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Editorial :

BJP's Return to Power: Time for Greater Vigilance

Mahi Pal Singh

When the leads/results of the 2019 Parliamentary elections started pouring in on the morning of 23rd May it became more and more clear that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) along with its other National Democratic Alliance (NDA) partners was going to reach somewhere near the 350 mark in a house of 543 (minus one for which elections were not held) leaving the Congress alliance much behind at nearly 90 with the Congress itself reaching only upto 52 seats and the others including the Trinamool Congress in West Bengal, the Mahagathbandhan partners Bahujan Samaj Party, Samajvadi Party and Rashtriya Lok Dal in U.P. and others like Biju Janata Dal in Odisha, Dravida Munetra Karagam in Tamil Nadu etc. etc. It is certainly celebration time for the BJP and its leaders who had claimed that their party alone would win more than 300 seats and the NDA 350. It must be said to their credit that they judged the mood of the people much more exactly than anybody in the opposition or the media. At the same time it is for the opposition to analyse and judge the cause of their failure to stop the onslaught of the BJP and its advance and success in states like West Bengal and Odisha where it had negligible presence earlier and where the RSS had been working and reaching out to the people for a long time.

The BJP leaders are attributing this victory to their work for the masses, development and things like distribution of LPG cylinders to the poor (although when Sambit Patra of the BJP was having dinner at a poor woman's house in Odisha during his election campaign, the woman could be seen cooking meal on a rural stove made of mud – showing the reality even of that claim) though the people hardly have money for getting them refilled, bank accounts to a large

number of people though they have no money to deposit in them, building of toilets in large numbers, though they have not reached all and wherever they have reached they are incomplete and unusable, etc. During the election campaign, however, neither Mr. Narendra Modi nor Mr. Amit Shah referred to any achievement of their government or any significant work done during the last five years. They had nothing to say on very high unemployment, accentuated by demonetisation and faulty implementation of the Goods and Services Tax (GST), non-payment of dues to the sugar cane growers, non purchase of farm product at 50% profit over the input cost to the farmers and subsidy in urea and electricity, improvement in education and health infrastructure and facilities etc. Post Balakot surgical strike in retaliation of the Pulwama terrorist attack in which 40 CRPF personnel were killed, the PM talked only of national security, national pride and punishment to Pakistan for terrorist attacks and made it the main or almost the only theme of his campaign. Because of Pakistan's role in terrorist attacks in the country, there is prevalence of anti-Pakistan sentiment in the country and Mr. Modi exploited this sentiment to the maximum. This provided him the best way of sidelining the problems of the country and diverting the attention of the voters from them, at the same time gaining the support of the masses. He also talked of his backward caste and 'garibi' being his caste to establish a rapport with the masses to gain their support.

This time the election campaign touched its new low because of indecent language used by many leaders and used as a main tool by Mr. Modi himself. He used some truths, some half-truths and many blatant lies during his campaign,

some because of his utter ignorance and others in a planned way to malign the image of opposition leaders. His claim of ordering the air force to go for surgical air strike at Balakot on that night because their planes would not be caught by the Pakistani radars because of the presence of clouds and rains and the air force accepting it and going for the kill, had the presence of ignorance of the radar technology on his part. At the same time it had the element of falsehood because the responsible air force officers can hardly be expected to accept that claim. In fact it is an insult to their knowledge, experience and capability. So was his remark that Rajiv Gandhi had used INS Vikrant, the famous naval ship, as a personal taxi for touring Lakshadweep Islands for 10 days in December 1987 along with his family, friends and relatives from Italy. The statement was denied and denounced as utterly false by many concerned naval officers including Admiral L. Ramdas (Retired). The PM's statement questioned the integrity of the Naval Officers present on that ship by almost calling them private taxi drivers. He talked of national pride and sacrifices of the army personnel without really having any respect for them. It is clear from the statement of the people of Bisan village in Jhajjar in Harayna which is known as army-village because almost every family of the village has a serving or retired army jawan or officer, who told a reporter that "Army Is Miserable Under Modi's Government". One who really respects the sacrifices of our defence force personnel would not have asked the first time voters to vote for his party in the name of the jawans killed in the Pulwama terrorist attack to exploit their sacrifices for electoral benefits. This election campaign presented Narendra Modi as a compulsive and serial liar damaging the dignity and respect of the Prime Minister's post.

While Narendra Modi used every method to reach out to the people – through the NaMo TV channel especially floated for the election

campaign time singing songs in his praise 24 hours a day, getting a biopic and a serial made and desired to be released during the campaign time, though disallowed from release at that time by the Election Commission, his two day visit to the Kedarnath temple and meditating in a nearby cave, with all the modern facilities present in it, in saffron robe like a *sanyasi* just before the last phase of election on 19th May with the sole aim of remaining 24 hours a day on focus before the eyes of the voters through the TV screen continuously for two days almost all TV channels obligingly following him through his journey. In fact, he was never out of sight, and consequently never out of mind, of the voters, supporters and the opponents. By making himself the centre of focus throughout the campaign period, he presented himself as bigger than life sized leader giving this election the semblance of a Presidential election, with nobody else even reaching his shoulder height to give the people an alternative to him. He must thank the money power, the vast media support he received in 2014 and also this time, and unequal strategy of the opposition leaders for his success. The opposition leaders failed miserably to bring the focus on people's issues, their sufferings throughout the last five years, particularly of minorities, women and scheduled castes / scheduled tribes, unemployment, the condition of farmers, reduced budget on education and health care etc. They were caught in the trap of Balakot and Rafale as desired by Mr. Modi who decided the electoral discourse. Only they are to blame for their failure. If they could not present a united front against the BJP and Mr. Modi, they have nobody else but themselves to blame.

Now that the people's verdict has come, it is time to ponder over the coming times and future challenges. Of course, the people must demand performance from the government unlike the last time. But what is most worrisome is that now that the BJP is in power for the second

term, the RSS will press for the formation of the Hindu Rashtra which has always been its aim. So the minorities will have to be more alert. Those who believe in secularism and respect the Constitution of the country will also have to be more vigilant, vocal and active and not remain mere spectators or drawing room revolutionaries. Remember that the BJP President had declared during the elections that they would remove Article 370 and 35A if they come to power the second time. During the campaign Mr. Modi himself and Mr. Shah had criticised the opposition saying that they supported the 'tukde, tukde gang', referring to the incident of some Kashmiri students shouting separatist slogans at the JNU campus. But they conveniently forget that any attempt to remove these Articles from the Constitution of India will invite even more disaffection in the minds of Kashmiri people and directly mean breaking away of Kashmir from India as was hinted by some Kashmiri leaders when Mr. Shah

talked of removing these articles from the Constitution, except through the use of military force thereby internationalizing of the Kashmir issue as never before and playing into the hands of Pakistan which has been trying to do so for a long time without much success. This is not nationalism. In fact it will be an attempt of blatant anti-nationalism – a charge Mr. Modi and Amit Shah have been levelling against some students and the opposition leaders. What can be more dangerous and anti-national than something which has the potential of breaking the country? However, the BJP people have their own definitions. For them, like Pragya Thakur, and many others like her, Nathuram Godse, the killer of the father of the nation, Mahatma Gandhi, "is, was and will remain a 'patriot'" and those who talk of removing the cause of discontent among the Kashmiris so that they do not think of separation from the country, are anti-nationals.

The people as a whole will have to guard the country against such attempts. 🇮🇳

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Articles and Features :

BJP poll campaign was a perfect ambush: Yogendra Yadav

Following Pulwama, what Narendra Modi's team designed was a classic dodge, distract, derail scheme, says Yogendra Yadav



New Delhi: Several days before the exit poll results began hitting the airwaves, noted political scientist Yogendra Yadav had already read the tea leaves and it had begun to look increasingly saffron. With its national security pitch, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) effectively ambushed the 2019 general elections, says Yadav, who is also the president of Swaraj Abhiyan.

For a variety of reasons—from a lacklustre opposition campaign to the BJP's organizational machinery, money, and media dominance—the election is coming to a close amidst a sense of inevitability, he says. “To my mind, it is quite clear that (Prime Minister) Narendra Modi is headed for a second term,” he says.

But he warns that while the Congress' past blunders might have fuelled the BJP's dramatic rise on the Indian political landscape, the saffron party's cultural and social dominance may end up becoming much worse than the Congress's hegemony of the 1980s. The Congress may have won huge electoral majorities in the 80s, but they never had raw street power or the backing of large cultural organizations, he says. If enough Indians aren't watchful, including those who

preferred the BJP for a variety of reasons, then, he warns, India could easily head towards electoral authoritarianism—a regime where elections take place at the appointed hour, but everything other than elections that a democracy needs does not exist. Edited excerpts:

How do you think India has voted?

It is foolish to hazard a guess, but since there is no law against foolishness, let me say what I think is the writing on the wall. To my mind, it is quite clear that Narendra Modi is headed for a second term. The specific calculus may vary—it could be a clear National Democratic Alliance (NDA) majority but not a BJP majority, which is the most likely. It should not be hard to guess why the numbers may add up this way. My own sense is that the BJP is not losing more than 30 to 50 seats over what they had last time (282 Lok Sabha seats) and the Congress is unlikely to more than double what they had in 2014 (44 seats). The broad composition of how these numbers will stack up is almost clear. The BJP might end up gaining something like 30 seats in the East—from Odisha, (West) Bengal and the North-East. This gain will be enough to take care of any marginal losses the party will suffer in the rest of India outside Uttar Pradesh (UP). So, in a sense, whatever the losses of the BJP in UP would be its net loss in the country.

So, how do you think UP may have voted?

UP is one state where I would have liked to have some detailed exit polls (data) before I speak with some certitude, so what I say is subject to correction. We all know that beginning with 71 seats, the BJP can only lose seats in UP. We also know that the Samajwadi Party (SP)-

Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) alliance is formidable enough to reduce BJP seats by half. Now, there are two questions. Whether the alliance will be able to bring its votes fully together. Second, whether they will create a buzz and get some additional votes, which is what great alliances do, when two and two become five. The third minor but significant question is whether the Congress can act as a spoiler. To my mind, hardcore supporters of the SP-BSP seem to have voted for the alliance, but we still don't know whether both the alliance partners have worked to their full capacity.

In a good election, the SP could get something like 75% of the Yadav and Muslim votes and the BSP could get 85% of Jatav and 60% of other Dalit votes. Have they tapped into that much or transferred all of it? I am not sure. Has Mayawati's base among non-Jatav Dalits eroded further? Have the Muslims not been distracted by the presence of the Congress? If we see that the alliance did not deliver to the extent to which it was expected to, then these will be the underlying reasons. One thing we can say without hesitation though. In the whole of north and west of India (the area where the BJP swept in the 2014 polls), except Punjab, UP is the only place where the party is facing a serious resistance. But this resistance has come on the basis of caste and community arithmetic, not on the basis of ideological or agenda. Being able to offer an alternative dream, being able to convince voters of an alternative vision is altogether different. That did not happen in UP, and it could be one of the reasons why this historic alliance may not achieve what it potentially could.

So the nationalism pitch worked for the BJP in UP?

It is only fair to acknowledge that this almost turned the elections all over the country, not just in UP... even down to Karnataka. What Balakot (retaliatory airstrikes in Pakistani territory) did was it foregrounded the question of kaun banega pradhan mantri (Who will become the prime

minister)... a question that was receding into the background. It forced people to think: If not Modi, do you want (Congress party president) Rahul Gandhi. In an election where the BJP would have contested defensively, it provided them with a narrative.

By February, there were questions that the BJP found almost impossible to answer—on the farmers' front, on employment, and, increasingly, on Rafael and corruption. It is not that people completely forgot those issues, but in a state of mind where an ordinary voter was willing to suspend disbelief, Balakot provided them with just the excuse necessary to do so. We should, of course, ask why were voters in that state of mind—that will take us to the state of the opposition.

How would you rate the opposition campaign against Modi?

The opposition Congress and its allies looked amateurish, if not childish, in the way they handled the campaign. The opposition and the BJP's campaign belong to two different universes. The BJP had access to unlimited resources and the quiet backing of the Election Commission. They had Modi, the organizational machine, the money, and the media which played into the hands of the ruling party. These four M's were so powerful. And the BJP exhibited a will to power which you rarely find in politics. The manner in which (BJP president) Amit Shah can strike a deal with the Shiv Sena—short of personal abuses, there is nothing that the Sena has not done against the BJP—or to strike a deal with the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) which had almost called them anti-national, or to have the kind of coalition in Bihar where it decided to retire its sitting members of Parliaments (MPs).

In comparison, the opposition campaign was a joke. They had no message. Above all, they did not have a messenger. They had no master plan. The Congress and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) which had no MP in Delhi could not come to an understanding. It is not quite clear what

was the Congress trying to do by putting Rahul Gandhi in Wayanad (Kerala) when they were also hoping to court the Left. Congress' manifesto was far superior to the BJP's but a manifesto is not a message to the voter sitting in a remote corner of this country. I almost felt that writing serious and responsible manifesto is not a political virtue. In these elections, where the challenge was to create a wave and come to power, they produced such a nice, responsible, correct, proper, duly audited piece of document that I almost felt angry about. This was not a political document you take to the people to change their mind.

Rahul Gandhi showed many virtues in this election. He showed a certain tenacity. He exuded energy. He did not sink to the level to which Modi did, but the one thing that he needed to do was this: carry conviction to the people... Here is the message. I will do it. Look into my eyes, I mean business. As (former US president) Ronald Reagan used to say: "Read my lips." That's what he needed to do. Ultimately, it is the lack of credibility of the opposition which made all the difference.

What was at stake in this election?

This has been, in many ways, an extraordinary election. When the election began, there were many like me who felt that the stakes were very high... that this was probably the third most important election in the history of India. The first was 1952, which decided whether India could go ahead with universal adult franchise or not. 1977 decided whether India will remain a democracy or not. This election, I said, was about whether India remains India or not. Fifty years from now, a future historian would wonder why what was at stake in these elections was never really discussed. How the election actually managed to bypass what was really at stake. In a sense, what we have witnessed is a perfect ambush. Following the Pulwama terror attacks, what Modi's team designed was a classic dodge, distract, derail (scheme). They created so much mist, so much dust... by the time the dust settled,

the game was over. This is where the BJP used its propaganda machine, money and media muscle power... and the Election Commission let that ambush take place.

Unless something is dramatically wrong in my assessment, it is an ambush that has succeeded. In any election, there is always a gap... a misalignment between what voters intend to do and the real consequence. For the voter, this was a low choice election where they probably said: "Okay, Mr Modi has not done what he said he would do and I can't quite trust him to tell me the truth, but on balance, who is better than him? Maybe, the fellow deserves one more chance." So, intentions are very limited, endorsement is almost conditional, but the outcome can be staggering. The outcome can be something which can change the future history of this country for a very long time to come.

What do you fear?

I feel we are entering a long and dark tunnel. I am not given to paranoia, but I think we would be fooling ourselves if we do not acknowledge the consequence of a BJP victory and Mr Modi's return to power. What will be perceived and presented as popular endorsement... the consequences will be deeply damaging for our republic. I almost feel that this election will contribute to the beginning of the dismantling of our republic, and the tragic thing is that the public can be mobilized to dismantle a republic. To put it more specifically, if Mr Modi forms the government, we would see a very serious erosion in whatever remains of the quality of our democracy. We would be taking many steps towards what can only be described as electoral authoritarianism, which is to say, a regime where elections take place at the appointed hour but everything other than elections that a democracy needs does not exist. In elections, the counting is fair, but nothing other than counting is fair.

We have already seen a serious erosion in the quality of institutions, from the Central Vigilance Commission and the Central Bureau of

Investigation to even the Supreme Court. We have seen the Rajya Sabha being bypassed in many occasions. I fear that with this election, we are staring at not just a loss of autonomy but a situation where a duly elected leader exercises all the powers of an authoritarian regime—where there is a concentration of constitutional power in the hands of the central government, concentration of the state power in the hands of a political party, and concentration of political party in the hands of one person. We are looking at a situation where electoral success will be the measure of everything. Elections taking place at an appointed hour will be the single source of legitimacy. Once you have an election, why bother about anything else. I have the mandate, I have the people with me. This is classic populist authoritarianism.

We are looking at a BJP hegemony which is stronger than the Congress hegemony of the 1980s. The Congress's hegemony was based on massive electoral victories. But that is only one component. The second component is brute and effective use of state power to silence everyone... in a way in which leaves no dark corners. You capture everything from a school teacher to a rickshaw-wallah, the syllabi to the national security apparatus. The third component is raw street power. Fourth is cultural and ideological hegemony which the Congress did not enjoy in the 1980s. The BJP may be the first party in the history of India to exercise its hegemony through all four components.

Our liberal intelligentsia is unwilling to recognize that the BJP has managed to shift the centre-point of popular imagination. The things some in the party say about Muslims, which appear vulgar to us, enjoy a resonance among the public, and their capacity to control the cultural agenda is very deep.

So, it seems that party, government, nation, and religion are merging into one identity in popular imagination.

That is what we are walking into. These


distinctions (will) cease to exist. Constitutional governance is all about creating distinctions and marking boundaries and authoritarian regimes are all about erasing these distinctions.

India was born in a state of turmoil. Later came the Emergency years. Many said India will fall apart. Don't you think it has enough resilience?

India is an impossible experiment that worked. No one in the 1950s gave India a chance to hold together as a nation. There were moments during the Emergency when everyone thought democracy has all but being folded up. So, yes, I am not saying the dream is lost forever. All I am saying is this is a very serious setback, even worse than the Emergency, which was an onslaught only on one of the pillars of the idea of India—democracy. The other two pillars, diversity and development for the last person, were sort of left untouched.

I do not believe in some magical hand of self-resilience, but we do have concrete things left on the basis of which to mobilize. We still have the Constitution, our biggest gift. The cultural agenda of the BJP's majoritarianism runs against the grain of everyday practices in this country. We have deep cultural resources—(Guru) Nanak, Kabir (Das), Tukaram. We have great and deep traditions. We have the entire legacy of India's freedom struggle which stands against what Mr Modi represents today. I do feel that because this (electoral) endorsement is not so unquestioning, there will be a vast reservoir of unease and disquiet which Mr Modi may not be able to manage. Youth and unemployment, even more than farmers, could be the biggest problem for the new government.

If I could respond rhetorically, this regime has most things, but its detractors will still be left with three assets—the soil of this country, the Constitution and (Mahatma) Gandhi. In that sense, the darkest moments also present the biggest opportunity. These are moments that await the heroes and heroines of history.

Courtesy **Livemint**, Sunday, 19 May 2019 

May 23 Will Not Be a Defining Moment in the History of Secular India

If Modi wins a second mandate, it doesn't mean that our democracy is irrevocably broken. If he doesn't, it unfortunately won't mean the converse is true—that our democracy is safe.

Nilanjana Bhowmick

Exit polls on Sunday evening predicted a second landslide win for the right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, renewing a question that was asked repeatedly over the past few weeks: whether India can handle another five years of Modi. Here's the short answer. Yes, it can. There's a long answer too.

While he used it as a poll plank, Modi's first mandate was never supposed to be about development or the country's economy. It was spoken about in whispers in inside circles, but nonetheless was an open secret that Modi was brought in to replicate at the national level the Gujarat model of Islamophobia and religious polarisation. It was about mainstreaming the "othering" that the BJP and its mentor, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), has been carrying out clandestinely pre-Ayodhya and not-so-clandestinely post-Ayodhya.

"It is therefore the duty of every Hindu to do his best to consolidate the Hindu society," Keshav Hedgewar, the founder of the RSS, had said in the RSS mission statement. He added that the aim of the Sangh was to mould the minds of the youth to achieve that cause.

According to a report in *The Hindu*, 58,967 shakhas (RSS branches that spread Hindutva propaganda) were operating at 37,190 places across the country. In 2017, the number stood at 57,165, up from 39,396 in 2014. So, yes there are thousands of Indians who have bought into this idea of a 'Hindu India'. How do you wish that away?

The RSS is working at saffronising Indian politics. Modi's second mandate at the Centre

is less dangerous than say anointing Yogi Adityanath, a rabble-rousing, Islamophobic monk, as the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, India's largest state, or the mainstreaming of Pragya Thakur, a prime accused in a bomb blast near a mosque in Malegaon in Maharashtra in 2008. The blast killed around 6 and injured over 100. Thakur has been fielded from a seat in one of India's largest and most populous states, Madhya Pradesh, where the BJP was defeated in state-level elections end of last year.

Modi is a great actor. More than divider, he is distractor-in-chief, with his discernible lies, his 'non-political interviews', his hundreds of thousands of photo-ops.

If Modi wins mandate, democracy isn't broken

Our democracy is in danger, but it extends beyond Modi. If Modi wins a second mandate, it doesn't mean that our democracy is irrevocably broken. If he doesn't, it unfortunately won't mean the converse is true — that our democracy is safe.

India has a multi-party system. Often in democracies, political parties come to power in rotation. The BJP is one of the largest parties in India. It is almost utopian to think they would not want to politically validate their Hindutva agenda. The RSS wants Hindus to wallow in this feeling of victimisation, it allows them to slice through our secular values that much easily.

Minorities in this country have for long been preyed upon by parties who pay lip service to their interests but who do nothing to improve their lot. Since these parties have over time only weakened them as a group, this is not the time

for minorities, and especially Muslims, to feel demoralised. This is the time for minorities to fight for their rights, building alliances and partnerships with all those who have been, and will be, marginalised by the march of Hindutva politics and policies.

In the last five years, while India's economy nosedived, and hate mongering and Islamophobia rose, something else happened too. As the Modi government went on a spree to destroy institutions and target dissidents, and bought over the mainstream media, it also created an alternative set of institutions and more robust dissidence. It has seen the emergence of independent, impartial media, of young and committed politicians, including a new political party in Kashmir, headed by a former bureaucrat. Shah Faesal, who resigned from the

Indian Administrative Service to protest the "unabated killings in Kashmir and marginalisation of Indian Muslims", has said his party would pursue the peaceful resolution of the Kashmir issue. That's the kind of resistance coming out of the last five years of Modi's rule.

You just can't wish away a major political party in one of the world's largest democracies. But you can keep fighting its divisive agenda.

In the past five years, we have become less complacent of our democracy. Looking at May 23 as a defining moment in the history of secular India would be mere fear mongering.

I beg to differ, but our democracy is stronger than ever.

Nilanjana Bhowmick is a Delhi-based journalist. She tweets at @nilanjanab.

Courtesy **The Wire**, 22 May 2019. 

The issues that mattered in an issue-less election

Lokniti Team

Bread-and-butter concerns seem to have counted for less than they did a few months ago, with priorities shifting from specifics such as unemployment to 'Vikas'

With reports of joblessness being at a four-decade high, a deepening agrarian crisis and a recent spike in food prices, it was widely expected that economic issues would end up mattering the most to Indians when they vote in the Lok Sabha election.

This expectation was not misplaced given that there is a fairly large body of work in Western democracies that is centred on the effect that the state of the economy has on election outcomes.

However, a nationwide post-poll survey, conducted by Lokniti during the past one month after each phase of election, has thrown up data that seem to be somewhat at odds with this presumption.

Only 12% of the voters interviewed across the country (see methodology) in the post-poll exercise spontaneously said in response to an

unprompted question that when they finally went to vote, the issue of unemployment is what decided their vote the most. It is only on being asked a specific close-ended question on joblessness did most say that it was a serious issue for them.

Similarly, price rise or inflation was reported as being the most important voting issue by merely 4% of the voters.

Both these figures pale in comparison to those that were recorded in the pre-poll done by Lokniti just before the start of the election in late March. Back then, 21% of the voters interviewed in 19 States said that lack of jobs was going to be the most important voting issue for them. Price rise was a top-of-mind issue for 7% of the voters.

Clubbing all economy-related answers such as unemployment, price rise, poverty, wages and

salaries, GST and demonetisation together, then, overall, economic issues seem to have mattered most to 25% of the voters, a sharp decline of 13 percentage points from the 38% who reported in the pre-poll survey that economic issues was the first priority.

It must be pointed out here that the post-poll data being reported here are of only up to the sixth phase of elections and do not include the last phase of voting. However, it is very unlikely that these figures will change drastically once the seventh phase data get added to our national data set.

Ayes for infrastructure

Displacing unemployment as the number-one voting issue for voters was the issue of development, or *vikas*. In the survey, 17% of the respondents reported “development” and 9% matters related to development (roads, water, electricity, schools, hospitals and so on) as being the single-most important issue that determined their voting choice.

Hence, clubbed together, development issues mattered to 26% of the respondents. This number is slightly higher than the one recorded in the pre-poll survey.

Interestingly, 17% or one in every six voters did not answer the open-ended question, which is a two-fold increase in non-response to the question since the pre-poll survey.

This sudden shift of voter priorities from the specifics of the economy to either the general idea called “development” or to a refusal to answer the question is significant because not only does it highlight voter volatility but also may indicate voters identifying issues in tune with their vote choice.

In other words, the crucial question we confront is: do perceptions of issues drive vote choice or vice versa. For those who identified “development” as the most important issue, the BJP or the NDA were more likely to be the vote choices.

On the other hand, the NDA’s lead over the

UPA among those for whom economic issues mattered a lot was relatively much smaller. Similarly, supporters of Prime Minister Narendra Modi were far more likely to report development as their main voting issue, whereas supporters of Congress president Rahul Gandhi were more likely to report economy-related issues.

While we cannot be sure about the direction of causality, we suspect that many voters may have ended up looking at the matter of issues through the lens of their own political preferences than the other way round.

A State-wise look at what mattered to voters reveals that the issue of development trumped economic matters as the single most important voting issue by a large margin in West Bengal, Odisha, Karnataka, Uttarakhand, Jammu and Kashmir, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

Economy-related concerns appear to have been far more important in the States of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Haryana, Gujarat, Bihar, Jharkhand and Tamil Nadu. The issue of unemployment, in fact, was found to be a much greater concern in the Hindi heartland States than in the rest of the country. The survey also indicates that problems related to farming seem to have mattered far more to voters in Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand than in other States.

As far as the issues of national security, the Pulwama terrorist attack and India’s air strikes in Pakistan are concerned, merely 2% of the voters interviewed spontaneously reported the three issues as having been most important to them while voting. This is the same percentage as the one recorded in the pre-poll.

Among this tiny minority however, the NDA, not surprisingly, seems to have scored hugely over the UPA. In a bitterly polarised election that may see narrow victory margins in many seats, a big lead even among a small section of voters may end up being decisive.

National security

Moreover, this small section of voters that

put national security over everything else while voting may actually have been much larger in number. We say this because for the second straight survey we find the Balakot strikes issue to have had an impact on voter attitudes at the subliminal or subconscious level (though the effect did wane a little).


Nearly four of every five voters were aware of the Balakot strikes, almost the same proportion as the pre-poll done in 19 States, and among them the opinion that the Modi government should get another chance was far greater than those unaware of the Balakot strikes.

Awareness of the strikes was also, once again, found to be subduing the negative impact that issues such as price rise and joblessness may have had on the BJP's chances. Over two-fifths of the voters who said that price rise or unemployment were the most important voting issues for them but had heard of the Balakot strikes were in favour of giving the Modi government another chance as opposed to over one-fourth of those voters for whom the two issues were most important but had not heard

of the Balakot strikes. Bottom-line, bread-and-butter issues seem to have mattered less to voters in the election than they did a few months ago, and even if they did, many voters do not seem to have spelled them out as such, perhaps because they may have viewed the whole question of issues through the prism of their political choice.

Many of the issues that voters finally voted on do not seem to have been the same as the issues they had been emphasising to surveyors/pollsters for a long time, most probably because of the sudden surge around the nation's security post-Balakot, a factor that seems to have had a covert effect on voting behaviour.

The other factor that overshadowed the perception of issues as relevant to vote choices was probably the leadership of Narendra Modi. We shall report on this tomorrow. In a sense, an election that had promised to be issue-laden at the start of the year may just have ended up bypassing the real issues under the garb of "vikas" and nationalism — both identified with Mr. Modi's leadership.

May 20, 2019. 

Articles/Reports for The Radical Humanist

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- Mahi Pal Singh, Editor, The Radical Humanist

The new Indian election: Free but not fair

Mukulika Banerjee

Bad tackles by one side, the favourites, have failed to be shown the red card whilst minor ones by other sides have been sent off the field. News of discord among the three Election Commissioners has emerged and their repeated failure to create a level playing field for all players is evident. News of discord among the three Election Commissioners has emerged and their repeated failure to create a level playing field for all players is evident. This 2019 national election in India is nothing like the one before it in 2014. There is something fundamentally different about it, even though it is superficially familiar. The vocabulary is the same, but the grammar has changed. It is as if we are watching a game in Eden Gardens, wearing our team's T-shirts, cheering as the players work hard — but the game we are watching is something altogether different from what we grew up with and are used to. Not just the wickets / goalposts have been moved, but the whole rules of the game have been changed. Let me show what I mean. First, the referee is partisan. For the first time, the Election Commission of India, that much respected and celebrated public institution, has completely lost credibility in this election. News of discord among the three Election Commissioners has emerged and their repeated failure to create a level playing field for all players is evident. Utterances that lower standards of public discourse immeasurably, blatant violation of electoral rules such as the instrumental use of armed forces are nodded through while a retired soldier is disallowed from standing for election on the other. Bad tackles by one side, the favourites, have failed to be shown the red card whilst minor ones by

other sides have been sent off the field. Second, electoral finance has crossed all limits. Between 2014 and 2019, the new instrument of “electoral bonds” was introduced by the BJP government, without any parliamentary debate, to make funding of political parties and candidates utterly opaque. Unsurprisingly, 95 per cent of these bonds has gone to the ruling party, creating campaign wealth of an unprecedented order. Evidence of this is the capture of the public space by its ubiquitous and expensive advertising, and the easy availability of masks, flags, earrings, saris, brooches, pencil cases, umbrellas — all of one single party. Its marketing works on the same principle as that of a cement company whose strap line is “People Buy it, Because They Know it” (Shobai cheney, tai keney). And it works, especially in places where the message is new. For instance, in a state like West Bengal where the party organisation is relatively weak, people enthusiastically stated that the BJP would come back. When asked why, their reply is “you see their colours everywhere, so they must be winning”. It is like going to a sporting event where the merchandise of only one team is available. Third, the chance to maintain the secrecy of the ballot — a key aspect of democratic elections — was explicitly rejected by the party in power. In 2015, the BJP and its allies blocked the introduction of the totaliser machine, which the Election Commission had commissioned and one that the Law Commission recommended be adopted, which would have electronically “mixed” votes from all polling booths in a constituency before counting. Earlier, with paper ballots, this used

to be done physically in large drums. With the introduction of EVMs in 2004, counting has been done machine by machine, thereby allowing political parties to ascertain how each segment of 1,000 people, the average population covered by a polling booth, voted — for them or against. One can see why the BJP blocked the totaliser: as their candidate Maneka Gandhi said recently at a public meeting, her party would look at the booth level data after elections to punish those areas that had not voted for them. Thus the secret ballot, an essential reason why Indians vote in high numbers in elections and have faith in the electoral process in India, stands compromised, but many voters do not even realise it yet. Fourth, this is the first time in recent memory that the country is voting in national elections not having seen or heard the Prime Minister face a single uncensored interview or press conference. Those who ask for accountability from an elected government are deemed to be spoilsports, or worse still, anti-national. In 2014, the majority of the print and electronic media had a modicum of neutrality and at least felt obliged to maintain the appearance of it. This is no longer the case in 2019. Finally, WhatsApp did not exist in India in 2014. By 2019 however, the combination of cheap smart phones and affordable data plans — helpfully made available by at least one company owned by a single industrialist close to the ruling party who presciently stated “data is the new oil” — has made direct texts, video and audio messages to individual phones possible. This combined with a formidable grassroots organisation of the same party has meant that voters receive regular feeds that are literally at their fingertips, to be rehearsed, disseminated and chanted with others. It is as if spectators continually receive messages on their phones while the match is on, telling them

that their team is the best, that the previous victories of their opponents are all hollow, that Eden Gardens did not exist before their team played, and that their team will triumph as the only champions. For these reasons, the 2019 election is a radical rupture from any that came before it. This time we have witnessed a truly 21st century campaign where one party has combined the use of technology and organisation to disseminate the message it wants voters to consume, regardless of veracity, determined to win at all cost. And this desire to win elections as if they are an end in themselves, echoes a wider mood in the country. A recent survey conducted by CSDS-Azim Premji University, analysed by Suhas Palshikar, shows that commitment to democracy in India may be paper thin, and mainly an enthusiasm for elections with much less enthusiasm for broader democratic values, such as freedom of expression or the curbing of majoritarian disdain for accommodating and celebrating diversity. Elections are considered the only democratic game in town and winning them is the only goal to be scored. If this is indeed true, it has happened because a disdain for institutions, procedures, accountability, reason and evidence has been systematically encouraged — while maintaining the thinnest of veneers of democratic governance. Whoever wins the 17th Lok Sabha elections, the game that has been played is just not cricket! This article was taken from the South Asia @ LSE blog. It gives the views of the author and not the position of South Asia @ LSE blog, nor of the London School of Economics.

The writer is author of Why India Votes? She is the founding director of the London School of Economics' South Asia Centre.

Published: May 12, 2019. 

Torrent of Lies from the Prime Lier of India! Yet Another Conclusively Nailed:

Rajiv Gandhi did not use INS Viraat for personal cruise ; no foreigners were onboard' says Admiral (retd) Ramdas

Vijay Singh

NAVI MUMBAI: The retired Indian Navy officer, Admiral L Ramdas, has today issued a strong statement from his Alibag residence stating that former prime minister, Rajiv Gandhi, did not use the aircraft carrier, INS Viraat, for his personal cruise 32 years ago. Admiral Ramdas was reacting to the earlier poll speech of Narendra Modi in which he said that Rajiv Gandhi had misused INS Viraat as his 'personal taxi' to go on a holiday to Lakshadweep, along with his family and some foreign relatives.

"After collating email responses from my colleagues — Adm Arun Prakash, Vice Adm Vinod Pasricha, Adm Madanjit Singh — all of whom were serving officers in the Western Fleet of Indian Navy during the events (of December 1987) referred to here, I would like to state unequivocally that Rajiv Gandhi did not use INS Viraat as a personal cruise lasting 10 days to Lakshadweep Islands," stated Adm Ramdas.

He further added that Rajiv Gandhi and his wife Sonia Gandhi had come onboard INS Viraat off Trivandrum, en route Lakshadweep. "Rajiv Gandhi was going to Lakshadweep on official duty to Chair a meeting of IDA (Islands Development Authority). There were no foreigners with them on INS Viraat."


Adm Ramdas also stated: "PM is authorized to travel along with his spouse by service aircraft on official duties. From what I know, only Rajiv and Sonia Gandhi went ashore by helicopter, and Rahul never accompanied them."

Courtesy TNN, May 9, 2019. 

'Army Miserable Under Modi Govt,' Says Haryana's Army Village

The Quint's chaupal reaches Bisahan village in Jhajjar in Haryana. This village is home to retired general Dalbir Singh Suhag, the current Indian High Commissioner to Seychelles and the Army Chief when the surgical strikes were conducted.

In this village of 3,000 people, almost every household has someone enrolled in the army. Rajpal Suhag, a retired flying officer said, "It is wrong to politicise the army. The army is only for the nation. The army is for the underprivileged and no good will come out of politicising the army."

Subedar Balban Singh also added to the argument and said, "Army and caste should not be made into poll issues. The martyred CRPF and BSF jawans should be honoured. The government is not concerned about the safety of the army. Patriotism is being used to secure votes and the name of the army is being used to deviate from pressing issues." 

An Apology for Democracy, Freedom and Secularism

The urgency of these bleak times demands all people to go back to the fundamentals of the Constitution, and correctly exercising their electoral right is the beginning of this.

Basharat Shameem

These are very heady times in India, as the minorities, especially Muslims, find themselves under attack by the Right-wing fascists. It is known that whenever fascist forces emerge in any society, like in the current day India, dissent, pluralism and tolerance are its first casualties. This should matter more to us in Kashmir since we are the ones who are on the path of dissent as we struggle for our democratic rights. Having been bred and brought up under the constant shadows of the gun, one will inevitably be perplexed at what freedom and democracy means under such circumstances?

People in Kashmir have undoubtedly lost faith in such ideas, but if at all we are talking about any solution, its path lies only through a democratic way in the form of people's will. And fascism is its stark antithesis. The electoral success of fascist forces in India again will inevitably mean more suppression of our rights and thereby further rescinding any possibility of a democratic solution. For a consensus on the fulfillment of legitimate Kashmiri aspirations, fascist consciousness has to be defeated in India. The people of India need to be reminded about this big time. As a Kashmiri, who strives for democracy, freedom and secularism, one can only appeal to the Indian public who are in the midst of the electoral process to choose their next government to remind them about their constitutional obligations in these crucial times.

The Constitution is, after all, a guarantor of the various freedoms like the freedom of living, expression, socio-political affiliation, economic opportunity, and dissent. But since these freedoms are facing assaults currently, the responsibility falls much more upon all Indian

citizens to affirm and defend constitutional values. These values are the ones on which the foundations of any democracy are based. A democracy without freedom is farce. As radical humanist M N Roy once posited: "Quest for freedom and search for truth constitute the basic urge of human progress... Freedom is the progressive disappearance of all restrictions on the unfolding of the potentialities of individuals, as human beings, and not as cogs in the wheels of a mechanized social organism. The position of the individual, therefore, is the measure of the progressive and liberating significance of any collective effort or social organization." What this implies is that the struggle for existence is the struggle for the freedom to exist and from forces threatening it. In other words, it forms the essence of human living.

The Constitution, the laws, the governments are there to preserve and safeguard freedoms, not to subvert them. So the fundamental spirit of democracy implies freedom. Corruption, exploitation, attacks on minority communities, restraints on freedom of expression, human rights violations, gender inequality cannot define democracy and freedom. Political freedom cannot also be realised on the social and economic norms which exist in this country, like the rigid and polarising religious, caste, and gender norms. Democracy, freedom and equality are simply unrealisable till these structures are transformed.

There is an urgency to retrieve Indian nationhood and identity from falling into the hands of the Sangh Parivar whose only purpose is to vertically disseminate the hyperbolic definition of nationalism, one, in which, there

are no dissidents and critics. It is influenced by fascism and contains only overtures of brute majoritarianism of a particular ideology which is exclusively saffron. We have seen how citizens' fundamental rights, like the right to eat, dress, expression, choose partners, practice free thought, protest, dissent, and demand for democratic rights, as in Kashmir, all have come under attack in India.

We have seen how rationalists and journalists have been murdered. We have seen the spate of lynchings and we have seen how the Union ministers go to garland the accused in these cases. We have seen the distress of farmers. We continue to see the unabated rape violence against women, and more shockingly, how elected leaders of the ruling party (as in Kathua) start rallies in favour of the accused. We have seen the killing and blinding of protestors in Kashmir. We have seen how a voter was tied to a military jeep (in Budgam) and used as a human shield. We have seen the brazen assaults on the autonomy of educational institutes, judicial institutions and other state institutions.

Democracy cannot be leveraged by the ruling class for simply its own benefits while risking the fundamental rights of the citizens. The test of any democracy is the condition of the minorities even if democracy means 'majority rule.' Maltreatment of the minorities is not democracy but a clear case of tyranny. All freedoms are under assault even though no emergency has been declared. People are being killed for following specific sets of belief, people are being jailed for holding critical views and are being branded 'anti-national.' The assault on the freedom and equality of citizens seems to have no parallel in the recent history. And if this is not tyranny, then what is?

The urgency of these bleak times demands all people to go back to the fundamentals of the Constitution, and correctly exercising their electoral right is the beginning of this. In the current scenario in India, where assaults are

ever increasing on the people's differential way of living, there is no other alternative, but to fight for safeguarding the fundamental democratic rights. This comes with building solidarity, support and strength for the truly secular and progressive forces which are the real bulwark against the fascist forces. The other like minded political forces who believe in constitutionalism and the essential secular, plural and tolerant values of Indian republicanism, as the urgency of the times demands, must also come together. The fight for true democracy and freedom is long, of course, and does not end at the ballot necessarily.

It is important to talk about Kashmir in this context, because it is in Kashmir that the ideas of freedom and democracy have come under severe tests in the past three decades. We have seen how fascistic principles are being violently asserted in the most malevolent manner in Kashmir. It was done because in today's India, the ruling Right-wing dispensation tried to link fascism and jingoism increasingly to the idea of the Republic. This naturally impinged on all the essential democratic and republican values all over India, but in the Sangh Parivar's project, there is no better fertile site to bring all this into full force than the troubled valley of Kashmir.

In the exceptional circumstances of 1947, it was the secular and democratic foundation which brought Kashmir closer to India while it rejected the two-nation theory. The idea of a secular democracy found natural coherence with the idea of Kashmiriyat, which is based on the universal ethos of secularism and pluralism. As great Kashmiri poet and saint, Sheikul Alam or Nund Rishi, as he is popularly known, had said in the 15th century by giving a call for pluralism:

We bear no ill will to each other,

Should our love bind us all alike, Hindu and Muslim,

Then surely God is pleased with us...

This is the pluralist ethos which has

historically defined the idea of Kashmir and Kashmiriyat. But unfortunately, we have had to pay a heavy price because of the conflict and political unrest. Both politically and socially, our rights and plural fabric took a terrible toll. However, it has often been said that the democratic ideals are best appreciated in those arenas where they are under severe attack. Their true value is realised in their absence and this is what Kashmiris like this writer have been tragically made to feel in their lives so far.

It is time for the Indian people to uphold and fight for the great democratic ideals which their national founding fathers bestowed upon them in the form of a secular Constitution. Ultimately, any solution to the Kashmiris'

genuine aspirations lies within the spirit of democracy and secularism. And it is imperative that both in Kashmir and mainland India, such supreme ideals survive. It is certainly not any imposed or borrowed method or concept, but something which is at the very heart of Kashmir's historical identity—the idea of pluralism and secularism which can certainly complement the democratic struggle. At the same time, resolving Kashmir's protracted political problem may yet be the greatest triumph of the secular, democratic and federal nature of the Indian Republic.

The writer is a blogger and youth activist based in Kulgam, Jammu & Kashmir. The views are personal.

Courtesy News Click, 27 Apr 2019 

Gandhi's Assassin Godse's ideological inheritors

Ram Puniyani

Pragya Thakur, Malegaon blast accused out on bail on health ground, is at the centre of the present turmoil around Nathuram Godse. The story begins with her filing nomination papers for Bhopal Lok Sabha constituency. The criticism came up that how can an accused of act of terror be a candidate of elections. Narendra Modi; jumped into the controversy stating that calling her a terrorist is the insult to the five thousand year old glorious civilization and that no Hindu has ever indulged in an act of terror. As per him and his party the earlier coining of the term Hindu terror, Saffron terror, in the wake of series of blasts which took place between 2006-2008; was to defame Hindus.

The next link in the whole controversy comes with big film star, now turned politician, Kamal Haasan stating that Nathuram Godse was the first terrorist of Independent India. When he was attacked for stating this, slippers were thrown at him in a public meeting. He further confirmed that every religion has its own terrorists. Pragya Thakur, the new recruit of

BJP, went out to pour her heart stating that Nathuram Godse was a nationalist, is a nationalist and will remain a nationalist. Her statement threw the BJP in tizzy and she was asked to apologize. She was not the only one coming forward to uphold Godse and express their real and deeper ideological stand. Anant Kumar Hegde, the current Union Minister, who has been asking for change in Constitution, stated that there is no need to be apologetic about Godse any longer. While another Karnataka BJP leader Nalin Kumar Kateel also came in Godse's defense. To cap it all BJP Madhya Pradesh media in charge Anil Saumitra said that Mahatma Gandhi was father of Pakistan. Saumitra has been suspended while others have been asked to apologize and notices have issued against them by BJP.

Narendra Modi surpassed hypocrisy when he said that while Thakur has apologized, he will never be able to forgive her! While some reprimand has been administered against her,

she continues to be BJP candidate for Bhopal constituency. Is BJP really serious about taking action against those upholding Godse? It is not the first time Godse is being upheld. Many a times in the past, those belonging to BJP-RSS-Hindu nationalists have expressed their praise for Godse. One recalls the RSS Sarsanghchalak Rajendra Singh, alias Rajju Bhaiyya, stating that Godse's intentions were right, he believed in Akhand Bharat (expanded India incorporating Afghanistan Myanmar, Srilanka etc.) Then we have Sakshi Maharaj, the present BJP MP, who has been given ticket to fight the election again, who had also called Godse as Nationalist. Despite such ideas he is part of BJP. During last few years glorification of Godse, temple for him in Meerut, demand for land for his memorial and busts are gaining strength in the country.

When he is called a nationalist, in a way what is hidden from the word is its essential prefix, Hindu to the word nationalist. Godse was a Hindu nationalist for sure. It is only from Hindu nationalists, RSS and its affiliates that Godse is upheld and praised. BJP is in a dilemma. They do hold on to Hindu nationalism, they have deeper sympathy for what Godse did; still they cannot support it openly. The dilemma is that BJP does pursue the path of Hindu nationalism, in contrast to Indian nationalism as propounded in our constitution. Why can it not openly support Godse and his assassinating Gandhi? One recalls that after the murder of Gandhi sweets were distributed in RSS shakhas. One recalls that RSS chief even at that time expressed his sorrow and stopped RSS work and declared thirteen days mourning. One recalls that RSS was banned by Sardar Patel for spreading hatred in the society. Still the point remains that all those upholding Godse cannot yet openly say so. That is not yet 'politically correct' for BJP. This is what the BJP line is. Support Godse's nationalism internally but do not say so openly.

The reason is Gandhi cannot be criticized and bypassed in the country. His contribution in making of modern India, his central mission of cultivating fraternity, cutting across the lines religion, region and language are too profound to be ignored. The path delineated by him, the one of non violence has captured the imagination not only of the country but of the whole World. His campaign against untouchability had deeper impact. His contribution in this direction was in the line of what Ambedkar wanted. His acting as 'one man army' in the sectarian violence has been a landmark in the story of India and the World!

So BJP, while pursuing Hindu nationalism has to make the show of respecting Mahatma. Very conveniently it has made him symbol of 'Swatchta Abhiyan' (cleanliness campaign), bypassing Gandhi's central mission of Hindu Muslim unity and his path of Indian nationalism. What we are witnessing on one hand is the contradictions of BJP on the electoral arena and its long term goals. In electoral arena, to make a success it is BJP's compulsion to uphold Gandhi, while all its major leaders and workers are trained in the values of Hindu nationalism, in its shakhas and training camps. In its training module Savarkar, the progenitor of Hindutva Hindu nationalism, has a pride of place, while Gandhi is presented as appeaser of Muslims and the one who was responsible for partition of the country. Godse was ardent follower of Savarkar. Savarkar was also a murder accused along with Godse but escaped the punishment in the absence of any corroborative evidence. Savarkar-Godse duo is looked up among most of the followers of Hindutva ideology. That's what explains the spontaneous outbursts of the likes of Sakshi maharaj, Anantkrishna Hegde and Pragya Thakur. BJP is compelled to make the show of speaking against them, bowing to electoral and global compulsions, while letting them thrive in the party in various capacities! 🌈

Godse's Killing of Gandhi Is Not Just Terrorism – It's Much Worse

Sudheendra Kulkarni

"Hinduism has an infinite capacity, almost incredible capacity, to survive and endure the outrages committed on it by its followers... Hinduism has always been an admixture of foreign goodness and indigenous debasement."

This quote by Nirad C Chaudhury, one of the most irreverent yet incisive critics of all things Indian, is very apt and useful if you want to understand the current outrage over actor-turned-politician Kamal Haasan's recent statement, that Nathuram Godse was the 'first Hindu terrorist' in India.

Let us be specific. The outrage is not nationwide; it is only confined to a section of the RSS-BJP Parivar.

(I am saying 'only a section', because I know there are many people in the RSS and its affiliates, who recognise that a Hindu can be a terrorist.)

BJP's Narrative Of Majoritarian Nationalism

Most Indians have no sympathy whatsoever for Godse, who assassinated the Father of the Nation on 30 January 1948, and for which crime, he was hanged on 15 November 1949. They have not engaged in any academic debate over whether the killing of Mahatma Gandhi comes under the category of terrorism or not. They only know that it was an act of unmitigated evil, indeed a sinful act. In India's religiously moulded national consciousness, judging an act as *paap* (sin), carries a far higher indictment than something seen only as *aparadh* (crime).

Why is there outrage in a section of the Sangh Parivar? The reason is obvious. This is election season – and a very difficult season indeed for the ruling party and its 'Supreme Leader'.

Unsure of getting a renewed mandate on the basis of its unfulfilled 2014 promise of 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas' and 'Aache Din', the Bharatiya Janata Party has determined that its best bet is to polarise the electorate on communal lines. Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself has used the 'majority vs minority' language in his election speeches, with the least fear of being censured by the Election Commission.

For the past five years, PM Modi and his storm-troopers have built a narrative of majoritarian nationalism, in which the majority community (Hindus) have a default claim on being 'true Indians'. Even secular Hindus, who question this communal 'Idea of India', have been routinely branded as 'anti-nationals'.

The binary of 'Bajrangbali vs Ali', 'Ramzade vs Haramzade', 'Shamshan vs Kabrastan' – has made it clear how the BJP has tried to consolidate its Hindu vote bank.

'Demonisation' of Pakistan, 'Otherisation' of Muslims

A logical extension of the agenda of communal polarisation of India is the projection of terrorism and national security from a majoritarian perspective. It is true that most of the terrorist acts in India and the around the world in recent decades, have been carried out by Muslims. It is also incontrovertible that these misguided Muslims have misinterpreted and misused their own religion, Islam, both for self-motivation and goal-setting. In the Indian context, it is equally undeniable that most acts of terror have been directly and indirectly aided and abetted by Pakistan. Both official and non-official Pakistan have been guilty of this.

While Pakistan must be held accountable in India's fight against terrorism, the BJP (along

with its ally, the Shiv Sena) is the only party in our country that has used Pakistan-bashing as the centre-piece of its election campaign.

This is not surprising because the explicit demonisation of Pakistan, and implicit 'otherisation' of Muslims, are two sides of the same coin in the BJP's narrative of Indian nationalism.

However, history is always a thorn in the flesh of those who try to falsify it. Even though most acts of terrorism in India have been carried out by Muslim extremists, at least some – (according to probes conducted by India's own investigative agencies) – have also been perpetrated by Hindu extremists. In the past five years, the Modi government has done everything possible (by way of misuse of institutions) to help the accused go scot-free. In spite of this, some are still facing terror charges. Acceptance of this reality is inconvenient to those who claim that a Hindu can never be a terrorist.

What BJP's Choice of Pragya Thakur As A Candidate Means

Under normal circumstances, whether a Hindu can become a terrorist or not would have remained a somewhat inconsequential debate, confined to the op-ed pages of newspapers. But this being election time, and since the BJP has been compelled to junk its plank of 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas' in favour of muscular Hindutva nationalism, it suddenly found it electorally expedient to claim that a Hindu can never be terrorist.

The pretext was the Congress party fielding its veteran leader Digvijaya Singh – former Madhya Pradesh chief minister – as its candidate from Bhopal. Since no leader of his stature in the BJP was willing to contest against him, the BJP strategists decided to turn the adversity into an opportunity for their party's Hindutva-inspired election campaign nationwide. Hence their choice of saffron-clad Pragya Thakur, who is still a terror-accused in the Malegaon blast case, as the party's

candidate from Bhopal.

Now, it is not necessary here to go into the question of whether Digvijaya Singh coined the term 'Hindu terror'. (He has denied it.) In any case, the term is as inappropriate and unacceptable as the counterpart term 'Muslim terror', since both terms wrongly identify terrorism with a specific religion.

But what is instructive is, how the BJP chose to justify Pragya Thakur's candidature. The party's propagandists said it was their way of telling the electorate – not only in Bhopal but also all over India – how the Congress is actually anti-Hindu, because it insulted Hinduism by coining the term 'Hindu terror'.

The Outrageous Falsification of History

No less than Prime Minister Modi himself led the charge against the Congress. In his campaign speech at Wardha in Maharashtra, he went beyond saying that a Hindu can never be a terrorist. Shockingly, Modi said a Hindu can never be involved in an act of violence. If he is to be believed, no Hindu has ever participated in communal riots, mob lynching and other violent hate crimes. Falsification of history could not have been more grotesque and outrageous.

In a TV interview, Mr Modi subsequently defended the BJP giving a ticket to Pragya Thakur to contest the elections.

So far, there has not been a word of condemnation, not even disapproval, from him, with regard to Pragya Thakur's outrageous slander of super-cop Hemant Karkare, who was martyred in the 26/11 Mumbai attacks. (Karkare, in his last interview to Aaj Tak's Sahil Joshi, just hours before he was killed, clearly states that the investigative agencies had solid evidence against the Hindus accused in terror cases.)

Not All Hindus Are Peaceful & Tolerant; Godse Proves This

It is against this background that Kamal

Haasan, a staunch critic of Hindutva, has said that Godse was the first ‘Hindu terrorist’ in India. To counter him, some BJP spokespersons have argued that Godse was an ‘assassin’ but not a ‘terrorist’. The point here is not whether assassination of Mahatma Gandhi was an act of terror or not. The point is that it was a far graver hate crime. It was no doubt motivated by the same extremist Hindutva ideology that is responsible for so many violent attacks on innocent Muslims. (In the same way that the extremist Islamist ideology has been responsible for many violent attacks on innocent non-Muslims as well as Muslims in many parts of the world, including Pakistan.)

But what elevates Godse’s action in the hierarchy of crimes against humanity is that it killed one of the greatest human beings to have sacrificed his life for peace and Hindu-Muslim unity.

Yes, Hinduism is a religion of tolerance. It is a religion of non-violence. (Non-violence is at the core of *all* religions.) The Mahatma himself was the greatest Hindu of our times, a venerable apostle of *ahimsa*. But that does not mean *all* Hindus are tolerant and non-violent. Godse, and his hidden admirers in the Hindu community, who have debased Hinduism, exemplify this truth.

*(The author was an aide to former Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. He has recently founded ‘Forum for a New South Asia’, which advocates India-Pakistan-China cooperation. He welcomes comments at sudheenkulkarni@gmail.com. He tweets @SudheenKulkarni. This is an opinion piece and the views expressed are the author’s own. **The Quint** neither endorses nor is responsible for them.)*

Courtesy **The Quint**, 17 May 2019. 🌈



రాధిక పూజామండలం తల్లి, తండ్రి, అన్నగార్లు (ఎ.ఆర్. రాయ్, రాయ్, ఎ.ఆర్. రాయ్)

This rare picture was taken in Tenali of Andhra Pradesh in 1940s. In the front row M N Roy and Ellen Roy are seen. In the front row right side last person is AGK (Avula Gopalakrishna Murthy). Next to him is Mr Jampala Syamprasad (from Jagarlamudi village). Among the standing persons left to fourth person is Mr Meka Chakrapani.

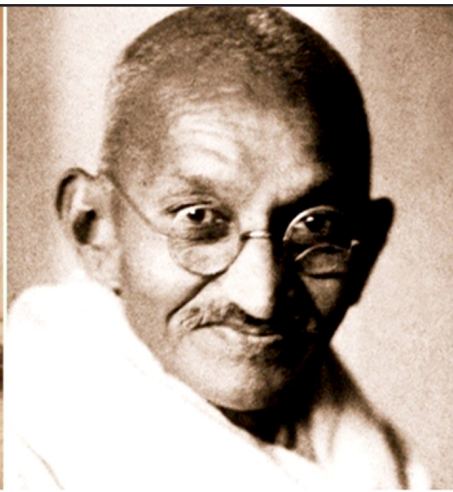
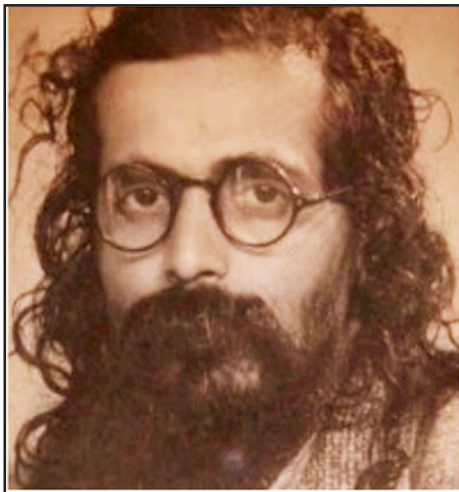
Courtesy Dr. Narisetti Innaiah

How the RSS Detested Gandhi

In this excerpt from his recent biography of Gandhi, Ramachandra Guha documents the intense and at times venomous hatred that the RSS and its long-serving sarsanghchalak, M. S. Golwalkar, had for the Mahatma



Ramachandra Guha



The
RSS's
M.S. Golwalkar
and
Mahatma
Gandhi.

The statements in praise of Nathuram Godse by a series of Hindutva politicians have once more foregrounded the Sangh Parivar's deeply ambivalent attitude towards the life and legacy of Mahatma Gandhi.

Given the appreciation expressed for Godse by BJP candidates for parliament, and even by BJP Union ministers, how credible are Prime Minister Narendra Modi's own professions of admiration for Gandhi? The historical truth is that detestation of the Father of the Nation runs deep in the veins of Hindutva.

The riots of 1946-7 had brought radicals on both sides to the fore. On the Muslim side it was the Muslim National Guards and the Khaksars; on the Hindu side the Hindu Mahasabha and the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS). Founded

in 1925, the RSS was now led by M. S. Golwalkar, an intense man of extreme views, determined to purge India of all non-Hindu influences. RSS cadres had played an active part in the violence in the Punjab. Now, in Delhi, they sought to crystallise and take advantage of the swarm of Hindu and Sikh refugees that had come into the city.

On March 8, 1947, a rally of RSS workers of the Delhi Province was held. Some 100,000 volunteers participated. The chief guest was M. S. Golwalkar, who told the gathering that it 'was the duty of every Hindu to defend his religion'.

Two days later, a meeting of RSS leaders was held in the home of one Sham Behari Lal in Daryaganj. The attendees seemed to be mostly Hindu merchants. The fragile Hindu-Muslim situation in Punjab was discussed. One Lala Hari

Chand presented a purse of Rs 100,000 to M. S. Golwalkar on behalf of the Delhi branch. Golwalkar, in his speech, said that if the Hindus perished, the Sangh would perish. Golwalkar added that 'the disunity among Hindus in the Punjab was the cause of the present calamity. The Sangh should unite the Hindus and the capitalists should help by funds' (*C. I. D. Report for and March 8 and 9, 1947, in File 137, Delhi Police Records, 5th Instalment, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library*).

In the last week of September 1947, Gandhi spoke to a group of RSS workers in the Harijan Colony. He praised their discipline and the absence of untouchability within their ranks, but told them that 'in order to be truly useful, self-sacrifice had to be combined with purity of motive and true knowledge.' Many allegations that the Sangh was against Muslims had been brought to Gandhi's notice. He reminded the Sangh workers that Hinduism was not an exclusive religion, and that Hindus 'could have no quarrel with Islam'. The strength of the Sangh, said Gandhi, 'could be used in the interests of India or against it' (*Report in Harijan, September 28, 1947; Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Volume LXXXIX, pp 173-5*).

Gandhi was ambivalent about the RSS; the Sangh, for their part, actively distrusted him. An article in their magazine, *Organiser*, savagely attacked Gandhi's attempts at forging communal peace in Bengal. 'Nero fiddled when Rome burnt', it remarked: 'History is repeating itself before our very eyes. From Calcutta Mahatma Gandhi is praising Islam and crying Allah-o-Akbar and enjoining Hindus to do the same, while in the Punjab and elsewhere most heinous and shameless barbarities and brutalities are being perpetrated in the name of Islam and under the cry of Allah-o-Akbar'.

Gandhi had reached out to the Muslims; but the RSS believed that 'Muslims do not attach any importance to Gandhiji and his words unless it suits them. His policy towards the Muslims has

utterly failed to the chagrin and detriment of Hindus. He is, however, still held in great reverence and esteem by the Hindus, although they are in no mood to appreciate his subtleties and much less his Islamic preaching and appeasement'.

This article in the *Organiser* urged Gandhi to put his acknowledged leadership of the Hindus to other ends. The Mahatma, it said, 'has unprecedented opportunity of organising and consolidating Hindus and making them and Hindusthan great and strong within and without to be reckoned with by any aggressive nation of the world' (*Raghu, 'Whither Mahatma Gandhi?', Organiser, September 11, 1947*).

This was at once a critique and a lament. If only Gandhi would use his status and position to actively and militantly lead the Hindus, thus to show Muslims their place while simultaneously forcing Hindus themselves into the councils of the world! From the point of view of the RSS, Gandhi was a leader gone awry. Their own endeavour, as a policeman assigned to their beat reported, was 'for building the Hindus physically strong and for establishing Hindu rule in India'. The RSS believed 'that the present government was not cent per cent a Hindu Government but still they were not opposed to it as with the help of this government they would be able to establish purely a Hindu State'.

The police report continued:

According to the Sangh volunteers, the Muslims would quit India only when another movement for their total extermination similar to the one which was started in Delhi sometime back would take place. ... They were waiting for the departure of Mahatma Gandhi from Delhi as they believed that so long as the Mahatma was in Delhi, they would not be able to precipitate their designs into action. They were further of the opinion that at the time of the forthcoming Id-ul-Zuha festival, if the Muslims would slaughter any kine [cows] of which the Sangh people would get a scent, then there was every

possibility of communal disturbances in Delhi. (*'Source Report', dated October 24, 1947, signed Bhagwan Das Jain, S[tation] I[n]spector, in File 138, Delhi Police Records, 5th Instalment, NMML*).

In November 1947 M. S. Golwalkar returned to Delhi. He collected money from supporters, met RSS cadres and assessed the progress of the Sangh in Delhi. Several thousand new members had been enrolled. An Intelligence Bureau report dated November 15 noted that 'the workers of the Rashtriya Swayam Sewak Sangh, especially those coming from West Punjab as refugees, intend starting communal trouble in Delhi after the Diwali festival. They say they could not tolerate the sight of Muslims moving about in Delhi and collecting large amounts from business while the Hindu and Sikh refugees, who were made destitute for no fault of theirs but only because they opposed the Muslim League and establishment of Pakistan, were dying of starvation and would have to freeze dead with chill in the coming winter. ... It is reported that some [RSS] workers have gone out to fetch arms and ammunition for the purpose'. (Reports dated November 10, 15 and 17, in *ibid.*)

The annual function of the Delhi RSS was celebrated at Ramlila Ground on December 7. The main speech was by Golwalkar, who spoke for an hour and a half. He began on a visible note of self-congratulation: 'The RSS had so many branches throughout the length and breadth of India that it would take twenty to twenty-five years to visit all of them. Despite continuous touring he had succeeded in seeing only a few of them. People were surprised to see the progress of this organisation, which was not heard of a few years back, and regarding which they had seen nothing in the press...'

Golwalkar then turned to the aims and ideals of the Sangh. After eulogising the medieval warrior-kings Shivaji and Rana Pratap, he spoke of the importance of Hindu unity and self-respect. 'We should not be ashamed to call


ourselves Hindus', he remarked: 'The Sangh had taken a vow to keep up our ancient culture...'

The following evening, a smaller and more focused meeting was held in the Sangh's camp on Rohtak Road. Some two thousand RSS full-timers were present. Addressing this group of activists, Golwalkar said 'We should be prepared for guerilla warfare on the lines of the tactics of Shivaji. The Sangh will not rest content until it had finished Pakistan. If anyone stood in our way we will have to fight him to, whether it was Nehru Government or any other Government. The Sangh could not be won over.'

Also in the meeting was a policeman in plain clothes. His report noted that, 'referring to Muslims', M. S. Golwalkar

said that no power on Earth could keep them in Hindustan. They would have to quit the country. Mahatma Gandhi wanted to keep the Muslims in India so that the Congress may profit by their votes at the time of election. But, by that time, not a single Muslim will be left in India. ... Mahatma Gandhi could not mislead them any longer. We have the means whereby such men can be immediately silenced, but it is our tradition not to be inimical to Hindus. If we are compelled, we will have to resort to that course too (Reports by Kartar Singh, Inspector, C. I. D., dated December 7 and 9, 1947, in *ibid.*).

The mood in Delhi during the second half of 1947 was very ugly. Angered by the violence in the Punjab, inflamed by the stories carried by Sikh and Hindu refugees, RSS militants in India's capital wished to purge this ancient city of its Islamic influences, of its large and well-established Muslim population. M. S. Golwalkar and the RSS were even thinking of having men like Gandhi and Nehru—who stood in the way of making India a Hindu theocratic state—'immediately silenced'.

[Excerpted with the author's permission from Ramachandra Guha, *Gandhi: The Years That Changed The World*, Penguin/Allen Lane] 

The BJP Is Digging Its Own Grave

Even if the final seat count is in their favour, the current election has exposed the weakness of the BJP-RSS combine, not its strength.

Shankar Gopalakrishnan

These days, most of us are focused on what is going to happen on May 23 – and what that will mean for our hopes for ourselves and our country. But in being preoccupied with voting and the results, it's easy to miss the deeper significance of some of the trends this election has already thrown up.

Elections often act as a giant lens, bringing into focus subterranean trends that were already developing. And if there is one thing that these polls have brought into focus, it is the hollowing out and brittleness of what the BJP represents – at precisely what might look like its moment of greatest triumph.

That isn't necessarily a good thing, even for those of us who are opposed to the RSS's ideology. But it does mean that, while the future may head down several pathways – some of them terrifying – in the long term a monochromatic, dictatorial 'Hindu Rashtra' run by the RSS is actually quite unlikely.

To see why, let's go back to 2014. The Modi government came to power on a tidal wave of political action by two broad sets of actors – the RSS and its Sangh *parivar* on the one hand, and a big business-corporate-media nexus on the other. Each had its own political project. The corporates backing Modi wanted to push their version of 'economic reforms'. The RSS, of course, sought to push Hindutva.

Those of us who don't agree with one or the other, or both, of these projects, tend to focus on how they result in injustice, violence and hatred. But these two projects have another problem. Not only can they not meet the expectations of the rest of us, but they also cannot meet the expectations of their *own* supporters. In this sense, they are

fundamentally delusional.

To see this, fast forward from 2014 to 2019.

The economic project

Most commentators have noted that the economic project has vanished from the BJP's agenda. This is a surreal election where the ruling party wants everyone to forget its own previous campaign slogan – 'achhe din'. This isn't an accident, nor is it merely a result of "economic mismanagement" by the Modi regime.

The problem in 2014 was that the corporate media had managed to convince both itself and a large section of the public that its 'reforms agenda' – withdrawing the new Land Acquisition Act, diluting labour laws, making forest and environment clearances 'easier' and so on – would benefit India's businesses, and, thereby, everyone.

But in reality, and much before 2014, "reforms" in India had degenerated into steps that benefit the country's top 100 companies and no one else. This makes them not merely unjust but actually *irrelevant*. Thus, forest and environmental clearances are already granted to 99% of projects, so diluting them further makes little sense; labour regulations are already so weak that many businesses don't even realise they exist and for the vast majority of businesses, land acquisition issues are not relevant.

Much before 2014, "reforms" in India had degenerated into steps that benefit the country's top 100 companies and no one else. Credit: Reuters

As a result, after trying to implement this agenda for its first two years in power, the Modi government realised it was getting nowhere in terms of winning either corporate or mass

support and essentially junked its entire economic project. Since then we've seen the government just run an ad hoc approach combining some welfare schemes, straight handouts of resources to selected corporates and the twin blows of demonetisation and GST. This approach, in turn, has pushed the Indian economy into a growing crisis.

The Hindutva project

The Hindutva project, though, seems to be alive and well, and this is what terrifies so many people. But look beyond the surface triumphs and we can see similar problems beginning to emerge – this project too cannot satisfy its *own* stated goals. First off, the promise of employment and economic security was an integral part of Hindutva, and that is now sought to be quietly sidelined.

Similarly, each successive Hindutva agenda has seemed to have gotten stuck in a *cul de sac*. The handful of JNU students accused of being the 'tukde tukde gang' are today much bigger political personalities than their BJP accusers (anyone remember OP Sharma?).

Gau raksha was primarily meant to target Muslims, but it degenerated into attacks on Dalits, problems for farmers with crop destruction and general extortion. Today, most BJP leaders themselves no longer prioritise it. The Ram Mandir effort has barely moved in five years. The Citizenship (Amendment) Bill got stuck with protests in the Northeast, and given the composition of the Rajya Sabha, it is not likely to be easy to pass – and without it, a nationwide National Register of Citizens will not serve Hindutva purposes.

Change in focus

For these reasons, the Sangh parivar seems to now be on a single point focus on Kashmir, 'terrorism' and Pakistan. But the BJP has already tied itself down here too. Within Kashmir, the BJP rule has led the state into a spiral of increasing violence, and the party has no proposal with even a remote chance of addressing that situation.

Indeed, after Balakot, the BJP has further trapped itself into the position of having to use military strikes after every major attack in Kashmir – but if there is one thing both the Israeli and American experiences have shown, such strikes have little effect on their target organisations. Moreover, in India's case, the target country is both willing to retaliate and capable of doing so. If nothing else, the inevitable result of this will be increasing international intervention, which is unlikely to play out in the direction the Sangh parivar would want.

There is nothing unusual about this process. Around the world, every fascist party, and most majoritarian politics has followed a similar trajectory. These organisations and leaders always promise 'security' by 'empowering' their followers to oppress others. But once in power, because they cannot address the real conflicts that they themselves create, these groups rapidly create so much insecurity, instability and conflict that they themselves eventually collapse. The only projects of this kind that have been able to survive in power for long periods are those that benefit from very specific historical circumstances – ones that don't exist in India.

Fault lines appear

But the problem arises precisely when such politics fails to deliver. At that historical conjuncture, the search begins, either within the leading organisation or among its followers, for the 'true' leadership that *will* deliver on the impossible dreams that were first promised. This process too is already starkly visible in India. For instance, it is certainly not an accident that, after Modi and Shah, the two most prominent faces in the BJP's election campaign – Adityanath and Sadhvi Pragya Thakur – are both outsiders who were not part of the RSS.

Thakur's case is particularly striking. The RSS claims to have five million members, but it ignored all those five million in favour of promoting a woman who was originally arrested for murdering one of its cadres and, according

to the RSS itself, was also trying to assassinate its leaders.

Indeed, the tradition that Thakur belonged to explicitly set itself against the RSS, saying the Sangh has 'poor leadership' that is unwilling to make difficult decisions. No doubt the RSS believes it can co-opt both Adityanath and Thakur. But that is not the point. The point is that this 'model for the future Hindu society' is now not even the 'model' for the Hindutva movement itself. The fracturing process has already begun.

Of course this is not necessarily a good thing. Bigotry has permeated deep into popular culture in India and many people, above all Muslims, live with fear and hatred as a daily reality. This isn't going to go away just because the BJP or the RSS ceases to be central. Even if the Congress or someone else comes to power – now or later – they haven't shown a great deal of commitment to fighting such bigotry. Won't the situation then be just as bad, if not worse?

This is certainly possible, and indeed the most dangerous potential outcome of the present situation is that we will end up, Pakistan style, with multiple majoritarian groups that fight each other as well as minorities and everyone else. General bigotry will then be combined with mass violence and a collapsing state.

Rise of opposition forces

But that is not the only possible outcome. For all that the opposition parties have not allied with each other as well as they might have in this election, it is important to remember, again, that electoral politics are not the be-all and end-all of politics. The RSS itself, after all, dominates Indian politics today precisely because it spent nearly six decades focusing on work that had nothing to do with elections.

In that sense, it is very significant that the last five years have seen deepening, and sometimes unprecedented, connections between opposition forces in Indian society and politics.

For instance, in the five years since 2014, we saw national literary figures engage in 'award

wapsi' – something that has never happened before or since. Then the following year, as already noted, a handful of JNU students suddenly became national personalities, allied themselves with a Dalit leader from Gujarat who talks about land and Dalit rights in the same breath, and have now gone on to run an election campaign with support from film stars, comedians, writers and a social media following that outstrips that of almost all BJP leaders other than Modi.

We have also seen student protests in university after university, Dalit leaders explicitly calling for Muslim-Dalit alliances, feminist organisations challenging both Hindu and Muslim orthodoxies and every institution from the Supreme Court to the CBI to the Election Commission being questioned. Even Indian comedy has seen an efflorescence of critical political comedy. Within the wider media, while nine out of ten outlets have sold out, those media persons have not consolidated their presence and acquired an outsize influence in their own right.

All of this may or may not amount to enough in the long run, of course. This real question will become more and more apparent as the disillusionment with the Modi-Sangh brigade mounts – an inevitable outcome whether they win these elections or not. Will those who once supported them turn further right, or will the forces seeking a more democratic India become strong enough, and raise issues potent enough, that these supporters will be won over by them instead?

If that happens, the possibilities of genuinely combating bigotry increase greatly. Will that happen? No one knows. Can it happen? It certainly can, and for those of us who oppose majoritarian politics, that should be a source of both hope and urgency.

Shankar Gopalakrishnan is a researcher and an activist who has worked on issues of forest rights, natural resource politics, workers rights and communalism.

Courtesy **The Wire**, 10 May 2019. 

‘India’s Divider in Chief’: TIME Magazine Changes Tone on Modi

As the Lok Sabha elections 2019 reach their penultimate phase, *TIME Magazine* in its issue dated 20 May 2019, has carried its cover story on Prime Minister Narendra Modi, carrying the title ‘India’s Divider In Chief’.

The story, written by novelist and journalist Aatish Taseer, asks if the world’s largest democracy can “endure another five years of a Modi government.”

“Of the great democracies to fall to populism, India was the first,” the story proclaims at the onset as it goes on to delve into history starting from India attaining Independence, to the many years of Congress rule starting from Nehru’s prime ministership, right up till Modi’s ascension to power.

The myriad aspects of Modi’s tenure that it makes references to include attacks on minorities by lynch mobs, Modi’s record on women’s issues, the demonetisation move, Sadhvi Pragya Thakur’s candidacy, among others.



(Photo Courtesy: TIME)

‘A Politician Who Has Failed to Deliver’

The piece opines that Modi’s economic miracle has “failed to materialise,” and instead “an atmosphere of poisonous religious nationalism” has been created in the country.

“...Modi will never again represent the myriad dreams and aspirations of 2014. Then he was a messiah, ushering in a future too bright to behold, one part Hindu renaissance, one part South Korea’s economic program. Now he is merely a politician who has failed to deliver, seeking re-election. Whatever else might be said about the election, hope is off the menu.”

Besides the cover story, *TIME*’s latest issue also carries another piece, titled ‘Modi the reformer’ by Ian Bremmer.

Notably, in May 2015 too, Modi was featured on the cover of *TIME* magazine, carrying the title ‘Why Modi Matters’. It was accompanied by an interview with the PM and carried the

tagline “The world needs India to step up as a global power. One year in, can Prime Minister Narendra Modi deliver?”

In the past few days, the international media has actively been discussing Modi’s prime ministership and his shot at the second term in power in the run-up to the elections. On 14 April, the *Wall Street Journal*’s editorial board had published an opinion piece titled ‘Modi’s Reform Disappointment’. Meanwhile, *The Economist* on 2 May had published a piece titled ‘Under Narendra Modi, India’s ruling party poses a threat to democracy’.

India Today 2003 Cover Called Modi ‘Master Divider’

Former editor of India Today Prabhu Chawla also shared a picture of the *TIME* magazine cover along with an edition of the *India Today* magazine from January 2003 which had called Modi ‘Master Divider’.

Courtesy **The Quint**, 10.05.19 🌈

Modi Sarkar

Dr. P.R. Dubhashi

The term 'Modi Sarkar' was coined by Shri. Modi himself and gained currency by its frequent use by Modi himself. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of free India, was Prime Minister for an uninterrupted period of seventeen years on the basis of three successive free and fair elections as envisaged in the constitution but never talked of 'Nehru Sarkar'. Smt. Indira Gandhi was Prime Minister for a period of more than thirteen years through interrupted by a short interregnum of three years from 1977 to 80 of Janata Party Government when she was unseated in 1977 elections. She never talked of 'Indira Sarkar', even during the period of emergency from 1975 to 1977.

Rajiv Gandhi succeeded Indira Gandhi, winning general elections with largest ever in parliamentary majority did not use the term 'Rajiv Gandhi Sarkar'.

Shri. Narsimha rao was Prime Minister from 1990 to 1995 but was too civilized to talk of 'Narasimha Rao Sarkar'. Dr. Manmohan Singh was Prime Minister for ten years from 2005 to 2014 but was too humble to talk of 'Manmohan Singh sarkar'. Shri. Atal Bihari Vajpayee was the first Prime Minister of Jana Sangh and later Bharatiya Janata Party for a period or more than six years but never talked of Vajpayee Sarkar. Shri. Modi is the only Prime Minister with the designation of adding 'Sarkar' after his name!

It is highly objectionable to talk of 'Modi Sarkar' because it implies people falling prostrate at the feet of Sarkar for 'favours' which in fact are the fundamental rights

guaranteed by the Constitution itself. The Constitution talks of Union Government and the administrative system talks of central and state governments but never of a 'sarkar' named after the name of the Prime Minister. Clearly the use of the term 'Modi Sarkar' is objectionable.

It is indicative of megalomaniac tendency which poses a danger to democracy and is repugnant to the system of Parliamentary Democracy envisaged in our constitution. The so called 'Sarkar' is the executive branch of the system of Parliamentary democracy. Parliament is elected every five years by the people of India. The party or a coalition of parties which has majority in Parliament forms the government. The Government is all the time answerable to Parliament and should always have a support of majority of members of Parliament and if it fails to gain such a support, it has to resign.

The Government consists of Cabinet of Ministers who are members of Parliament. The Prime Minister is the head of the cabinet, but is only first among equals and not a 'boss'. The cabinet has to meet periodically to take executive decisions. The Prime Minister cannot ignore the cabinet or the parliament and take decisions all by himself. If it happens, the system of Parliamentary Democracy will turn into dictatorship. If this happens in the name of '*Majboot Sarkar*', it will be disastrous to Indian democracy. It will turn democracy into dictatorship. People of India should stop this at all cost.

Dr. P.R. Dubhashi is IAS (Retd) 

‘People have the right to ask what we did in Balakot,’ says former Vice President Hamid Ansari

In an interview to Tiranga TV, he said the five years of Modi government was a mixed record and that the general perception was that it has let the people down.

Former Vice President Hamid Ansari on Tuesday said every citizen had the right to question the military and the government. In an interview to Tiranga TV, Ansari said it was the government’s responsibility to answer such queries.

Ansari was the vice president from 2007 to 2017. His comments come after much speculation and Opposition criticism for the government on the strike on Balakot, Pakistan.

Asked if it was anti-national or unpatriotic to question the military or the government, Ansari said, “Of course it is the right of any citizen to question the performance particularly on matters that relate to foreign policy and defence.” Since the Balakot strike on February 26, the government has criticised the Opposition for questioning its impact. “There is now so much of evidence available from credible bodies outside the country that you cannot brush it under the carpet.”

Asked about claims that India did not shoot down Pakistan’s F-16 plane, Ansari said: “If I have claimed that I have shot a tiger on a tiger hunt, surely I have to produce the tiger.” He said there was no harm in finding out answers to such questions in a democracy. “I don’t know the technicalities of the Air Force,” he said. “One side claims it has shot down a plane the other side says it has not shot down a plane then surely there is something which is in between.”

Ansari said fear was possibly being stoked to divert attention from the problems facing the country. “It has been taken over by a rhetoric of a certain kind which to a man of my generation is less than desirable,” he added.



File photo of former Vice President Hamid Ansari. | IANS

He said the Narendra Modi-led government is “some distance away” from fulfilling promises it had made in 2014. He said the five years of Modi government was a mixed record and that the general perception was that it has let the people down.

The former vice president said he hoped legal action would be taken against BJP’s Bhopal candidate Pragya Singh Thakur since she admitted to participating in the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya in 1992. “Since all others who were identified as being complicit in that act have been charged, I suppose the legal process will now take this also into account,” he added.

Pragya Thakur is facing charges under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act and other sections of the Indian Penal Code in connection with the 2008 Malegaon blasts, in which six people died and 101 were injured. The Bombay High Court had granted bail to her in April 2017. She has made several controversial remarks after the ruling BJP announced her candidature in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

Courtesy **Scroll.in**, Apr 24, 2019. 🌈

8 Ex-DGPs Come Out Strongly Against Pragya's 'Despicable' Comments on Hemant Karkare

In a statement, the former DGPs said the country owes Karkare, who headed the Maharashtra Anti-Terror Squad and was killed during the 26/11 terror attack, a huge debt of gratitude and anything that detracts from this is worthy of strong condemnation.

PTI

New Delhi: Eight former top police officers Sunday strongly condemned the “despicable” remark of BJP’s Bhopal Lok Sabha seat candidate Pragya Singh Thakur that her “curse” killed Hemant Karkare, and demanded those who laid down their lives for the country be respected.

In a statement, the former DGPs said the country owes Karkare, who headed the Maharashtra Anti-Terror Squad and was killed during the 26/11 terror attack, a huge debt of gratitude and anything that detracts from this is worthy of strong condemnation.

“This despicable and regrettable statement of Pragya Thakur only serves to highlight the need to publicly recognise the supreme sacrifice made by the 35,000 police personnel from all corners of India who since Independence have laid down their lives in the line of duty,” the statement said.

Those who signed the statement include: former Punjab DGP Julio Ribeiro, former BSF chief and UP and Assam DGP Prakash Singh, former Kerala DGPs PKH Tharakan and Jacob Punoose, former National Police Academy (Hyderabad) DGP Kamal Kumar, former Maharashtra DGP Sanjeev Dayal, former Assam DGP and NSG DG Jayanto N. Choudhury, and N Ramachandran, ex-DGP Meghalaya.

The former police officers said Sadhvi

Pragya, a contestant from the Bhopal constituency, made some unfortunate remarks referring to the late Karkare.

She has since retracted.


“Karkare would probably be alive today had he not volunteered to return to the Maharashtra cadre from a plum posting at the Centre with the specific intention of working with the Anti-Terror Squad to prevent and investigate the activities of terrorists so that the rest of us could sleep safe in our beds,” the statement said.

The former police officers said the brave policemen and women have unflinchingly answered the call of duty, even offering the ultimate sacrifice, despite being under-resourced and often working 24x7 in the most challenging conditions.

“As former DGPs from across the country, we urge all candidates in these Lok Sabha elections to seek out and honour the families of these martyrs who live in their constituencies.

“We also urge them to commit, to engaging with every effort to improve the delivery of policing services to their constituents.”

Addressing BJP workers in Bhopal last week, Thakur had claimed that Karkare died during the attack as she had “cursed” him for “torturing” her when he probed the Malegaon blast case as the chief of the ATS.

Courtesy News 18, April 21, 2019 

Shabana Azmi : ‘I Am Not Going Anywhere’

‘This is where I was born and this is where I’ll die.’

A fake tweet with Shabana Azmi’s picture is being circulated stating that the award-winning legendary actress would leave the country if Narendra Damodardas Modi becomes prime minister again.

The false remark attributed to Shabana has provoked outrage among her friends and well-wishers who have followed her social commitment for decades.

Shabana remains unfazed.

“I do not feel hurt at all. I don’t need a certificate from people who are hellbent on destroying the ethos of India, which is one that embraces diversity and encourages dissent,” Shabana tells **Subhash K Jha**.

“I have only contempt for the pathetic attempts to malign those who have the courage to speak the truth. I have no intentions of leaving the country! This is where I was born and this is where I’ll die.”

“I have nothing but contempt for the fakenews brigade. Their desperation to try and discredit those who hold a view different from theirs is both vicious and laughable. I have never made this statement attributed to me,” she adds.

The sheer preposterousness of the statement attributed to Shabana takes her breath away. “Surely, nobody would believe that I would say something so stupid! It is incomprehensible to me how such a crass statement could be attributed to me. I am a responsible citizen. Do I have to give proof of that?”

Shabana lashes out at the fakenews brigade. “When you can’t face up to the fact that your leader failed to deliver what he had promised, you resort to fake news to malign someone whose sane voice doesn’t suit your purposes!”

“My father (*the legendary late poet Kaifi Azmi*) taught me never to treat your opponent



IMAGE: Shabana Azmi celebrates Holi, March 2019. Photograph: Pradeep Bandekar

as your enemy. Discredit fakenews with truth not with falsehood and innuendo!”

The attempt, says Shabana, is to discredit and thwart all voices of dissent. “But it can’t work beyond a point because it also gives rise to fact-finding teams and AltNews reporters who stick their necks out to expose falsehood.”

“Ultimately, Truth will prevail. Like Kaifi said *Honthon ko sii ke dekhiye pachchaitaiyega aap/Hungamein jaag uthate hain aksar ghutan ke baad.*” (If you seal your lips, you will regret it/ Generally strong voices rise up after being muzzled up.)

“*Jeena yahan marna yahan isske siva jaana kahan,*” (We are to live here and to die here and to go nowhere else.) says Shabana. “I am not going anywhere.”

Courtesy **Rediff.com**, May 14, 2019. 🌈

Watch out India's next govt, Modi regime is leaving behind an extremely weak economy

Industrial output has declined, manufacturing growth has hit a new low and banks are in woeful state. Agriculture is another story.

Jayshree Sengupta

With more information about the state of the economy coming out, it is clear that the new government will have to kickstart a weakening economy. Clearly, the NDA is leaving behind an economy with severe problems. Industrial output has declined by 0.1 percent and manufacturing growth has hit a new low in March registering a negative growth of 0.4 percent. Consumer demand is languishing in almost all sectors.

It is already worrisome that big car makers like Maruti and Hyundai have reported that their car sales have plummeted. Even motorcycle and scooter sales have fallen in the past few months. Slowdown in car sale and low volume of sales in fast moving consumer goods and tourism show that across the board, there are signs of a slowdown. The economic slowdown is now recognized even in official circles as real and GDP growth is likely to be 6.5 per cent in the fourth quarter (Q4) of 2018-19. Non food bank credit has slowed in Q4 also. Capital goods production which registered a contraction of 8.7 per cent in March is a key source of weakness.

The revenue collection through GST has not been as good as expected and there is a Rs 1.6 trillion shortfall when compared with the revised revenue estimate numbers for 2018-19; hence the government will not have a handful to spend specially when there is strong likelihood of a slippage in fiscal deficit. The Centre's revenue growth is only at 6.2 per cent instead of the budgeted revenue growth of 19.5 per cent.

Even on essentials like infrastructure, there may be a cutback in public expenditure which is not going to help in the revival of the

economy. India has huge infrastructural needs and it must spend on refurbishing and improving infrastructure building new roads, railways, ports and airports to increase competitiveness.

The government has acknowledged that export growth has been 'tepid' with a wide trade deficit of \$176 billion which the next government will have to reverse. This is because we are losing out in labour intensive exports to countries like Bangladesh and Vietnam. Over the years, India's upper hand in labour intensive exports like textiles, garments and jewellery has been eroding because labour productivity is not rising fast enough. Technical progress on the other hand has improved capital productivity dramatically and reduced the relative cost of automation. Lack of proper healthcare, skill training and education of labour as compared to countries like China means that the quality of work relative to wages of workers is not improving fast. It is also due to excessive use of contract labour that labour productivity is not rising. Unless the financial and labour costs in industry are brought down, there cannot be an increase in India's competitiveness vis-à-vis our rivals in South East Asia and elsewhere.

India's dominant exports are now relatively more capital intensive such as auto parts, electronics and pharmaceuticals. Labour intensity in organised sector has declined as a result which is bad news for job creation. Unless labour intensity in production goes up significantly, the organised sector will not be able to absorb the 10 million job-seekers a year.

Most important is the health of the banking sector. There has been a severe credit crunch

for medium and small scale (SMEs) industry because of the problem of NPAs in the banking sector. India still has among the world's worst stressed asset ratio and soured credit as a share of total loans. According to RBI, this ratio has shrunk to 10.3 percent in March from 10.8 per cent in September. Public sector banks account for nearly 90 per cent of NPAs.

The banks have not yet been nursed back to health even though \$28 billion has already been injected over the past two years in the banking system. Bank credit growth has somewhat accelerated in the past few months but the aggregate credit growth is still weak.

The shadow banking companies or the NBFCs (Non-Banking Finance Companies) are still in trouble. They have been cash strapped since the IL&FS crisis making it difficult for SMEs to borrow from them. The NBFCs provide credit to retail trade also. The SMEs need capital at reasonable cost. Retail market also needs loans to sustain consumption growth and low cars sales is a result of NBFC problems. Their borrowings of short-term funds from Mutual Funds has dried up to a great extent due to investors' concerns about the financial health of mutual funds as they hold

\$46 billion debt issued by NBFCs. Many investors have already exited. The shadow banking companies are also struggling to raise funds from the market but demand for NBFC bonds is dwindling after the IL&FS fiasco.

The doors of wholesale debt market are thus virtually shut and NBFCs are looking at other sources of funds such as External Commercial borrowings or selling down assets. Even the AAA rated NBFCs are only able to raise funds at a higher cost today—paying 100 basis points more than the market rate.

Interest rates have been reduced twice in recent times by the RBI, but the 'real' (minus inflation) interest rate still remains high. Steeper interest rate cuts will bring down borrowing costs of NBFCs and corporates. The new government may have to pump prime the economy which means giving both fiscal and monetary stimulus to raise private investment from its current stagnant level. Agriculture needs urgent attention also — which is another story.

The author is a Senior Fellow (Associate) with Observer Research Foundation's Economy and Growth Programme. Views are personal.

Courtesy **The Print**, 18 May, 2019. 

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Waiting for the Revolution

Jayanti Patel

The situation in Indian Continent is, considering various types of deprivations, theoretically absolutely ripe for a revolution. Then, what keeps it in abeyance?

The political, economic and social milieu is not only frustrating but also, leading to dissatisfaction, anger and search for an alternative system of governance.

Dark Clouds

Politically the democratic system is riddled with feudal, communal, cast based ethos and electoral system is manipulated in such a fashion that people feel alienated and helpless. Political parties and their members are more concerned in getting power and personal benefits which leads to hobnobbing with corporate sector, corruption and scams has resulted in the people losing faith in the system and making them cynic or putting their faith in false promises and leaders in hope of betterment which has proved to be a mirage. Also, the demand to make political system, parties and elected members more responsible and responsive to people has failed to produce substantial results. No doubt that, even now large numbers of people participate in every election enthusiastically but find again the same or worse situation, yet something is stopping them to revolt against the system, barring Naxal and such other resistance movements.

Political Scenario

We have a democratic constitution to safeguard the system but no democratic culture to uphold democratic traditions, rules, and regulations controlling the arbitrary or dictatorial behavior of the persons in power. We have no organized, effective non-political democratic value oriented leadership, groups, and media to effectively oppose the wrong policies of the rulers or insist for right policies to implement.

Further, the rise of fascist forces, their use

of communal card, boggy of Pakistan and terrorism (true or imagined) has vitiated the political and social milieu. These forces have divided the nation, subverted the constitutional checks and democratic system (as they have no faith in democracy and wish to establish a dictatorship) has posed a threat against the democratic system and culture. They have destroyed the legitimacy of Election Commission and machinery, Judiciary, independence of Reserve Bank, law and order maintaining arms like Police, Central Investigation Bureau, ED, and so forth. They are also trying to subvert the credibility of armed forces and their operations. These actions are similar to death bell for democracy.

Social Milieu

The value system of the social life is the backbone of a nation's character; it also charts the path of that nation's development and progress. The fascist forces are basically, congenitally, against the human values of human dignity, freedom, equality, fraternity, intellectual freedom, tolerance of different opinion or ideas. They are systematically destroying the people supporting rational, secular and egalitarian forces in the civic society. They have been propagating and promoting an ideology totally opposed to these values amongst the masses. Now, they have come out openly to infuse, impose and force it through their organizations and power in the society. They cleverly deceive the people in the name of Nationalism, Dominant and powerful nation, Hindutva, Communalism and enticing promises of Development and 'Achhe Din'.

The propagation of communal hatred, religious fanaticism resulting in rampage by mobs, murders, lynching, rapes, has generated an atmosphere of fear, despondency, disharmony and antagonism in the society.


Economy

They neither know nor care about the economic welfare of the masses. They do not have any economic agenda for an egalitarian distribution of wealth. They support the capitalist system and its exploitation of the people. Actually, they use the capitalist-corporate-sector to accumulate funds for the aggrandizement of their policy, power and personal benefits. Acquiring lands cheaply from farmers and gifting them to the corporate houses, destroy the nationalized sectors like banks, communication agency, industries are the instances of this policy. Because of this type of economic policy we are facing the problems of increasing unemployment, suicides of farmers and number of people under poverty line.

Possibility of the Revolution

On the whole, there is an increasing gap between expectations and achievements which is considered as a ripe situation for the revolution. However people always think that this night of bad times would pass and dawn of better days in future will come. Further, the Indian mind is highly dominated by the theory of KARMA,

which not only provides them solace but abstain from taking any action to change the overall situation. But, after all, there is a limit to the patience of man, limits to the tolerance of injustice and deprivation. Indian history is also instances of people rising against the arbitrary, unjust and oppressive rule. They just need a spark, a leader and a goal to achieve. No doubt that the modern state possesses immense coercive power but it is dependent on armed forces that may be subverted or neutralized.

Revolution is a painful but sometimes a necessary cleansing process. It clears the debris of useless, obstructing and stinking institutions, organizations and ideologies. Thereby, opening the possibility for the growth of a new progressive and egalitarian social culture. It can also abolish the exploitative parasite classes perpetuated by feudal, social and religious traditions and utilize the wealth amassed by them for the benefit of the masses. It is possible that sometimes a revolution boomerang and the new system may be more oppressive and dictatorial. However the revolutionary act paves a way for another effort to correct and rectify the process. 

“Selections from The Radical Humanist” on the website

Selections from The Radical Humanist’ Volume I (1970 to 2005) and II (2006 to 2018) containing articles by all-time greats like M.N. Roy, Justice V.M. Tarkunde, Prof. Sib Narayan Ray and others on democratic freedoms, radical humanism, human rights, and emancipation of the downtrodden are now available at the website www.lohiatoday.com on the periodicals page where ‘The Radical Humanist’ magazine is put every month. Readers may download these volumes from there and read whenever they like.

- Mahi Pal Singh

Crony Elitism

P.A.S. Prasad

Let me start with a not very recent example of crony elitism. The intelligence chiefs, also good friends, of India and Pakistan, after retirement, jointly penned and published a book bringing out their exploits and joint operations for and against their respective countries. This publication is an eye opener in many respects, contrary to general public perception that heads of such institutions would be at each other's jugular because of perpetual strained relations between both the countries.

It is relevant to quote here an Urdu couplet. I am unable to recall the author's name. "*Sarhad pe tanaav hai kya, patta karo chunav hai kya.*" It means, "It is observed that whenever there is an election around in either of the countries, border tension is created in connivance with the crony elite at the top of both the countries, to improve the election prospects of the top elite of the country facing elections." This is the reason why Balakot is suspect.

The arrest of fugitive Nirav Modi, also an elite in his own right, just before the elections in India, leaving him untouched all this long is a case in point. On a London street, it is reported that while going to hail a *taxi*, repeat *taxi*, he was arrested. Sounds like done by prior arrangement by the crony elite concerned.

During the Emergency, it may be recalled that, the picture *Aandhi* was banned. One of the scenes depicts that two heads of states decide to go to war for their respective agenda.

Bertrand Russell, the great pacifist who exposed the humbug and fraud played by the top ruling elite of countries, observed that wars are never fought for declared reasons but for altogether different reasons never revealed.

The seeming antagonism and rivalry, the snarling jibes of various political leaders at each

other should never be taken as real. We should never forget all the vociferous shouting and the threats in the parliament and elsewhere are mostly well choreographed to impress the public. The main aim and objective of all this impressive show is to waste the time in parliament and abide the hoarse throats is to get well paid and periodical increase in perks, privileges and sumptuous rise of salaries and allowances, while patting themselves for making the people suckers time and again...

With all the acrimony, bitterness and fouled climate at the time of partition, people naturally take it for granted that the top leaders on both sides of the boundary line would be daggers drawn and remain sworn-out arch enemies. But the truth is stranger than fiction. Ordinary people might have killed each other and indulged in blood bath, but the elite remained steadfast cronies.

The striking illustration is the Jinnah house in Mount Pleasant Road, in Malabar Hills of Bombay. Jinnah, creator of Pakistan had this luxurious bungalow. After partition, having moved there, he wanted to rent out his house left behind in Bombay to a right party. He did not want to rent it out to Indians as he was not sure whether it would be maintained by them as befitted the elegant house. So he wrote to Nehru requesting him to help him in renting it out to suitable party. Nehru obliged Jinnah by arranging to rent it out to the British Dy. High Commissioner to the satisfaction of Jinnah.

Even in recent past P.V. Narasimharao and Manmohan Singh duo when about to embark on far-reaching reforms, it was reported, that they consulted L.K. Advani, the opposition leader and obtained his nod even before consulting their cabinet colleagues.

We all know that Ram Manohar Lohia was a bitter and biting critic of Nehru inside and

outside Parliament. But when Lohia was put in jail for leading protests and agitations, Nehru would send him mangoes in spite of objections from his colleagues. A classic example from history was when Richard the Lionhearted lost his mount on the battle field and the enemy fighting him, Emperor Saladin sent him a fresh mount.

To illustrate the bonhomie among the elite, we have an example from World War II when Churchill was the P.M. and Attlee was the opposition leader. Churchill handed over the reins of the govt. to Attlee and devoted himself to the conduct of the war.

There is a galore of instances to illustrate that the seeming enmity of the elite is not what people see and believe. There is an underlying instinctive cordiality and understanding among the elite fraternity.

Resorting to executions and hangings of individuals in the top elite class, are very rare in the civilised world, e.g., recent cases of Bhutto and Saddam Hussein, are for some really serious reasons only known to the individuals concerned and not the handouts to the press and public.

Actually the elite club is a worldwide phenomenon pervading right from the village to

the country's capital level and then on to the international level. At the village level, the rich land lords, the *sarpanch* and the local govt .officials form the elite. This is similarly formed at a higher level in the towns and cities and onto the capital and the metros. So at the national level, we have the heads of state, cabinet ministers, the judiciary, services chiefs, top bureaucrats, leading industrialists, and all recognised prominent individuals from all fields including leaders of opposition, leading politicians of all parties and members of diplomatic corps and so on, not to be excluded are the top gurus, religious heads and so on.

There is always the tendency of many to climb the arduous ladder to the elite membership. In some cases some slip down from the elite to the ordinary mortal level. Then they are ignored and forgotten.

But the elite as such seemingly daggers drawn at each other in many cases, they are all bound by an invisible bond of camaraderie, they covertly or overtly help each other. It is referred as log rolling, i.e., I will do your job, you do my job, the degree of cooperation varying.

It is therefore not surprising that crony capitalism and crony elitism are seen shoulder to shoulder. 🌈

Condolence Message

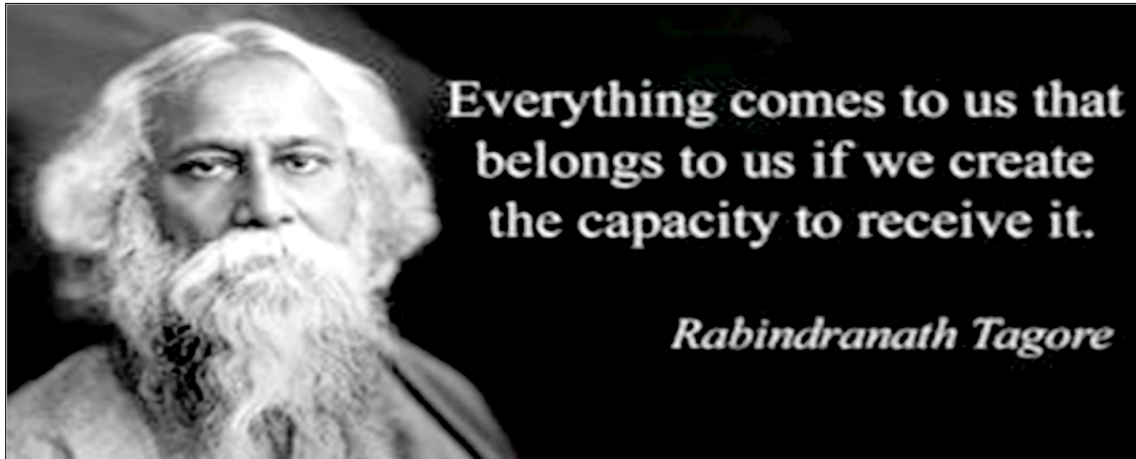
Shri Kirit Ratilal Shah from Ahmedabad passed away on Saturday, May 11, 2019 after prolonged illness. He was one of the strong members of Gujarat Rationalist Association and was taking in several miracle exposure programmes and events. He also attended most of conferences in Gujarat and also some outside, including one in Atheist Center at Vijaywada in 2009. It is a loss for all rationalists of Gujarat and elsewhere.

On behalf of the Indian Renaissance Institute I send our condolences to the bereaved family members of Mr. Shah.

Kiran Nanavati, Secretary, IRI

158th Birth Anniversary of Rabindranath Tagore Observed

By : CAAdda



India's first Nobel laureate who reshaped Bengali literature and music, **Rabindranath Tagore** was also an educationist who started the **Vishwa Bharati University in Shantiniketan**, and in the process, challenged conventional mores of education. Rabindranath Tagore's birth anniversary is also known as **Pochise Boishakh 2019**.

Here is a list of interesting facts about **Shri Tagore**:

1. Confusion regarding birthday: According to the Bengali calendar, Tagore was born on the **25th day of Boishakh month**, in 1422. Subsequently, West Bengal celebrates Tagore's birthday as per the Bengali calendar, which overlaps with either May 8 or May 9 on Gregorian calendar. However, in other states, Rabindranath Tagore Jayanti is observed as per the Gregorian calendar on May 7.

2. The painter William Rothenstein was actually a friend of the Tagore family and ran into Rabindranath in 1910. Tagore gave Rothenstein his translations of his own songs—translations that would comprise the *Gitanjali*—when he travelled to London in 1912.

3. When Tagore was awarded the **Nobel**

Prize for Literature in 1913, he became the first non-European to win it. He was awarded the prize after the publication of his acclaimed collection of poems *Geetanjali*.

4. Rabindranath Tagore is the only known person to have written the national anthems for two different countries. He wrote **Jana Gana Mana**, the national anthem for India, and **Amar Sonar Bangla**, the national anthem for Bangladesh.

5. In March 2004, the Nobel medal that had been awarded to Rabindranath Tagore was stolen from a museum in the Uttarayan complex in Santiniketan. The Nobel later went on to issue a new medal to Tagore on his birth centenary.

6. Tagore and Gandhi were well acquainted and in fact, it was Tagore who conferred the title 'Mahatma' on the father of the nation. **Tagore and Einstein** met four times between 1930 and 1931 and revered each other moved by their mutual curiosity to grasp each other's contributions, their search for truth and love for music.

Courtesy currentaffairs.adda247.com, May 9, 2019. 🌈

Major Activities in Gujarat for Spreading Humanist Values

Kiran Nanavati

Gujarat-Mumbai Rationalist Association is active as an umbrella organization guiding various small and large organizations across Gujarat and Mumbai. Majority of organizations involved in awareness of rationalism and humanism are associated with it. Veteran humanist from Gujarat, Mr. Bipin Shroff is steering this organization, which broadly guides activities of member-organizations. Major activities being miracle exposure programme to demonstrate fallacy of miracles, education on astronomy by stargazing through telescope to eradicate myths of star-powers, talks and discussions on various humanist values, visiting *smashaan* (cemetery) on *Kali Chaudas* day of Diwali to break the myth related with ghosts. Besides this, it holds state level conferences for its members.

Satya Shodhak Sabha (truth finding committee) based at Surat is a leading organization that has been active in propagating rational values in society since late 1970's. Their major thrust has been to spread knowledge of science and demonstrate alternatives to existing religious customs. They

have instituted an award for rationalists and it is called *Raman Bhraman Award*. Mr. Raman Pathak from Surat was columnist in a local daily and fearlessly wrote on rational values in his weekly column called *Raman Bhraman*. Thus, an award was instituted in his name with his encouragement. He is no more and award continues as an annual event. In 2019, this award was conferred upon Mr. Govind Maru of Navsari in south Gujarat, who has been actively spreading messages on rational values since yearsthrough his blog.

Besides several activists propagating virtues of humanism through newspaper columns, social media, books and articles; there are also publications dedicated to this cause. *Vaishwik Manavvad* (Universal Humanism) is a Gujarati monthly being published by Mr. Bipin Shroff via his blog. *Satyanveshan* (Truth Seeking) is a monthly published by *Satya Sodhak Sabha* from Surat. In addition to this, *Naya Marg* (Novel Path) and *Nirikshak* are Gujarati fortnightly; which comprise of several thought provoking writings by thinkers in form of articles, opinions and poetries. 🌈

Error Regretted

At page 12 of the April 2019 issue of The Radical Humanist, the following item had a grave error.

FROM THE WRITINGS OF M.N. ROY (1987-1954)

The years should have been 1887-1954.

I regret the error and also thank Ms. Rani Drew for pointing out the error. – Ed.



M.N. Roy, Ellen Roy with Subash Chandra Bose, India (1938)

