with Tata Memorial Mumbai.

• Priyadarshini recently supported shiksha abhiyan in Kathmandu Nepal with Ms Maya Toffu for the welfare and education of the children in this SAARC country and the neighboring countries around India.

• Priyadarshini is always supporting through the year sisters of the people society – Delhi branch in aid of poor women slum children and aged people.

• She is also serving food with water every month to various different trusts like – Sai Baba Trust, Aims Society and many other around Delhi.

**REPORT FILED BY Anshuman Dogra in association with AIAI.**

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*The Pioneer* thanks all its readers and patrons for their support.  
The journey of passion continues with your blessings as we enter our 20s

# Get Set for Kick-off!

The 21st FIFA World Cup, to be held for the first time in Russia, will start on June 14, 2018 and will continue for a little over a month. Though Russia is a huge country spanning across 11 time zones, for the ease of travel and logistics management, the matches will be held in stadiums in the western part of the country, across four time zones — Moscow (UTC +3), Kaliningrad (UTC+2), Samara (UTC+4) and Ekaterinburg (UTC+5). Here, we bring you the timings of all matches in IST:

## Fixtures and match-timings (Date and time in IST)

<b>June 14, 2018, Thursday</b>	
Russia vs Saudi Arabia	8:30pm
<b>June 15, 2018, Friday</b>	
Egypt vs Uruguay	5:30pm
Morocco vs Iran	8:30pm
Portugal vs Spain	11:30pm
<b>June 16, 2018, Saturday</b>	
France vs Australia	3:30pm
Argentina vs Iceland	6:30pm
Peru vs Denmark	9:30pm
Croatia vs Nigeria	5:30pm
<b>June 17, 2018, Sunday</b>	
Costa Rica vs Serbia	12:30am
Germany vs Mexico	8:30pm
Brazil vs Switzerland	11:30pm
<b>June 18, 2018, Monday</b>	
Sweden vs South Korea	5:30pm
Belgium vs Panama	8:30pm
Tunisia vs England	11:30pm
<b>June 19, 2018, Tuesday</b>	
Poland vs Senegal	5:30pm
Colombia vs Japan	8:30pm
Russia vs Egypt	11:30pm
<b>June 20, 2018, Wednesday</b>	
Portugal vs Morocco	5:30pm
Uruguay vs Saudi Arabia	8:30pm
Iran vs Spain	11:30pm
<b>June 21, 2018, Thursday</b>	
France vs Peru	5:30pm
Denmark vs Australia	4:30pm
Argentina vs Croatia	11:30pm
<b>June 22/6/2018, Friday</b>	
Brazil vs Costa Rica	5:30pm
Nigeria vs Iceland	8:30pm
Serbia vs Switzerland	4:30pm
<b>June 23/6/2018, Saturday</b>	
Belgium vs Tunisia	5:30pm
Germany vs Sweden	8:30pm
South Korea vs Mexico	11:30pm
<b>June 24, 2018, Sunday</b>	
England vs Panama	5:30pm
Japan vs Senegal	8:30pm
Poland vs Colombia	11:30pm

<b>June 25/6/2017, Monday</b>	
Saudi Arabia vs Egypt	7:30pm
Uruguay vs Russia	8:30pm
Iran vs Portugal	11:30pm
Spain vs Morocco	10:30pm
<b>June 26, 2018, Tuesday</b>	
Australia vs Peru	7:30pm
Denmark vs France	7:30pm
Nigeria vs Argentina	11:30pm
Iceland vs Croatia	11:30pm
<b>June 27, 2018, Wednesday</b>	
South Korea vs Germany	7:30pm
Mexico vs Sweden	7:30pm
Serbia vs Brazil	11:30pm
Switzerland vs Costa Rica	11:30pm
<b>June 28, 2018, Thursday</b>	
Japan vs Poland	7:30pm
Senegal vs Colombia	7:30pm
Panama vs Tunisia	11:30pm
England vs Belgium	10:30pm



### Round of 16

<b>June 30, 2018, Saturday</b>	
Group C winners vs Group D runners-up	7:30pm
Group A winners vs Group B runners-up	11:30pm
<b>July 1, 2018, Sunday</b>	
Group B winners vs Group A runners-up	7:30pm
Group D winners vs Group C runners-up	11:30pm
<b>July 2, 2018, Monday</b>	
Group E winners vs Group F runners-up	12:30am
Group G winners vs Group H runners-up	11:30pm
Group F winners vs Group E runners-up	7:30pm
Group H winners vs Group G runners-up	11:30pm

### Quarterfinals

<b>July 6, 2018, Friday</b>	
Qualifier 1: Winner (Group C winner vs Group D runners-up) vs Winner (Group A winners vs Group B runners-up)	7:30pm
Qualifier 2: Winner (Group E winners vs Group F runners-up) vs Winner (Group G winners vs Group H runners-up)	11:30pm
<b>July 7, 2018, Saturday</b>	
Qualifier 3: Winner (Group F winners vs Group E runners-up) vs Winner (Group H winners vs Group G runners-up)	11:30pm
Qualifier 4: Winner (Group B winners vs Group A runners-up) vs Winner (Group D winners vs Group C runners-up)	12:00am

### Semi-finals: July 10, 2018, Tuesday



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