

PM has lost credibility. He made huge promises... Recently, there have been many changes in the country... In April-May, a force will come into the country that will change the political scenario”



WHY DUSHYANT CHAUTALA

The Jind bypoll, slated for January 28, is a high-stakes political battle, with all major parties — the BJP, the Congress, the INLD and the newly formed Dushyant Chautala-led Jannayak Janata Party — fielding candidates. With only a few months to go for the Lok Sabha polls, the contest is also being seen as a crucial referendum on the

Haryana BJP government. Dushyant, 30, the youngest ever Member of Parliament (Hisar), split from his family-run Indian National Lok Dal, and formed the JJP. Though a majority of INLD's MLAs continue to support Dushyant's uncle and Leader of Opposition Abhay Chautala, Dushyant is confident of JJP's chances



“I don't feel there's a Jat-non Jat divide. The divide is between educated, uneducated, rural, urban. It is very tough for a rural kid to compete with an urban kid. That's a divide which nobody sees

NIRUPAMA SUBRAMANIAN: What do you hope to achieve with your new political outfit?

We want to change the political scenario in the state. From traditional politics, which is based on caste and regional divide, we want to bring in progressive thinking which leads to development of every person in the state. We are among the youngest states in the country. We have around 1.71 crore voters, of which 92 lakh are below the age of 45. On the other hand, we have an economy that is spiralling downwards. Until you give employment to people in your own state or train your own people to go to other states and get employed, you can never rise on the development scale. There has been a lack of infrastructure development. We have been seeing projects pending for decades... They have not even been completed fully till date. On the other hand, the crime ratio of the state, according to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), has increased in terms of rapes, dacoities and murders. We have got ourselves on the list of the top five states in crime. Crime against women has increased. Traders are not feeling secure today.

NIRUPAMA SUBRAMANIAN: What is your party's key priority? What is your action plan now?

The biggest subject in Haryana, currently, is employment for the youth. There are about 17 lakh jobs in Gurgaon, but in how many of those positions are people from Haryana employed in? We have skilled labour. We recently had the Group D examination in the state — 17,000 jobs and 18 lakh applicants. People who have done their Masters, PhD, and cleared the NET examination (National Eligibility Test to determine eligibility for college and university-level lecturership) were applying for jobs of peons, gardeners. This is the state of our country. We have to create employment. The primary focus of the Jannayak Janata Party (JJP) is to give employment opportunities to the youth and provide security to our citizens. We have to create an atmosphere which helps in the development of our state and makes people feel safe.

We will create a policy for reservation of 75 per cent jobs, even in the private sector, for people of Haryana. It is our first promise. Telangana has done it. Andhra Pradesh has it. Maharashtra has a demand for 80 per cent reservation in private sector for Marathi-speaking people. Our youth is insecure. You see educated youth boarding buses daily to take some exam. But how many people get employment? In the last four years, during the BJP regime, 13,000 people got employed (in Haryana). We have a backlog of over 92,000 jobs that are vacant.

NITIN SHARMA: What led you to split from the Indian National Lok Dal (INLD)?

That is all in the past now. I am looking forward to working for the new organisation — making it strong, working at the booth level and creating new talent for Haryana. We are working on the 'One Booth-10 Youth' programme. It will target all 17,000 booths of the state and create a dedicated workforce of 1,71,000 young, talented youth that will lead us in the upcoming Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha elections.

VARINDER BHATIA: Is the split final? It's a family-run party and Abhay Chautala has said that his meals still come from your family's kitchen, three times a day?

Khana tohi mere ghar pe hazaron logon ka banta hai (Meals for thousands of people are cooked at my home). My house is a place where food is cooked like *langar* and somebody who has come to my house has never left it without having a cup of tea or snacks. It is the practice of our family since (former Haryana CM and deputy PM) Chaudhary Devi Lalji's time. That is something that has carried on for generations and this tradition cannot be changed. If somebody wants food, our house is always open.

JAGDEEP SINGH: Will you join the mahagathbandhan against the BJP in the Lok Sabha elections?

It is too early to say whether we will be part of any alliance because we are at the formation stage. We have given seven posts to people for now. These are necessary for the party to work at the state level. We are working to get the outfit standing in other states too — in Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan as well as the Union Territory of Chandigarh. We will expand in the coming days to all the 90 Assembly segments

‘There are 17 lakh jobs in Gurgaon. How many people from Haryana are employed there?’

Jannayak Janta Party chief Dushyant Chautala says employment for youth is his party's biggest concern, calls for 75 per cent reservation for people from Haryana in jobs in the state, insists his split with INLD is a thing of the past, is non-committal on joining the mahagathbandhan against the BJP in the general elections, is optimistic about the JJP's prospects in the Jind bypolls



JJP founder-chief Dushyant Chautala with Resident Editor, Chandigarh, Nirupama Subramanian in *The Indian Express* newsroom in Chandigarh. Jaipal Singh

in all the 22 districts of Haryana. That is our primary focus. Later, we will think of an alliance with any political party.

NITIN SHARMA: What kind of role will regional parties play in the 2019 general elections?

The Prime Minister has lost his credibility. There were huge promises made by him, of *acheche din*, of putting Rs 15 lakh into people's bank accounts, giving employment to two crore youth, loans to small traders... In the recent past, there have been many changes in the country, these concerns things that the nation wants... In April-May, you will see, a force will come into the country that will change the political scenario.

SUKHBIR SIWACH: The Jind bypoll, slated for January 28, will be your first political contest since the formation of the JJP. How do you see your prospects?

We are completely ready to face the challenge even though our party is still in the process of registration and formation. Initially, the Haryana BJP was avoiding the bypoll, but then suddenly they got it announced. Maybe they thought we won't be able to prepare for it. But, if you see the wave in Jind, it's totally in favour of the JJP.

Our teams have studied the entire constituency and enumerated issues related to infrastructure, hygiene, agriculture, employment etc. People in Jind have no hope left in the BJP, the Congress or the INLD. They gave all the parties a chance, but no one could provide even basic amenities to the city and villages in the area. Our candidate Digvijay Chautala has received an overwhelming response from people of all sections of the society. We are heading for our first victory after the formation of the JJP.

PARUL: What about employment opportunities for women?

If we are talking about 75 per cent reservation, it cannot be only for the men. It has to be for each and every girl and boy who is educated, who has a degree, who is technically qualified to work in the industry. If we talk about Gurgaon today or the IT sector, you will see more women than men, and that is a change that people never thought would happen.

HINA ROHTAKI: In several parts of Haryana, the *ghunghat* or the veil system still persists. What are your views regarding the practice?

There have been winds of change. The amount of urbanisation in the state in the past one decade is surprising. The education standards have improved and need to improve further. There has been a 22 per cent increase in people from rural areas moving to urban and semi-urban areas. This change has also changed the mindset of the rural people.

JAGPREET SANDHU: What is your



stand on *khap* panchayats?

There have been *khaps* that have done very well and there have also been some that have been part of huge controversies. The panchayat system was initially a parallel judicial system. If you think the judicial system is the only way to get justice for every citizen of the country... There are more than three-and-a-half crore cases pending. How many people will get justice?

SOFI AHSAN: Are you then advocating a parallel judicial system such as the *khaps*?

I come from a village which has about 300-odd marriages within the village. I cannot be in favour of any condition that says you cannot get married... Marriage can be between people of different castes and religions. (Traditionally, the *khaps* have been against marriages within the same *gotra* and village). That tradition needs to change... the society is also adapting to the changes. The *khaps* have also become liberal. There is a *khap* in Narwana (Jind district) which has

changed its rule that one cannot marry within 48 villages it listed. Earlier people from those villages would go to Sonepat, Uttar Pradesh or Rajasthan in search of brides and grooms. So, such changes have been happening and change needs time. In the past one decade, people have started making changes and in future, these changes will happen more frequently. One has to balance things.

SAURABH PRASHAR: But there have been instances of *khaps* issuing diktats, and ordering people to be killed, like in the 2007 honour killing case of Manoj and Babli.

There is no law which states that *khaps* can act like dictators or issue such diktats. If you give me evidence... There has been a case or two in which such things have happened, where *khaps* have issued diktats over inter-caste or inter-village marriages. I am totally against such decisions. But the interesting fact is, that except in that one case, of Manoj and Babli, there is no other case from Haryana. But still when it comes to *khaps*, everyone in the media associates *khaps* with Haryana. What happened in that case, I don't know why such kind of decision was made... One has to study and analyse as to what led to such an act.

NIRUPAMA SUBRAMANIAN: How do you see the polarisation along caste lines, after the Jat agitation in Haryana, playing out in the elections?

I don't feel there's this kind of a divide. I feel that the divide will be between the educated and uneducated, the rural and the urban population. There have been other divides that our state is facing. There is a divide between a student studying in rural areas and a student studying in the city. It is very tough for a rural kid to compete with an urban

kid. That's a divide which nobody sees. Another divide has been created after the introduction of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) and demonetisation. It has led to the rich getting richer and people from lower income groups suffering due to the decision. And then people talk about caste, things like Punjabi and non-Punjabi. The Haryana Chief Minister made a statement about being a Punjabi. Does a leader who leads the state, who is the boss of the state, say such a thing? What is his thought process? (In Hindi dailies in Karnal, the home town of Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar, an ad said: "It is for the first time that Haryana has got a CM from the Punjabi community in 52 years of its inception. If you make a mistake today, you won't get such chance in the next 60 years. Some people from a particular caste want to remove the Punjabi CM by firing from the Independent candidate's shoulder. It's a request from the Punjabi community to openly support the Punjabi CM." The ad had pictures of Khattar and PM Modi).

NIRUPAMA SUBRAMANIAN: What is your verdict on the last four years of the Khattar government in Haryana?

I see it as a complete failure. This government cannot say that they have done 'this' for the society. In the last four years, crime has increased in the state. The unemployment rate in the state has increased and common people and traders have suffered due to the GST and demonetisation. Industries have been moving out of the state. The CM talks about investment of more than Rs 7,000 crore. We have not seen that money come in. This government has caused more divide in the state on caste and religious lines. These have been dark days for the state.

FIFTH COLUMN



TAVLEEN SINGH

Priyanka becomes a politician

IT HAPPENS that I was listening awestruck in Congress Hall in Davos to the Vice-President of China when news came that Priyanka Gandhi had officially entered politics. Awestruck because Wang Qishan's rollick of China's 5,000-year-old history and the details he gave of its ambitious present and future plans made me feel India was a minor, inconsequential country foolishly hoping to compete. The news that our oldest political party was offering yet another member of the Imperial Dynasty as a solution to India's problems made me feel gloomier still.

After the Chinese leader's session ended, I found myself standing on a freezing promenade among an eminent group of Indians. There were businessmen, politicians and political pundits all trying to avoid freezing to death as *India Today's* Rahul Kanwal asked if we thought this was 'a gamechanger'. Would this 'Brahmastra' (his words) end all chances of Narendra Modi winning a second term. I said the timing of Priyanka's political debut would harm her brother more than Modi.

Rahul Gandhi has just won his first three elections, having fought and lost more than 30, so he is finally being seen as a leader. And not just a bumbling heir. Is this the time for his sister to come in as number two on the board of the family firm? She is more charismatic, her Hindi is excellent, she has a natural connect with ordinary people and is lucky enough to resemble her grandmother. I am no fan of Indira Gandhi but have to concede that millions of Indians remember her as one of India's greatest prime ministers. It is not the Emergency they remember, but what they believe was her great love for the poorest Indians. She did not do much to lift them out of their horrendous poverty but they believe she tried.

My problem with the advent of Indira Gandhi's granddaughter as the great new hope is that I despise dynastic democracy. I believe it stunts political leaders and democratic institutions. We in the media are ridiculously overawed by the Imperial Dynasty. Journalists who show great courage in attacking Modi for diminishing institutions remained silent when Sonia Gandhi diminished the office of the Prime Minister. The Gandhis are India's royal family so we kowtow. Priyanka's husband has been put through the wringer for his shady business deals but she has always remained above reproach. Rahul has sometimes been treated as a joke but not of late. Sonia Gandhi's status is between Mother India and Mother Teresa. She brought the Congress party to its lowest point in 2014 and remained above censure.

Narendra Modi cannot escape blame for having revived the fortunes of the Dynasty. It is not his fault that he inherited an economy that Sonia Gandhi had severely damaged by economic policies that brought the licence raj back slyly on 'environmental' grounds. It is not his fault that taxpayers' money was wasted on huge, leaky welfare schemes while crony capitalism was encouraged in the name of socialism. It is his fault that he did not bring the change he promised. It is his fault that instead of taking the new economic direction he promised he spent four years digitising schemes that should have been scrapped. It is his fault that he continued to pour money into schemes like MNRREGA when it would have been better spent on creating real jobs in rural India.

It is his fault that he did not deliver on his promise of 'minimum government, maximum governance'. In the past four years his chief ministers have interfered even in the eating habits of people, and in the name of our sacred cows, killed off millions of jobs.

It is unsurprising that recent polls indicate that he will not win anywhere near a full majority again. But, what will India get instead? More democratic feudalism. Nearly every young MP in the Congress party is the progeny of a political parent and the message that Priyanka's political debut sends is that we will get more of the same. Her brother has already indicated that he despises the private sector and wants to return to the 'socialism' that his grandmother always espoused. His sister's political and economic ideas are unknown but unlikely to be different to those of her family.

So to me what becomes gloomily clear is that India better forget about catching up with China. That country's leaders discovered long ago that free markets were the way to building a strong economy. There may not be democracy in China but the question we need to ask is if there is real democracy in India. It is great that we have regular elections but not so great that we have closed the democratic process to those who do not come from political families. Modi could have changed all this. It is a shame he failed.

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ACROSS THE AISLE



P CHIDAMBARAM

Ring out the old, ring in the new

IN TAMIL NADU the festival is called *Bhogi*. In other parts of India it is called *Lohri*.

The harvest is imminent, it is time to honour the bulls and the cows and the ploughs, and it is time to celebrate with the farm hands. Before we celebrate the new dawn, we must throw out the old — used clothes, broken farm implements and useless knick-knacks that accumulated during the year gone by. We make a symbolic bonfire of them on *Bhogi* day. The next day is *Pongal* or *Sankranti*, the harvest festival. The *Jallikkattu* (taming the bull) is part of the celebrations in Tamil Nadu

'Ring out the old, ring in the new' captures the spirit of harvest time. On the eve of the Lok Sabha elections, I asked myself what can be thrown out before we welcome the next government. I was able to list a few.

MUSCULAR APPROACH

Firstly, we must abandon the muscular approach to complex problems that cannot be resolved through a show of the might of the State. In Jammu and Kashmir, the muscular approach has acquired an ominous dimension: it is muscular, militaristic and majoritarian, alienating a whole population and driving young men to embrace militancy. A fine young man, topper of the IAS batch of 2010, resigned from the service in frustration and despair. In the Northeastern

states, the muscular approach accelerated the preparation of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) and left out, initially, 40,07,707 persons who found themselves 'stateless'. The muscular approach is now forcing down the Citizenship Amendment Bill on the ethnic population because of misplaced concern for 'persecuted minorities' of other countries, notably Bangladesh. The muscular approach must go.

Secondly, we must repeal or re-enact laws that are unjust. Top of the list is Section 124A of the IPC that defines 'sedition'. It must go lock, stock and barrel. The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act that allows the use of force to 'the point of causing death' must be repealed or amended extensively. The Goods and Services Tax (GST) laws must be completely redesigned. If any one claims to have understood the *text* of the Central GST Act (in what is passed off as legal English language), that person deserves to be admitted to the Bar without the need to pass a law examination! The anti-profiteering provision in GST laws must go. The Angel tax on start-ups must go.

DISCRIMINATING AGAINST POOR

Thirdly, poorly designed and inherently discriminatory (against the poor) schemes must be scrapped and replaced by schemes that will deliver the intended outcomes. There is a long list: MUDRA

loans, *Swachh Bharat* (Clean India) that builds toilets that are unused or unusable, *Fasal Bima Yojana* (Crop Insurance Scheme) that robs farmers and enriches the insurance companies, *Kaushal Vikas Yojana* (Skill Development Programme) that is able to place only 28 per cent of the trainees, and *Ayushman Bharat* (Health for All) that is underfunded and excludes the poor who have no access to private hospitals. You can add to the list based on your experience of the schemes that concern you. The grave flaws in these schemes must go.

Fourthly, the *Aadhaar* excesses must be reversed. The *Aadhaar* Act authorised the government to require *Aadhaar* only for transfer of 'subsidies, benefits and services'. The government exceeded its authority, insisted on *Aadhaar* for many other activities and collected huge personal data. The illegally acquired data must go. How that can be done is a question that must be answered by the next government.

EVM VS BALLOT

Finally, there are concerned citizens who want Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) to go and to return to the ballot paper system. On the other hand, the Election Commission and the government swear by EVMs. I supported EVMs because of the ease of casting valid votes, but I was troubled by the numerous instances of malfunctioning EVMs. That led me to plead for VVPATs. Now, the

counts of one EVM and one VVPAT (in each Assembly constituency) are matched. A constituency has, on average, 250-300 polling stations. Hence, the chances of discovery of mischief in the electronic units is less than 1 per cent. I have, therefore, pleaded that the count of every EVM must be matched with the physical count of the VVPAT slips. The argument that counting — and declaration of results — will be delayed is a weak argument. Nothing will be lost if the results are announced three or four hours later if the gain is greater in the process of electronic voting.

I was confident that my — and others' — suggestion will be a satisfactory answer to the demand for returning to ballot papers, but my enthusiasm has been dampened by Mr G Sampath's brilliantly-argued piece in a newspaper (*The Hindu, January 22, 2019*). According to the author, the paper ballot system alone will satisfy the three tests of visual confirmation of the vote, secret ballot and visible counting. EVM-VVPAT system fails on all three tests as established by a judgment of the German Constitutional Court. It is difficult to disagree with the author or the German Court. So, while I cannot say EVMs must go, we should demand match of the counts in all polling stations.

If we can get rid of the dross, perhaps we can drink the water from the pool.

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INSIDE TRACK



COOMI KAPOOR

BIGGER SHARE OF PIE?

Priyanka Gandhi's entry into politics is not just a challenge for the BJP, it is also a message to the anti-BJP Opposition that the Grand Old Party cannot be taken for granted. While preaching unity, *gathbandhan* votaries such as the SP, BSP, TDP and TMC have kept the Congress out of an alliance in their respective states. Others like the DMK, RJD, Jharkhand Mukti Morcha may offer the Congress less than 10 seats in state-specific tie-ups. In such a situation, the Congress would be a serious contender in only some 260 of the 543 parliamentary seats. It would have to win every second seat out of the 260 if it hopes to reach a respectable figure of around 125 seats, and be in a commanding position in an anti-BJP coalition government. Whether with Priyanka's charismatic presence the Congress can ask for a bigger slice of the pie will be known in the coming weeks.

PRIYANKA FACTOR

Those who once dismissed the Congress as a spent force in UP now acknowledge that with Priyanka's presence the party has a fighting chance in constituencies such as Kanpur, Jhansi, Saharanpur, Ghaziabad, Padrauna, Lucknow, Barabanki, Varanasi, Allahabad and Farrukhabad, apart from the family pocket boroughs of Amethi and Rae Bareilly. Priyanka's cousin Varun Gandhi is unlikely to stand from nearby Sultanpur and Narendra Modi may perforce have to spend more time campaigning in Varanasi. But the Congress could also upset the calculations of the BSP-SP alliance, splitting the anti-BJP vote. Some suspect that the SP knew in advance of Priyanka's entry and could eventually reach a tacit understanding over a few urban seats. Though Mayawati is reportedly fuming over the Priyanka announcement, Congresspersons still nurse a hope that the *gathbandhan* will offer the party a more respectable deal.

STARS STRUCK OFF

The four filmstar MPs in the Trinamool Congress — Sandhya Roy, Tapas Paul, Satadbi Roy and Moon Moon Sen — are apprehensive that Mamata Banerjee will drop them in the coming polls. Tapas Paul is definitely out of the race because of his alleged links to the Rose Valley chit fund case while the performance of the three others as par-

liamentarians has reportedly been found wanting. Mamata is not meeting MPs these days, so it makes more sense for the three to plead their case with Abhishek Banerjee, Mamata's nephew, now unquestionably her heir apparent. The powerful nephew's photo even figured in all party posters for the recent TMC rally in Kolkata.

STRANGE HAPPENINGS

It is increasingly difficult for the Congress in Karnataka to maintain the façade that the BJP is to blame for the murky shenanigans in the party. Last Sunday night, a brawl broke out among Congress MLAs lodged at Eagleton Resorts near Bengaluru and a seriously injured Anand Singh had to be hospitalised. Congress minister D K Shivakumar, who made arrangements for the MLAs' stay, claimed at first that Singh had suffered a heart attack. But the cover-up came to light when Anand Singh's wife took one look at her husband's cracked skull and bruised face and announced that she was going to police, regardless of the Congress denials. An FIR of attempted murder has now been registered against JN Ganesh, the Congress MLA accused of the assault who was later suspended by an embarrassed party. Accounts differ as to whether the weapon was a flower pot, a stick or a whiskey bottle. The brawl reportedly broke out when Ganesh, one of the MLAs who was temporarily missing from Karnataka, accused Anand Singh of being a double-crosser and an agent of Shivakumar. Suspicion remains that former chief minister Siddaramaiah and dislodged minister Ramesh Jarkiholi encouraged the MLAs to do the disappearing act in a bid to bring down the Kumaraswamy government before the Lok Sabha polls. Meanwhile, Chief Minister H D Kumaraswamy has not made any comment on the strange goings-on in the Congress.

HANDS-ON MINISTER

When Hardeep Puri took over as MoS Housing and Urban Development in September 2017, there was scepticism as to whether a former diplomat could handle a portfolio totally outside his field of expertise. But the figures speak for themselves. In his first 15 months in office, the ministry's project completions and investments have shot up dramatically. The number of projects for Smart Cities has gone up from 109 to 1,409. There were only three states free of open defecation in the first three years of the Modi government; there are now 19. The number of tap connections has gone up from 1.22 lakh to 47.37 lakh. House occupation by beneficiaries was 5,23,395 till September 2017; it is now 8,68,177. In the same period, the Central assistance released to the states for housing has gone up from Rs 11,654 crore to Rs 23,874 crore.

Sahgal saga and sammelans

GAINED IN TRANSLATION

PRADNYA DAYA PAWAR
प्रज्ञा दया पवार

2013. THE 86th Akhil Bharatiya Marathi Sahitya Sammelan was to be hosted in January at Chiplun (Konkan). Senior author-critic Dr Nagnath Kottapalle presided over the Marathi literature summit. He had been officially elected as the president of the summit. Being a member of the Sahitya Parishad, I had voted for him. As a part of the Sahitya Sammelan, I was bestowed the presidency of the (invited poets') poetry summit.

However later, the organising body announced the naming of the main dais of the summit in honour of Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray, who had passed away a couple of months ago. He was a person who disparaged the Marathi literature summit calling it a cattle market, who extolled Hitler's organisational skills, who trampled upon writers' freedom of expression, who promoted violence. I was hoping that this announcement would create a wave of protests in literary circles. It did not happen. In the words of a senior Marxist thinker and critic D K Bedekar, there was an 'obscene chill' in the air. When I spoke to a few people for collective action, I was shocked to know that most writers felt Thackeray had made significant contribution to Marathi. Some people agreed to register a protest at the venue. But the simple fact is: there was no protest.

I decided that I would not attend the Chiplun Sammelan if the name of the dais wasn't changed. Meanwhile, news broke that Parashurama's picture was printed on the programme cards. The Minister of State for Water Resources and the chairman of the summit's welcoming committee, Sunil Tatkare, ruled out any possibility of reconsidering the decision to name the main dais. Therefore, I boycotted the summit. For this, I was criticised. Apparently, my position upset the organisers so much that then Union Cabinet Minister of Agriculture Sharad Pawar, in his opening remarks at the summit, felt it necessary to say, "Who are you? You have a misconception that the summit will not transpire if you do not attend." The



Illustration: Suvajit Dey

Chiplun Sahitya Sammelan transpired — in the presence of many politicians.

The point is, literary sammelans transpire whether a writer attends or not. In 2019, the Yavatmal Sahitya Sammelan transpired in the absence of the inaugurator. Nayantara Sahgal, a senior English writer, was invited to inaugurate the Sammelan. As is the norm, she sent her written speech to the organisers four days in advance. The organisers were perturbed when they read the speech. Sahgal's speech critiqued the present dispensation in power, which supported a full-fledged attack on India's diversity, tolerance, and impinged on the fundamental freedoms of Indian citizens.

The BJP MLA and the Minister of State for Energy, Madan Yerawar, was the chairman of the summit's welcoming committee. The organisers did not want to hurt the sentiments of Madan Yerawar and his political conglomeration. The invitation was revoked. As an excuse, they referred to a few vague threats from a local MNS worker, who threatened to disrupt the literature summit if it was inaugurated by a non-Marathi personality. The reality was: after the news of the threat spread across Maharashtra, MNS chief Raj Thackeray made it clear that he didn't oppose Sahgal's speech.

Uninviting Sahgal to the Sahitya Sammelan was an assault on her freedom of expression. There were voices of dissent among the Marathi litterateurs. There is a unanimous agreement that the situation in the country is far worse now than 2013. Many poets, writers, journalists and editors decided to boycott the Sammelan — perhaps a first in the history of the Akhil Bharatiya Marathi

Sahitya Sammelan. All eyes were on Aruna Dhare, the president of the Sammelan. After being appointed as a president, Dhare had made it clear that she would not tolerate any kind of politics. She remained true to her position. She attended the Sammelan and registered her protest in her speech.

Before I sign off, let me share a parable about politics. Before the Sahgal row, there was another raging topic. The manner in which Dhare was selected president of the Sammelan by doing away with the age-old tradition of electing a president. All these years, the Sammelan president was elected by around 1,200 voters. In the past few years, there have been whispers about unsavoury elements who have contaminated the election process. It was said that good and noble writers could not contest this election. And so, the elections were scrapped. As a result, the president was elected by 12-14 voters, instead of 1,500 voters.

This election reminds me of the recent local body polls in Kashmir. The major political parties boycotted the polls. The state saw an extremely low voter turnout. Later, when Kashmiri parties joined hands to stake claim to form the government in the state, the Assembly was dissolved.

Whether it is Kashmir or the Marathi Sammelan, you cannot maintain the façade of democracy by trampling upon democratic values. To sum up, I read an apt statement somewhere: Nayantaraji, do not forgive us. For we know what we're doing!

Pradnya Daya Pawar is a well-known Marathi poet
Translated from Marathi by
Rushikesh Aravkar

OUT OF MY MIND



MEGHNAD DESAI

THE MASSIVE meeting of the Pravasi Bharatiya Sammelan in Varanasi is proof of the worldwide spread of Indians. For once, *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* seems true since Indians are a global family.

Yet there is a nagging question which should trouble us. Why are Indians so successful when they leave India and go abroad? For years, it was blatantly true that at home a vast majority of Indians

The lessons from Pravasi meeting

were poor and downtrodden. But those of their friends or relations who had left came back to tell good stories. Think of the Biharis. They work hard, are willing to go and work anywhere across India, even so, the image of the Bihari is of a poor person. The presence of Pravind Jugnauth, the Prime Minister of Mauritius, at the Pravasi Bharatiya Sammelan should make us ask that question even more urgently. Mauritius is an island in the vicinity of Southern Africa. It has a population of around one and a quarter million. Majority of these are from India, principally Bihar. Perhaps the richest Biharis live in Mauritius. While India is proud to attain per capita income of \$2,020 this year, Mauritius had already reached beyond

\$10,000 by 2017. Indeed between 1976 and 2017, Mauritius doubled its per capita income. Only 6 per cent of its people are below the poverty line. Income inequality is much lower than in India. It has a much better Human Development score than India, the highest in Africa and is in the category of Middle HDI.

It is also instructive to see how Mauritius came to achieve this status. It became independent only 50 years ago. When the British government was still in charge, two reports were commissioned to gauge the prospects of the colony. James Meade, a distinguished economist who went on to win the Nobel Prize in Economics, was a warm humane person. He was most pessimistic about the prospects of Mauritius. It was a one-crop

economy — sugarcane — and its population was rising too fast. It was to suffer from the Malthusian crisis. Another social scientist, Richard Titmus, who devoted his life to studying and improving the British Welfare State, a man of deep humanity, agreed with Meade. The case of Mauritius was hopeless.

Luckily, like many other social scientists, they were wrong. Mauritius has shown that far from being a case of Malthusian disaster, it is a strong growing economy and a vibrant democracy. The most interesting part of it is that it is a multi-racial, multi-religious society. The Dutch arrived first but yielded to the French, who lost to the British in 1810. The French started the sugarcane cultivation with African slave labour. But once the British abolished slave trade and

freed the slaves in Mauritius, indentured labourers came from Bihar and Tamil Nadu. So Hindus, Muslims, Christians, White, Black and Brown coexist as well as Chinese who arrived later.

The French owned the best lands for sugarcane cultivation but after independence they diversified into textiles, which were exported. The government intelligently moved the economy into the service sector. Mauritius invested heavily into education sending many students abroad. This allowed a smooth transition to tax and finance sectors. Mauritius became a good 'middleman' economy. It took advantage of its human capital to achieve a high income.

Who says Indians cannot get rich?