


ACROSS  
THE AISLE



P CHIDAMBARAM

# One Nation, One Election, Many Fears

YOU HAVE to give it to Prime Minister Modi to throw up issues that will distract the attention of the people. He bets on the fact that the Opposition will respond by speaking in multiple voices and not always with irrefutable facts or logic.

Pulwama was a telling example. By every account, there was a massive intelligence failure. The governor of Jammu & Kashmir admitted as much when he said on February 15, 2019, "We could not detect or check the vehicle full of explosives moving on the highway... The fact that we did not know that there was a *fi-dayeen* among them (local militants) is also part of the intelligence failure."

No government could keep quiet after the attack. Balakot was the answer, the Pakistan Air Force was half-prepared, the Indian Air Force hit the targets, and Pakistan shot down an IAF aircraft. The doubts are not about the strike but about the number of casualties. So, what do we have? — a worrying failure in Pulwama and a significant success in Balakot.

## DISTRACT ATTENTION

Mr Narendra Modi successfully fused Pulwama and Balakot. Anyone questioning the intelligence failure in Pulwama (and the tragic loss of 40 lives) was mischievously interpreted as if he was questioning the IAF's success in Balakot, and labelled an anti-national. The Opposition — at least in the Hindi-speaking states — was not able to respond to this clever election tactic and make the people understand the distinction between the

Pulwama failure and the Balakot success. Mr Modi successfully distracted the people and took the election discourse away from the sluggish economy, unemployment, farmers' distress, communal hatred, lynching, etc.

After the election to the Lok Sabha, the focus should return to the sluggish economy, unemployment, farmers' distress, communal hatred, lynching, etc. That should have been the thrust of the President's Address; that should have been the core of the Prime Minister's replies in Parliament; and that should be the theme of the pre-Budget debates. Alas, it is not so, and what is hogging the public space is Mr Modi's slogan of One Nation, One Election. It is the new distracting tactic.

## UNCONSTITUTIONAL

In a *federal* parliamentary democracy, the council of ministers in the Central government and the state government shall be collectively responsible, respectively, to the House of the People [Article 75(3)] and to the Legislative Assembly [Article 164(2)]. The 'responsibility' to the Legislature means that the council of ministers must enjoy the confidence of the majority in the Legislature every day and every hour. The moment the council of ministers loses the support of the majority, it should go. The notion that such a council of ministers can continue in office until another council of ministers proved it has the support of the majority is antithetical to the fundamental principles of a parliamentary democracy.

Suppose a government is voted out, but no other person can muster the support of a majority in the Legislature, will the defeated prime minister or chief minister continue in office? That would be parliamentary sacrilege. Mid-term election is the only legitimate answer.

Equally antithetical to a parliamentary democracy are suggestions to the effect that the tenure of a Legislative Assembly can be *extended* or *curtailed* despite the prescribed term. The people elect candidates for a prescribed term: it will be an affront to the people if the term is extended or curtailed.

Evidently, the campaign for One Nation, One Election has been launched with the full knowledge that it is unconstitutional under the present Constitution. Although the protagonists will not admit it yet, their real intention is to change the Constitution. The direction of change is also visible: unitary, not federal; stronger Executive, weaker Legislature; uniformity, not diversity; common identity, not multiple cultures; and majoritarianism, not consensual. The direction is toward a presidential system of government.

## BEWARNED OF CHANGES

All of the above can be achieved only by amending, extensively, the present Constitution of India. It appears that the BJP is not averse to the idea of drastically amending the Constitution because they believe that, since the RSS was not represented in the Constituent Assembly, they

are not obliged to take ownership of the present Constitution. It is obvious that the RSS and BJP want a Constitution of their liking and the One Nation, One Election campaign is a precursor to changing the Constitution.

No comparable country with a federal system of government has simultaneous elections to the national parliament and to the state/provincial legislatures — notable examples are Australia, Canada and Germany. The United States has a presidential system of government and hence is not comparable. Besides, the US has simultaneous elections and non-simultaneous elections (one election every four years and one election every two years). The argument that a country cannot be in perpetual election mode is also hollow: what does it matter if in a handful of state elections are held when due? If any country is in so-called perpetual election mode, it is the US where the House of Representatives is elected every two years! The US seems no worse for it.

The BJP should make plain its intentions. If it wants a presidential system of government, let it say so openly. Let the people decide if the priorities before the country, at this stage, are the sluggish economy, unemployment, farmers' distress, communal hatred and lynching, or installing the first Executive President, subservient Cabinet and powerless Parliament.

Website: [@Pchidambaram\\_IN](http://pchidambaram.in)

## FIFTH COLUMN



TAVLEEN SINGH

# No rule of law, no democracy

FROM INDORE last week came pictures of the son of a senior BJP leader using a bat to attack officials on government duty. From a village in Jharkhand came a video of the latest lynching. Tabrez Ansari was tied to a pole and, while being beaten with sticks by a mob, ordered to repeat 'Jai Shri Ram' and 'Jai Hanuman'. The video of his terrified face was too awful to watch, but went viral on social media as did the news that the local police, instead of taking him to hospital, locked him up. It took him four days to die. And in his last days his family was not allowed to meet him.

In Mumbai a Muslim taxi driver, Faizal Usman Khan, was beaten by a Hindu mob, who ordered him to say 'Jai Shri Ram' as they beat him. He later told reporters that his cab stalled and, while he was trying to fix it, some men came by on a scooter and started beating him for what he thought was no reason till they ordered him to say 'Jai Shri Ram', till he became unconscious.

In Kolkata, a Muslim teacher, Hafiz Mohammed Shahrukh Halder, was thrown off a train because he refused to say 'Jai Shri Ram'. He sustained severe injuries but lived. He told reporters that his attackers had first mocked him for his clothes and his Islamic beard and then ordered him to chant 'Jai Shri Ram'.

In Kasganj, Uttar Pradesh, a policeman was threatened by a local BJP legislator because he arrested his friends for rowdiness. The MLA warned him that he had the power to have him transferred.

In Parliament, meanwhile, the Prime Minister made two fine speeches in which he painted a glowing picture of the 'new' India he promises he will build. A prosperous, powerful, secure India in which every citizen will be treated equally. In his speech in the Rajya Sabha, he mentioned Tabrez Ansari. He was saddened, he said, by the death of this youth and hoped that those responsible would be given the severest punishment. He denounced violence in general and said nobody had the right to break the law, whether in Jharkhand, West Bengal or anywhere else.

As I listened, I found myself wishing that the Prime Minister had put more emphasis on the significance of the rule of law for the survival of democracy. I found myself wishing that he had pointed out that without the rule of law there can be no democracy. If he had said something like this, it is possible that his message would have been clearer to his partymen and to the killer mobs who now defile Ram himself with their craven brutality. It is no longer about cows. It is about the rule of the mob.

No excuse is needed for violence. In the case of Akash Vijayvargiya, an MLA in his own right, when asked why he was beating up the officials in Indore, he defended himself proudly. On camera he announced that it was his policy to first make a polite request and, when this was refused, he did not think it wrong to use violence.

He was arrested for attacking the officials. But, has so far not been sacked from the BJP. What signal does this send?

Let me answer my own question. The signal this sends is that taking the law into your hands is kind of acceptable in the eyes of those who the Prime Minister has made responsible for laying the building blocks of the 'new' India. It is not even about Hindus attacking Muslims any more because once mob rule becomes acceptable, it becomes the norm. In Patna last week, when a drunken driver (Hindu) ran over children sleeping on a pavement, he was not caught and handed to the police but killed on the spot by a mob.

In India the wheels of justice turn slowly. Sometimes they do not turn at all. If the victim is poor and helpless and the culprit rich and powerful, justice is unattainable in many cases. So a degree of rough justice has always existed. But, in the past few years, cow vigilantism has given a whole new facet to rule by the mob. The vigilantes have mostly got away with what they did. Inevitably, now that Narendra Modi's mandate is bigger than the one that he got last time, many of his supporters see it as sanction for them to carry on with their violent activities.

After making his first speech to his newly elected MPs in Parliament's Central Hall, the Prime Minister bowed his head before the Constitution as if it were a sacred text. This wonderful gesture will soon seem meaningless unless mob rule is brought to a swift end. A good first step would be to expel Akash Vijayvargiya.

Follow Tavleen Singh on Twitter  
[@tavleen\\_singh](https://twitter.com/tavleen_singh)

INSIDE TRACK



COOMI KAPOOR

## CONGRESS IN LIMBO

THE CONGRESS is in limbo with Rahul Gandhi remaining adamant that he will not continue as party president. A few alternative scenarios are being talked about. The old guard is pushing three names for president — Mallikarjun Kharge, Ashok Gehlot and Sushil Kumar Shinde — since they are considered loyalists and have the requisite experience. Kharge's performance as the party's leader in the previous Lok Sabha gives him an edge, particularly as he is from the south. Another proposal is for Manmohan Singh to be made party chief. His name has been floated by backers of Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, who want her to eventually take over the party. An alternative is that Sonia Gandhi becomes party chief temporarily. Meanwhile, there is a buzz in the Congress that someone close to the Gandhi family could jump ship. Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury's appointment as Congress leader in the Lok Sabha has not been well received. No name has been announced as deputy leader in the Lok Sabha since Manish Tewari and Shashi Tharoor are most reluctant to work under him.

## POETIC ADVICE

With opposition parties yet to recover from their devastating defeat, the mood is palpably glum in Parliament. Kapil Sibal, the Congress's legal brain and the party's in-house poet, has, however, not lost his equanimity. When asked if he had composed a poem to suit the occasion, he rattled off a verse: "*Chal chod batein kal ki/Mat pooch kiski galti/Is mein milega na kuchh bhi/Har kadam pe kismat badalti* (Forget yesterday's events/Don't ask whose fault it is/You will get nothing out of this/With each step, one's fortunes keeps changing)."

## NO ROOM LEFT

A group of first-time YSR Congress MPs were noticed in Parliament's Central Hall, intently studying portraits on the wall of some of the biggest names in Indian politics. They especially examined the placement of a recently installed portrait of Atal Bihari Vajpayee. The YSR Congress wants to put forward a demand that the portrait of the late Y S Rajasekhara Reddy, former Andhra Pradesh CM and father of party

## OUT OF MY MIND




MEGHNAD DESAI

IT IS a constant of Indian history since time immemorial. India never had a central empire which covered the entire subcontinent as China had through its history. In India there were occasionally large regional empires, mainly in the Doab region. But never the South or the Northeast. Most empires broke up into small principalities after lasting a century at most.

The kingdoms in South India were maritime, spreading to South East Asia,

# A world without water

GAINED IN  
TRANSLATION



G SUNDARRAJAN  
கோ. சுந்தர்ராஜன்

AROUND 2,000 years ago, in his immense and matchless wisdom, the sage-poet Thiruvalluvar said there was no world without water, *Neer indri amaiyathu ulagu*. Today, even as Chennai has come to the streets searching for water, the words shine a light on the immortality of the truth yet again.

Chennai is parched. So is Tamil Nadu. Women of already water-stressed districts like Virudhunagar and Ramanathapuram have to walk several kilometres daily to fetch water. The walks offer no assurance of the availability of water. On many days, they have to do without the "luxury". Temporary wells have been dug in several villages in and around these districts for the poor to access some water. Early this March, the state government declared 24 districts as hit by hydrological drought, and allotted close to Rs 900 crore to handle the scarcity. That has not seen an end to women walking miles looking for water. Nor has it ended the midnight queues next to water tanks in Chennai.

Though the entire state is reeling under a debilitating water crisis, the focus is largely on Chennai. The state capital has a population of about a crore — the density making it enormously difficult to handle the crisis. The four reservoirs in and around Chennai — Red Hills, Sholavaram, Poondi and Chembarambakkam — have completely dried up. The four reservoirs were essential to quench the city's thirst. Not so long ago, in 2015, Chembarambakkam had filled up and the overflow had flooded Chennai. But the flood that brought the city's residents to the streets is now a distant, fading memory for those who have returned to the streets, this time to demand water.

As an environmentalist, I have reasons to believe that this drought is the result of human follies. Chennai has seen some rain-deficient years in the past. While it received less rainfall last year than usual, it could still manage the drought. So, to



Illustration Suvajit Dey

blame low rainfall is clearly an attempt by the authorities to pass the buck. Such excuses offer a convenient blindfold against actual solutions. The crisis Chennai is currently facing is drought-accumulation stress: in other words, our own failure to take concrete steps over the past decades. Several of us saw this coming. Chennai's water need is about 12 TMC (thousand million cubic feet) per year and desilting all the four reservoirs would take its capacity to well over the city's requirements. That has not happened!

Chennai has lost over 350 lakes in the past several years. Over the years, Chennai has also lost its green cover which, in turn, has led to the loss of groundwater. With no path for rainwater to seep down, Chennai is facing the danger of exploiting all its groundwater by 2020, according to a NITI Aayog report. This year, the groundwater level has gone down drastically in many districts, including Chennai, compounding the crisis.

It is perhaps time the state turned to ancient wisdom for solutions.

The Chola kingdom was particularly known for exemplary water management by way of constructing lakes. Kallanai constructed by the Chola king, Karikalan, remains a fine example of constructing a dam without causing environmental damage. Two lakes constructed by the Chola kings over a thousand years ago — in Maduranthakam and Veeranam — cater to the needs of the public till date.

Ancient Tamil literature, especially of the Sangam era, is replete with ideas on water management and its importance. Elango Adigal, the author of *Silappadhikaram*, one of the five great epics of Tamil, describes the qualities of a good king thus: *Idiyudai perumazhai eitha ega*

*pisiyaavilaiyul peruvalam tharappa mazhaipinithu aanda mamavan* (A good king is one who saves rainwater in tanks and lakes, and enriches his land).

A poem from the Sangam-era anthology *Akananooru* compares a mother watching over her child without sleeping to a soldier guarding a lake: *Perungula kaavalan pola arungadi annaiyum thuil maranthale*. Another Sangam poem says that a king will remain victorious and immortal if he takes steps to ensure water resources in low-lying areas: *Aadupor sezhhiya igozhaathu valle nilaneli marungin neermilai peruga*.

And, of course, Thirukkural speaks at length on the importance of water and its management.

When elders have handed down such priceless wisdom, it is ironic that our rulers think it fit to hold *yagnas* to propitiate the rain gods. Reports suggest that a permanent solution to the water woes of Chennai — and Tamil Nadu — lies with the monsoon. Metro water authorities are raving how only rain can solve this crisis. But that is only half-truth. It is our ability to harvest rains for our own future needs that can address the crisis. During the December 2015 deluge in Chennai, 320 TMC water drained into the sea. Our consistent failure to harvest rainwater for our use and needs of future generations will only result in recurrent drought and eventually, a permanently parched Tamil Nadu.

Sundarrajan writes on ecology and volunteers with Poovulagalin Nanbargal, a voluntary environmental collective in Tamil Nadu

Translated by the author from Tamil

# It is democracy that unites India

but seldom went North to win territory. The first person to rule over all India (excluding what became Pakistan) was Dr Rajendra Prasad. India had to become a sovereign democratic republic to achieve a single geographical shape.

Democracy is not native to India though there were republics in the old days. Yet India took to democracy and stayed democratic. It is too problematic to say whether it was British imperialism which bred democratic culture in the Indians. Pakistan, Bangladesh and Myanmar were also part of the same Empire but their democratic record is patchy. China could not face the breakdown of its empire and, within 40 years of becoming a republic, became communist but without democracy.

So what explains India's fondness for democracy?

My answer is one which people may not like because it goes against much received wisdom. Indians have been searching for a single narrative as to what defines them. The Partition is both the cause and the result of the anxiety to find a single story which would fit all the people of the subcontinent. Hindu identity was sought by many great leaders, starting with Swami Dayanand Saraswati, Swami Vivekanand and of course, in his own way, Mahatma Gandhi. Yet again these ideas were mainly confined to the North. Even after a century and a half, the issue of Hindu nationalism has not been resolved.

This is partly because Hinduism/

Sanatan Dharma is not easy to encapsulate in a single simple message. There is no single book, no original founder, no single God. Hinduism is a multi-layered, multi-lingual, polytheistic religion. India is as large as Europe and has just as many languages. Christianity united Europe till it broke up into rival sects, Catholic and Protestants, which led to many wars. Religion split Europe till after two bloody world wars people came to their senses and created the European Union.

A country as large and as diverse as Europe, with as many religions as you can wish for, plus the multi-coloured rich Hinduism, has never been conquered by a single ruler. It was democracy which united the Doab and Punjab with Bengal and Assam plus the South. No region, no

language can ride roughshod over others. Democracy allows disputes and complaints to be resolved peaceably. India has set up mechanisms for reconciliation, such as federalism with the statutory Finance Commission, Judiciary which is unitary, the Election Commission holding regular elections where millions express their voice.

Even over the last 72 years, there have been deep divisions between the North and South on the national language question. The Assamese felt their identity threatened by influx of 'other' people, and India is still sorting that issue. The Nagas in the Northeast and the people of the Kashmir Valley have yet to feel fully Indian. Democracy will provide the answer.