

THE DARK SIDE OF THE VERDICT BY MJ AKBAR

WHY THE MODI APPEAL IS INTACT BY SWAPAN DASGUPTA

www.openthemagazine.com

OPEN



RNI CODE NO. HARENG01045

17 JUNE 2024 / ₹80

A HISTORIC HAT-TRICK

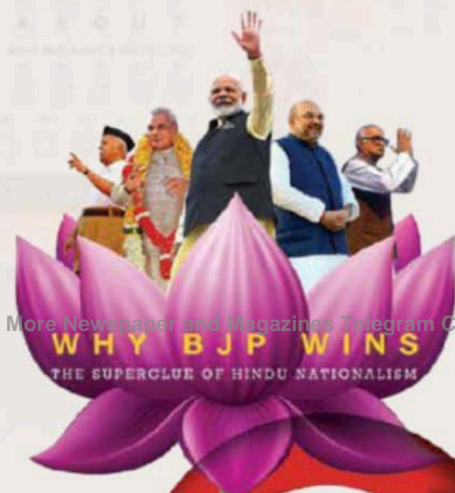
INDIA RENEWS ITS TRUST IN MODI

ALLIES AND THE BALANCE OF POWER
CONGRESS' SHOT AT REDEMPTION
RETURN OF THE SATRAPS
THE ODISHA JUGGERNAUT
RISING IN THE SOUTH

OPEN
www.openthemagazine.com

WHEN THE OTHERS GET
CAUGHT IN THE DETAILS.

TURN TO US
FOR THE
BIGGER PICTURE.



More Newspaper and Magazines Telegram Channel join Search https://t.me/Magazines_8890050582 (@Magazines_8890050582)



[NO ONE MAKES AN ARGUMENT BETTER THAN US]




openthemagazine.com



openthemagazine



openthemag

TO SUBSCRIBE,  'OPENMAG' to 9999800012



Available as an e-magazine for tablets,
mobiles and desktops via Magzter

CONTENTS

17 JUNE 2024

28



58



62

58

STAR AND STRIDES

Kani Kusruti enjoys the national limelight with work across Hindi, Malayalam and Tamil capped with a performance feted at the Cannes Film Festival
By Kaveree Bamzai

62

STILL STAYING IN STYLE

The local-yet-global reinvention of Abraham & Thakore
By Varun Rana

66

STARGAZER

By Kaveree Bamzai

6

LOCOMOTIF

Why it is still Modi
By S Prasannarajan

8

OPINION

The next five years
By Minhaz Merchant

10

BYLINE

The dark side of the verdict
By MJ Akbar

14

NOTEBOOK

No devil in the machine, sorry
By Rajeev Deshpande

18

INDRAPRASTHA

By Virendra Kapoor

19

GAME, SETH AND MATCH

It's about us. Not about Modi
By Suhel Seth

20

SOFT POWER

End of appeasement
By Makarand R Paranjape

22

COMMENT

The undiminished
By Rahul Shivshankar

24

OPEN ESSAY

Modi's appeal is intact
By Swapan Dasgupta

More Newspaper and Magazines Telegram Channel join Search https://t.me/Magazines_8890050582 (@Magazines_8890050582)

28

INDIA RENEWS ITS TRUST IN MODI

The prime minister begins his third term with the confidence of working with allies. And the Opposition is unlikely to remain united against him
By PR Ramesh

38

NO TIME TO PAUSE

Modi may set aside BJP's more contentious agendas but he is unlikely to be overcautious
By Rajeev Deshpande

42

A SHOT AT REDEMPTION

Rahul Gandhi has led Congress out of the doldrums. Can the party sustain its new momentum?
By Rajeev Deshpande

46

RETURN OF THE SATRAPS

Five of them not only held on to their turfs but emerged stronger as well
By Amita Shah

50

THE MAN AND THE MYSTIQUE

Modi has psychologically liberated Hindus just as Gandhi had freed the Indian mind
By Arvind Sharma

52

THE JUGGERNAUT

BJP ends the Patnaik era with a landslide
By Siddharth Singh

55

RISING IN THE SOUTH

NDA makes massive inroads into Andhra Pradesh and Telangana and opens its account in Kerala
By V Shoba

VERDICT
2024

Cover Photograph by Ashish Sharma

Disclaimer 'Open Avenues' are advertiser-driven marketing initiatives and Open assumes no responsibility for content and the consequences of using products or services advertised in the magazine



LETTER OF THE WEEK

Uttar Pradesh swung the national verdict and nobody predicted it. The Dalit vote was going to be critical in the state, and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) couldn't shore up enough of it, nor counter Congress' charge that a "400 paar" mandate would lead to changes in the Constitution. Narendra Modi was the face of the campaign for BJP, telling voters in every constituency he visited that they were voting for him. The Opposition I.N.D.I.A. bloc did a good job in rallying its voters. Although it effectively lost the election, it improved its position in Lok Sabha majorly, and it did so in the face of many challenges. Voters have given a mandate for safeguarding the rights of minorities as well as respecting a pluralistic society. India has once again proved to itself and the world that it is a vibrant and functioning democracy. The new government has a responsibility to live up to the expectations of the people, and they are much more than a voter base. BJP must heed this message in a democratic spirit and reorient itself to the reality of of coalition politics after 10 years.

KR Srinivasan

A NEW BEGINNING

The BJP-led NDA has won a third term in a much tighter Lok Sabha election than anticipated. Voter fatigue is a factor for BJP's tepid show. To many in the run-up to the polls, the outcome of the Lok Sabha election was a foregone conclusion, making their participation in the exercise not so eventful. On the other hand, those strongly opposing the politics of BJP had a strong motivation to vote. The party's ambitious slogan 'Ab ki baar, 400 paar', too, may have backfired, with such a massive majority raising fears of Constitutional changes among the poor. It is left to be seen now if the BJP allies stick with the ruling party.

Ashutosh Garg

MESSAGE FOR CHANGE

Indian democracy can now breathe easy. The core values of the Constitution, which came under severe stress in the past 10 years, now stand well-protected. BJP, which looked invincible, has been checked. The people of India have given their verdict, and the verdict is for change. The nation's political landscape will change significantly in the months and years to come, well ahead of the next parliamentary elections. There is no hung Parliament. By ensuring political stability, the electorate has given the next government an opportunity to rule without facing immediate trials and tremors. Rahul Gandhi has revitalised Congress, and its graph can only go up. Who



after Modi is a question that will begin to be asked increasingly in the days to come.

KT Gopalakrishnan

A WIN FOR THE AGES

Several members of the Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) squad and support staff played a key role in their dominant IPL 2024 campaign ('The Making of a Winning Team', June 10, 2024). At the heart of their success, however, were their planning and execution that became near-perfect towards the business end of the tournament. After his national contract was cancelled and he was not picked for India's T20 World Cup squad, is this IPL victory redemption for Shreyas Iyer? Has Gautam Gambhir's magic touch at KKR made him the biggest contender for the role of national head coach? From Gambhir's tactical magic to Iyer's captaincy, the change in Kolkata's mindset that led to the title was the culmination of a near-perfect journey towards ending the decade-long title drought.

Saurya Sengupta

EDITOR S Prasannarajan
MANAGING EDITOR PR Ramesh
CONSULTING EDITOR-AT-LARGE
Rajeev Deshpande
EXECUTIVE EDITOR Ullekh NP
EDITOR-AT-LARGE Siddharth Singh
DEPUTY EDITORS Madhavankutty Pillai
(Mumbai Bureau Chief),
Rahul Pandita, Amita Shah,
V Shoba (Bengaluru),
Nandini Nair, Sudeep Paul
ART DIRECTOR Jyoti K Singh
SENIOR EDITORS Lhendup Gyatso Bhutia
(Mumbai), Moinak Mitra, Aditya Iyer
SENIOR ASSOCIATE EDITOR
Antara Raghavan
ASSOCIATE EDITOR Vijay K Soni (Web)
ASSISTANT EDITOR Soumava Halder
SENIOR COPY EDITOR Neelabh Raj
CHIEF OF GRAPHICS Saurabh Singh
SENIOR DESIGNERS Anup Banerjee,
Veer Pal Singh
PHOTO EDITOR Raul Irani
DEPUTY PHOTO EDITOR Ashish Sharma

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
Preeti Sahni

CFO Raas Taneja

NATIONAL HEAD-EDUCATION
Virender Singh Bhati
GENERAL MANAGER-EVENTS INITIATIVES
Ashutosh Pratap Singh
GENERAL MANAGER
Uma Srinivasan (Chennai)
Jyoti Handa (West)

NATIONAL HEAD-CIRCULATION
Dhanpreet
Amol Joshi (West & East)
Ranjeet Kumar Yadav (North)
N Kishore Kumar (South)
HEAD-PRODUCTION Maneesh Tyagi
HEAD DESIGN-ADVERTISING Liju Varghese

All rights reserved throughout the world.
Reproduction in any manner is prohibited.

Printed and published by Raas Taneja on
behalf of the owner, Open Media Network
Pvt Ltd Printed at Thomson Press India Ltd,
18-35 Milestone, Delhi Mathura Road,
Faridabad-121007 (Haryana) and
Published in English from 1st Floor,
Tower 3A, DLF Corporate Park,
DLF City, Phase-III, MG Road, Gurugram,
Haryana-122002.
Editor: S Prasannarajan

For subscription and other enquiries:
WhatsApp 'openmag' to 9999800012
or log on to www.openthemagazine.com
or call on our Landline no: (0124) 4561900
or email at:
customercare@openmedianetwork.in

Volume 3 Issue 24, Weekly, ₹80
RNI Code No. HARENG01045
For the week June 11-17, 2024
Total no of pages 68



By S PRASANNARAJAN

WHY IT IS STILL MODI



IT'S NOT ALWAYS THAT, in the history of nations, a people come to see in a leader the alchemist of their anxieties and aspirations, the one who makes the future not a fairy tale but a comprehensible reality. Such leaders owe the consistency of their power to the decreasing distance between the ruler and the ruled in an unrestrained democracy—to an intimacy necessitated by trust and preserved by the shared stories about common good. They are, in the genealogy of politics, what the familiar figures from the book of dictatorship are not. They don't reinvent the nations like crazy nationalists and paranoid revolutionaries; they restore the lost memories of a culture, and make the past not a dispute but a mandatory reminder of who we are. They sway the popular mind not to launch a fantasy, feeding on fear, but to redeem the nation. They are born in the impatience of a people let down by the pathologies of power and the excesses of ideologies. And it's such knowledge that keeps them on the path. Their journey parallels the popular will in a free society. Like the journey of Narendra Modi.

There were leaders before him who gained a monumental space in the national imagination. In the formative years of independence, it was for the nation builder to turn the privilege of being the first manager of freedom into a mandate for the future. What Nehru, with his cultural cosmopolitanism and ideological fascination with the Soviet Model, sought was the creation of the perfect citizen

in a morally supervised republic. The wayward impulses of the nation and the natural affinities of religion, in the larger scheme of the secular statesman, only marred modernity, and restrained the state with a social morality. This lofty project, in retrospect, only sent national impatience underground.

If Nehru de-sentimentalised the nation, the other Leader with a Capital L who concentrated the Indian mind was a national sentimentalist with the cultivated aura of a Mother India. Even as Mrs G kept herself steady on the left, she turned the nation into an emotional investment. It was a misplaced nationalist's paranoia that unleashed her totalitarian temptations, but still, when the Indira saga came to a heartbreaking end, the mythology of a leader who lived and died for the nation was born. The nation, though, was a story less compelling than the nationalist herself.

The nationalist who came to power after a historic right turn in Indian politics was more effective in atmospherics

than recasting the nation in tune with his political inheritance. Atal Bihari Vajpayee's success was in taking India out of Third Worldism and realising the redundancy of anti-Americanism. It may have taken a while for India to catch up with the post-Berlin Wall world, but when it did, India's first rightwing prime minister was at the helm as a culturally different internationalist. The right still failed to comprehend the enormity of the mandate they had won—and to keep it.

Change ceased to be a worn-out slogan and became a national project in 2014, and

THE HOUSE OF ANTI-MODI IS BUILT ON THE POLITICS OF NEGATIVISM AND PROVINCIALISM, THE FIG LEAF OF A LABOURED NOMENCLATURE NOTWITHSTANDING. WHAT STOOD OUT IN THEIR DISPARATE CAMPAIGN WAS NOT A COHESIVE ARGUMENT FOR A QUALITATIVELY DIFFERENT INDIA BUT OUTRIGHT REJECTIONISM. THE RESULT BROUGHT OUT ITS LIMITS



Illustration by SAURABH SINGH

Narendra Modi was a different kind of leader even as BJP struggled to remain a party with a difference. The cultural content of his leadership set him apart from those who came before him. Here was someone for whom India was a permanent argument he couldn't afford to lose, particularly in a country where the idea of nationhood was a necessary contention for a certain class of modernists. By balancing his commitment to modernisation with his adherence to the cultural traditions that moulded his political life, Modi made governance an exercise in national rebuilding. It was this image of the man overwhelmed by the magnitude of his own mission that dominated the politics of India for the last 10 years. Nothing else mattered but what Modi said or did to influence the Indian mind and infuriate those who never accepted the inevitability of him—or the sociology behind making him one of the most shared stories in a democracy. His resoluteness alone animated the politics of the last decade; India went along with him because he

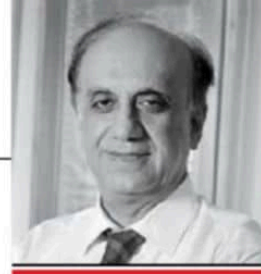
had the stamp of authenticity, and he made himself an idea for India to reject or rejoice at. The vote of 2024, like the two before it, was India's interpretation of Modi. Everything else was derivative.

On June 4, Modi was the argument that won India, which would make him the longest-serving elected prime minister of India. Despite the stupendous effort to refashion decisive defeat as tentative victory, there was a clear winner and an inflated loser. NDA's majority over I.N.D.I.A. was made possible by one man's relentless campaign for the future, which itself was sustained by his convictions and gratitude. For, he could not have been unaware of the fact that most Indians saw in his empowerment the unrealised possibilities of themselves. It was not for him to live up to the exit polls. It was only for him to win India—and defeat I.N.D.I.A., which, unarguably, is the largest coalition of incompatibles in a democracy. The opposition's fragile unity in diversity is a testament to the absence of a fortifying idea other than the convenient anti-Modi-ism.

It's a measure of the narrative subversion on the part of a section of the commentariat, suddenly relieved by the retreat of Indian

democracy from the brink of an abyss, that the ruling party's reduced numbers are being celebrated as the delegitimisation of the Modi mystique, no matter the gap between BJP and Congress is 141 seats. The House of anti-Modi is built on the politics of negativism and provincialism, the fig leaf of a laboured nomenclature notwithstanding. What stood out in their disparate campaign was not a cohesive argument for a qualitatively different India but outright rejectionism. The result brought out its limits.

It's the nature of power that too much sunlight takes some sheen off the crown. Modi, in his tenth year as prime minister, still standing tall with a renewed mandate, too, may suffer a bit from the politics of familiarity. Which can only quicken the pace and sharpen the argument of someone who knows how to turn adversity into a political advantage. For India's choice, the days after June 4 are a prologue as well as a provocation. We may just wait for the next restorative phase in the argument for the national future. ■



The Next Five Years

An action plan for Modi 3.0



THE 2024 LOK Sabha election will go down as historic. It has set three clear trends. First, the era of coalitions is back. Single-party domination no longer dictates Indian politics. Regional parties hold the levers to power.

Second, seat-sharing between national and regional allies across states can bring down a formidable opponent. The Congress-SP alliance in Uttar Pradesh swung the election away from BJP. In Maharashtra, the MVA alliance between Congress, Uddhav Thackeray's Shiv Sena and Sharad Pawar's NCP was the other big game-changer.

Third, in an aspirational society like India with a young demographic, religion matters less than upward mobility. BJP's electoral campaign focused more on deity than on development—a mistake for which it is paying the price.

The Congress-led Opposition will target BJP's NDA allies in an attempt to form a coalition government. It did so with 145 seats in 2004 and 206 seats in 2009. Can it pull off an upset in 2024? Unlikely.

The 2024 General Election underscored the grip BJP continues to have on the Hindi heartland, except for Rajasthan and Haryana. It swept Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Uttarakhand, and Himachal Pradesh. But its attempt to conquer the east met with limited success. It faltered in West Bengal but won Odisha, both in Parliament and the state Assembly.

BJP's southern thrust remains a work in progress though Andhra and Telangana are bellwethers for the future. With delimitation due in 2026, new constituencies will be drawn, giving the Hindi heartland states greater parliamentary representation. That could spell trouble for Congress and its allies in the 2029 Lok Sabha election.

The next five years of the new coalition government must now focus on five specific areas.

Infrastructure: Upgrading India's infrastructure was a highlight of Narendra Modi's second term in 2019-24. Highways were built—at record pace. So were new airports, sea terminals, Metros, bridges, tunnels and houses for the poor.

Technology-driven infrastructure will now take centre-stage. The Gati Shakti Master Plan has not received the attention it merits. The portal allows access to infrastructure and manufacturing industries. They can map exactly which land parcels are free of encumbrances, speeding up

new industrial and infrastructure projects. This is an innovation that will play an increasingly important role in India's economic growth in 2024-29.

Reforms: The Modi government faltered on land, farm and labour reforms in its first two terms. These must now be fixed. The government needs to bite the bullet.

Welfare: Many outstanding welfare benefit schemes have reached maturity over the last 10 years: sanitation, village electrification, water on tap, health insurance, financial inclusion, food security, MUDRA loans and low-cost housing. But much remains to be done in each.

Sanitation is still a work in progress. Toilets in villages are being converted into store rooms, defeating the purpose of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan. Several private hospitals have mean-

while dropped out of the Ayushman Bharat health insurance scheme, causing hardship to many vulnerable sections. Each of these welfare schemes needs remedial, timebound action.

Civic management: While infrastructure development at the federal and state level has sped ahead, the quality of civic infrastructure remains a problem. Indore, Surat and Navi Mumbai have created clean cities

but the majority of Indian cities, towns and villages lack good civic management. A key reform in 2024-29 should be to appoint elected mayors across India's cities and towns and hold them accountable to citizens.

Geopolitics: India rose from the world's 10th largest economy in 2014 to the world's fifth largest economy in 2024. The task for the next five years is to steer India's economy past Japan and Germany to emerge as the third largest economy globally.

This outcome will focus the spotlight on India. It will face increasing scrutiny from the world's established powers used for centuries to controlling the global narrative. The quality of Indian democracy will be questioned. Foreign institutions with poor and opaque methodology will criticise religious and media freedom. India's neutral position on the Russia-Ukraine war will raise more hackles in Europe as the conflict grinds on.

With elections due in the US in November 2024, India will hold its cards close to its chest. Modi has built a personal rapport with both President Joe Biden and former President Donald Trump, a key factor as Modi prepares to meet global leaders at the G7 summit in Italy soon. ■

The Modi government faltered on land, farm and labour reforms in its first two terms. These must now be fixed. The government needs to bite the bullet

OPEN. ON THE GO.

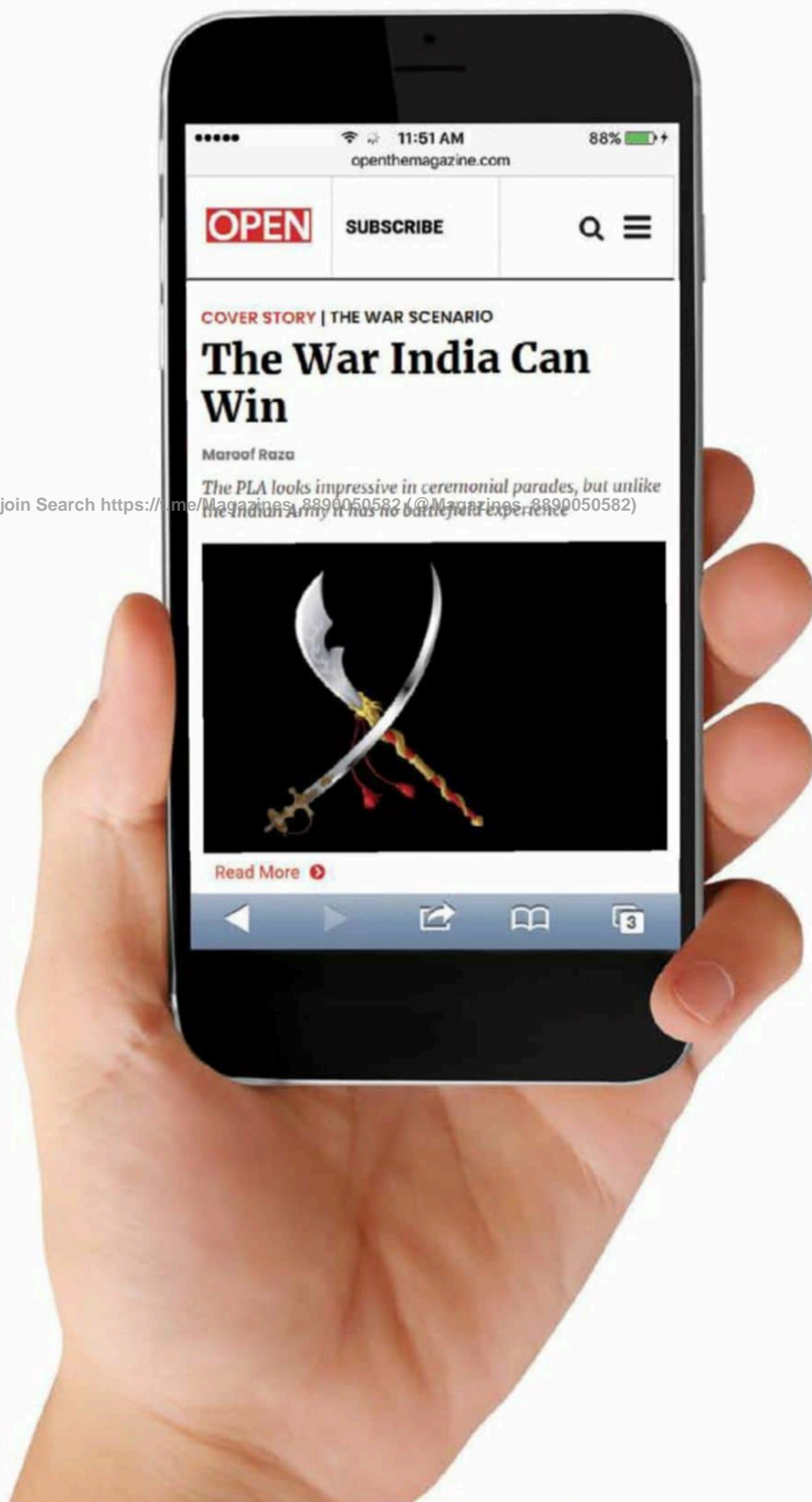
While you are on the go, *Open* gives you perfect company. Read *Open* for its engaging and insightful essays and features on politics, economy, art, lifestyle, cinema, sports, literature and much more. And enjoy articles by our regular contributors such as Swapan Dasgupta, Tunku Varadarajan, Sunanda K. Datta-Ray, Shashi Tharoor, Bibek Debroy, Rajeev Masand, Rachel Dwyer, James Astill and Rosalyn D'Mello. Start accessing *Open* on any digital device, wherever you are or on the go.

OPEN

www.openthemagazine.com

Also on

 [openthemagazine](#)  [openthemag](#)





The Dark Side of the Verdict

Modi's challenge in dealing with the separatists rearmed



IT IS SYMPTOMATIC of the dominance of drama over shades of relevance that the most dangerous results of the 2024 General Election were shifted to also-ran status in print or ignored by screen-screamers after

EVMs revealed their secrets on June 4.

Three independent candidates have been elected to the new Parliament as the latest heirs of familiar separatist aspirations, two from Punjab and one from Kashmir.

Amritpal Singh Sandhu is a self-styled reinvention of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, leader of the violent secessionist insurrection who was killed in Operation Blue Star precisely four decades ago this June; Sarabjeet Singh Khalsa is the son of Beant Singh, assassin of Indira Gandhi. Sheikh Abdul Rashid, now 56, is the oldest. He is a maverick former engineer of the Public Works Department of Jammu & Kashmir. All three have been elected to Parliament as independents, an ironic verbal resonance since they represent variations of faith-based separatism.

Every candidate is interesting. But the story, as always, lies in the voters. Victory for a non-party candidate is rare in our system, and can happen only through viral support from a spontaneous network that has sprung up for an election. Which dangerous and dormant spirits have these three victories awakened?

Amritpal Singh Sandhu, born in 1993, preaches a volatile mix of faith and radical secession in the name of Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, who inspired an armed rebellion in search of Khalistan that bled Punjab and led to a sequence of tragedy from Operation Blue Star, an assault on the holy Golden Temple in Amritsar between June 1 and 10, 1984, to the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on October 31 that year. The death and havoc in Punjab in that blood-red decade are tattooed into my consciousness and memory. I was among the last journalists to interview the Sant; the rooftop where we met on a pleasant spring day in 1984 was stacked with AK-47 guns.

Sandhu, resident of Bakala tehsil in Amritsar, left for Dubai as a teenager in 2012 to join a transport business. He returned to Punjab a decade later to spearhead

Waris Punjab De, with a militant wing known as Anandpur Khalsa Fauj. His 'purification', or reborn baptism, drive was modelled on Bhindranwale's activism to which he added a campaign to wean the young off drugs. Families were grateful. Growing support bred rising militancy; there were targeted attacks in December 2022. Two months later, in February, his supporters stormed the Ajnala police station using the holy book as a shield. On March 18, 2023, Punjab Police began sustained action against Waris Punjab De. Sandhu was arrested on April 23, 2023 in Moga under the National Security Act, and sent to a jail in Assam. From this distant lock-up Sandhu won from the Khadur Sahib constituency by a margin of 1,97,130 votes. His father thanked the Almighty and the *sangat* for the victory.

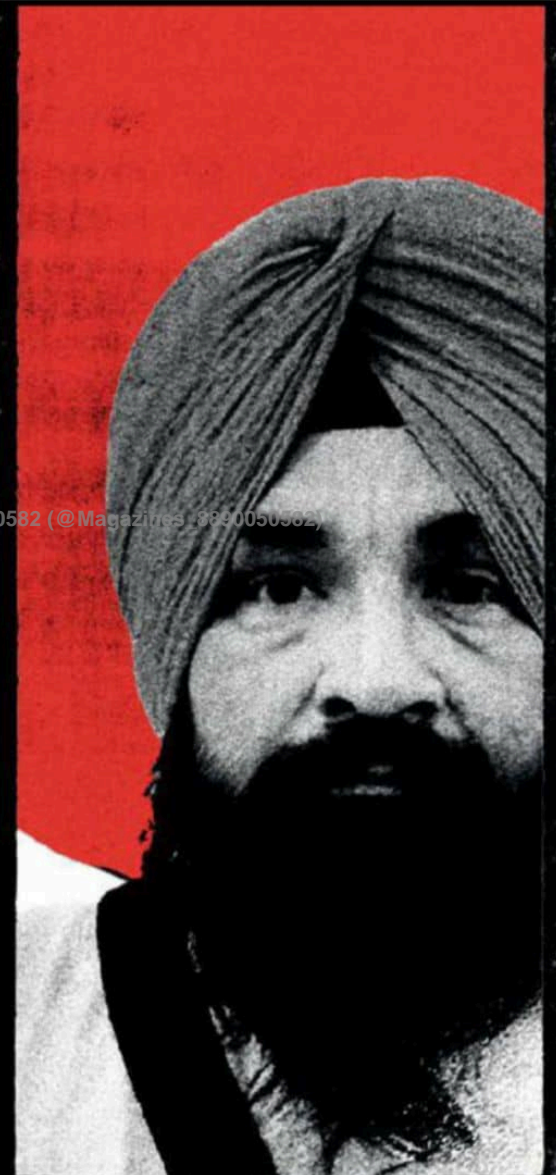
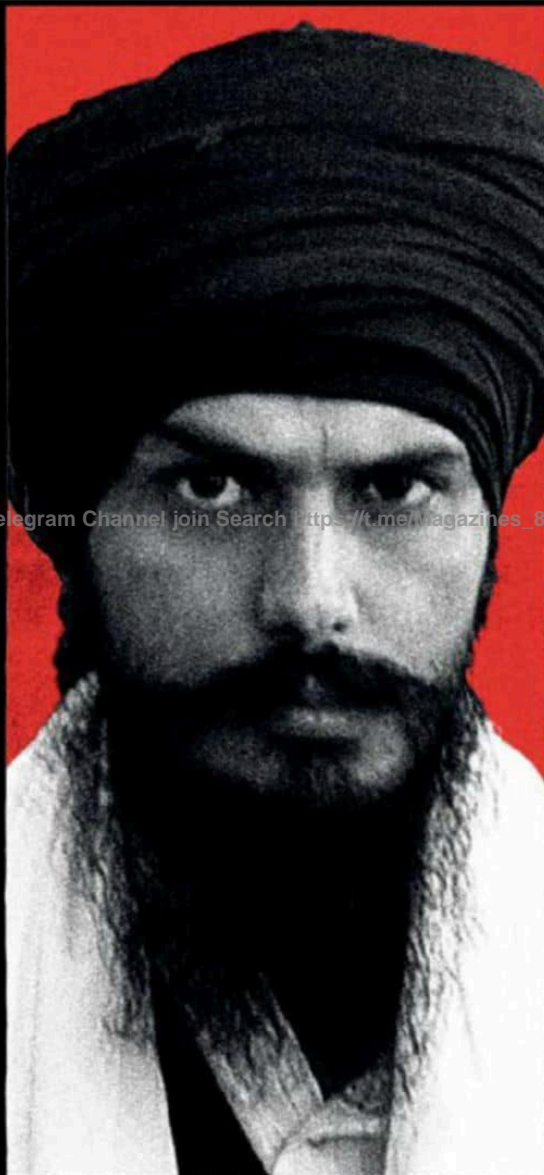
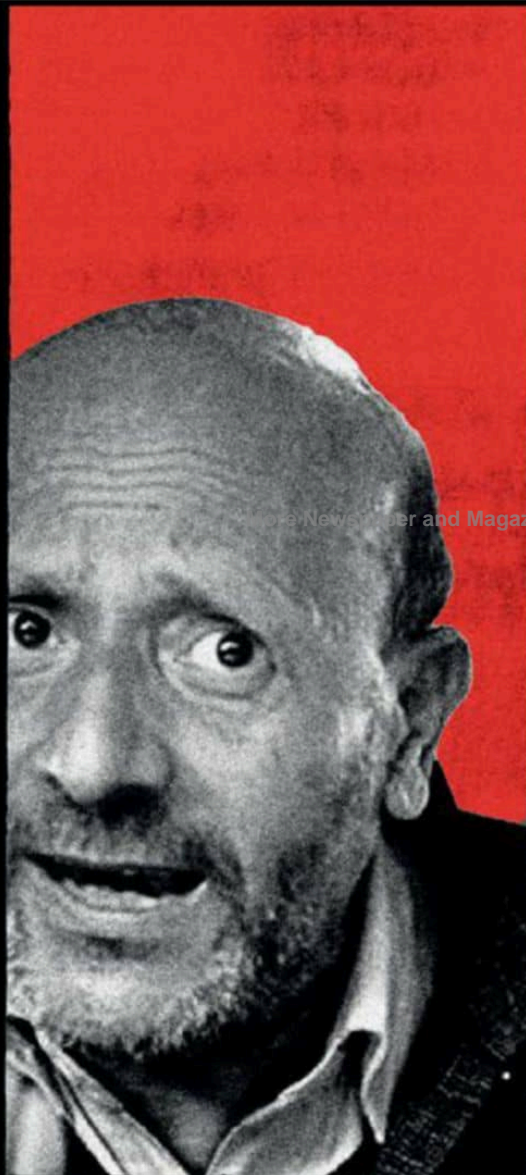
Faridkot is about a hundred kilometres north of Khadur Sahib. The victor from Faridkot is Sarabjeet Singh Khalsa, with a comfortable margin of 70,053 votes over AAP nominee Karamjit Anmol, an actor and friend of the Punjab chief minister. His father Beant Singh, a bodyguard of Indira Gandhi, was deeply grieved by Operation Blue Star. Intelligence agencies warned her of potential danger but Indira Gandhi never abandoned her trust in Beant Singh. On October 31, 1984 at 9.30 in the morning, he and his colleague Satwant Singh sprayed bullets into Indira Gandhi's helpless body at her residence on Safdarjung Road.

Engineer Rashid, founder of the Jammu & Kashmir Awami Ittehad Party (AIP) in 2013, was admired for a simple lifestyle that is in total contrast to how most politicians live. He would be seen taking a bus. In 2019 he was arrested under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA), and imprisoned in Delhi's famous Tihar Jail, from where he defeated Kashmir's most famous dynast Omar Abdullah, getting 4,72,481 votes against 2,68,339. As the numbers indicate, the victory was overwhelming. The quote of this election must surely be the remark by Abrar Rashid, the Engineer's 22-year-old son, who pointed out that the total cost of the campaign was ₹27,000, which he needed for fuel for his vehicle. Contrast this with the spend-levels that have become normal in Indian elections. Abrar and his brother

**ENGINEER RASHID
WAS ADMIRER FOR A
SIMPLE LIFESTYLE. IN
2019 HE WAS ARRESTED
UNDER UAPA, AND
IMPRISONED IN
DELHI'S FAMOUS
TIHAR JAIL, FROM
WHERE HE DEFEATED
KASHMIR'S MOST
FAMOUS DYNAST
OMAR ABDULLAH**

**AMRITPAL SINGH
PREACHES
A VOLATILE MIX
OF FAITH AND
RADICAL SECESSION
IN THE NAME OF
SANT JARNAIL SINGH
BHINDRANWALE, WHO
INSPIRED AN ARMED
REBELLION IN SEARCH
OF KHALISTAN THAT
BLED PUNJAB**

**SARABJEET SINGH'S
FATHER BEANT SINGH,
A BODYGUARD OF
INDIRA GANDHI,
WAS GRIEVED BY
OPERATION BLUE STAR.
ON OCTOBER 31, 1984,
HE AND
SATWANT SINGH
SPRAYED BULLETS INTO
INDIRA GANDHI'S
HELPLESS BODY**



Illustrations by SAURABH SINGH

Asrar Rashid had an uncomplicated message: *Jail ka badla vote sey* (Your vote is the answer to jail).

There is one aspect which the three victors will now be forced to ponder on. Indian democracy, with freedom and free will at its heart, offers space for even secessionists in an election, but draws a line if they win. All three will have to swear an oath of allegiance to India before they can become members of Parliament. We shall see what happens.

ARE WE WITNESSING a 1982 moment? This is the question that should be on the radar of national concern.

No one in government was particularly bothered in 1982 when Delhi Police began to frisk Sikhs in buses and cars entering Delhi before the scheduled Asian Games. The troubles of Punjab made all Sikhs suspect in the eyes of the Congress government in Delhi. If every passenger had been searched, as happens now at airports, there

would have been no problem. That would not have been discrimination. But Sikhs were identified, and their self-respect demeaned. It led to anger in the community and spurred radicalisation within specific coterie or groups. Even Sikhs who had served in the Indian Army, and what could be better evidence of patriotism, were not spared. In a shocking incident, Major General Shabeg Singh, PVSM, AVSM, of the Garhwal Rifles, a hero of wars fought by India in 1947, 1962, 1965 and 1971 was forced to leave his Delhi home in 1982 because he was considered, astonishingly, a security risk. He joined Sant Bhindranwale as his military commander, and displayed his capability in the fighting during Operation Blue Star.

History is in no hurry to exact the price of mistakes. But it does not forget.

These three results have to become a very high priority for Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his core security team as he begins the third term. This danger can be resolved through wisdom, and a judicious combination of political and administrative measures. The delusion, the evasion of responsibility, or the rough partisan measures adopted by the thick-skinned and thin-brained establishment of 1982 will be counterproductive. A fresh mind, a different eye are required to gauge rapidly shifting perspectives. Business-as-usual is the recipe of the complacent.

Every result has a meaning. The economic well-being of hundreds of millions of Indians has improved beyond measure in the last decade. This is why BJP got 240 seats. But gaps can be measured in statistics. BJP's vote share rose from 33 per cent in 2019 to 40 per cent in urban areas, which is extraordinary by any standards. But it dipped from 39.5 per cent to 35 per cent in rural India despite the remarkable support that Prime Minister Modi received from rural women who thanked him for rations and saw better governance. But the young moved away because of stagnant employment opportunities, and disconnect.

THESE THREE RESULTS—AMRITPAL, SARABJEET SINGH AND ENGINEER RASHID—HAVE TO BECOME A VERY HIGH PRIORITY FOR MODI AND HIS CORE SECURITY TEAM. THIS DANGER CAN BE RESOLVED THROUGH WISDOM, AND A JUDICIOUS COMBINATION OF POLITICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE MEASURES



The rural vote-drop is the statistical equivalent of a 63-seat drop. The defeat of Cabinet Minister Arjun Munda is another indication of slippage in the tribal areas of Jharkhand. There is much to repair. The greatest danger, however, lies in the northwest of our country. There is no quick fix. There is no magic mantra. There is immediate need for sympathy, clarity, concern and where required, strength. It is not good policy to be provoked by provocateurs; equally, the real enemy of the state required proportionate chastisement.

We witnessed the political earthquake which undermined Punjab in the 1980s. We watched as Jammu & Kashmir, restored to peace and democratic participation in the 1970s, slipped out of control by a colossal mistake in 1987 when Congress and the National Conference became allies and rigged the polls to continue in power. The people never forgave either party, but that was less important than the instant escalation of violence, mainly sponsored by elements in Pakistan, that destroyed the amity of the Valley and drove Kashmiri Pandits out of their homes. The repercussions continue to reverberate.

The outstanding fact of the 2024 elections is the triumph of the credibility of Indian democracy. No one disrupted the will of the people. No one wanted to even if they could. People in public life may become kings for five years, but the voter is true monarch on the day of the mandate. One of the most incongruous accusations against the government, fanned by the innate prejudices of many foreign journalists, was that India was no longer a democracy. You have to be blind, or stupid, to say this in the midst of the most vibrant and largest election in the annals of democracy.

Democracy demands delivery. Every book on politics has some advice somewhere on how to govern. The best thesis I have read is just a paragraph, not a book. It is attributed to a 7th-century Umayyad Caliph, Muawiya ibn Sufiyan, who ruled from Damascus: "I do not use my lash where my tongue suffices, nor my sword where my whip is enough.

And if there be one hair binding me to my fellow men, I do not let it break. If they pull I loosen, and if they loosen I pull."

In a democracy the day of the vote is only a culmination point. Democracy is a daily relationship of trust, faith, interaction and learning between power and the people. Democracy is not a dance, but it is a careful choreography of partnership in which the people show the way and the government charts the route map to that always elusive horizon where there is reasonable calm, sufficient food, and the promise of a better future. ■

India's Best **FINANCIERS** *+ Sustainability*



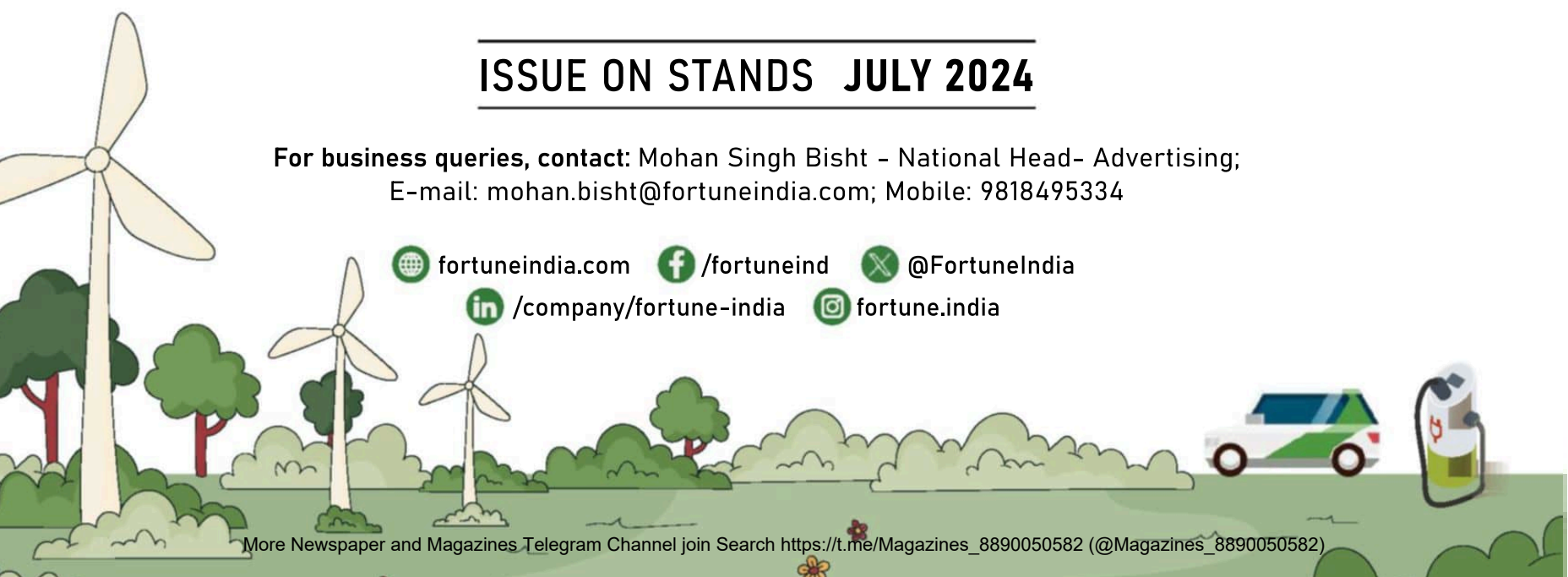
A Fortune India - Grant Thornton study of **India's Best Banks** and NBFCs measured on parameters such as business growth, profitability, asset quality, efficiency, investor perception as well as capital and liquidity.

Our **sustainability** package examines which companies in India Inc. are complying with sustainability norms. And, what are the next level of innovative renewable energy sources, besides solar, wind and hydro.

ISSUE ON STANDS JULY 2024

For business queries, contact: Mohan Singh Bisht - National Head- Advertising;
E-mail: mohan.bisht@fortuneindia.com; Mobile: 9818495334

 fortuneindia.com
 [/fortuneind](https://facebook.com/fortuneindia)
 [@FortuneIndia](https://twitter.com/FortuneIndia)
 [/company/fortune-india](https://linkedin.com/company/fortune-india)
 [fortune.india](https://instagram.com/fortune.india)



OPENINGS

NOTEBOOK

No Devil in the Machine, Sorry



AS RESULTS OF the 2024 Lok Sabha elections became clear by around noon on June 4 with the Opposition I.N.D.I.A. bloc posting a better-than-expected showing, plans to approach the Election Commission (EC) demanding an examination of electronic voting machines (EVMs) in “close” contests and move the Supreme Court over alleged voter suppression were quietly shelved. Incredible as it may sound, no one is talking about returning to paper ballots or questioning the manipulation of EVMs despite such demands hogging headlines and the time of the Supreme Court for weeks on end. There is not a cheep about the timeliness or accuracy of voter turnout data. No doubt struck by the irony of the silence, Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Rajiv Kumar permitted himself a pat on the back, noting the results are a vindication of the Election Commission’s impartiality and its commitment that outcomes must reflect the will of the people.

There is a truism about the CEC’s remarks to *The Indian Express* where he also pointed to the diversity of the mandate in different states and emphasised that false narratives are an insult to the Indian voter. If the results had been more aligned with exit polls that predicted a big majority for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), every effort would have been made to undercut the validity of the mandate by alleging sinister conspiracies to subvert the “actual” poll outcome. Congress and other I.N.D.I.A. bloc leaders have repeatedly questioned the functioning of EVMs and raised doubts over the reliability of EC’s processes without explaining how such a plot which must necessarily involve hundreds of individuals across various states, including those where Opposition governments are in office, could possibly unfold. Though they are unlikely to do so, busybody civil society groups and political parties should acknowledge the EC has upheld its tradition of ensuring India’s elections are free and unblemished.

The CEC’s observation about the

diversity of the mandate merits more attention. It is clear that the Opposition’s better-than-expected showing is as much a surprise to them as it was to those who conducted the exit polls. The preparations to protest the election results are clear indication that BJP’s opponents feared a presidential-style outcome as has been the case in 2014 and 2019. They did not quite anticipate that the Lok Sabha elections was going to devolve into a series of local or state polls. It is not that a “national” narrative is completely absent, as otherwise, BJP’s tally of 240 seats might have fallen further. The party’s success in urban constituencies and its ability to retain large parts of its social coalition ensured a minor dip in its vote share from 37.7 per cent in 2019 to 36.5 per cent even if the anticipated rise did not materialise. The Modi factor prevented a retreat from turning into a rout. But that said, efforts to force-fit an overarching narrative such as the results being a vote against “divisiveness” or “democratic backsliding” are not supported by any evidence.

The success of the Samajwadi Party (SP) and Congress in Uttar Pradesh shows that caste is back after two Lok Sabha and two Assembly elections where Modi’s Hindutva plus development model prevailed. The drift of a section of Bahujan Samaj Party voters towards SP-Congress was hard to detect. This along with a decreased turnout of BJP voters and the desertion

of some of them for the I.N.D.I.A. camp delivered an optimal consolidation for the Opposition which already had the unstinted support of Muslims and Yadavs. Does the fall in the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) numbers from 64 to 33 mean a negation of the delivery of welfare schemes and improved law and order? It would be a folly to think so. More likely the SP’s candidate selection which counted on a shrewd ticket distribution among non-Yadav castes and the benefits of allying with Congress—which might have helped attract Dalit votes—did the trick for the I.N.D.I.A. bloc. Calling its victory of

If the results had been more aligned with exit polls that predicted a big majority for BJP, every effort would have been made to undercut the validity of the mandate by alleging sinister conspiracies to subvert the ‘actual’ poll outcome.

Congress and other I.N.D.I.A. bloc leaders have repeatedly questioned the functioning of EVMs and raised doubts about the reliability of EC’s processes without explaining how such a plot could possibly unfold



More Newspaper and Magazines Telegram Channel join Search https://t.me/Magazines_8890050582 (@Magazines_8890050582)

Illustration by SAURABH SINGH

“secular forces” might be read as a weakening of Hindutva but more accurately, it is a re-emergence of Mandal politics.

In Maharashtra, the messy ruling alliance and a sympathy factor for Uddhav Thackeray and Sharad Pawar after their parties split seems to be the main factor for BJP losing the pole position. In Haryana and east Rajasthan, the disgruntlement of Jat voters over their perception that BJP has given them the short shrift was evident as were a clutch of local issues. In Karnataka, BJP did more poorly than its own expectations due to a losing streak in the Hyderabad-Karnataka region while holding its ground elsewhere, and in fact adding the Bangalore Rural seat. In West Bengal, reports of organisational disunity are surfacing, but the real problem might be the lack of a stable vote bank and the fact that the Trinamool Congress chief solely focused on West Bengal unlike in 2019 when she allowed herself to be distracted by her ambition to forge a national front against BJP. In Bihar, though BJP slipped a bit, the alliance with Janata Dal (United) remains the dominant combination. BJP national numbers have elevated Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar’s clout but the unhappiness with JD(U) among voters is real. It is an irony that JD(U) candidates were helped by the Modi effect, as NDA voters prioritised a government at the Centre—just opposite to what happened in next-door Uttar Pradesh. The CPM which rules Kerala has hailed the Lok Sabha result but the bitter truth is that its stance on issues such as the war in Gaza and anti-Israel demonstrations failed to sway

Muslim voters who saw Congress as the alternative to BJP.

Efforts to explain BJP’s sub-par performance as a vote against inflation or that Dalits and tribals have not backed the party suffer from similar limitations. States like Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and Odisha with large Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe populations remain saffron. While there might be a reduction in the number of reserved seats BJP has won, this may be in keeping with the overall decline in its fortunes. Even in many of the urban constituencies which BJP has won, the margins have shrunk. If price rise or inequality were serious concerns, BJP ought not to have done well in cities where the effects of inflation are more keenly felt. It also does not explain why this should impact certain states and not others so much. Odisha is a state that exports a large number of migrants and has numerous OBC, Dalit, and Adivasi voters but overwhelmingly rejected Naveen Patnaik’s Biju Janata Dal (BJD). Odisha’s voters were impatient with the inadequacies of the BJD government and were strongly attracted to the Modi model and its promise of swift development.

The 62.4 crore voters who participated in the Lok Sabha elections are irrefutable evidence of the vibrancy of India’s political system and proof that democracy is not a Western preserve. It is a lesson not only foreign commentators but homegrown sceptics and professional dissenters need to learn. ■

By RAJEEV DESHPANDE

PORTRAIT • SUNITA WILLIAMS

SPACE QUEEN

At 58, the Indian-origin astronaut returns to the International Space Station for the third time

TO APPRECIATE WHY astronaut Sunita Williams figures in the Indian imagination you have to turn to the state of India's space programme in 2006. At present, we have been on the moon, orbited Mars and sent vessels towards the sun to study it but back then, ISRO was still an overachiever though mainly known for satellites. And then there was Williams, not an Indian, but who became the second woman of Indian origin to go to space as part of a mission by the US space agency NASA. Three years before that, the first Indian-origin woman to go to space, Kalpana Chawla, had died in a tragic accident when the space shuttle *Columbia* exploded while returning to Earth. When Williams took off in the *Discovery*, India rejoiced, basking in reflected glory. On Wednesday, June 5, she once again headed back to space on the *Starliner*, a spacecraft that heralds Boeing's entry into this sector, making it her third time.

Williams is of Indian descent through her father, a doctor from Gujarat who subsequently went to the US and made his name as a neuroanatomist. Her mother is Slovenian. Astronauts typically come into the field sideways, often having previous experience as a pilot. In Williams' case, too, that was the trajectory. She began in the US navy flying helicopters in logistics, rescue and relief operations but her experience broadened until she had flown more than 30 aircraft. She was selected for the NASA astronaut programme, but before that she also did a Master's in Science in Engineering Management. Her training started in August 1998 and it ranged from

scientific briefings to survival techniques, like living in an underwater habitat for days on end.

It would still take eight years before she could fly on her first mission into space and stay in the International Space Station (ISS). It wasn't a short stint. She was there for over six months, a record for a woman astronaut then. In an interview to the BBC once, she detailed how much mental and physical preparedness that involves, and that it was important to be at "peace with everything" before take-off. She said, "We weren't exactly sure how long it was going to be because I went up and back on the space shuttle which was dependent on weather for launch and landing. So you might have to say goodbye a couple of times and you might get excited to come home and then have to wait. It was an emotional rollercoaster, particularly because it was my first space flight."

Once on the ISS, she had to consciously maintain a routine that prevented psychological collapse. What really helped was the long training time that had been spent together by the members of the team on earth. They knew each other well and could be a foil when it came to work and isolation. Something extraordinary that Williams did in that mission was to be the first astronaut to ever run a marathon in space. She did it on a treadmill in the ISS simultaneously with the Boston Marathon happening on earth, finishing the race in 4 hours and 24 minutes.

She returned to the ISS for a four-month stint in 2012. Her profile in the NASA website says: "With 50 hours and 40 minutes, Williams once again held the record for total cumulative spacewalk time by a female astronaut (has since been overtaken by Peggy Whitson with 10 spacewalks). In addition, Williams, who has spent a total of 322 days in space on two missions, now ranks sixth on the all-time U.S. endurance list, and second all-time for a female astronaut." In her latest mission, Williams is back to the ISS after 12 years but with a difference. The spacecraft *Starliner* is owned by Boeing and after SpaceX, this will now be the second private company to offer such a service. Space flights are being privatised and Williams at the age of 58 is part of this movement. The mission itself will be of much shorter duration. She will return in a week. In her earlier flights, she had carried a small idol of Ganesha and samosas as a part of her Indian heritage. Once she is back, we might again get confirmation of what aspect of her Indianness went to space with her this time. ■

By MADHAVANKUTTY PILLAI

AFP



ANGLE

CERTAIN UNCERTAINTY



Stock market losses after election results highlight the difference between investing and speculating

By **MADHAVANKUTTY PILLAI**

IT WAS THE FATHER of value investing Benjamin Graham who once said that in the short run, the stock market is a voting machine, and in the long run, it is a weighing machine. But what it is not is a predictable machine, even though that is exactly how short-term investors perceive it. It is why all those who put money in stocks a few days before the election results expecting a quick buck shouldn't blame anyone except themselves when the fall happened.

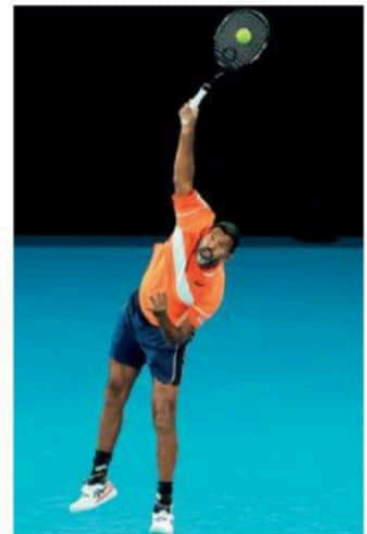
The safest investment usually is the government bond. The 10-year one is now giving around 7 per cent yield, and that is a guaranteed return. It will not fail unless India itself goes into bankruptcy. The question those who want even 1 per cent above 7 should be asking is why they deserve it since nothing in life is free. The more you get, say 15 per cent or 20 per cent, or in short-term punts, even 100 or 200 per cent annualised, the greater the risk of also losing the money invested. Extra returns bring on extra risk. That is why cooperative banks, with their history of folding up, pay much more than public sector banks for fixed deposits. Most people just don't get this concept. Some investors make extraordinary returns and that is because they have an investment philosophy honed with past losses. Their extra risk is balanced out by experience and knowledge but even they never have

a sure bet.

Those who expected to make a certain profit off election results were just unaware of the nature of the activity they were doing. When the markets tanked, it wasn't the rare event they thought just couldn't happen. It was only the risk that came with the potential reward doing the talking. In the case of such short-term financial misadventures, the risk, in fact, is even greater than the usual. Millions of others are also thinking the same way and by the time you put in your money, the market has already risen a lot and even if your bet had swung the right way, the profits would be small. Whereas if it went in the other direction, as just happened, then the losses would be proportionately greater. If you really want to make money off election results, the time to invest is months or a year earlier, before everyone is crowding the same party. Still, you might lose but the risk would be reduced and losses less.

So next time someone gives you a tip about a stock that will double in two months, ask what is the risk that you are taking on. The answer is your capital, the money that you worked hard to earn for your needs, and not to gamble away. Graham had another fundamental idea—that what most people do in the stock market is speculation and not investment, and that also gets borne out again and again in market crashes. ■

IDEAS



GETTY IMAGES

LONGEVITY

Age can be cruel for a sporting professional. That is what makes Rohan Bopanna's case so unusual. Currently 44 years old, one could argue the bulk of the tennis player's successes have come after the age of 35. He's won several titles since then, including the mixed doubles at the 2017 French Open with his Canadian partner Gabriela Dabrowski, the men's doubles at the Australian Open earlier this year with his Australian partner Matthew Ebden, and he also became the world's oldest No 1 tennis player in history earlier this year, when he went to the top of the rankings in doubles. Even at the ongoing French Open, as other Indian players crashed out, Bopanna soldiered on. The duo of Bopanna and Ebden could not make it beyond the semis. But with every match, Bopanna is showing that age, at least to him, is just a number. ■

WORD'S WORTH

'Longevity is having a chronic disease—and taking care of it'

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES JR
AMERICAN JURIST

INDRAPRASTHA

Virendra Kapoor



NOBODY ACCUSES me of being a member of what Modi had called the “Khan Market

Gang”, though I must confess my tenuous link with that costliest of commercial spaces in all of India. For years, I had relied on a haircutting salon tucked away in an obscure corner of the market which, much to the chagrin of its loyal clientele, fell to the greed of its owner who cashed out his tenancy rights, leaving the skilled barbers to their own devices. It was then that several of us old clients began to call one of the barbers home for a haircut. A couple of days ahead of the polling, when I called my freelance barber, he responded by saying that he was in his village in Bihar and would return after the polling. That is when the penny dropped. He had always declined to mention his real name, hiding behind a pseudonym that could make him a Hindu or a Muslim. On his return when I gently prodded him, he weakly mumbled under his breath that he had voted NOTA. Now, nobody goes to one’s faraway village only to vote NOTA. Again, in the tea lounge of the India International Centre, one came across a former news telecaster of a global channel who had flown in from London to vote in a South Delhi colony and then return to London. Also, there were reports of chartered flights from West Asia to Kerala with the sole objective of voting in the General Election. Such commitment to one’s duties as responsible citizens would be admirable but for the fact

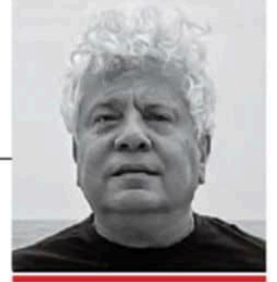


that their singular objective was to defeat Modi at all costs. It was as if Muslims were summoned by a higher power to vote out BJP. Which is why BJP’s 240 tally seems all the more impressive. It enters the contest with a debit of nearly 20 per cent vote. Unlike the Khan Market Gang, I am convinced that the cause of this mutual antipathy lies in our shared history. Both sides are to blame for the lack of an enduring entente.

Never before has victory looked as defeat and loss as victory. Dejection in the BJP camp on June 4 was in sharp contrast to jubilation in the Congress camp. Though BJP had very nearly won a simple majority for the third successive time while Congress had failed to get into three figures three times on the trot. It is all about expectations, isn’t it? BJP’s ‘400 paar’ slogan did the mischief while Congress cleverly set itself no target, enabling it to gloat in whatever number of seats it won over its 52 in the last Lok Sabha. In the event, it won too few to prevent Modi from being sworn in as prime minister for a consecutive third term. BJP’s 240 seats are bound to work as a bulwark against any attempt to

destabilise the Modi government. The Congress hope that it could wean away Nitish Kumar’s JD(U) and/or N Chandrababu Naidu’s TDP at some stage is unlikely to come true, especially when Modi not only has the support of smaller parties to reach the halfway mark but also because he has the trump card of calling an early election. There is nothing in Modi’s record to suggest that he would be hostage to the allies à la Manmohan Singh in UPA 1 and 2. Expect Modi to retain a strong grip on NDA 3.0. He would rather sit out in Opposition than become a prisoner of allies in government. Besides, allies wouldn’t risk the uncertainty of a fresh poll.

Meanwhile, the absence of a broad-based decision-making process in BJP may have been a factor in its failure to breach the halfway mark. There ought not be any place in a cadre-based party for anyone to play the arbiter. I am reminded of an interaction with my first editor, the late KR Malkani. A senior member of the RSS-Jana Sangh, he was an integral part of the party’s decision-making forums. On sensing I accorded Vajpayee too much importance, Malkani chided me, “Vajpayee is not the arbiter of the Jana Sangh.” He went on to explain that RSS-Jana Sangh did not believe in the personality cult, taking all decisions collectively. Collegial decision-making—*goshti laga kay*, as the party faithful say—was the routine till the end of the Vajpayee-Advani era. Failure to keep the state satraps on board was, without doubt, a major cause for losses in Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. ■



It's about Us. Not about Modi

Between the irony and reality of a verdict



SO, THE ELECTIONS are finally over and Indian democracy thrives. As do the EVMs; the election commissioners and all those who were being accused of throwing away the election in favour of BJP.

Stupidity has no medical prescription nor any social comfort. Facts can never be employed to counter either stupidity or rumours because the arguments are made by closed minds: as bigoted in a manner of speaking as the ones they blame for bigotry.

So, what does the 2024 General Election say about us as Indians? Here is my analysis based on consumer insight and not some TV studio-acquired knowledge of the Indian mind.

Ingratitude is our birthmark.

The so-called Hindutva movement that was fuelled and made into a reality by BJP itself got a kick in the stomach because they even lost Ayodhya. The learning is people still love Ram more than they do Modi. And to expect swathes of Hindus to vote for BJP because of the Ram temple was asking for too much. Look at Uttar Pradesh: Ask anyone and they will tell you that the law and order improved manifold; people were able to do business without fear or favour; and, the state was slowly drawing in mammoth investments. But how did the voting happen? Across caste lines and not qua development.

We don't care about development: We are not the kind of people who actually care about how much which political party has done in terms of the economy or poverty alleviation. We expect MPs to be bothered about leaking taps and potholed roads. We have no clue about how elections at the national level are different from the states: which is why we behave the same way in both. If we were truly concerned about development, West Bengal wouldn't have voted the way it did (or has been for aeons) in this election. In many ways, we are both clueless and suicidal when it comes to voting. So, for all those who say the Indian electorate is smart, think again. By and large,

the Indian electorate is still pretty unintelligent when it comes to voting.

When was the last time you read a manifesto? We tend to be alarmed when we see governments do the things they do. But wait, everything that BJP promised in 2014 and 2019, they did, and they are the kind who tend to do what they say, be it a temple or a tax. But then we feign ignorance or set alarm bells off only because we haven't bothered to read a word: the reason is we are lazy and inept as are

many of our politicians. Which is why I have always said we are the nation of low-hanging fruit: take the easy way out and don't give a damn because the inevitable will happen. And then we self-exult and become self-congratulatory. We should actually be ashamed of the way we vote: for all reasons other than either self-development or national development.

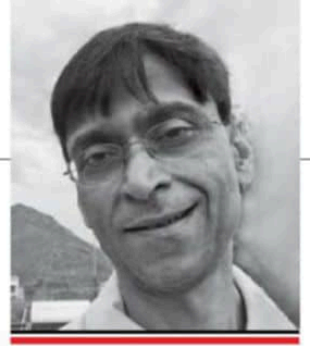
We are mostly in denial: For all the dolts who say India has rejected bigotry and religion, and so on: stop being in denial. Scratch the surface and 99 per cent of India is either communal or religious, depending on how you look at it. The richer you are, the more communal perhaps. So,

let's stop this drivel that the 2024 elections were a vote for secularism: they weren't and they never shall be.

Essentially, what we have done is reject the good and the known for the unknown and the dubious. Hate BJP as much as you wish but the truth of the matter is that most other political parties have not bathed themselves in honour ever. Sadly, we have begun to take pollsters and social media far too seriously than we should. We've stopped using our mind to gauge and decide and this is what is evident in these electoral results.

How can you beat this irony: the victors are behaving like the vanquished and the vanquished are parading as victors. This is at the heart of these elections. I don't know how long this government will last. But the blame is at our doorstep. No one else's. It's time we manned up and took responsibility. ■

**HATE BJP AS MUCH AS YOU WISH
BUT THE TRUTH OF THE MATTER
IS THAT MOST OTHER POLITICAL
PARTIES HAVE NOT BATHED
THEMSELVES IN HONOUR EVER.
SADLY, WE HAVE BEGUN TO TAKE
POLLSTERS AND SOCIAL MEDIA
FAR TOO SERIOUSLY THAN WE
SHOULD. WE'VE STOPPED USING
OUR MIND TO GAUGE
AND DECIDE AND THIS IS
WHAT IS EVIDENT IN THESE
ELECTORAL RESULTS**



End of Appeasement

Polarisation doesn't necessarily result in Hindu vote consolidation



THE OUTCOME OF the 2024 Indian General Election gives us the occasion, once again, to revisit the Hindu-Muslim question in India. In fact, not just in India, but in the Indian subcontinent, where it continues to be a burning issue. Almost literally.

Outside India, Hindus in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, we know for a bitter fact, have almost been annihilated. Those of the so-called lowest of the low, the night soil removers, sweepers, and cleaners, who were persuaded to stay on in Pakistan upon Partition in 1947, with guarantees of protection, have all but converted, over a few generations, to Christianity.

Unfortunately, that has not spared them—or Christians in general—from repeated, even murderous attacks in Pakistan. The most recent of such deadly attacks happened in Sargodha, West Punjab, hardly over a week back. This time, those accused of blasphemy were a factory owner, Nazil Gill Masih, and his family. Both father and son were brutally beaten up. They had to be rushed to the hospital in critical condition. Luckily, 12 members of their family managed to escape.

The attack took place in the Gillwala Mujahid area of Sargodha. It was reported primarily in Catholic Christian outlets, while mainstream media, as usual, blocked and blacked out the news. Farther south, the kidnapping of Hindu girls in Sindh, Pakistan, followed by their forcible conversion, marriage, repeated rape, and the rare rescue or restoration, is a regular and recurring fact. So frequent that we are almost inured to it. But for how long? For, at this rate, there will soon be no Hindu mothers left in Sindh. The ethnic cleansing of Hindus will soon be complete and irreversible.

On our eastern borders, Hindus have fared only somewhat better in Bangladesh. With continued attacks, even lynchings, within that country, coupled with unvarying and uninterrupted migration across the borders to India or elsewhere, the Hindu population in Bangladesh is in a steep downturn and decline.

Afghanistan, very much a part of the erstwhile Hindu ecumene, has no Hindus or Sikhs left to speak of. The cruel logic of Hindu annihilation north of the Hindukush (or Hindu killer) mountains has now been followed to its logical “final solution”—the total extermination of Hindus

in that geographical territory.

Now to Bharat that is India. The ethnic cleansing of Hindus, bordering on genocide, is a well-known and tragic truth in the erstwhile state, now Union Territory, of Jammu and Kashmir. This story has recently attracted worldwide attention thanks to its portrayal in Vivek Agnihotri and Pallavi Joshi's award-winning feature film, *The Kashmir Files*.

But apart from fictional representations, just recently, a team of authors led by Shamika Ravi of the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM), has published a paper on the asymmetric birth rates of Hindus and Muslims in independent India. The data shows what should be obvious. Despite the denialism and negationism of the so-called left-liberals, let alone the outright Islamists amongst us, Muslims in India have documented higher growth rates than Hindus.

It is another matter that these rates are generally in decline and that the higher the education and economic prosperity among the Muslims, the lower the gap between their growth rates and that of the Hindus. Nevertheless, the very real threat of what has been called the “demographic bomb” cannot be ruled out. This will become demonstrably, even alarmingly clear when the now overdue Census exercise is conducted in the country after a long gap of over 13 years.

The border districts of West Bengal and Assam have already shown the decline of Hindu population to be so significant that it has affected election outcomes. How else can we explain that a rank outsider, the Muslim candidate of All India Trinamool Congress (TMC), Yusuf Pathan, from distant Vadodara in Gujarat, defeated five-time Congress MP and senior Congress leader, Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, from Baharampur? This is a constituency that not only borders Bangladesh but, by a steady increase, now has over 50 per cent Muslims. Of course, one might argue that Pathan won because he was a popular cricketer, in addition to being a Muslim.

But this line of research and rhetoric, that of the diminishing demographics of Hindus, is not new. It was well-documented over a century ago in a famous book, *The Decline and Fall of the Hindus* (1920) by SC Mookerjee. Even much earlier, during the Bengal renaissance, the Hindus are already referred to as a dying race. Luckily, the latter gloomy prediction has not fructified.

Hindus number easily over a billion worldwide, possibly closer to 1.2 billion. It would take much more than “ethnic cleansing” in neighbouring countries, illegal migration, or conversion within our borders to wipe them out entirely from the face of the earth. But that does not mean that we are anywhere closer to finding a lasting solution to the Hindu-Muslim question. I hesitate automatically to call the Hindu-Muslim problem, in contra-distinction to a new class of activists and influencers whom we might call “hyper Hindus”.

Clearly the “*ralif, galif, ya chalif*” (convert to Islam, leave, or perish) option offered to Hindus, whether in Pakistan, Kashmir or to a lesser extent, in Bangladesh, cannot be reworked or retooled in India against the Muslims. Why? Not only because they are numerically so large, over 200 million in fact, that it would be impossible even to consider it. But also because it goes against one of the core principles of Sanatana Dharma, which may be summed up as “live and let live”.

That is also why Vinayak Damodar “Veer” Savarkar’s version of the final solution to the Hindu-Muslim question—become culturally and civilisationally Hindu or accept second-class citizenship—is also equally untenable. Not only because it goes against the very grain of the Indian Constitution and is therefore impossible to implement, whether surreptitiously or overtly, whether by subterfuge or coercion, in the present republic. But also because there is no clear way, despite every possible attempt to homogenise and hegemonise it, of defining, let alone, enforcing, any one version of Hinduism itself.

Therefore, even if Muslims are to become culturally assimilated, the question remains—assimilate or conform to which brand or strand of Hinduism? Which is exactly the reason why some sort of uniform Hindutva was sought to be offered as the standard form of Hindu cultural nationalism to the whole nation. But can we really believe that political Hinduism by any other name has actually come to substitute the multiform and multiverse of Hinduism as it is practised on the ground?

The election results in the crucial “swing” state of Uttar Pradesh in India’s Hindi and Hindu heartland have clearly

belied this belief. The Muslim-inclined Samajwadi Party, derisively referred to at one time as ‘Mulla’ Mulayam’s party, scored over the saffron-clad Yogi Adityanath-led ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in India’s most populous and powerful state.

Furthermore, the irony is that BJP has lost in Faizabad, the very constituency in which it managed to pull off a cultural, religious, and political miracle—the reconstruction of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya. Even in Meerut in Western UP, TV star Arun Govil, who once played Lord Rama himself, managed to muster just over 10,000 votes over his Samajwadi rival, Sunita Verma. He barely scraped through, by the slenderest sliver of an electoral margin, from a humiliating defeat.

If these elections are anything to go by, “hard” Hindutva is also not the answer to the Hindu-Muslim issue in India.

What do we have then? A return to “appeasement,” which continues, by all appearances, to be the Opposition Congress line? There is little doubt that a quiet but determined and concerted effort by Muslim voters against BJP must have contributed, in no small measure, to the latter’s lower numbers. We might await hard data to bear this hypothesis out. But any which way we look at it, the Muslim question cannot be ignored in India. The sheer size and numbers will disallow this.

We might safely argue that “appeasement” has been comprehensively rejected, not only by the Hindu majority but also by influential sections of the

Muslims themselves. Therefore, neither appeasement nor domination, bordering on demonisation, even if the latter is supposedly “only” for political purposes, is the way forward.

The election results have shown that excessive polarisation does not necessarily result in Hindu vote consolidation. Both Hindus and Muslims want peaceful and equitable relations on a day-to-day basis. Neither wishes to be instrumentalised or weaponised as election cannon fodder.

There is, indeed has to be, a third way other than appeasement or polarisation.

This, to my mind, is one of the important takeaways of the 2024 Indian General Election. ■

Illustration by SAURABH SINGH



**BOTH HINDUS AND MUSLIMS
WANT PEACEFUL AND EQUABLE
RELATIONS ON A DAY-TO-DAY
BASIS. NEITHER WISHES TO BE
INSTRUMENTALISED OR WEAPONISED
AS ELECTION CANNON FODDER**

The Undiminished

A better idea of India has won

By RAHUL SHIVSHANKAR



NARENDRA MODI WILL become the first incumbent prime minister to return to office for a third consecutive term 62 years after Jawaharlal Nehru's hat-trick in 1962.

Only this time BJP has fallen short of the majority mark and India returns to a period of coalition politics after a hiatus of 10 years. A win, of course is a win.

Given that NDA has a stable core it is very well placed to deliver effective governance.

Of course, BJP will have to learn to rule on terms that may not always be set by it. It is true that the prime minister has never personally lost a major election but he has plenty of experience in making compromises. In Karnataka, Bihar, Jammu & Kashmir, and Maharashtra BJP ran effective coalition governments under Modi's aegis.

The chastening of BJP is an affirmation of the robustness of India's democracy and its guardrails. This is not a country sliding backwards into the abyss of tyranny. Authoritarian leaders never voluntarily subject themselves to an inquisition at the hands of the public. Quite clearly, Modi is very much a democrat willing to let the people have their say.

India's democracy has matured, and voters are spoilt for choice. No result is pre-ordained, and no precept is sacrosanct except one: performance pays.

And that's why BJP projected Modi front and centre. BJP knew Modi's personal credibility was the only guarantee against defeat in the face of 10 years of anti-incumbency exacerbated by twin convulsions.

First, the deflating impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on job prospects. Second, a conflict in Europe that has inflated the price Indians need to pay to simply keep their heads above water.

That the prime minister has emerged from this maelstrom relatively unscathed is still a remarkable feat.

And there are other feats, too.

For one, BJP is by far the single-largest party with more than double the number of seats than Congress. Its vote share has more or less held steady since 2019.

BJP's seats overall may be down by a little over 50, and it

might have lost in its twin citadels—Uttar Pradesh (UP) and Maharashtra—but it has nevertheless broken fresh ground.

In Odisha, BJP has emerged as the ruling party at both the state and national level. In the south, it has made impressive gains. In Andhra Pradesh, NDA will have its government at the state level and an overwhelming share of parliamentarians. In Telangana, it has emerged as a major force. It has opened its account in Kerala. Even in Tamil Nadu, where it has flattered to deceive, BJP has grown. This is the first time since 1989 that a national party leading a third front has won a double-digit vote share.

The disaffection with BJP was localised to a few states where lots had gone wrong.

BJP has seen its support among the depressed classes dwindle in the Hindi heartland, especially in UP. For a variety of reasons, non-Jatav Dalits and non-Yadav OBCs have deserted BJP. The prime minister has always seen himself as the greatest benefactor of these classes. Their goodwill had powered BJP to two terms with massive majorities. BJP will have to introspect why and how they squandered their beneficence.

Simultaneously, BJP may have also squandered the goodwill of some of

its own cadre. Putting "winnability above all", BJP lowered the entry-level threshold substantially. Many leaders taken in laterally had little in common with BJP's ideological disposition or the Sangh's cultural outlook. There are murmurs that these imports sparked mini-revolts among BJP's old guard who didn't embrace campaigning.

To merely view the result of the 2024 election as a barometer of Modi's electability would be to reduce the consequentiality of the contest. The 2024 election was unique because it was not merely a competition between leaders but between their vastly differing take on the "idea of India".

Posterity will judge if the better idea won. But today, a vast number of people have certainly told us that with a few important caveats, they still mainly trust the agency and vision of Prime Minister Modi to secure their future. ■



Rahul Shivshankar is Consulting Editor, Network 18

**INDIA IS NOT A COUNTRY
SLIDING BACKWARDS INTO
THE ABYSS OF TYRANNY.
AUTHORITARIAN LEADERS
NEVER VOLUNTARILY
SUBJECT THEMSELVES TO
AN INQUISITION AT THE
HANDS OF THE PUBLIC.
QUITE CLEARLY, MODI IS
VERY MUCH A DEMOCRAT
WILLING TO LET THE
PEOPLE HAVE THEIR SAY**

OPEN

OPEN THE MOST SOUGHT AFTER WEEKLY MAGAZINE



SUBSCRIBE TO OPEN MAGAZINE & GET ASSURED FREE GIFT WORTH ₹7999

YES! Please start my subscription to OPEN magazine as per the offer chosen below:

TO SUBSCRIBE

Tick [✓]	Term	No of Issues	Cover Price (₹)	Offer Price (₹)	Discount (%)	Additional Benefits
<input type="checkbox"/>	3 year	153	12,240	8,570	30	FIRE BOLTT Smart Watch worth ₹7999 plus 3 year Digital Access
<input type="checkbox"/>	2 Year	102	8,160	6,530	20	FIRE BOLTT Smart Watch worth ₹7999 plus 2 year Digital Access
<input type="checkbox"/>	1 Year	51	4,080	3,670	10	FIRE BOLTT Smart Watch worth ₹7999 plus 1 year Digital Access

BEST BUY



NAME (MR./MS./MRS.): _____
 DESIGNATION: _____ OCCUPATION: _____ INDUSTRY TYPE: _____
 ADDRESS: _____
 CITY: _____ STATE: _____ PIN (MANDATORY): _____
 MOBILE NO.: _____ LANDLINE NO.: _____ EMAIL ID: _____

PAYMENT DETAILS

CHEQUE NO./DRAFT NO.: _____ DATE: _____ AMOUNT (IN ₹): _____

PAYABLE TO "OPEN MEDIA NETWORK PRIVATE LIMITED"

MAIL THE SUBSCRIPTION FORM WITH YOUR CHEQUE/DD TO **OPEN MEDIA NETWORK PRIVATE LIMITED, 1ST FLOOR, TOWER 3A, DLF CORPORATE PARK, DLF PHASE 3, DLF CITY, GURUGRAM, HARYANA - 122002**

TERMS & CONDITIONS: • OPEN publishes 51 issues in a year • The cover price of weekly issue is ₹80 • Please allow 2-3 weeks for processing your subscription • OPEN subscription offer is a limited period offer and subject to change • Once the free gift has been dispatched, no cancellation request will be entertained • All disputes are subject to the exclusive jurisdiction of competent courts & forums in Delhi/New Delhi only.

TO SUBSCRIBE - WhatsApp 'openmag' to 9999800012 CS Direct line: 0124-4561900

Visit www.openthemagazine.com/subscribe Email: customerscare@openmedianetwork.in



By SWAPAN DASGUPTA

MODI'S APPEAL IS INTACT

And it's unlikely that he will allow himself to be constrained by coalition pressures

More Newspaper and Magazines Telegram Channel join Search https://t.me/Magazines_8890050582 (@Magazines_8890050582)



ALMOST EVERY ELECTION in a country as vast and varied as India produces something unexpected. Often, this can be as profound as the 2004 General Election result that led to the defeat of Atal Bihari Vajpayee's government. At other times, as in 2019, the scale of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's re-election left many surprised and others puzzled.

The 2024 verdict had a very large element of surprise.

First, the results departed significantly from what the exit polls had suggested—that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) would register an emphatic victory, bigger in scale than 2019.

Secondly, the verdict indicated that there was no categorical national outcome. A state may have voted in one way, but its neighbour went ahead and expressed a completely different preference. In some parts of the country, the vote transcended immediate livelihood concerns, while in other parts it was determined by whether people felt good or looked ahead with trepidation.


Thirdly, perhaps in line with the larger elevation of tentativeness, the outcome was looked upon by both the incumbent and the Opposition as qualified victories. It gave both sides something to cheer about.

Finally, because of the results that combined predictability with surprise, the larger concerns expressed by many India-watchers, both at home and overseas, that the future of democracy was in jeopardy, came to nought. The integrity of the EVMs that had been needlessly questioned throughout the election process stood vindicated yet again. By the end of counting day, it was conceded by all that all the talk of 'democratic backsliding' was hogwash and that the status of the Constitution was unimpaired.

For Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who had tried to make the election a referendum on both his 10-year record in office and his vision of India as a developed economy rooted in its Bharatiya idiom, the outcome was a disappointment. The voters were emphatic that they wanted only Modi to lead the country for the next five years. At the same time, they expressed their misgivings over certain facets of contemporary politics.

Aggregating the different strands of the verdict is always a daunting proposition. BJP fought the election on the strength of the Modi guarantees. It won 240 seats, which was 32 short of the majority mark and a whopping 63 short of its tally in 2019. Yet, despite the reduced numbers, the BJP tally was more than the combined tally of the I.N.D.I.A. bloc. In terms of the popular vote, the BJP vote fell nominally from 37.3 per cent in 2019 to 36.6 per cent in 2024. If the number of seats fell disproportionately, it was due to a greater consolidation of opposition votes—a testimony to the relative success of the I.N.D.I.A. bloc in chastening BJP.

What the national statistics don't quite show up is that BJP emerged as a truly pan-India force at the point of its worst showing since 2014. The party fared disastrously in Uttar Pradesh (UP), the state that had catapulted it to a majority on its own in 2014 and

A portrait of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He is an elderly man with a white beard and glasses, wearing a dark blue vest over a white shirt. His hands are pressed together in a traditional Indian prayer gesture (namaste). He is adorned with a thick garland of pink flowers. The background is a solid orange color.

Prime Minister
Narendra Modi
at BJP headquarters
in New Delhi,
June 4, 2024

More Newspaper and Magazines Telegram Channel join Search https://t.me/Magazines_8890050582 (@Magazines_8890050582)

THE APPEAL OF THE PRIME MINISTER WAS SUFFICIENTLY ROBUST TO DELIVER A SMALL WORKING MAJORITY FOR NDA, A MAJORITY THAT WILL PROBABLY INCREASE WITH THE ACCRETION OF SMALL PARTIES AND INDEPENDENTS. JUDGING BY MODI'S LATE-EVENING SPEECH TO KARYAKARTAS AT THE BJP HEADQUARTERS ON COUNTING DAY, IT WOULD SEEM THERE HAS BEEN NO PANIC RESPONSE TO THE SHRINKAGE OF THE MAJORITY. INSTEAD, MODI HAS SAID HE WILL PERSEVERE WITH THE CHOSEN PATH TOWARDS VIKSIT BHARAT, INCLUDING THE CONTINUATION OF THE WAR ON CORRUPTION. THIS REASSURANCE HAD THE STOCK MARKETS RECOVERING GROUND THE NEXT MORNING

Photograph by **ASHISH SHARMA**

More Newspaper and Magazines Telegram Channel join Search https://t.me/Magazines_8890050582 (@Magazines_8890050582)

2019, and it lost ground in Maharashtra and Rajasthan. Yet, a tale of the party becoming stale in its core Hindi belt states of northern India doesn't quite add up in its entirety. Apart from losing one seat unexpectedly to Congress in Gujarat, BJP maintained its total dominance of Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Delhi, and the smaller states of Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh. In UP, BJP lost big time in Awadh and Purvanchal, but won handsomely in the west and the National Capital Region (NCR).

The party was however rescued from a worse tally by the voters of the Coromandel Coast and Assam. Despite the modest showing in the Assembly elections a few months ago, BJP equalled the Congress tally in Telangana, rode piggyback on the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) and picked up three seats in Andhra Pradesh and, most dramatically, decimated the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) in Odisha. Additionally, even though BJP failed to win a seat in Tamil Nadu, its popular vote rose dramatically in the state. It rose more dramatically in Kerala, where actor Suresh Gopi did the impossible and won a seat.

IN 2024, BJP'S march towards inheriting Congress' erstwhile mantle of dominant party suffered a setback because of erosion in its core areas of support. This was, however, compensated by its emergence as a truly all-India party. Even with West Bengal's tally having come down, eastern India (including Bihar and Jharkhand) contributed more than 50 seats to the party's overall tally. Add to this the 30 seats won from southern India, mainly from Karnataka and Telangana, and it is possible to gleam how Modi has made BJP more geographically representative.

The larger political implications for BJP are obvious. It is now sufficiently clear that the larger political effects of the Ram temple in Ayodhya were blunted by the alienation of subaltern castes over the mischievous spin given to the '400 paar' slogan by Congress and other I.N.D.I.A. partners. It was suggested that BJP was seeking a steamroller majority in Lok Sabha to modify the Constitution and dilute the reservation quotas. Though there was no basis to this suspicion, it made an impression in the minds of many Dalit and backward-caste voters across

northern and western India. This was strong enough to lose the party a majority of seats in UP.

To my mind what is significant is not that I.N.D.I.A. went out of its way to derail the Modi guarantees by creating a bogey. Fighting on the backfoot, it was natural that the likes of Rahul Gandhi and Akhilesh Yadav would try to secure a stick with which to beat BJP. What is more noteworthy is that the alarm signals were not picked up by BJP prior to polling to contain any potential damage. If, as is being suggested, this muted desire to win was a result of inner-party tensions over ticket distribution, it would suggest a Congress-isation (in a truly pejorative sense) of BJP. Certainly, there was an element of smugness and complacency that cost the party dearly in eastern UP. Earlier election campaigns that had been fought using Modi as the mascot—these also include the Assembly elections of 2002, 2007 and 2012—had involved a large measure of participation by walk-in volunteers, apart from the karyakartas. This sense of popular involvement was particularly marked in 2014 when the Modi campaign was accompanied by a fierce popular desire, particularly among the youth, to change India and usher in *achhe din*. That election also saw many social and religious organisations actively campaign for BJP candidates.

In 2024, Modi approached the voters of India with a clear sense of accomplishment and a vision for the future. His

leadership was acknowledged by all sections of society, and he had been elevated into a cult-like figure. Yet, despite this, the party organisation did not take the necessary steps to elevate a party campaign to a mission involving civil society. In many parts of India, BJP operated as a closed shop, shunning the active participation of those who weren't political activists. Anecdotal evidence suggests that a disproportionate number of those who didn't bother to brave the summer heat and join the queue of voters were Modi supporters. The impression that victory was in any case assured plus the lack of party mobilisation were factors behind the setback. The opponents of the prime minister, including large voting blocs, were sufficiently motivated to defeat BJP. The countervailing motivation among those who believed that Modi had transformed India for

DURING A THIRD TERM, WHICH ONLY A HANDFUL OF LEADERS ACHIEVE, THERE IS LIKELY TO BE A SUSTAINED FOCUS ON LEGACY ISSUES. THIS MAY SEE MODI REDOUBLING HIS ENERGIES ON THE INTERNATIONAL STAGE, PROMOTING ECONOMIC GROWTH RELENTLESSLY AND PRESSING THE ACCELERATOR IN THE FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION. MODI MAY WELL TAKE STEPS THAT ALLAY CONCERNS THAT THE INVESTIGATIVE AGENCIES ARE PARTISAN AND THAT JOINING BJP HAS A WASHING-MACHINE EFFECT ON THE TAINTED

the good was absent.

This was a monumental political failure, a tale of missed opportunities.

Mercifully, the appeal of the prime minister was sufficiently robust to deliver a small working majority for NDA, a majority that will probably increase with the accretion of small parties and independents. Judging by Modi's late-evening speech to karyakartas at the BJP headquarters on counting day, it would seem there has been no panic response to the shrinkage of the majority. Instead, Modi has said he will persevere with the chosen path towards Viksit Bharat, including the continuation of the war on corruption. This reassurance had the stock markets recovering ground the next morning, after a complete meltdown when it once seemed India had returned a fractured verdict.

It is not merely the investing classes that fear the arrival of a disparate, if not fractious, coalition whose leading party had just 99 Lok Sabha seats. After 10 years of total and unwavering political stability, there were larger fears that the Centre would be buffeted by competitive pressures, verging on political blackmail, from parties that are not able to look beyond sectional and sectarian considerations. Modi's presence as prime minister for the third consecutive term has served as a deterrent to the demoralisation of India. Yet, the fact that I.N.D.I.A. shied away from persisting with its initial inclination to try and form a government is itself revealing. Of course, neither Nitish Kumar nor N Chandrababu Naidu gave the adventurists any scope for encouragement at this stage. But, viewed dispassionately, it also suggests that the I.N.D.I.A. leadership believes that the personality of Modi will be unable to cope with the vagaries of coalition politics. In short, the Opposition believes that NDA will fall under the weight of its own contradictions.

This fear may also have gripped a section of Modi's own supporters, although with clever optics the prime minister may have walked an extra mile to disabuse such concerns. There will, predictably, be rounds of hard bargaining over public finances involving both Andhra Pradesh and Bihar. What concerns those who have put their emotional weight behind Modi's project for a New India is that there will be sustained and unbearable pressures on the coalition

IN 2024, MODI APPROACHED THE VOTERS OF INDIA WITH A CLEAR SENSE OF ACCOMPLISHMENT AND A VISION FOR THE FUTURE. HIS LEADERSHIP WAS ACKNOWLEDGED BY ALL SECTIONS OF SOCIETY, AND HE HAD BEEN ELEVATED INTO A CULT-LIKE FIGURE. YET, DESPITE THIS, THE PARTY ORGANISATION DID NOT TAKE THE NECESSARY STEPS TO ELEVATE A PARTY CAMPAIGN TO A MISSION INVOLVING CIVIL SOCIETY. IN MANY PARTS OF INDIA, BJP OPERATED AS A CLOSED SHOP, SHUNNING THE ACTIVE PARTICIPATION OF THOSE WHO WEREN'T POLITICAL ACTIVISTS

government to break the bank and enlarge the welfare architecture of the country.

My own belief is that Modi will not act out of character. There may be tweaking of the welfare payments to the poor and more focused monitoring aimed at ensuring that non-NDA state governments (as in West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala) don't run away with the credit for important Central schemes. However, the focus is likely to remain one of securing the dividends of growth through economic activity. Modi is more likely to go slow on incorporating new civilisational issues, unless he senses that BJP has itself shed its extra fat.


DURING A THIRD term, which only a handful of leaders achieve, there is likely to be a sustained focus on legacy issues. This may see Modi redoubling his energies on the

international stage, promoting economic growth relentlessly and pressing the accelerator in the fight against corruption. Modi may well take steps that allay concerns that the investigative agencies are partisan and that joining BJP has a washing-machine effect on the tainted.

Most important, it is my feeling that Modi won't like a situation where he is constrained by coalition pressures. If such pressures are real and lead to the government losing its elbow room, the prime minister may like to engineer a situation where he can call a premature election on terms of his own choosing. If, however, being in a coalition isn't an impediment—as it wasn't for PV Narasimha Rao and Vajpayee—it is more than likely that Modi will settle for a full five-year term. He will use the time before 2029 to work towards a situation where BJP regains the political dominance it had slowly managed in the past 10 years, but which was lost with the loss of single-party majority.

For the first six months of the new government, an energised Opposition will taunt Modi in Parliament with the *abki baar, 400 paars* slogan. The prime minister will be looking for an opportunity when he can return the compliment, with compound interest. ■

Swapan Dasgupta is India's foremost conservative columnist. He is the author of Awakening Bharat Mata

A photograph of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other men in blue shirts standing amidst a shower of colorful confetti (pink, orange, yellow, and white) at night. The background is dark with some blurred lights.

Prime Minister
Narendra Modi at
BJP headquarters in
New Delhi, June 4, 2024

More Newspaper and Magazines Telegram Channel Join Search https://t.me/Magazines_8890050582 (@Magazines_8890050582)

INDIA RENEWS IT

THE PRIME MINISTER BEGINS HIS THIRD
WITH ALLIES. AND THE OPPOSITION IS

Photograph by **ASHISH SHARMA**

Join Search https://t.me/Magazines_8890050582 (@Magazines_8890050582)

More Newspaper and Magazines Telegram Channel join Search https://t.me/Magazines_8890050582 (@Magazines_8890050582)

STRUST IN MODI

TERM WITH THE CONFIDENCE OF WORKING
UNLIKELY TO REMAIN UNITED AGAINST HIM

By PR RAMESH



IN THE SULTRY EVENING OF JUNE 4, AFTER THE results of the General Election confirmed a third straight term for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA), its campaign spearhead Prime Minister Narendra Modi stood before the cheering party workers at their headquarters on Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Marg in New Delhi and said that the opposition I.N.D.I.A. bloc's combined tally was lower than BJP's alone.

His broadside—comparing an entire rainbow coalition with a single political party—was an apparent response to the instant narratives sewn during the day by a section of the media, commentators and political



opponents who were quick to suggest that BJP was on the wane nationally and that Modi's spell over the crowds had vanished. His intent was also to drive home his conviction that people continued to put their faith in him in the fiercely fought polls—beset with deep fakes, misinformation and other falsehoods—in his tenth year in office. Any other leader of a country as diverse as India would have had a poor day—thus was the reasoning that the alliance would soon endorse.

True, the party's tally at 240 seats in the 543-member Lok Sabha trailed expectations, a vast majority of exit poll projections, and the results of the previous two elections of 2019 and 2014. And

Modi with senior Union ministers and leaders of NDA constituents at his residence in New Delhi, June 5, 2024



More Newspaper and Magazines Telegram Channel join Search https://t.me/Magazines_8890050582 (@Magazines_8890050582)

More Newspaper and Magazines Telegram Channel join Search https://t.me/Magazines_8890050582 (@Magazines_8890050582)

yet, there was no denying that the saffron party was still the winner and a coalition leader. In the run-up to the polls, BJP was expected to secure more than 300 seats on its own and 400 as an alliance. That didn't happen. BJP doesn't have an absolute majority on its own at the Centre this time although it has expanded to new geographies, winning state and parliamentary elections in Odisha and opening its account in Kerala.

Again, as in 2014 when he became prime minister for the first time, this time too, Modi can brandish many firsts like gold medallions. Back then, Modi was the first premier since 1984 to lead a party with an absolute majority in Parliament. This time, his is the first political formation since 1962 to hit a hat-trick of wins. He is also the first non-Congress prime minister to complete two full terms in office and comfortably return to power in the world's most populous nation.

With alliance partners back in the spotlight after a gap of a decade, BJP will recalibrate itself into working closely with its key allies, including the N Chandrababu Naidu-led Telugu Desam Party (TDP) and the Nitish Kumar-led Janata Dal (United), among others. Evidently, Modi's speech at the party headquarters on the evening of June 4 laid emphasis on his multiple priorities, especially pragmatism, development and empowerment of the deprived, key topics on which there is already consensus among all NDA partners.

More Newspaper and Magazines Telegram Channel join Search https://t.me/Magazines_8890050582 (@Magazines_8890050582)

W

HILE NAIDU IS known to wholeheartedly embrace Modi's economic vision, Kumar is on the same page with him regarding his social goals, which include a greater emphasis on backward communities and women. "NDA's third term will see a new 'Golden Chapter' in

India's development and this is Modi's guarantee," Modi said, adding that "uplifting 25 crore Indians from poverty is our commitment to foster the empowerment of the deprived... Holistic development of all including the SC-ST-OBCs while also facilitating women-led development is our mantra," Modi said.

Contrary to rumours about demands being raised by coalition partners, Modi and his allies, including Naidu and Kumar, have pledged in their huddle on June 5 to step up the offensive against corruption and revitalise the economy through reforms. In sharp contrast to unsubstantiated reports doing the rounds, *Open* has learnt that at the first meeting of NDA, in which the partners unanimously chose Modi as the leader of the alliance, the consensus was on forming the government at the earliest and laying to rest speculation about allies being zealously wooed, not on Cabinet berths. No such demands came up that day at the meeting, *Open* has confirmed.

To set the record straight, it was Naidu who had insisted on meeting as early as June 5 in Delhi. The others had readily agreed with the urgency of his tone when it was conveyed to them. At the NDA meeting, which was held at the prime minister's 7 Lok Kalyan Marg residence, Naidu spoke about the historic nature of the alliance's victory in the 2024 General Election, stressing



Photograph by **ASHISH SHARMA**

that after 10 years of being in power, no other formation in recent Indian history has won seats anywhere close to what NDA and BJP managed in a bitterly contested election. The TDP leader went on to generously credit Modi with the triumph that, he added, was thanks to the transformative politics of the BJP heavyweight. He also said that all that Congress could manage after 10 years of being in power from 2004 to 2014 was a mere 44, the lowest tally ever in the history of India's so-called grand old party.

Speaking on the occasion, JD(U) leader and Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar also opined that the need of the hour was to form the government as soon as possible because people have been waiting for a while after a long-drawn-out election. "Whatever you want to do, you do it fast enough," he told the gathering chaired by Modi about the formalities required to be



BJP workers celebrating in New Delhi, June 4, 2024

WITH BJP EXTENDING ITS FOOTPRINT, AT THE CENTRE ITS LEADERS HOPE TO SECURE MORE SUPPORT FROM NONALIGNED PARTIES AND EVEN FROM WITHIN THE OPPOSITION FOLD. A MASSIVE OPERATION IS ON AS THE RULING PARTY SENSES AN OPPORTUNITY TO EXTEND ITS WINGSPREAD

AS IN 2014, THIS TIME TOO, MODI CAN BRANDISH MANY FIRSTS. BJP IS THE FIRST POLITICAL FORMATION SINCE 1962 TO HIT A HAT-TRICK OF WINS. MODI IS ALSO THE FIRST NON-CONGRESS PRIME MINISTER TO COMPLETE TWO FULL TERMS IN OFFICE AND COMFORTABLY RETURN TO POWER IN THE WORLD'S MOST POPULOUS NATION

completed to re-elect the prime minister.

Conspicuous at the meeting was a hurry to douse misreporting in the media and social media which were abuzz with 'news' of feelers being put out by Congress and other members of the Opposition to Naidu. Equally disconcerting was the news about Tejashwi Yadav, the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) leader and former deputy chief minister of Bihar, "holding talks" with Kumar on the plane. *Open* has verified what had happened on the plane from Patna to Delhi on which Kumar and Yadav had flown together. When the flight took off from Bihar's capital, Yadav was seated behind Kumar in the business class section. Besides Kumar, Tejashwi Yadav and Sanjay Yadav, an RJD Rajya Sabha member, there was the family of a high court judge and a former IAS officer in that section that had eight seats.

Shortly thereafter, Yadav requested the lady, a relative of the former judge who was seated next to Kumar, to switch seats—and she politely obliged. The next thing that Kumar saw was Yadav seated next to him—and he smiled at his former deputy. A Patna-based journalist on the flight took the photograph of them together. By the time Kumar reached Delhi, the photograph had gone viral, insinuating that Kumar and Yadav had held political discussions—although all that Kumar did was smile at Yadav. None of these veterans is new to any of this: they simply argue that one cannot stop the waves, but are glad that they have learnt to surf in the rough waters of Indian politics.

At the NDA meeting attended among others by BJP president JP Nadda, Amit Shah, Rajnath Singh, Nitish Kumar, Chandrababu Naidu, Shiv Sena chief Eknath Shinde,

Janata Dal (Secular) leader HD Kumaraswamy, JanaSena Party chief Pawan Kalyan, Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas) chief Chirag Paswan, Nationalist Congress Party (Ajit Pawar faction) leader Praful Patel, Asom Gana Parishad's (AGP) Atul Bora, and Apna Dal's (Soneylal) Anupriya Patel and others, the Apna Dal leader expressed regret that NDA was tormented in Uttar Pradesh (UP) by a misinformation campaign. Patel, who won from Mirzapur, added that although the alliance tried its best to counter the propaganda blitz targeted at the ruling party, certain rumours spread faster than expected and that there was a failure to reach out to people with immediacy and in clarifying various positions. The most damaging of such sinister campaigns was

a deepfake video of Amit Shah, who was shown announcing a curtailment of reservation rights for Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Other Backward Classes (OBCs). Cases were registered against social media handles run by Congress. BJP has concluded that the fake video had done much more harm than it had anticipated, especially in UP, where NDA suffered a significant setback. The poor performance of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) also tilted the fortunes in favour of the I.N.D.I.A. bloc, benefitting especially the regional Samajwadi Party (SP) led by former Chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav who fought a winning battle solo for the first time. On all previous occasions, it was his late father Mulayam Singh who had sealed victories.

WITH ALLIANCE PARTNERS BACK IN THE SPOTLIGHT AFTER A GAP OF A DECADE, BJP WILL RECALIBRATE ITSELF INTO WORKING CLOSELY WITH ITS KEY ALLIES, INCLUDING THE CHANDRABABU NAIDU-LED TOP AND THE NITISH KUMAR-LED JD(U). MODI'S SPEECH ON JUNE 4 LAID EMPHASIS ON HIS PRIORITIES—PRAGMATISM, DEVELOPMENT AND EMPOWERMENT

AT THE FIRST MEETING OF NDA, WHERE THE PARTNERS UNANIMOUSLY CHOSE MODI AS THE LEADER OF THE ALLIANCE, THE CONSENSUS WAS ON FORMING THE GOVERNMENT AT THE EARLIEST AND LAYING TO REST SPECULATION ABOUT ALLIES BEING ZEALOUSLY WOODED, NOT ON CABINET BERTHS. NO SUCH DEMANDS CAME UP AT THE MEETING, OPEN HAS CONFIRMED



A

T THE MEETING, All Jharkhand Students Union (AJSU) Party chief Sudesh Mahto—an NDA constituent—said that the coming together of Naidu and Kumar was an evocative moment for him in that it reminded him of the days of the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government of 1999-2004 when both Naidu and Kumar were aligned with BJP. At the meeting, NCP leader Praful Patel turned up with a letter of support for Modi.

The others who spoke at the meeting too were gung-ho about the re-election of Modi in a historic win. “No demands were made at the meeting by any partner except to go ahead swiftly to form the government under the leadership of Modi,”

a politician who attended the meeting told *Open*. There was a display of joy at the meet about NDA, especially BJP, spreading far and wide, including in Odisha, where it has won 20 of 21 seats in Lok Sabha while Congress won only one. Shockingly for them, the outgoing Biju Janata Dal (BJD) drew a blank. In Odisha, where elections were held simultaneously to the state Assembly, BJP won a landslide, trouncing the incumbent BJD led by Naveen Patnaik. BJP won 78 seats, securing 55 more seats and 7.5 per cent more votes compared with five years ago while BJD lost 4.5 per cent votes and 61 seats.

In Andhra Pradesh, Naidu’s TDP played a pivotal role in NDA’s surprise victory, securing 16 seats in the Lok Sabha polls

in a tripartite alliance in which the JanaSena Party won two seats and BJP managed three. In the simultaneously held state elections in Andhra, TDP, which made a dramatic comeback from near-oblivion over political miscalculations of the past, dominated the polls, winning 135 out of 175 seats, even as the JanaSena Party won 21 and BJP eight seats. The incumbent YSR Congress Party of Jagan Mohan Reddy suffered a drubbing, losing 18 Lok Sabha seats and 140 Assembly seats.

At the June 5 meeting, Nitish Kumar noted that black money was in use in the elections and that it had to be fought. “We have to do something about it,” Kumar said. His concern was fully endorsed by other participants as a menace that needed to be weeded out. For his part, Chirag Paswan, chief LJP (Ram Vilas) in Bihar, whose party won all five Lok Sabha seats it contested in Bihar and has often described himself as “Narendra Modi’s Hanuman”, was all praise for Modi’s leadership.

Modi, in his address to NDA constituents after listening to what they had to say, began by requesting all of them to ask their people to plant a sapling on that day, June 5, World Environment Day. He went on to concur with the views aired by the partners, especially about the no-holds-barred campaign unleashed against him and his allies as well as institutions that include the Election Commission of India (ECI) and others at the height of the campaign. While promising continuity of transparent governance and a crusade against corruption, he said that there will be a “push-back” against toxic misinformation targeted at them. Modi also said that those who made false promises to people, including handing slips promising homes to deceive the poor to pull in votes, would come under the scanner. According to reports in both local and national dailies, several women turned up

Modi and President Droupadi Murmu at Rashtrapati Bhavan, June 5, 2024



Modi with Nitish Kumar
in New Delhi



WHILE CHANDRABABU NAIDU IS KNOWN TO WHOLEHEARTEDLY EMBRACE MODI'S ECONOMIC VISION, A GREATER EMPHASIS ON BACKWARD COMMUNITIES AND WOMEN. CONTRARY TO RUMOURS,

in front of the Congress office in Lucknow, demanding that the guarantee cards of ₹1 lakh promised during the Lok Sabha polls be given immediately. Congress and its I.N.D.I.A. allies had promised that women from poor households would be given guarantee cards. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi himself had assured such guarantee cards to women from disadvantaged families. Gandhi had been quoted in the media as saying that the new government on Congress' watch would transfer ₹1 lakh annually into accounts of women belonging to SC, ST, and backward categories.

The NDA meeting resolved to look into cases of such false promises to lure voters. In general, NDA allies also alluded later to the damage caused by a pliable media which, according to one of them, is gleefully reporting "a massive setback" for BJP even as top leaders of the party are doing their best to expand the tally by persuading likeminded MPs into their fold. Their attempts have already met with results as several independents and parties with single MPs agreed to tie up with NDA.

The meeting also expressed delight at BJP winning a Lok Sabha seat for the first time in Kerala where NDA has massively

improved its vote share. In the Thrissur Lok Sabha constituency, winning BJP candidate Suresh Gopi trounced his Left rival VS Sunil Kumar by a margin of 74,686 votes while Congress came a poor third. Gopi won 37.8 per cent of the votes polled. EC data showed NDA's vote share soared to 19.39 per cent from upward of 15 per cent in the 2019 General Election. Much to the anguish of the ruling Left government in Kerala, in most Lok Sabha seats in the state BJP won more than a lakh votes and in six of them more than 20 per cent votes. The ruling Left Democratic Front (LDF) won only one seat and lost a good chunk of its traditional vote share. In some seats, Left candidates failed to get votes as the state government had alienated a large section of people. In Punjab, too, BJP gained in vote share which rose to 18.56 per cent compared with 9.63 per cent in 2019, surpassing former ally Shiromani Akali Dal's (SAD) share.

With BJP as well as NDA extending its footprint, with probable exceptions, at the Centre its leaders hope to secure more support from nonaligned parties and even from within the Opposition fold. Besides, a massive operation is on as the

With N Chandrababu Naidu
in Vijayawada

More Newspaper and Magazines Telegram Channel join Search https://t.me/Magazines_8890050582 (@Magazines_8890050582)

NITISH KUMAR IS ON THE SAME PAGE WITH MODI REGARDING HIS SOCIAL GOALS, WHICH INCLUDE NAIDU AND KUMAR HAVE PLEDGED TO STEP UP THE OFFENSIVE AGAINST CORRUPTION

ruling party senses an opportunity to extend its wingspread. BJP sees the Modi juggernaut advancing thanks to a renewed commitment by its allies, notwithstanding a revival for the main Opposition Congress and its allies—most of them battered from recent elections—from an existential crisis.

THE BJP-LED NDA is, regardless, thrilled at the results from various parts of the country, including Kashmir, where dynasty politics has been routed. Meanwhile, among the parties that have decided to throw their weight behind NDA are the Bharat Adivasi Party (BAP) (from Rajasthan's tribal belt), the Rashtriya Loktantrik Party, the Zoram People's Movement, and so on. It is not unlikely that Jagan Reddy and BJD too would like to stay in the good books of the ruling BJP. Again, nobody can vouch against the MPs of other parties, such as the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), veering towards the ruling front.

Although various fictitious—and malicious—stories are

out about the demands that the allies of BJP are making, it is known that Naidu wants Amaravati to remain the capital of his state, a demand that will come up shortly. He also wants a special category status for Andhra because it was at a disadvantage after losing a significant amount of revenue due to the fact that Hyderabad fell in the new state of Telangana carved out of undivided Andhra Pradesh in 2014. JD(U)'s KC Tyagi also later made a statement to the media about seeking special status for Bihar.

The special category status is granted to regions that have historically been at a disadvantage compared with the rest of the country. So far, 11 states enjoy this status, which means they get priority funding from the Centre.

BJP doesn't see any difficulty whatsoever in working with its alliance partners. It is also pinning its hopes on the Opposition, which is typically fragmented and in disarray, to weaken further as time passes. And Modi looks firmly on the saddle on the back of popular trust and is ready to move ahead. The 73-year-old is confidence personified and knows only too well that a smooth sea never made a skilled skipper. ■

NO TIME TO PAUSE



Modi may set aside BJP's more contentious agendas but

THE NEWS FROM the first round of polling held on April 19 was mixed, with low turnouts in north Rajasthan and western Uttar Pradesh (UP), reports of anger among Jat voters and a certain complacency among the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) supporters a cause for concern in the saffron camp. There was a need to step on the gas and stoke the campaign fires and the moment came when Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke at a rally at Banswara in Rajasthan on April 21 and launched a frontal attack on Congress, accusing the party of a radical redistribution agenda and plotting to favour infiltrators and those who have more children. In the days that followed, Modi did not relent and said Congress was looking to divert

quotas to Muslims by depriving Other Backward Classes (OBCs) of their legitimate rights. He pointed to the Congress government in Karnataka that had restored reservations categorising Muslims as “backward”, and later in the campaign criticised the West Bengal government for smuggling in religion-based quotas in violation of the Constitution.

The idea was to single out Congress as a real and present danger, as a party that would, if given a chance, have no compunctions about redistribution of private wealth and following a path of social divisiveness. The thought was to prevent the Lok Sabha election from devolving into a battle of local issues in various states that would disadvantage BJP. The move did succeed but not to the extent BJP wanted it to. The elections in Haryana, Rajasthan and Maharashtra became localised. In Rajasthan, the sullenness of Jat voters, unhappy about being dealt out of the power

Prime Minister
Narendra Modi chairs
the NDA meeting in
New Delhi, June 5, 2024



he is unlikely to be overcautious By RAJEEV DESHPANDE

equation in the state where their wait for a chief minister remains unfilled, saw Congress score upsets in seats like Churu, Sikar, Jhunjhunu and Bharatpur. The confused and fractured picture in Maharashtra where both the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) and Shiv Sena split in two resulted in another setback for BJP. In a bid to strengthen the party, BJP allied with NCP rebel Ajit Pawar but it appears this did not work with the party's support base.

Modi mixed BJP's message, making it an amalgam of development promises (Viksit Bharat), pro-poor schemes, and criticism of Congress' appeasement politics. Though BJP suffered losses in several states, it might have been even worse off but for the prime minister varying his line of attack. He sought to shake off the sense of disappointment in the ranks of the party cadre and supporters on Tuesday, June 4, evening while speaking at the BJP headquarters when he pledged to implement big decisions in his

third term. It was an important speech as he made it clear that he is up to leading the party and government and that his focus on combating corruption and quickening economic growth remains undiluted. "There is no time to pause, no time to stop," he said. The government will not swerve from taking big decisions. "This is Modi ki guarantee," he said. The people of the country had done a great favour to BJP and the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) by electing it office for a third term. The prime minister's message was intended to convey that Modi 3.0 will not lack ambition nor would it be cowed by the stronger than anticipated Opposition performance. It was also a signal to allies that while the exigencies of coalition government may mean some give on the part of BJP, the accommodation will not mean abandonment of key political and governance objectives.

The setbacks in Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Haryana

may have been offset by better showings in Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh but the biggest story of the election lay in UP that has been a BJP fortress since 2014 with the party winning two Assembly and two Lok Sabha elections. The upsurge in the Samajwadi Party's (SP) fortunes in UP, a development missed by all exit polls and surveys, proved to be a major factor in preventing BJP from hitting the majority mark on its own. The West Bengal scene was also the opposite of what most exit polls had indicated, with the Trinamool Congress (TMC) holding firm after Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee played an audacious hand by taking on BJP as well as the Left-Congress and pulling off an impressive win. The reasons for the BJP meltdown in UP will take time to decipher but it is evident the "double-engine" government—or the Narendra Modi-Yogi Adityanath model—that has worked for the party hit a serious air pocket. One aspect could be unhappiness with candidates, with voters in many constituencies seeking a change. This meant that even where voters supported BJP, they did so somewhat reluctantly, and this might well have resulted in lower turnouts. The key factor explaining the SP and Congress successes in central and eastern UP could be a movement of the Bahujan Samaj Party's (BSP) Jatav base towards SP when it became apparent that the Dalit party was not in the reckoning. BSP leader Mayawati has suffered by going it alone; not winning a single seat. Her decision to silence her nephew and apparent heir Akash Anand midway through the election was puzzling and might have pushed more BSP voters to the SP-Congress camp.

The defeat of individual BJP ministers like Smriti Irani and Ajay Kumar 'Teni' in UP is evidence that the Modi factor was not enough to overcome the unpopularity of individual candidates. It will take some time for the message from UP, particularly Purvanchal, to sink in. The delivery of welfare programmes which reached most households was intended to solidify the support for BJP. Modi's 'Hindutva-plus development' model has forged a social coalition where non-Yadav OBCs were a pillar of support. BJP's outreach to OBCs had altered the political balance in UP, ending the dominance of Mandal politics. This time round, the formula has not worked. The question whether BJP's OBC support has slipped needs a more careful examination. BJP has polled 41 per cent votes and this does not seem to be possible without OBC participation. After a dream run in office, Adityanath will be under scrutiny as he has helmed a government without much resistance, using the bureaucracy to implement programmes that included providing housing in addition to PM Awas Yojana. While development initiatives did reach rural areas, caste as a consideration is back. It was precisely

such caste combinations that undid BJP in the 1993 Assembly election in UP after the demolition of the Babri Masjid when SP and BSP were in alliance. The Yadav-Muslim-Dalit consolidation had trumped BJP and, more than 30 years later, the SP-Congress alliance has halted the saffron party in its tracks—this time without BSP.

An important aspect of Modi's politics has been an unhesitating advocacy of Hindu cultural identity and a preparedness to wage a wider battle against ideological adversaries who contest his view of India. BJP's calculations that Hindutva would provide inroads into the east and south proved partially correct. The party achieved a long-awaited breakthrough in Kerala and its vote in the state as well as in Tamil Nadu has increased. BJP has made gains in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh too, but expectations were belied in West Bengal where exit polls had predicted a big jump.

BJP has a 16 per cent vote in Kerala and 10 per cent in Tamil Nadu, and though the latter number will be less than expected, it is a start. Despite a vigorous campaign in the company of regional allies, NDA could not cross the critical threshold that would have delivered seats in Tamil Nadu. The Hindutva consolidation expected in UP in the wake of the Ram Mandir consecration ceremony did not happen either. The problem lay in creeping incumbencies and an impatience for faster progress on issues such as employment.

Will Modi alter his style of leadership that focuses on ambitious goals and political dominance? It would be fair to anticipate that agendas like uniform civil code

(UCC) and economic reforms could face serious headwinds. The pitch for UCC, always a polarising issue, will not be easy to pursue. It is not that Modi cannot sometimes retreat and declare victory. He surprised allies and opponents when he withdrew the three farm laws after farmers' unions from Punjab, western UP and Rajasthan blockaded Delhi for over a year. Realising the agitation was hurting the government, threatening to take attention away from more productive decisions, Modi, on Gaurpurab on November 19, 2021, had announced that the laws would be repealed. But while the more contentious parts of the BJP agenda could be put away, the prime minister is unlikely to see merit in being overcautious. The risk of slipping into a survivalist mindset is that it allows the Opposition to gain traction while the ruling side keeps losing steam. Being defensive can only delay the inevitable, which is a defeat in the next election.

The evidence of his leadership indicates that Modi will push on with the agenda he considers non-negotiable. Allies and opponents alike will be forced to consider the perils of another election at short notice. As the 2024 verdict has shown, there is no guarantee that the public mood will remain the same. ■

WILL MODI ALTER HIS STYLE OF LEADERSHIP? THE RISK OF SLIPPING INTO A SURVIVALIST MINDSET IS THAT IT ALLOWS THE OPPOSITION TO GAIN TRACTION WHILE THE RULING SIDE KEEPS LOSING STEAM. BEING DEFENSIVE CAN ONLY DELAY THE INEVITABLE

SUBSCRIBE TO FORTUNE INDIA AND GAIN VALUABLE INSIGHT



More Newspaper and Magazines Telegram Channel join Search https://t.me/Magazines_8890050582 (@Magazines_8890050582)

**GET UNRIVALLED ACCESS TO THE BEST OF BUSINESS PRACTICES
AND LEADERSHIP MANTRAS FROM ACROSS THE WORLD.**

YES! PLEASE START MY SUBSCRIPTION TO FORTUNE INDIA AS PER THE OFFER CHOSEN BELOW:

TICK (✓)	NO OF ISSUES	COVER PRICE (₹)	YOU PAY (₹)	DISCOUNT (%)
<input type="checkbox"/>	36	7800	5460	30
<input type="checkbox"/>	24	5200	4160	20
<input type="checkbox"/>	12	2600	2210	15

BEST BUY

NAME (MR./MS./MRS.): _____
 DESIGNATION: _____ OCCUPATION: _____ INDUSTRY TYPE: _____
 ADDRESS: _____
 CITY: _____ STATE: _____ PIN (MANDATORY): _____
 MOBILE NO.: _____ LANDLINE NO.: _____ EMAIL ID: _____

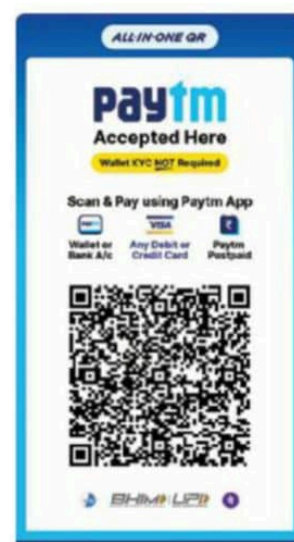
PAYMENT DETAILS

CHEQUE NO./DRAFT NO.: _____ DATE: _____ AMOUNT (IN ₹): _____
 PAYABLE TO "BMPL A/C - FORTUNE INDIA"

MAIL THE SUBSCRIPTION FORM WITH YOUR CHEQUE/DD TO **BUSINESS MEDIA PRIVATE LIMITED, 1ST FLOOR, TOWER 3A, DLF CORPORATE PARK, DLF PHASE 3, DLF CITY, GURUGRAM, HARYANA - 122002**

TERMS & CONDITIONS:

■ FORTUNE INDIA publishes 12 issues in a year ■ Fortune India may publish occasional extra special issues ■ The cover price of regular issue (10) is INR 200 and special issue (2) is INR 300. ■ Please allow 4-6 weeks for processing your subscription ■ Fortune India subscription offer is a limited period offer and subject to change ■ All disputes are subject to the exclusive jurisdiction of competent courts & forums in Delhi/New Delhi only.



TO SUBSCRIBE



Website: www.fortuneindia.com



Email: subscriptions@fortuneindia.com



CS Direct line: 0124-4561900

More Newspaper and Magazines Telegram Channel join Search https://t.me/Magazines_8890050582 (@Magazines_8890050582)



More Newspaper and Magazines Telegram Channel join Search https://t.me/Magazines_8890050582 (@Magazines_8890050582)

Rahul Gandhi at Congress headquarters
in New Delhi, June 4, 2024

A SHOT AT REDEM

**Rahul Gandhi has led Congress out of the doldrums.
Can the party sustain its new momentum?**



More Newspaper and Magazines Telegram Channel join Search https://t.me/Magazines_8890050582 (@Magazines_8890050582)

PTION

By **RAJEEV DESHPANDE**

W

HEN THE 18TH LOK SABHA meets, Rahul Gandhi will be at the head of a large contingent of Congress MPs, just one short of 100. Congress benches will be flanked by detachments of Samajwadi Party (SP), Trinamool Congress (TMC), and the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), along with a sizeable presence of parties

like the Shiv Sena (UBT) and the Nationalist Congress Party (Sharad Pawar). All told, the numbers make for a vociferous Opposition that can disrupt or block government business much more effectively than has been the case. And unlike in the previous two Lok Sabhas, the Congress tally meets the 10 per cent qualification bar—in terms of House strength—to claim the Leader of the Opposition designation. It is a remarkable turnaround for a leader who was disqualified as an MP in March last year after being convicted in a defamation case and it gives him a new shot at establishing himself as the head of an alternative political formation that stands in opposition to the National Democratic Alliance (NDA).

The positives do not, of course, mask the obvious downsides of Congress finding itself sitting in the Opposition benches third time running. But such has been the dominance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) that electoral performance of Congress is seen as a remarkable feat. Even though 99 represents the party's third-worst performance, its improved strike rate in direct contests with BJP—which has been a one-way street since 2014—and success of alliances with SP, NCP, SS(UBT) and DMK prevented another sub-par outing and, importantly, prevented BJP from achieving a majority on its own. That's why a modest increase in Congress' vote share from 19.5 per cent in 2019 to a shade over 21 per cent in 2024 delivered disproportionate benefits in terms of seats. The combination of issues and a synergy in vote bases turned several contests towards Congress, leading to Rahul asserting at a post-result press conference that the verdict is an indictment of BJP top duo Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah. Holding a copy of the Constitution, he said the results are the first step towards saving democratic institutions. "We fought this election not just against BJP but governance structure of the country, intelligence agencies CBI and ED and judiciary because all these institutions are captured by Amit Shah and Narendra Modi ji," he said.

Rahul's summing up of the results outlines his likely campaign against the government as Congress is also likely to see the verdict as a vindication of its manifesto promises to conduct a nation-wide socio-economic and caste census, do away with the 50 per cent cap on reservations, distribute government and 'surplus' land to the poor, set up a diversity commission to promote diversity in public and private employment, oppose a uniform civil code (UCC), implement a ₹1 lakh a year apprentice scheme, waive off education loans, provide ₹1 lakh per year for women from poor families, set up a commission to evaluate loan waivers, take measures to ensure a 'fair share' to minorities in public work contracts, and roll out work guarantees for the

urban poor. The manifesto has populist overtones and the pledges to address inequality and ensure minority participation in the economy have a distinctly redistributive ring. Congress' success will encourage Rahul to sharpen this plank which he believes can undo the social coalition BJP has forged. Even with reduced numbers, Rahul has nudged Congress to oppose almost all Modi government initiatives and party representatives on selection panels for posts like chiefs of the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC), the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and election commissioners have submitted dissent notes since 2014. With BJP short of a majority in Lok Sabha, the Congress leader may well calculate that the government's equity can be further eroded by adopting an adversarial posture in Parliament.

Did high-sounding issues like saving democracy and protecting constitutional probity weigh with voters? The evidence is scratchy at best. Interactions with voters and media reports did not offer much to support such a conclusion. The issues voters related to were more direct, connected to unpopular candidates, lack of development and opportunities, caste affiliations, or a perception of prospects under BJP and the available alternatives. On the larger canvas there was a discussion on whether the Modi government enhanced national prestige and the import of decisions such as the abrogation of Article 370 and the consecration of the Ram Mandir. While finalising their choices, voters ranked issues and evaluated what mattered most to them and most, including intended beneficiaries, were not clear about the advantage of a caste census. There was considerable scepticism about cash doles for youth and women and even voters inclined to back Congress did not think the payouts would be feasible or sustainable. What might have bothered voters, particularly Dalits in states like Uttar Pradesh (UP) where caste is never far from the surface, is the allegation that BJP is seeking a brute '400 par' majority to fiddle with reservations. Here too, Dalits were not always too convinced, questioning if any leader or party could actually scrap reservations for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs). But it might have raised doubts that Congress and SP exploited. The BJP vote in Uttar Pradesh is 41.3 per cent, a decline from the 50 per cent it polled in 2019. The drop might be explained by a drift towards SP-Congress across communities as SP chief Akhilesh Yadav fielded candidates representing major social groups. It would include some erosion of non-Yadav OBC voters but the magnitude is not clear. Though its support dipped, a 41 per cent vote share is not likely without OBCs backing the party. The perception that the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) was a non-starter in this election seem to have boosted SP's vote to 33.5 per cent from 18.1 per cent although it needs to be kept in mind that the party contested fewer seats in 2019 when it was in alliance with BSP.

The Congress leader is often the butt of jokes and there is a case that he has won his spurs, causing his supporters to assert that he took the right calls. Often enough, Rahul has defined his engagement with public life, choosing to stay out of limelight for long periods. In Parliament, he has intervened sporadically and his speeches are marked by direct and personal references.

He taunts the treasury benches with "*darom mat* (don't be scared)" jibes and claims the prime minister cannot look him in the eye. The leader's second Bharat Jodo Yatra this year drew criticism for being timed when it would be more useful to finalise alliances ahead of the Lok Sabha election. As it happened, the alliances, barring the deal with the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in Delhi, worked out well and the yatra is seen to have been a catalyst for Congress, mobilising support and motivating cadre. His appearance has fluctuated between sporting an unruly beard—causing Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma to recall Saddam Hussein—and a completely clean-shaven look. At present the leader seems to have settled for a cropped beard that seems to retain a youthful but experienced touch. His trademark white T-shirt is intended to emphasise informality and fitness and is the look for almost all occasions. Having reversed the slump the party had been in, Rahul's challenge lies in leading his party in Parliament by making his point through well-argued speeches. Stalling and disruption of Parliament is a headache for the government but can deliver diminishing returns while a well-articulated intervention holds public attention. Adroit use of the floor was what marked BJP when it was in Opposition from 2004 to 2014 with leaders like Sushma Swaraj and Arun Jaitley leveraging the



parliamentary platform.

The encouraging news for Congress lies in the gains it registered in states like Maharashtra where it was pushed to the margins. It was part of the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) as a junior partner of Shiv Sena and NCP. But the splits in the two regional outfits increased Congress' salience and allowed it to contest more seats and this has paid off with the party recording the highest tally of 13. It has more seats than its allies and has overtaken BJP which saw a sharp fall from 23 seats to just nine, at par with Shiv Sena (UBT). In Karnataka, Congress could not replicate the lead it gained in the 2023 state elections but brought down BJP's numbers by winning nine seats in Kalyana-Karnataka (formerly Hyderabad-Karnataka) and Central Karnataka. BJP had swept Karnataka in 2019, winning 25 of the 28 Lok Sabha seats. Congress re-established a beachhead in the Northeast where it was all but blanked out, winning seats in Nagaland, Manipur, and Meghalaya. Similarly, the party picked eight and five seats in

HAVING BEEN DERIDED AS AN UNDERDOG WHO LACKED THE SMARTS TO TAKE ON BJP, RAHUL HAS SCORED AGAINST THE RUN OF PLAY. IN THE DAVID VERSUS GOLIATH BATTLE HE HAS GAINED HEFT AND CAN CLAIM HE STUCK TO HIS INSTINCTS WHEN OTHERS POINTED TO PAST FAILURES

Rajasthan and Haryana, respectively.

All these seats are positives for Congress as they whittled down BJP numbers while the Opposition party reoccupied political space denied since 2014. This could, if the party plays its cards well, open the doors to reclaiming the support of constituencies that deserted Congress and switched their loyalties to regional parties or BJP. The reasons for the favourable outcomes need more attention as these are mostly local conditions

and BJP's overdependence on Modi. The Jat factor is important in BJP's deficits in Haryana and eastern Rajasthan where the community is disgruntled about the perception that it has been sidelined. Jats in Haryana are displeased about the replacement of Manohar Lal Khattar as chief minister with another non-Jat Nayab Saini. In Rajasthan, the wait for a non-Jat chief minister has been interminable. Jats found some solace when BJP leader Vasundhara Raje was chief minister as she married into the house of Dholpur, a former Jat state. BJP's decision to name a relative nonentity like Bhajan Lal Sharma, a Brahmin, as chief minister heightened the alienation and was instrumental in the party's setbacks in Rajasthan. The muddled political situation in Maharashtra threw up several contradictions, not the least being Muslim support for Shiv Sena (UBT). BJP has been forced to deal with a set of bad choices to regain office in a state where the Shiv Sena walked out of a pre-poll alliance to seal a deal with NCP and Congress in 2019. While many more contributory factors can be listed, it remains unclear whether Congress' populist "five guarantees" or the "democracy is in danger" pitch brought in the votes.

Having been derided as an underdog who lacked the smarts to take on BJP, Rahul Gandhi has scored against the run of play. In the David versus Goliath battle he has gained heft and can claim he stuck to his instincts when others pointed to past failures, such as the allegations of corruption in the Rafale deal that flopped. He has an opportunity to indulge in honest introspection about what went wrong in the past and perhaps, more importantly, what actually worked for Congress. Since the defeat in 2014, Rahul has tended to blame BJP for "institution capture" and the subversion of the judiciary and the media rather than acknowledge organisational weaknesses. This time, too, going by his initial remarks, the leader feels the odds were unfairly stacked against Congress for similar reasons. This reasoning finds resonance in the Congress echo chamber comprising BJP's critics and opponents who claim the results would have been even more impressive if there had been an "even" playing ground. Their allusion is to the use of electoral bonds—now scrapped by the Supreme Court—and the alleged misuse of enforcement agencies against Opposition leaders. This is a tricky argument, more suited for propaganda than a viable political line which impresses voters. Some rules of politics are universal—parties that figure out bread-and-butter issues do better. ■

More Newspapers and Magazines Telegram Channel join Search [@Magazines_8890050582](https://t.me/Magazines_8890050582)
Sonia Gandhi, Mallikarjun Kharge, Priyanka and Rahul Gandhi at Congress headquarters, June 4, 2024



RETURN OF THE S

Five of them not only held on to their turfs but emerged st

AS PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI lauded a third term for the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), five regional leaders of the Opposition gained a grip on their turfs.

When Samajwadi Party (SP) leader and former Uttar Pradesh (UP) Chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav held a roadshow in Ayodhya during the 2022 Assembly elections in the state, he flaunted his Hindu identity by invoking Ram and Krishna. He talked of the 'Ganga-Jamuni Tehzeeb', a phrase symbolising Hindu-Muslim harmony, underscored his socialist roots, and

promised development, addressing people in the temple town, the soul of BJP's Hindutva ideology. At that time, the Ram temple was under construction. None of the SP chief's gambits helped. BJP won 255 of the 403 Assembly seats, including Ayodhya, bringing the party back to power for a second term in UP. But Akhilesh, caught in the quandary of his party being limited to Muslim-Yadav support, had apparently learnt his lessons. Two years later, targeting votes outside this core voter base, to reach out to the non-Yadav Other Backward Classes (OBCs), Akhilesh decided to put up 57 non-Yadav candidates in the 62 seats it contested as part of the I.N.D.I.A. bloc, forging the slogan '*Pichde, Dalit,*

Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav in Kannauj, June 5, 2024

More Newspaper and Magazines Telegram Channel join Search https://t.me/Magazines_8890050582 (@Magazines_8890050582)



ATRAP S

stronger as well By AMITA SHAH

Alpasankhyak in the Lok Sabha polls. It paid off, giving Akhilesh his biggest triumph since the mantle was passed to him by his late father Mulayam Singh Yadav, and humbling BJP in the heart of the Hindi heartland. SP, with 37 seats, outnumbered the 33 of BJP, which even lost Faizabad, the Lok Sabha seat in which the Assembly segment of Ayodhya falls, four months after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's consecration of the Ram temple in a grand ceremony. The SP's Awadhesh Prasad, a nine-time MLA, defeated BJP's Lallu Singh, who had won the Faizabad seat in 2014 and 2019. BJP was hoping the temple would bring it electoral blessings, amplifying its Hindutva narrative, particularly in UP, the most populous state with 80 Lok Sabha seats.

Of the 57 seats, SP fielded 27 non-Yadav OBCs, two more than BJP, 11 upper castes, four Muslims, and 15 Dalits. Seven of SP's Dalit candidates won in the state, where Mayawati's waning Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) did not win a single seat and its vote share dropped to below 10 per cent, despite the party contesting 79 seats. BJP, which contested 75 seats, fielded 34 from upper castes and 16 in Scheduled Caste (SC) reserved seats. Unlike 2019, when SP won just five of the 37 seats it had contested in an alliance with BSP, which won 10, this time the chemistry in the alliance with Congress, which contested 17 seats and won seven, was visible on the ground. SP's Yadav candidates, all of whom are from the family, were fielded in the other five seats, which have been its turf. Akhilesh himself stood in Kannauj, which SP lost to BJP in 2019 when his wife Dimple Yadav was the candidate. A more self-assured Dimple won from Manipur, SP founder Mulayam Singh's seat which she had won in a bypoll after his death. Dharmendra Yadav, Mulayam's brother Abhay Ram Yadav's son, was fielded in Azamgarh; Aditya Yadav, Mulayam's brother Shivpal Yadav's son, in Badaun; and Akshay Yadav, Mulayam's cousin Ram Gopal Yadav's son, in Firozabad.

SP had put up 10 Yadav candidates in 2019, including four from Mulayam Singh's family, banking on the Yadav and Muslim votes in the state where Muslims constitute 19 per cent of the population and Yadavs about 9 per cent. But it was this affiliation with the two communities that had deterred voters outside these sections from supporting SP. This time, the party managed to surpass its Muslim-Yadav core base, making a dent in a vote bank BJP had nurtured since 2014 when Modi came to power at the Centre.

In neighbouring Bihar, the Yadav family of Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) leader and former Chief Minister Lalu Prasad failed to have a similar resonance in terms of seats, with a formidable alliance of Nitish Kumar's Janata Dal (United), BJP, Chirag Paswan's Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas), and the Hindustani Awam



West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee in Kolkata, June 4, 2024

GETTY IMAGES

SP FIELDED 27 NON-YADAV OBCs, TWO MORE THAN BJP, 11 UPPER CASTES, FOUR MUSLIMS, AND 15 DALITS. SEVEN OF SP'S DALIT CANDIDATES WON IN THE STATE, WHERE MAYAWATI'S WANING BSP DID NOT WIN A SINGLE SEAT AND ITS VOTE SHARE DROPPED TO BELOW 10 PER CENT DESPITE THE PARTY CONTESTING 79 SEATS

Morcha led by former Chief Minister Jitan Ram Manjhi sweeping the state with 30 of the 40 seats. Though RJD got a vote share of 22.14 per cent, higher than that of JD(U) at 18.53 per cent and BJP at 20.51 per cent, it won only four seats. In 2019, RJD did not win a single seat while NDA had swept the state with 39. Lalu Prasad's daughter Misa Bharti, a Rajya Sabha MP, won the Pataliputra seat, defeating BJP's two-time MP Ram Kripal Yadav, but his other daughter Rohini Acharya lost to BJP's Rajiv Pratap Rudy in Saran, her father's bastion. Both Nitish Kumar, who had made a last-minute switch to NDA from I.N.D.I.A., and BJP won 12 seats each.

Away from the Hindi heartland, in the eastern part of the country, West Bengal also came in the way of BJP reaching the magic figure of 272, with Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee further strengthening her hold on the state. Of the 42 seats, Banerjee's Trinamool Congress (TMC) won 29 and increased its vote share by 2 per cent from 43.3 to 45.76 per cent, upsetting the calculations of BJP which was banking on increasing its tally in the state. BJP's score dropped to 12 from

18 in 2019, when it was 22. Banerjee had dismissed the exit polls which gave BJP more numbers than her party, saying she had seen such predictions going wrong in 2016, 2019 and 2021. She retained her hold on South Bengal and made inroads into North Bengal where BJP had won seven of the eight Lok Sabha seats in 2019. Her government's own welfare schemes for women, Muslim consolidation amidst BJP's euphoria over the Ram Mandir, and the absence of a formidable regional face in BJP all helped Banerjee as she reigned supreme, tiding over anti-incumbency with votes against her getting divided among the Left, Congress and BJP.

Among those who won in the state, is Mahua Moitra from Krishnanagar for a second term, less than six months after she was expelled from Parliament on the recommendation of Lok Sabha's Ethics Committee which had found her guilty of having shared her credentials to the parliamentary website with others and accepting gifts in exchange for favours. The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), on the directions of Lokpal, the anti-corruption ombudsman, had booked her in March. TMC's

**DOWN SOUTH, MK STALIN
RETAINED HIS DRAVIDIAN PARTY'S
HOLD OVER TAMIL NADU,
DENYING BJP A SINGLE VICTORY
IN THE 23 SEATS IT CONTESTED
AS THE DMK-LED I.N.D.I.A. BLOC
SWEEPED THE STATE IN A
FOUR-CORNERED CONTEST**



Tamil Nadu Chief Minister
MK Stalin in Chennai,
June 4, 2024

AFP



Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray in Thane



NCP chief Sharad Pawar in Mumbai

Photos GETTY IMAGES

No 2, the party's national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee, broke West Bengal's record for the highest victory margin at 7.1 lakh votes in the Diamond Harbour constituency, defeating BJP's Abhijit Das. The party's candidate, cricketer-turned-politician Yusuf Pathan, defeated five-time Congress MP Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury in the Muslim-dominated Baharampur seat, while Kirti Azad, also a former cricketer who was with BJP till 2015, defeated BJP's former state chief Dilip Ghosh from Bardhaman-Durgapur by over a lakh votes.

IN WESTERN INDIA, two regional players in Maharashtra—Uddhav Thackeray's Shiv Sena (UBT) and the Sharad Pawar-led Nationalist Congress Party (NCP)—regained their grip on their bastions, crushing the hopes of Mission 45-plus of the ruling Mahayuti coalition comprising the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena, BJP, and the Ajit Pawar-led NCP. The political realignment seemed to have backfired, with people largely favouring Uddhav Thackeray and Sharad Pawar. Of the 15 seats the Shinde faction fought, it won seven, and Ajit Pawar's NCP one of the five it contested. Far from helping BJP increase its tally, Maharashtra delivered a defeat to the party which fought in 28 seats and ended up winning nine, down from 23 in 2019. While Union minister Nitin Gadkari won from Nagpur, the headquarters of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), his Cabinet colleague Piyush Goyal was the only candidate from the Mahayuti to win in Mumbai city's six seats. Of the 48 seats in the state, NDA won 17. While the issue of Maratha quota hurt NDA in the Marathwada region, the Opposition's campaign that the BJP-led government would tamper with the Constitution dented BJP's share of Dalit votes. In the Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA), it was Congress that turned out to be the biggest winner with 13 of the 17 seats it contested, making a decisive return from one seat in 2019. The Shiv Sena (UBT) won nine of the 21 it contested and

Sharad Pawar's NCP seven of 10, including that of his daughter Supriya Sule who was taking on Sunetra Pawar, wife of Sule's cousin Ajit Pawar, in the family bastion of Baramati.

Down south, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin retained his Dravidian party's hold over the state, denying BJP a single victory in the 23 seats it contested as the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) led I.N.D.I.A. bloc swept the state in a four-cornered contest with alliances led by the AIADMK and BJP, besides the Social Democratic Party of India (SDPI) and Seeman's Naam Tamilar Katchi (NTK). BJP's state chief K Annamalai, a former IPS officer who galvanised the party cadre to go it alone without former ally AIADMK and had emerged as the party's hope to get a few seats in the state, lost in Coimbatore to DMK's Ganapathy Rajkumar by over a lakh votes. Both Annamalai and Rajkumar belong to the Kongu Vellala Gounder community, dominant in the western parts of the state. Though BJP's vote share improved as compared to 2019, with the party's entire top leadership campaigning, it is Congress which gained in terms of numbers, winning nine seats.

Even as BJP relied on free rations for the poor, Stalin highlighted his own welfare schemes like the free breakfast scheme for school children, ₹1,000 a month for women, and free bus travel for women on state-run buses. He campaigned across the state, promising social justice and taking on Modi over the reservation policy and the Good and Services Tax (GST), and alleging that BJP would alter the Constitution. He also raised the issue of Bills being stalled by Governor RN Ravi with whom DMK's face-off is likely to continue.

Barring Banerjee, the other regional players are family parties whom BJP has been targeting over nepotism. But that doesn't seem to have dented their popularity. They have held on to their citadels, each scripting their own strategy in what had seemed like a make-or-break election. The satraps not only survived but also ensured they would occupy more seats in Parliament, confronting the treasury benches with a mightier Opposition. ■

THE MAN AND THE MYSTIQUE

Modi has psychologically liberated Hindus just as Gandhi had freed the Indian mind

By ARVIND SHARMA

NARENDRA MODI HAS triumphed in the national elections in India again. This is the third time he has done so. He is the first prime minister after Nehru to do so. How does one account for this hat-trick?

Mahatma Gandhi and Narendra Modi are, in many ways, a study in contrast, yet the basis of Mahatma Gandhi's charismatic appeal to the Indian people may provide us with the secret of Modi's popularity. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, in his famous work *The Discovery of India*, accounted for Mahatma Gandhi's appeal in terms of his psychological impact on the Indian people. He explained that not everybody agreed with the specific agenda of Mahatma Gandhi, or followed his lifestyle. Nehru even confessed that he did not himself accept all of Gandhi's teachings. But he went on to point out that the primary impact of Gandhi was *psychological*—that the dominant impulse under the British rule was fear—of the army, the police, the landlord, starvation, and so on. As against this, Mahatma Gandhi's soft but firm voice was raised: "Be not afraid." He even went on to compare Mahatma Gandhi to a psychoanalyst. It was as if Gandhi had dived deep into the psyche of a nation, exposed its deepest fears, and thereby rid it of them.

What Mahatma Gandhi did for the Indians, Narendra Modi may have done for the Hindus of India.

The reader might balk at this statement and ask: What did the Hindus have to fear? Do they not constitute the overwhelming majority in India? Yes, they are a statistical majority, but they had the psychology of a minority. In order to understand this, one needs to delve into history. One needs to realise that although a Hindu-majority country, India has been a colonised country for almost eight hundred years. First, there was the period of Muslim rule over India, which extended from roughly circa 1200CE to 1800CE, and during which the Hindus were second-class citizens in their own land—*dhimmis* according to Islamic law. This was followed by a period of two hundred years of British/Christian rule. Once again, the Hindus were subject to a foreign power. What this meant was that Hindus had to keep their Hindu identity suppressed in order to live under first Middle Eastern, and then Western, colonisation.

It requires an effort of imagination to understand that the

situation did not change for the Hindus even after India became independent in 1947. India then became a secular state. A secular state is supposed to be neutral in terms of religion, but it did not turn out to be the case. Hindus were discouraged from asserting their religious identity lest the minorities feel threatened. This

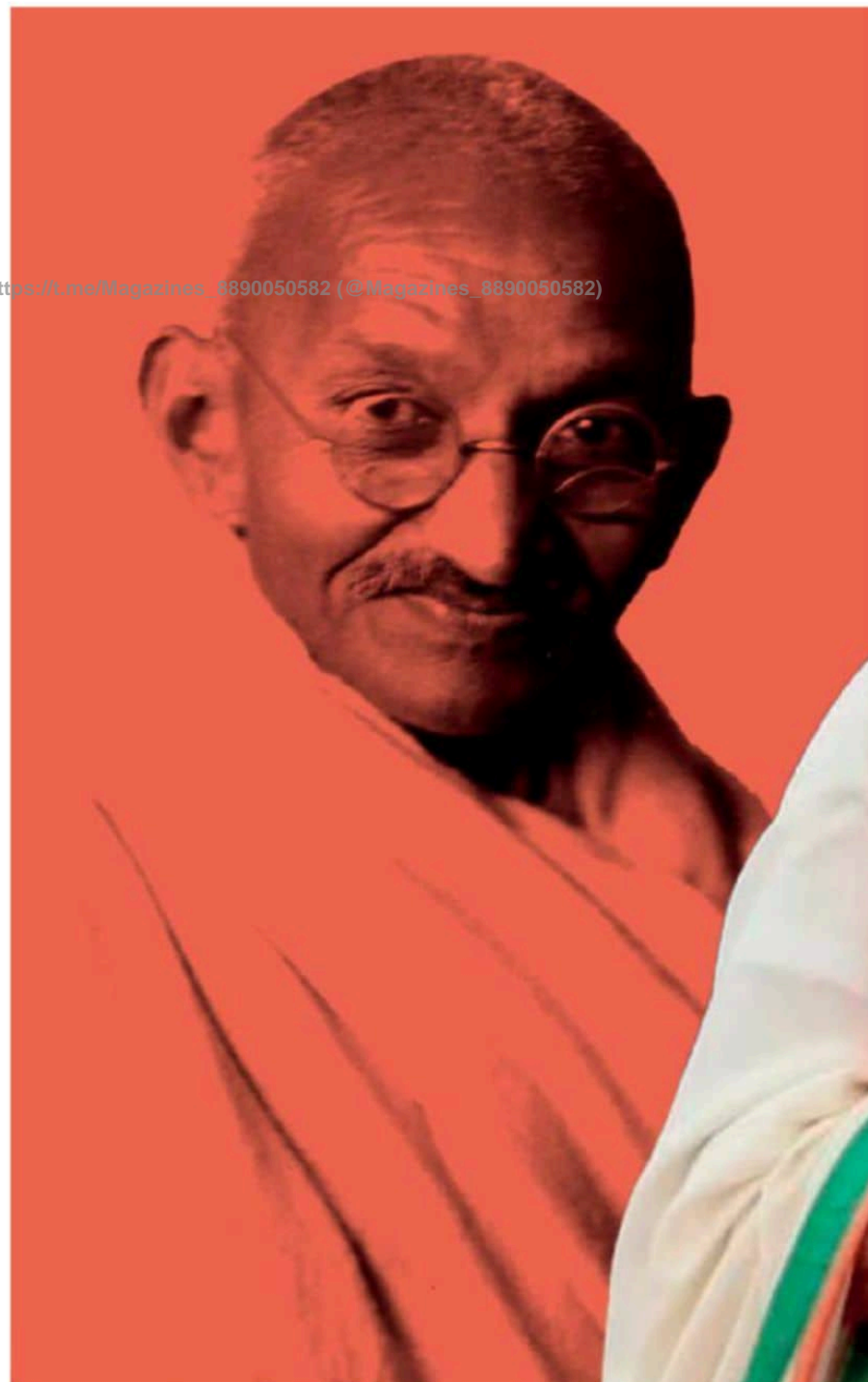


Illustration by SAURABH SINGH

was, in a sense, a legacy of the Independence movement during which Hindu identity had to be kept under wraps so that Muslims, Christians, and others could participate in the struggle for independence, without fear of Hindu domination.

Indian secularism evolved in a direction which became increasingly anti-Hindu in character. Part of it can be attributed to the electoral process, once elections came to be held from 1952 onwards. Various political parties in India could secure power by consolidating the vote of the minorities, such as the Muslims and the Christians, while the Hindu vote got divided along the lines of caste, region, and language.

Some situations cannot be fully understood until they are experienced. What I say may surprise the reader, but I felt freer as a Hindu to practise my faith in Canada than in India when I visited it. During this period of the eclipse of Hindu identity, I once met the future Nobel laureate, Amartya Sen, at Harvard

University, and requested him to contribute a chapter to a book with the provisional title *The Hindu Intellectual Between Tradition and Modernity*. He responded by saying: "Could you not make it the *Indian Intellectual*?" It was as if one had to disown one's Hindu identity in order to appear secular. It was also during this period that I met the distinguished Indian public figure, Karan Singh. In the course of our meeting, he described the situation of the Hindus in India as follows: for the Muslims there is Islam, for the Christians there is Christianity, but for Indians there is secularism.

The political climate against Hinduism was so adverse during the period of communist rule over West Bengal, from 1977 to 2011, that the Ramakrishna Mission, an essentially Hindu body founded by no less a figure than Swami Vivekananda himself, had to declare in a court of law that it was *not* a Hindu body, but followed a minority religion known as Ramakrishnaism. This

INDIAN SECULARISM EVOLVED IN A DIRECTION WHICH BECAME INCREASINGLY ANTI-HINDU. PART OF IT CAN BE ATTRIBUTED TO THE ELECTORAL PROCESS. PARTIES COULD SECURE POWER BY CONSOLIDATING THE VOTE OF THE MINORITIES

clearly illustrates how minorities enjoy more rights in a secular India than the majority, consisting of the Hindus. It is not as widely known as it should be that out of the 900,000 Hindu temples which dot India, at least 100,000 are under the control of various state governments. Some have put the figure at 400,000. No Muslim or Christian religious institution is subject to such control. As early as 1963, the American scholar, Donald Eugene Smith, had warned, in his *India as a Secular State*, that the right of the government to take over a religious institution posed a serious threat to Indian secularism. That the Indian government did so, only in the case of Hindu establishments, led to a kind of asymmetrical secularism which contributed greatly to the rise of Hindu nationalism.

It could be said that while Indians became free in 1947—free from British rule, the Hindus of India became free only in 2014—with the election of Narendra Modi as India's prime minister. Modi's rule has had the effect of psychologically liberating Hindus, the way Gandhi's movement had the effect of psychologically liberating the Indian people.

And that is why they keep voting him in. ■



Arvind Sharma is the Birks Professor of Comparative Religion at McGill University, Montreal. He is the author of, among other titles, *Hermeneutics and Hindu Thought* and *Hinduism and Its Sense of History*



Dharmendra Pradhan (centre) celebrates BJP's victory with Bhupender Yadav and Baijayant Panda (left), Bhubaneswar, June 4, 2024

THE JUGGERNAUT

BJP ends the Patnaik era with a landslide

By SIDDHARTH SINGH

IF THE BHARATIYA JANATA PARTY (BJP) suffered some setbacks in some states, the party also witnessed the lotus bloom in Odisha, a state where it is now the single-largest party in the Assembly with a majority as well as winning all but one seat in elections to Lok Sabha. In the results declared on Tuesday, June 4, BJP won 78 seats in the 147-member state Legislative Assembly, leaving the ruling Biju Janata Dal (BJD) at a distant second spot with 51 seats. In the parliamentary contest, BJP won 20 of the 21 seats, leaving Congress with one.

This is a historic change in Odisha where Naveen Patnaik was at the helm as chief minister for 24 years from 2000 until

Wednesday, June 5, when he resigned. This is a stunning reversal of fortunes for BJD and Patnaik in particular. Patnaik lost from the Kantabanji Assembly constituency at the hands of BJP's Laxman Bag with a margin of 16,344 votes. Patnaik had contested from two seats, Kantabanji and from Hinjili in Ganjam district, which he won. But even this victory came with a greatly reduced margin. This time, Patnaik won the seat by a margin of just 4,636 votes compared to 2019 when he had won the seat by a margin of 94,065 votes.

Patnaik's choice of Kantabanji was dictated by a strategy designed to limit BJP's influence in the party's stronghold of western Odisha. To an extent, the strategy paid off: in six seats in

the region—Padampur, Nuapada, Khariar, Junagarh, Lanjigarh and Dabugam—BJD prevailed. It is interesting to note that while BJD won these seats, at the parliamentary level, the same voters defeated the party. BJP won all the Lok Sabha seats under which these Assembly segments fall. BJD's western Odisha strategy was like the proverbial winning of a battle to lose the war. It's not just the chief minister who lost from Kantabanji but if one looks at the electoral map of Odisha, the state is awash with saffron from Rairangpur in its extreme north-eastern periphery bordering Jharkhand all the way to Malkangiri Assembly constituency in the southeast bordering Chhattisgarh and Andhra Pradesh. It is only in patches in between that BJD has managed to hold on.

One reason for BJP's victory was strategic; another was the fatigue of Odisha's voters with almost a quarter-century run of BJD in power. When the 2024 campaign kicked off earlier this year, there were signs that BJD and BJP might decide to ally with each other. But the idea was discarded very quickly. For one, it was not acceptable to the workers of the two respective parties and for another BJP's leadership had realised over time how unpopular BJD had become as a governing party.

from healthcare to education and from water supply to furthering economic opportunities, was found wanting. Like governments led by regional parties elsewhere, BJD tried to 'rebrand' many of the Central schemes, such as the one for distribution of food, but it did not work. The roadblocks in the way of fully implementing the Jal Jeevan Mission scheme that provides potable water also did not go down well with voters. In a state that is water-stressed and experiences extreme heat, this could have changed the quality of life for many people. But politics came in the way.

Andhra Pradesh gave another bit of good news to BJP. There, its alliance partner, the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), has emerged as the single-largest party and is now an important member of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA). After walking out of NDA in 2014 and spending a decade outside, TDP supremo N Chandrababu Naidu has clearly stated that his party will be a key member of the alliance. BJP has won three Lok Sabha seats from Andhra Pradesh and also has eight members in the new Assembly.

The one unnoticed trend was from Punjab where the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), which styled itself as a challenger to BJP, lost in its key stronghold, Malwa. Here, the party's four candidates,



Naveen Patnaik after resigning as chief minister, Bhubaneswar, June 5, 2024

THE ROADBLOCKS IN IMPLEMENTING THE CENTRE'S JAL JEEVAN MISSION SCHEME DID NOT GO DOWN WELL WITH BJD VOTERS. IN A STATE THAT IS WATER-STRESSED AND FACES EXTREME HEAT, THIS COULD HAVE CHANGED THE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR MANY. BUT POLITICS CAME IN THE WAY

This was in evidence, of all places, in Ganjam district that is home to Patnaik's Hinjili constituency as well as his former constituency, Aska. Of the 13 Assembly seats in the district, BJP won 11 and BJD only one, the chief minister's constituency. Anyone who is familiar with Odisha's economy would know the dire economic situation in Ganjam, one of the districts witnessing the highest level of migration for work in India. This was a blowback from the voters of the district who travel across the length and breadth of India and have seen development take root in different parts of the country in the past decade.

Reports from the grounds clearly indicated the electorate's disappointment with BJD. The delivery of virtually all public goods,

Gurmit Singh Khudian from Bathinda, Jagdeep Singh Kaka Brar from Ferozepur, Balbir Singh from Patiala, and Ashok Parashar Pappi from Ludhiana were trounced. AAP could win only one seat in Malwa, Sangrur, where its candidate Gurmeet Singh Meet Hayer, a minister in the Bhagwant Mann cabinet, won by a strong margin of 1,72,560 votes. The party's other two victories, in Hoshiarpur and Anandpur Sahib Lok Sabha constituencies, were outside its core area of strength. This picture stands in contrast to the stupendous scale of AAP's victory in the 2022 Assembly elections where it won 91 of the 117 seats, a majority of which came from the Malwa region that accounts for 69 of the 117 seats. It is here that the party won just one of the seven Lok Sabha seats.

Congress won four of these seven seats.

These results are reflective of three different trends that can be observed in Punjab and particularly in Malwa. One, the victories that AAP has secured are more in the nature of reaction and anger against the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) and not a positive vote for AAP. Two, SAD continues to be on a sticky wicket as it has managed to win only one seat, Bathinda, where Harsimrat Kaur Badal won. In every other constituency that SAD contested, it did not even get to the second position. This deep-seated anger against SAD is concentrated in Malwa but also prevails across the state.

The most important trend, one of importance at the national level, is that AAP is not quite the challenger to BJP that it once fancied itself as. The party contested 22 seats in Punjab, New Delhi, Haryana, Gujarat, and Assam. It won only three of these seats and failed to open its account in New Delhi, where it is the ruling party. In Gujarat, where it bargained hard for the Bharuch seat with Congress, its candidate lost by a margin of more than 85,000 votes to its nearest rival. This, after its sustained campaign in Gujarat for years on end. It has participated in elections across

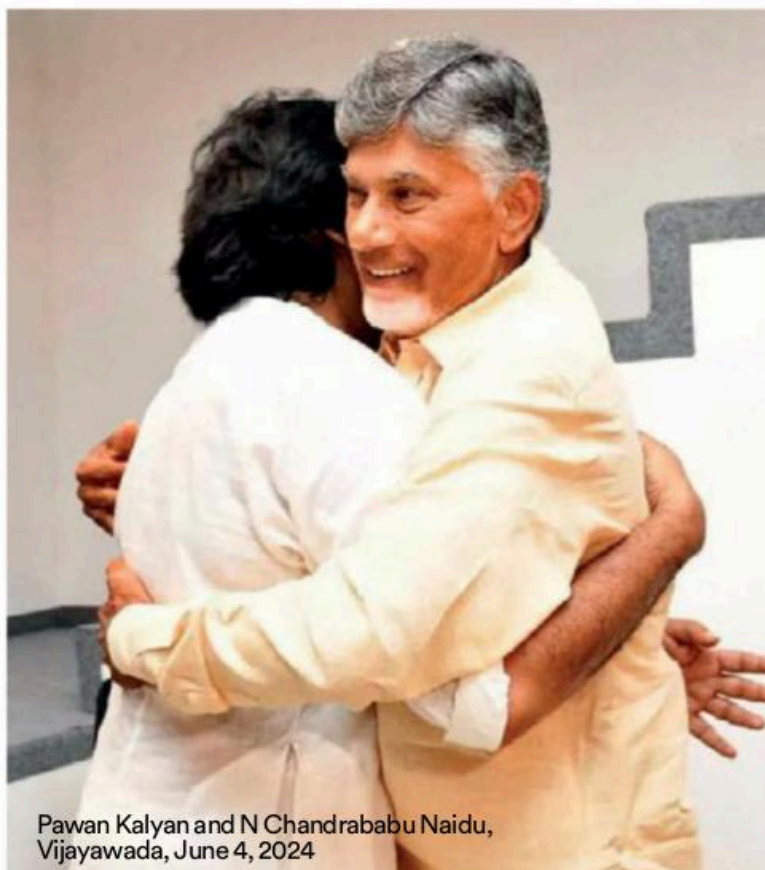
all levels in the state, from local bodies to Parliament. But it is yet to taste success. In Assam, where it contested from Dibrugarh and Sonitpur, the party lost these seats by margins of 5,55,898 and 7,42,740 votes, respectively.

AAP's huge geographic overreach—from New Delhi to Assam and from Punjab to Gujarat—speaks of its national ambitions but extremely limited reach. One major reason for its being checkmated in this ambition is its very nature. AAP began as an anti-system party but ended up cooperating with Congress, the very party against which it had raised its voice in the heady days of 2013 when it railed against corruption in the national capital. At that time and even later, AAP was thought of as a challenger to Congress and seen as an attractive and refurbished alternative to India's grand old party. In due course, this allowed AAP to imagine itself as a challenger to BJP. This was bolstered by its success in forming a government in Punjab in 2022. Since then, it has been delivered one rude shock after another across India. Its inability to win seats in Lok Sabha beyond its confines in Punjab testifies to those limitations. Even in Punjab, the party has been unable to meet the expectations of the electorate which remain elevated and beyond the means of a fiscally constrained government. Politically, AAP's challenge has come a cropper because of the very special set of circumstances in which it acquired power in Delhi and in Punjab. These factors are not replicated anywhere else in India.

The message that Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and Punjab convey to BJP is a positive one. For one, the party has expanded its footprint in Odisha from being a strong opposition party to the ruling party. Its victory in both the Assembly and Lok Sabha elections gives weight to the fact that BJP is now a party represented in almost all Indian states and Union territories. It also demolishes the pernicious claim that there is a North-South divide and that BJP is 'weak' in the state that abuts India's eastern seaboard. If anything, at one time, BJP had a very limited presence in the stretch of territory from Tamil Nadu to West Bengal. That has changed rapidly in recent years and even more on June 4. A similar story comes out of Andhra Pradesh where BJP now has three MPs. The party had three MPs from the state in 2014, a tally that went down to zero in 2019, and it has now scored once again. It also has eight members in the new Assembly and will be a partner in the coalition government with TDP and the Jana Sena Party (JNP).

The same message comes through from the travails of AAP. It is certainly not a challenger to BJP, if it ever was one on the ground. But its shock defeat in 19 out of 22 seats it contested highlights one important fact: India has no need for anti-system parties. Pan-India politics is characterised by high-entry barriers for individuals and parties. But unlike Western democracies, where voters are disillusioned and political parties are atrophying, India is a robust, vibrant and noisy democracy. The party-system in India is the very opposite of what prevails in the West: it is well-oiled and regularly delivers clear verdicts at all levels, from local bodies all the way to Parliament. In the last decade, there has been no logjam at any legislative level. This leaves very little room for anti-system parties like AAP. That is the message from the 2024 parliamentary election. ■

BJP'S ALLY, THE CHANDRABABU NAIDU-LED TDP, HAS EMERGED AS THE SINGLE-LARGEST PARTY IN ANDHRA PRADESH AND IS NOW AN IMPORTANT MEMBER OF NDA. BJP HAS WON THREE LOK SABHA SEATS FROM THE STATE AND ALSO HAS EIGHT MEMBERS IN THE NEW ASSEMBLY



Pawan Kalyan and N Chandrababu Naidu, Vijayawada, June 4, 2024



Suresh Gopi, BJP's victorious candidate in Thrissur, Kerala, June 4, 2024

More Newspaper and Magazines Telegram Channel join Search https://t.me/Magazines_8890050582 (@Magazines_8890050582)

RISING IN THE SOUTH

NDA makes massive inroads into Andhra Pradesh and Telangana and opens its account in Kerala

By V SHOBA

WITH SOUTH INDIA contributing over 50 Lok Sabha seats to the National Democratic Alliance's (NDA) tally of 294, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's consistent focus on Kerala, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, and Karnataka in the run-up to the General Election has not gone in vain. Of these, 21 parliamentary seats came from Andhra Pradesh, where the N Chandrababu Naidu-led Telugu Desam Party (TDP) made a spectacular comeback, leading the NDA alliance to a historic sweep. TDP, BJP, and actor-politician Pawan Kalyan-led JanaSena Party (JSP) also bagged 164 Assembly seats in a House

of 175, routing the YS Jagan Mohan Reddy-led Yuva Jana Sramika Rythu Congress Party (YSRCP). YSRCP managed to win just four of the 25 Lok Sabha seats, in a reversal of the 2019 verdict where it had coasted to victory with 22 seats, leaving TDP with just three. This time round, TDP has in fact improved on its performance in 2014, when it had won 15 seats, with YSRCP winning eight and BJP two. TDP's 16 Lok Sabha seats—along with BJP's three seats and JSP's two—have proved to be crucial to NDA, which is all set to form the government for the third consecutive term.

Karnataka, BJP's gateway to the south, has reliably given the party 17 seats out of a total of 28 Lok Sabha constituencies in the state, with its alliance partner Janata Dal (Secular) winning two. "The people of Karnataka have clearly shown their trust in

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's performance over Congress' promises," said state BJP President BY Vijayendra in a statement to the media on results day. "Despite the Congress party's grand displays, evident misuse of power, and their guarantees campaign, the BJP-JD(S) alliance has won 19 seats. There is no reason for the Congress chief minister or any of their ministers to celebrate in Karnataka," he said. BJP insiders say the party had hoped to win 21-22 seats, including Chikkodi and Bidar, where its veteran candidates lost to 20-somethings Priyanka Jarkiholi and Sagar Khandre. Hailing from political families, the two winners from Congress are among the youngest people to enter Parliament this time. In Raichur (ST), BJP's incumbent MP Raja Amareshwar Naik lost to G Kumar Naik, a former IAS officer who made his political debut on a Congress ticket. BJP retained its hold over the coastal belt, Bengaluru, and Mumbai Karnataka (with the exception of Chikkodi), with Congress sweeping the Hyderabad Karnataka region. In fact, five out of its tally of nine seats—Bidar, Kalaburagi, Raichur, Koppal, and Ballari—came from the region, also known as Kalyana Karnataka, in a boost to All India Congress Committee President Mallikarjun Kharge, who hails from Kalaburagi. "It is a poor and arid region that has benefited the most from the Congress' guarantees. We were sure we would do well. We had hoped to win some seats in the Old Mysore region but we had to face some surprise losses," says BNagendra, the state's Scheduled Tribes welfare minister, speaking to *Open*. The Ballari (ST) MLA, who has come under fire for a scam linked to the death of an accounts superintendent from the Karnataka Maharshi Valmiki Scheduled Tribes Development Corporation, is said to have ensured the defeat of BJP's ST strongman BSriramulu, the incumbent MP from Ballari.

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, while admitting that the party's performance in the state was not as expected, thanked party workers and voters for the big improvement in the party's Lok Sabha seats tally compared to 2019. "In 2019, we had won only one seat but this time, we got nine. Our vote share is 45.34 per cent, not even one percent less than BJP's vote share of 46.04 per cent," he said. This is not the first time Siddaramaiah has presided over a middling performance by Congress in the Lok Sabha polls. In fact, there is a sense of déjà vu in the state, which had delivered the exact same verdict in 2014, during his first term as chief minister. Karnataka, which has steadfastly backed BJP in the General Elections even while it wasn't the ruling party in the state, has now returned to the status quo of 2014 after delivering a landslide win to the saffron party in the 2019 polls. "BJP peaked in the state in 2019. Now, they can only lose seats. Perhaps they could have won one or two more seats had they picked the right candidates," says Vinayak Bhat Muroor, editor of the nationalist Kannada daily *Hosadigantha*.

KARNATAKA, BJP'S GATEWAY TO THE SOUTH, HAS RELIABLY GIVEN THE PARTY 17 SEATS. IN TELANGANA, IT HAS TIED WITH CONGRESS AT EIGHT. WITH ANDHRA, NDA HAS PRESIDED OVER THE DECIMATION OF TWO REGIONAL PARTIES



GETTY IMAGES

While it is true that BJP's vote share has fallen sharply from 51.38 per cent in 2019 and JD(S) from 9.67 per cent to 5.72 per cent, the alliance has worked well on the ground to effect a consolidation of Lingayat and Vokkaliga votes. Lingayats, a dominant community that has traditionally been with BJP, have continued to back the party after the appointment of former Chief Minister BS Yediyurappa's son, Vijayendra, as state president. The party's drubbing in the 2023 Assembly polls is attributed partly to a negative reaction by Lingayats to Yediyurappa's marginalisation within the party. Vokkaligas, the other dominant community in the state, have demonstrated a near-unshakeable faith in

JD(S) despite party scion Prajwal Revanna's arrest in an alleged sex scandal, with state President HD Kumaraswamy winning by 2.8 lakh votes from Mandya, where his son had lost in the last elections. Party chief and former Prime Minister HD Deve Gowda's son-in-law CN Manjunath, a cardiologist of repute, unseated DK Suresh, brother of Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, in the latter's supposed pocket borough of Bangalore Rural, winning by over 2.7 lakh votes. NDA's sweep of the Vokkaliga heartland—Bangalore Rural, Tumkur, Kolar, Chikkaballapur, Mandya, and



A BJP celebration in Bengaluru, June 4, 2024
 More Newspaper and Magazines Telegram Channel join Search https://t.me/Magazines_8890050582 (@Magazines_8890050582)

Mysore—and his own brother's loss have come as a setback for Shivakumar, who has worked to build a Vokkaliga vote base for Congress. "The seamless vote transfer from JD(S) to BJP in seats like Mysore, Chitradurga, and Chikkaballapur has really helped the alliance surge ahead," says senior JD(S) leader GT Deve Gowda. "A large section of society that has been critical of Congress' guarantees has voted for us," he adds. The regional party is said to be expecting at least one if not two, ministerial berths.

IN NEIGHBOURING TELANGANA, where BJP's meteoric rise has come at the cost of K Chandrashekar Rao's Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS), it has tied with the ruling Congress. Both parties won eight seats each, with the All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM)'s Asaduddin Owaisi bagging Hyderabad. BJP retained Adilabad, Karimnagar, Nizamabad, and Secunderabad, the four parliamentary seats it had won in 2019, also emerging victorious in four more—Mahbubnagar, Malkajgiri, Chevella and Medak. While Congress improved upon its tally of three seats in 2019, BRS had to contend with a crushing defeat for the second time in a year—after winning just 39 of the 119 Assembly seats in 2023—and secured third place in over a dozen constituencies. Adding insult to injury, the ruling Congress has wrested the Secunderabad Cantonment Assembly seat from BRS in the by-election held simultaneously with the Lok Sabha elections. "With

Congress securing 40.1 per cent of the votes, followed by BJP with 34.9 per cent, BRS has lost its right to call itself the main Opposition party," says Etela Rajender, the former BRS leader who won the Malkajgiri seat on a BJP ticket, speaking to *Open*. While Congress has retained its vote share—it had polled 39.4 per cent votes in the 2023 Assembly elections, winning 64 seats—BRS, which had secured 37.3 per cent of the votes last year, has been reduced to 16.7 per cent now. BRS' votes have shifted en masse to BJP, which has tripled its vote share from just 13.9 per cent last year. "This is BJP's fastest rise in any southern state," says Rajender, who won by a margin of 3.91 lakh votes from Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy's former constituency. "It is only a matter of time before BJP replaces Congress too. People have already realised that the party has not implemented even 10 per cent of the guarantees it promised to deliver within 100 days of coming to power." Rajender had lost the Assembly polls from Huzurabad and Gajwel in 2023. MRaghunandan Rao, who had lost the Assembly polls from Dubbaka, won the Medak Lok Sabha seat and successfully broke into one of BRS' fortresses.

With this, NDA has presided over the decimation of not one but two regional parties in South India. Not too long ago, both YSRCP and BRS enjoyed massive mandates in their respective states, but they have now been reduced to being distant thirds. With BJP firmly establishing itself in the Telugu states—it had drawn a blank in Andhra Pradesh in 2019 and won four seats in Telangana—the notion of the north-south divide seems to have vanished. After all, a 'North Indian party' could not have won the Thrissur seat in Kerala, opening its account in the state after a long wait. Actor-turned-politician Suresh Gopi's victory in a constituency with nearly 50 per cent minority votes is doubly significant for BJP because it has come despite the Congress-led United Democratic Front's (UDF) near-clean sweep of the state for the second time. UDF has won 18 of 20 Lok Sabha seats this time, one less than its tally in 2019.

The Dravidian citadel of Tamil Nadu, however, seems to be impenetrable by the saffron party, which had predicted a dharma renaissance in the state and tasked its young state president K Annamalai with winning several seats and boosting the party's vote share in the state. However, not only BJP, but its alliance partners AIADMK and PMK, too, came cropper as the ruling Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK)-led alliance swept all 39 seats. Annamalai lost from the Coimbatore Lok Sabha seat by a margin of over one lakh votes in a verdict that is sure to have shocked party seniors in Delhi who had reposed faith in his dynamic leadership. BJP had won the Kanniyakumari seat in the 2014 elections, but drew a blank in 2019, with its vote share falling from 5.5 per cent to 3.66 per cent. This time round, BJP's vote share has shot up to double digits—a long-time dream for the party. With over 11 per cent of the votes, BJP has in fact outperformed Congress, which secured 10.80 per cent. Congress, however, won all nine seats that it contested. Of the 23 constituencies contested by BJP, it came second in nine—Coimbatore, Nilgiris, Chennai South, Chennai Central, Tirunelveli, Kanniyakumari, Tiruvallur, Vellore, and Madurai—in what is a major boost for the national party. ■

STAR AND STRIDES

Kani Kusruti enjoys the national limelight with work across Hindi, Malayalam and Tamil capped with a performance feted at the Cannes Film Festival

By Kaverie Bamzai

More Newspaper and Magazines Telegram Channel join Search https://t.me/Magazines_8890050582 (@Magazines_8890050582)



WHEN KANI KUSRUTI walked the red carpet at the Cannes Film Festival in May, for Payal Kapadia's Grand Prix winning *All We*

Imagine as Light, in many ways it was a homecoming. Kusruti has not only studied theatre in France, at the L'École Internationale de Théâtre Jacques Lecoq in Paris (now in Avignon), but also worked with the experimental theatre company, Footsbarn. "I had no money as a student. It was one of the hardest times of my life. But it was also an amazing learning experience. I felt if I could survive there I could survive anywhere," she says.

Paris is like her second home. "I know the streets so well, and once I started with Footsbarn and started earning, France was more enjoyable," she adds.

In between, she came back to Kerala in 2009 to do a few movies, such as the anthology *Kerala Cafe* in 2009, but returned to Paris with Footsbarn in 2011.

She dropped all the films she was planning to do, until she finally came back to Kerala for good, with the idea of offering everything she had learnt back to her country and its people.

She did a few movies for money, she says quite calmly, not all, but over the years has built an impressive body of work, not the least of which is *All We Imagine as Light*. "It was amazing to collaborate with Payal who has so much empathy and understanding for the entire crew," she says.

Kusruti is one of a new wave of female actors who are slipping in and out of industries with ease. Much like Parvathy Thiruvothu, Nimisha Sajayan, and Darshana Rajendran, she is in a Hindi web series one moment, a Malayalam web series next, and in a Tamil film another moment. In the last three years alone, audiences have seen her play the strict Kaveri, an IAS officer on deputation to Bihar's first woman chief minister (played by Huma Qureshi) in three seasons of *Maharani* on SonyLIV. She has been the



More Newspaper and Magazines Telegram Channel join Search https://t.me/Magazines_8890050582 (@Magazines_8890050582)

**“I HAVE NO STYLE
AS SUCH. I DON’T
FOLLOW ANY
FASHION, I WEAR
WHATEVER I FEEL
THAT DAY”**

KANI KUSRUTI actor

Kani Kusruti

tough, no nonsense enforcement officer, Dina, in Richie Mehta's powerful web series *Poacher*; the Kalaripayattu-trained girlfriend in Abhishek Chaubey's *Killer Soup*; and as the mother who develops conflicting emotions for her daughter's boyfriend in Shuchi Talati's *Girls will be Girls* which won the Audience Award in the World Cinema Dramatic category at the Sundance Film Festival in 2024.

Kusruti's unusual career has a lot to do with her special childhood in Thiruvananthapuram. Brought up by writer, activist and photographer Maitreya Maitreya and community medicine specialist doctor Jayashree AK, she changed her surname to Kusruti (meaning mischief) just before her Class 10 board exams. She says she hadn't noticed earlier that she was brought up differently from her classmates but realised slowly that her parents gave her freedom but also responsibility. "I was brought up with a lot of love and care. My parents gave me a mind and conscience. I know how to take responsibility for my own actions and I do think deeply about what is right or wrong, I was always transparent with them. I never lied to them about anything unlike my friends whom I noticed often hid the truth from their parents. My parents and I grew up together. I love my childhood so much I want to relive it, I cherish the relationship I have with them and the love they have given me," she says.

IT'S A LOVE she found with one-time partner and forever friend Anand Gandhi, storyteller and founder of Memesys Culture Lab, Goa. "We connected through Facebook. He came for the Kochi Biennale and we understood there was a lot of art and culture we had in common. We realised though we had had different life journeys, the travel had brought us to the same point in how we viewed things," she says. She was also part of the group of filmmakers and storytellers who live and work together in Goa.

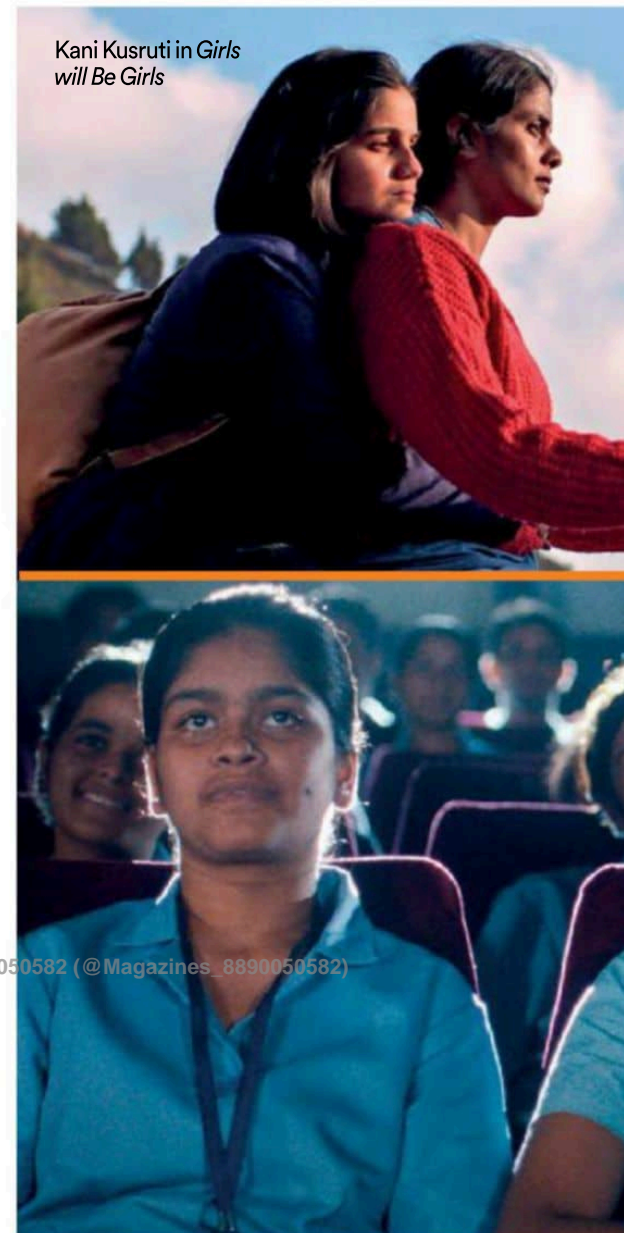
"The difference of opinion is great. I love it when we disagree. We grow exponentially when we have a peer group like Anand, Shreya Dudheria, Khushboo Ranka, Vinay Shukla, and Zain Memon," she says.

Kusruti has developed an unusual style of working, which includes a mix of influences, from the physical theatre she learnt at theatre school in Paris, evident in her comic character in Memesys Lab's *OK Computer* (2021), to the more serious, internalised character of Prabha, a woman who has been abandoned by her husband, in *All We Imagine as Light*.

Qureshi, who has worked with her in *Maharani* across three seasons, says Kusruti makes her process seem so easy and light. "Kani is lovely and I am so proud she is having such a stellar year. She brings so much grace to every part she plays. She is so unassuming about her process. She is one of those rare actors who doesn't want close-ups. She gets shy about it, I think. She cares about the larger picture, not just her part in it. She carries her talent so lightly. It also helps that she is a total nut job and that we can talk and laugh for hours," says Qureshi.

Kusruti's sensibility is also deeply shaped by her native state, Kerala, and the ideas her parents exposed her to. Footsbarn, for instance, first came into her life when her father took her to a workshop they were doing in Thiruvananthapuram with the Abhinaya Theatre Group. She was all of eight or ten. "I didn't even know what I was getting into, but when I was 15, there was a theatre group, friends of my parents. They asked if I was interested in acting. My mother asked me to check it out. I went with a lot of hesitation, but I was excited by their way of working and the mix of comedy, slapstick and dance," she says. It took a long time for her to start liking it. She went to a theatre school in Thrissur but dropped out and went to Paris as she wanted to learn physical theatre and puppetry.

Years later, she travelled with Footsbarn all over Europe performing



"MY PARENTS GAVE ME A RESPONSIBILITY FOR MY IS RIG

Shakespeare's *Tempest*, from Portugal to England to Ireland to France, where her lines were in French.

She has often played women on the edge, either of an emotional breakdown, or caught up in trying to become something else. Sometimes it can be a mix of both as in *Biriyaani*, her 2020 Malayalam movie, where she played Khadeeja, a divorced woman who is trying hard to find economic independence and sexual pleasure in a deeply conservative culture, a theme she had explored in the short, *Counterfeit Kunkoo* (2018), directed by Reema Sengupta.



In *Maharani*

In *All We Imagine as Light*

More Newspaper and Magazines Telegram Channel join Search https://t.me/Magazines_8890050582 (@Magazines_8890050582)

MIND AND CONSCIENCE. I KNOW HOW TO TAKE OWN ACTIONS AND I DO THINK DEEPLY ABOUT WHAT HT OR WRONG” KANI KUSRUTI

In *Vazhakku* (2022), she is a speech-challenged woman who is running away with her daughter from an abusive husband, whereas in *Nishiddho* (2022), she plays a Tamil midwife who lives a thoroughly independent life.

Her most iconic roles have been of women navigating their way through tough circumstances, not always knowing what to do, but trusting their instincts. For instance, in *Killer Soup*, as Kirtima, she is just another girl trying hard to make a life for herself, whereas in *Girls will Be Girls*, as Anila, her sexual awakening, as a young mother, tends

to mirror that of her daughter’s. Kusruti has never shied away from showing pleasure onscreen, whether it is in *Biriyaani* or in *Counterfeit Kunkoo*. Says Santosh Sivan, who directed her in *Urumi* (2011), in the early phase of her career, and in the Telugu film *Spyder* (2017), she has the capacity of “always surprising you”.

Of late, especially after her appearances at Cannes, she has emerged as a made-in-Kerala style icon, being the muse of long-time friend Diya John who runs Salt Studio. From the watermelon clutch she carried on the red carpet to

the striped sari she wore, Kusruti was quite the favourite of photographers. “I have no style as such. I don’t follow any fashion, I wear whatever I feel that day,” she says, sounding shocked at the idea of being dressed up. “It is just that Diya is a friend and I like to support independent designers.”

Her work has filmmakers wanting to collaborate with her. Says filmmaker Kamal KM, “I wanted to work with Kani in my diploma film at FTII. When Kani visited Pune, I narrated the script of *Vadhakramam*. At the end of the narration she started crying. It took a few moments for me to understand it was the story that made her cry. She told me that she can’t do the film. She wept and explained that she doesn’t want to act in films. I consoled her by saying that the story was so tragic that it was difficult for me as well. We have been friends since. Yes, later we laughed about it.” He adds that the director is relieved when the actor takes responsibility, both spiritual and physical, of a character in the given space of the scene. “Kani is such a gifted and sensitive person. We worked together in *Pada* (2022) and it was memorable. I am looking forward to the next one with her,” he adds.

She pours all her experiences into her work, of which she has plenty now. There is *Ek Ruka Hua Faisla*, a Hindi film, *Madhuvidhu*, a Malayalam web series, and another that she is shooting right now directed by Manu Ashokan. Then there is a Tamil film, a Malayalam film and a Hindi series. Will things change after Cannes? She is not so sure, and perhaps doesn’t really care. All she knows is she is trying to connect with everyone who has reached out to her, for work, or interviews, even as she is amid new projects. Unlike even minor actors, she doesn’t have a manager or publicist, answers her own calls, and responds dutifully to everyone.

She loves her solitude. “I crave it. I enjoy it when I am solitary but not lonely. But travel is something I am anxious about.” With places to go, it will be something she will get over soon enough. ■



Rakesh Thakore, Kevin Nigli
and David Abraham



The local-yet-global reinvention of Abraham & Thakore

By Varun Rana

THERE ARE TWO main reasons that the fashion label Abraham & Thakore has been able to reinvent itself almost entirely over the past two years. First, that since its launch in 1992, the designers—David Abraham and Rakesh Thakore, who graduated from NID, Ahmedabad, and NIFT-educated Kevin Nigli, who joined them soon after—have kept their offerings squarely in the ready-to-wear space for over 30 years, even though they designed and sold artisanal pieces for premium rates at the same time. A good example would be the ikat-houndstooth sari from their Autumn-Winter 2011-12 collection, which was snapped up by the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) as part of its permanent archives. The second is their just-over-two-years-old partnership with Reliance Brands Limited (RBL), which seems to have fired up the engines with new product lines like bed linen, scented candles, tableware, handwoven art, and even furniture now available and showcased at their flagship store in Delhi's Defence Colony, which opened recently.

A&T, as they're known more familiarly within the fashion industry, have opened five new stores in the past one year alone, with another slated to open in Hyderabad's Banjara Hills in the second half of this year. This is a marked difference from their beginnings, when it took them over 15 years, and the economic downturn of 2008, to finally participate in fashion week in 2010 (where they received a standing ovation; I was there) in a bid to capture the local market as global orders dried up for Asian designers across categories. Before that, a chunk of their business came from European and American retailers.

October 2022 marked their first fashion show in Mumbai, in partnership with RBL. And the lineup seemed both super fresh and mindlessly, beautifully obvious. It was A&T that we all wanted to wear, and now, could afford as well. There were easy-to-wear, nightgown-like digitally printed separates for everyone, as well as oversized leaf-patterned handwoven silk ikats from Odisha in the form of saris and jackets. There were embroidered shirts, as well as slinky tunics with shimmering sequins that wouldn't be out of place at a nighttime hotspot away from prying parents' eyes. And even a co-ord set digitally

“THERE WAS A CERTAIN OVERLAP BETWEEN US AS RAJESH PRATAP SINGH WOUND UP HIS OPERATIONS AT SATYA PAUL, AND THAT WAS VERY USEFUL ”

Rakesh Thakore designer

printed with a texture of raw, slubby khadi. Clever.

To those habituated to the usually limited lifespans of designer garments, A&T's remain as good as new after every machine wash. (Yes, machine wash.) Their daring focus on prints and digital patterns, inspired by their long association with the art of textile design, has changed their game, whether we realise it or wait to. Available at relatively affordable four-figure prices in the form of wearable separates, their design vocabulary is reaching an economically wider and more age-diverse segment of the population, giving the designers' work a platform no fashion week or event can match up to. By itself, this is unique; usually, it's the all-important fashion show that is any designer's best moment in the spotlight.

In terms of design output, A&T's lineup seems by far the most comprehensive and lifestyle oriented amongst all the Indian RTW (ready-to-wear) brands at Reliance Brands Limited. But how did this quiet, respected, reticent textile-based fashion label become such a strong proposition in a market where no other RTW brand has shown that kind of commercial fillip?

To answer this, we must look at RBL, founded in 2007, which has, over the years, invested in big names like Abu Jani Sandeep Khosla, ak ok (a ready-to-wear label by Kolkata-based designer Anamika Khanna, launched in 2019), Manish Malhotra, Raghavendra Rathore, Ritu Kumar, Satya Paul, and Rahul Mishra. And none of these are really known for their ready-to-wear.

RBL's involvement with A&T's operations began in March 2022. Since then, they've expanded fast. "A little too fast," laughs Rakesh Thakore, "but in a good, thought-out way." What's slightly surprising is that it was the designers who approached Darshan Mehta, president and CEO of RBL, to explore the possibilities of alignment at the end of 2019. "We looked at how the company was handling the luxury brands that came to them via Genesis Luxury, like Ermenegildo Zegna and Bottega Veneta," adds Abraham, alluding to RBL's periodic investments in that company since 2018.

What's interesting here is that they considered RBL's track record with Italian luxury brands as the standard, while theirs has always been a RTW label. "I wouldn't focus too much on the word 'luxury'," interjects Abraham, "but consider how brands like Zegna and Bottega have always been slightly difficult to understand"—an unfortunate side-effect of being 'quiet' and craft-focused in today's world; of being "brands that don't have flashy logos emblazoned across their designs," in Thakore's words.

Then came 2020, and the coronavirus pandemic dampened their conversation with RBL for just over a year. But it didn't take long for it to begin anew. In March 2022, with their partnership announced, work began in earnest. This included a complete overhaul of their design studio in Noida, new hires to fill both A&T's internal as well as bridge positions liaising with the new investors, and the announcement of their first fashion show as a Reliance brand at the fashion week in Mumbai, in October 2022.

In 2020, their close friend, designer Rajesh Pratap Singh,



Laser-cut
saris by Abraham
& Thakore

More Newspaper and Magazines Telegram Channel join Search https://t.me/Magazines_8890050582 (@Magazines_8890050582)

“REIMAGINING THE SARI THE WAY HE DID, IT’S WHAT I THINK THAT THIS ATTITUDE IS THE REAL POINT OF CUES LIKE HEAVY EMBROIDERIES OR WILD, CO

had taken over the house of Satya Paul (SP) (founded in 1985). SP was India's first design label to disrupt the sari space. "Going back to when Satya Paul began, in the 1980s the sari was considered somewhat sacrosanct," says Abraham. It was the time of textile doyennes like Kamala Devi Chattopadhyay and Pupul Jayakar, and the sari had to be protected and nurtured in all its traditional, artisanal forms. "Then came Mr. Paul, questioning the status quo and breaking it down." And 35 years later, with Rajesh Pratap Singh in the designer's chair, SP had come back into the visible spectrum of Indian fashion labels, especially with its shows regularly featured on the fashion week calendar once the event made a comeback post-Covid. After four years, and with his last show for SP in April, Rajesh handed over the reins to Abraham, Thakore, and Nigli, the new creative directors of Satya Paul. "There was a certain overlap between us as Rajesh wound up his operations here, and that was very useful," says Thakore.

In the two months since the announcement, Abraham says they've had the chance to delve deep into the SP archives with Rajesh Pratap Singh, and found that the way Satya Paul thought and worked matches their own ethos. "Reimagining the sari the way he did," says Abraham, "...it's what we do. Even



Houndstooth
sari by Abraham
& Thakore

More Newspaper and Magazines Telegram Channel join Search https://t.me/Magazines_8890050582 (@Magazines_8890050582)

WE DO. EVEN IF IT'S IN OUR OWN, QUIET WAY. SIMILARITY WITH SATYA PAUL, NOT JUST VISUAL LOURFUL PRINTS" David Abraham designer

if it's in our own, quiet way. I think that this attitude is the real point of similarity, not just visual cues like heavy embroideries or wild, colourful prints."

SO, WHAT KINDS of garments do they plan to design for Satya Paul? How many saris in the lineup? Printed separates? What about the brand's emblematic ties and pocket squares for men? Abraham, Thakore, and Nigli do not plan to commit to any seismic shifts immediately. "In our experience, design takes its time to evolve," says Abraham. "And we have the brand's existing customers to care for, too," adds Nigli. "Satya Paul is colour, pattern...it's very noticeable. And even Rajesh worked with this signature in his own way. We're going to find our take." Abraham adds that "there is a brand language that speaks to SP's customers, and we can't ignore that. You can bring your own voice to the idiom, but you still have to respect it and speak it."

The fact that they knew Satya Paul (who died in 2021) decades before his design responsibilities came to them also helps. Because right now, they're focused on getting the first collection out and into Satya Paul's 13 stores across five cities

nationwide. After that, it'll take a minimum of six months for the analysis of the retail data and other market metrics to get back to them, totalling up to a full year, conservatively, before they get any real analysis of how effective their efforts have been. And that conservatism, perhaps, serves a reason.

In a marketplace where the need for constant assurance on retail predictions forces designers to make increasingly quicker and (hopefully) predictive design and production decisions, Abraham, Thakore, and Nigli have had years of experience managing those expectations—first within, and then in the markets. What's the worst any critic can hit them with? That they take too much time? In today's world, that's possibly the greatest flex any brand or designer can claim. Besides, labels like A&T and Satya Paul can and should spend more time making fewer designs, focusing on quality and wearability over brute numbers in a carousel of quick collections that spend only a few weeks in stores and even fewer in clients' wardrobes.

The real question is, will what worked for A&T also translate well for a brand like Satya Paul? For the designers, this query can be answered through the product mix that developed at Satya Paul over the past few years—especially with the more recent design interventions of Rajesh Pratap Singh, who gave the label a hefty lineup of separates aimed at a younger crowd, designed and priced for that section. Abraham, Thakore, and Nigli it seems, plan to continue that push, perhaps realising that label SP's former push into embellished haute couture dresses and heavy, bridal lehengas was a dream best left in the past, where it belongs. "But even though Satya Paul is known mostly for its prints, we will still indulge in some embellished styles," adds Abraham.

The creative fit aside, there are other considerations to installing designers into creative roles at labels that have set their standards over decades. This is fairly new in India, where corporate investment in fashion brands is still a developing industry tactic, and inheriting design roles is still novel. Right now, there are only a few brands that aren't owned and/or still run by their founders. Apart from Satya Paul where 'external' creative directors have been a norm for over a decade, only Wendell Rodricks comes to mind. Even before the founder's passing in 2020, the label's design responsibilities had rested with Schulen Fernandes, his protégé, for about four years. But she exited the company unceremoniously barely a year after his passing and the acquisition of the label by Purple Style Labs. Apart from these two names, no others of note jump out. India's fashion labels, on the whole, are securely in the hands that nurtured them from their very beginnings.

With saris, ready-to-wear, accessories, home furnishings (a new category, which always seemed like a no-brainer given Satya Paul's mastery over colour and pattern) on Abraham, Thakore, and Nigli's list, one is not expecting any big shockers. But experiencing the expectation of a new design direction for an old fashion house is new to India. For that alone, it's worth the wait. ■

STARGAZER

KAVEREE BAMZAI

PATRALEKHA

SHABANA AZMI

TILLOTAMA SHOME

➤ Standing Up for Other Women

Tillotama Shome has emerged as the star of franchises, coming into *Delhi Crime* Season 2, the forthcoming second season of *Paatal Lok* and now *Kota Factory* Season 3. Shome says, "Making a show is always a battle, so coming into a show which works as a well-oiled machine and joining a team that has such camaraderie is always a joy. Especially with TVF [The Viral Fever, the makers of *Kota Factory*] which knows the struggle of engineering aspirants so well." She says she has observed the respect that the TVF team has in Kota where they shot Season 3. Shome adds that she knows the respect that students have for them, and also the way they have encouraged teachers to become like the mentors of the fictional Kota Factory. "Young people are the future of this country and yet there is such little investment in their well-being," she says. Not only was being on the set a huge validation for Shome but it also made her do her best. The last few years have been extraordinary for Shome, who has stunned the industry with her work in the movie *Sir* (2018), *Delhi Crime* Season 2 (2022), *The Night Manager* (2023) and *Lust Stories 2* (2023). She credits her pivot to the change in her approach. "I was so caught up in my self-doubt and my self-questioning that I forgot to build a safety net for myself. I had forgotten that you cannot be an artist without failure. But when one is younger, one doesn't realise it. I didn't realise how friends, family, my Buddhist practice, my sense of community now gives me tremendous power to

enrich my life," she says. As does her embroidery, her gardening, her love of beautiful things. She realises now that what enables one to walk long distance are people. "There are many women I haven't held up, many I haven't held close. I am trying now to be less worried about myself and my career. Now I call someone if their work inspires me or shout to someone who I find outstanding," she says. And indeed she continues to attract great work, whether it is the thriller series *For Your Eyes Only* or a forthcoming Bengali film.

➤ Patralekhaa's Time Has Come

When she saw her father, a man who lived and breathed his work, lying on his bed, lifeless, Patralekhaa realised how wrong she had been in beating herself up for not having done more work. "I decided I would not be so harsh on myself," says Patralekhaa, the actor who completes 10 years in the film industry this year. Coincidentally, the tragedy also marked the beginning of the busiest periods in her life, working on characters and stories that she felt aligned with. But even now when she remembers her father, who was always supportive of her work, she tears up. Patralekhaa says she has had years when she worked for a mere 10 days, and it was heartbreaking for her, especially after a striking debut in Hansal Mehta's *City Lights* (2014), where she played a fresh immigrant to Mumbai. Surprisingly despite rave reviews, the film didn't lend itself to work of the kind she was looking for, so she made the best

of what was on offer. Things have changed now, as she awaits a series of stellar performances, from Raj & DK's *Gulkanda Tales* (Prime Video), to Anubhav Sinha's film, *IC 814*, Simarpreet Singh's *Wild Wild Punjab*, Savitribai Phule's role in Ananth Mahadevan's *Phule*, to a thriller, *Suryast*, with Lara Dutta. With her delicate and fiery spirit, Patralekhaa brings an old-world charm to the industry, marking her out from cookie-cutter female actors. A childhood full of exposure to movies, music and dance, and a sense of style inherent in her ("Have you seen the people of my city Shillong?" she asks). Patralekhaa's talent will soon be in full bloom as her work finds a platform.

➤ Shabana@50

Even as the world celebrates the beautifully restored print of *Manthan*, another Shyam Benegal movie needs to be commemorated. *Ankur* (1974) was Shabana Azmi's debut 50 years ago. The actor, now 73, was in conversation with filmmaker Mira Nair, at the New York Indian Film Festival. In *Ankur*, Azmi plays Lakshmi, the wife of a hearing and speech-impaired villager. Lakshmi ends up sleeping with the landlord's son, played by Anant Nag. In a long and exceptional career, it is extraordinary that she continues to play lead roles, such as in the forthcoming *Bun Tikki* by Faraz Arif Ansari. And let's not forget she just played the second romantic lead to Dharmendra in Karan Johar's *Rocky Aur Rani kii Prem Kahaani*. ■

WHY JUST THE CORNER OFFICE? THE ENTIRE OFFICE SHOULD MAKE A STATEMENT.



Get your office **designed and delivered** with just a single click



One-stop
shop



Tech-enabled millions
of design options



Wide range of furniture,
décor and materials



Hassle-free,
on-time delivery

Our clients include:



 www.officebanao.com

 +91 8929399141

More Newspaper and Magazines Telegram Channel join Search https://t.me/Magazines_8890050582 (@Magazines_8890050582)

officebanao
make it easy

All Magazine Hindi English international magazine

Journalism (Indian)
India Today Frontline Open
India Legal Organiser The Caravan
Telhka Economic and Political Weekly The Caravan

Journalism (International)

Time The Week The New Yorker
The Atlantic Newsweek New York Magazine Foreign Affairs National Review
Money & Business

Forbes Harvard Business Review
Bloomberg Businessweek Business India Entrepreneur inc ET Wealth
Moneyweek CEO Magazine
Barron's Fortune International Financing Review Business Today
Outlook Money Shares Value Research Smart Investment
Dalal Street Investment Journal

Science, History & Environment

National Geographic National Geographic Kids New Scientist
Down to Earth Scientific American
Popular Science Astronomy
Smithsonian Net Geo History
Science Philosophy Now BBC Earth
BBC Wildlife BBC Science Focus
BBC History

Literature, Health & General
Interest

The Writer Publishers Weekly TLS
prevention OM Yoga Reader's Digest
The New York Review of Books
NYT Book Review Harper's Magazine The Critic Men's Health
Mens Fitness Women's Health
Womens Fitness Better Photography
Architectural Digest Writing Magazine Pratiyogita Darpan

Sport

Cricket Today The Cricketer
Wisden Cricket Monthly
Sports Illustrated World Soccer Tennis Sportstar FourFourTwo
Auto & Moto

Autocar India UK BBC TopGear
Bike Car

Tech

Wired PC Magazine Maximum PC
PCWorld Techlife News T3 uk India
DataQuest Computeractive
Popular Mechanics PC Gamer
Macworld Linux Format
MIT Technology Review

Fashion & Travel

Elle Vogue Cosmopolitan
Rolling Stone Variety Filmfare
GQ Esquire National Geographic Traveler Condé Nast Traveler
Outlook Traveller Harper's Bazaar
Empire

Comics
Tinkle Indie Comics Image Comics
DC (Assorted) Marvel (Assorted)
Indie Comics Champak

Home & Food

Real Simple Better Homes and Gardens Cosmopolitan Home
Elle Decor Architectural Digest
Vogue Living Good Housekeeping
The Guardian feast The Observer Food Monthly Nat Geographic Traveller Food Food Network

Other Indian Magazines
The Economist
Mutual Fund Insight Wealth insight
Electronics For You Open Source For You Mathematics Today Biology Today Chemistry Today
Physics For You Woman Fitness
Grazia India Filmfare India
Rolling Stone India Outlook
Outlook Money Entertainment Updates Outlook Business
Open Investors India The Week India
Indian Management Fortune India
Scientific India India Today Brunch
Marwar India Champak Travel + Liesure India Business Traveller
Smart investment Forbes india
ET Wealth Vogue india Yojana
Kurukshetra EVO INDIA New India Samachar Small Enterprise India
Voice & Data

हन्दी मैगजीन

समय पत्रिका साधनापथगु हलकषमी उदयइंडिया नरिंगधाम मॉडर्न खेतीइंडिया टुडेदेवपुत्र
क्रिकेट टुडेगु हथोभा अर्नाखीहनिदुस्तानमुक्ता सरति चंपकप्रतियोगिता दरपण सकसेसमरि
सामान्य ज्ञान दरपण फारम एवं फूडमनोहर कहानियां सत्यकथा सरस सललि स्वतंत्र वार्ता लाजवाब आउटलुकसच्ची शकिषावनति
मायापुरी रूपायन उजाला ऋषि पिरसाद जोश रोजगार समाचार जोश करंट अफेयर्स जोश सामान्य ज्ञान जोश बैंकिंग और एएसएससी
इंडिया बुक ऑफरकिरइसप्रक् तमिल
राजस्थान रोजगार संदेश राजस्थान सूजससखी जागरण अहा! जदिगी बालभास्कर योजना कुरकषैत्
More.....

More Newspaper and Magazines Telegram Channel join Search https://t.me/Magazines_8890050582

Send me message Telegram

Ya WhatsApp

M.....8890050582

Click here magazines Telegram group

https://t.me/Magazines_8890050582

More Newspaper and Magazines Telegram Channel join Search https://t.me/Magazines_8890050582 (@Magazines_8890050582)

📰 GET ALL FAST UPDATE OF ALL HINDI ENGLISH MAGAZINE JOIN OUR TELEGRAM CHANNEL.

Frontline,SportStar,Business India,Banking Finance,Cricket Today,Mutual Fund Insight,Wealth insight,Indian Economy & Market,The Insurance Times,Electronics For You,Open Source For You,Mathematics Today,Biology Today,Chemistry Today,Physics For You,Business Today,Woman Fitness India,Grazia India,Filmfare India,Femina India,India Legal,Rolling Stone India,Bombay Filmfare,Outlook,Outlook Money,Careers 360,Outlook Traveller,India Strategic,Entertainment Updates,Outlook Business,Open,Investors India,Law Teller,Global Movie,The Week India,Indian Management,Fortune India,Dalal Street Investment Journal,Scientific India,India Today,HT Brunch,Yoga and Total Health,BW BusinessWorld,Leisure India Today,Down To Earth,Pratiyogita Darpan,Marwar India,Champak,Woman's Era,The Caravan,Travel Liesure India,Business Traveller,Rishi Prasad,Smart investment,Economic and political weekly,Forbes india,Health The Week, Josh Government JOBS,Josh Current Affairs,Josh General Knowledge,Electronic For You Express,Josh Banking And SSC,Highlights Genius,Highlights Champ,Global Spa,Bio Spectrum,Uday India,Spice India Today,India Business Journal,Conde Nast Traveller,AD Architectural Digest,Man's world,Smart Photography India,Banking Frontiers,Hashtag,India Book Of Records,ET Wealth,Vogue india,Yojana,Kurukshetra

📰 JOIN TELEGRAM CHANNEL 📰
📰 https://t.me/Magazines_8890050582

📰 हिन्दी मैगजीन 📰

समय पत्रिका,साधना पथ,गृहलक्ष्मी,उदय इंडिया,निरोगधाम,मॉडर्न खेती ,इंडिया टुडे,देवपुत्र,क्रिकेट टुडे,गृहशोभा,अनोखी हिन्दुस्तान,मुक्ता,सरिता,चंपक,प्रतियोगिता दर्पण,सक्सेस मिरर,सामान्य ज्ञान दर्पण,फार्म एवं फूड,मनोहर कहानियां,सत्यकथा,सरस सलिल,स्वतंत्र वार्ता लाजवाब,आउटलुक,सच्ची शिक्षा,वनिता,मायापुरी,इंडिया हेल्थ,रूपायन उजाला,ऋषि प्रसाद,जोश रोजगार समाचार,जोश करेंट अफेयर्स,जोश सामान्य ज्ञान,जोश बैंकिंग और एसएससी,इंडिया बुक ऑफ रिकॉर्ड्स,राजस्थान रोजगार संदेश,राजस्थान सूजस,सखी जागरण,अहा! जिंदगी,बाल भास्कर,योजना,कुरुक्षेत्र,हिन्दुस्तान जॉब्स

📰 JOIN TELEGRAM CHANNEL 📰
📰 https://t.me/English_Newspaper_Banna

Like other groups, this list is not just written, we will make these magazine available to you with 100% guarantee.

JOIN TELEGRAM CHANNEL
📰 https://t.me/Premium_Newspaper

You will get the updates of all these magazinesfirst in the premium group.

📰 JOIN BACKUP CHANNEL 📰
📰 https://t.me/Backup_8890050582

SEARCH ON TELEGRAM TO JOIN PREMIUM GROUP

📰 @Lalit712Bot

Contact 📰 — [8890050582](https://t.me/8890050582)

