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FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Presenting the interim budget earlier this month, finance minister Piyush Goyal referred to women five times, including two mentions of 'sisters and mothers'. Finance minister Arun Jaitley referred to women-specific schemes eight times when he presented this government's last full budget in 2018. The prime minister, in his inimitable style, has said, "A daughter is equivalent to 10 sons. The *punya* you earn through 10 sons is equalled by one daughter. This underscores the importance given to women in our society. That is why, in our society, women have the status of *Shakti*." No wonder *Nari Shakti* or woman power is the new political mantra.

Women voters are clearly in every politician's thoughts for one very important reason—more women are turning out to vote. There has been a dramatic narrowing of the gap between male and female voter turnouts. From a 51 per cent turnout in 1980, women voters registered an all-time high of 65.3 per cent in 2014, as compared to 67.1 per cent male voters. A detailed 2014 study found the number of women voters actually ahead of male voters in 22 of the 30 states and Union territories where assembly elections were held—a phenomenon researchers describe as self-empowerment.

The implication of this self-empowerment is that there has been a silent feminisation of the electorate. The woman voter has arrived. Her vote matters. She now has the power to make or mar political fortunes. This explains the raft of women-specific schemes being rolled out by the states and the Centre.

Women have been the focus and, arguably, the biggest beneficiaries of the Modi government's flagship programmes like the Swachh Bharat Mission and the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana. Over 20 schemes were launched post the 2014 election across various states as political parties tried to woo the woman voter. From a grant of Rs 51,000 to help women from lower income families in Uttar Pradesh finance their weddings to financial support to pregnant women for medical check-ups in Bihar, fixed deposits of Rs 50,000 for girl children in Maharashtra, smartphones to women self-help groups in Andhra Pradesh, child kits for impoverished expectant mothers in Telangana, subsidised loans for women entrepreneurs in Karnataka, 11 grams of gold for brides of all communities in Assam—most Indian states today have signature schemes targeting women.

Studies indicate that women show independence of political choice and the factors that influence their voting go beyond caste and community calculus. This is why they sometimes spur significant policy changes. Prohibition implemented by Bihar CM Nitish Kumar in 2016 was famously seen as the fulfilment of a pledge to women voters. Similarly, the NDA's bill outlawing triple *talaq* is arguably an attempt to appease Muslim women.

On the flip side, there is abysmal representation of women in legislative bodies and within the power structures of political parties. Despite 15 Lok Sabha elections, a 2017 Centre for the Study of Developing Societies report notes the representation of women in the Lok Sabha is just a notch above the halfway mark of the world average of 22 per cent, with India ranked 141 among 193 countries in women's representation in the lower house. This imbalance is despite significant steps like amendments to the Constitution to reserve two-thirds of the seats in Panchayati Raj institutions for women. There are currently 1.3 million elected women representatives in such institutions in 20 states and Union territories. But this needs to extend to the upper legislatures and in Parliament. The BJP, whose election manifesto promised to reserve 33 per cent of the seats in the Lok Sabha for women, is now silent on this promise.

Our cover story *Her Vote*, put together by Senior Editor Shweta Punj, Deputy Editor Uday Mahurkar and Senior Associate Editor Kaushik Deka, with inputs from our bureaus across the country, looks at the rise of 'She Power' in Indian politics.

Beginning this week, INDIA TODAY magazine kicks off its coverage of the May 2019 general elections. Each week, we will examine in depth the key trends, personalities and events that will prove crucial in shaping the next government. This is an important election for India, as the party that won the first clear majority in Parliament in 30 years is seeking another term.

Hopefully, our insights over the coming weeks before the election will not only help you keep abreast of the latest electoral trends but also make a more informed choice. Keep watching this space.

(Aroon Purie)



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Cover by **NILANJAN DAS**



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BIJU BORO/AFP



BANDH OVER BILL Assam Gana Parishad members protesting during PM Modi's Guwahati visit on Feb. 8

CITIZENSHIP AMENDMENT BILL

MODI'S NORTHEAST GAMBLE

By Kaushik Deka

On February 9, addressing a gathering of nearly 200,000 people in Changsari near Guwahati, Prime Minister Narendra Modi lamented the fact that iconic singer and musician Bhupen Hazarika, who in January had been awarded the Bharat Ratna posthumously by the Union government, had not received the honour in his lifetime. He blamed this "neglect" on the Congress government, before pivoting to a justification of his government's commitment to passing

the Citizenship Amendment Bill 2016.

The bill has caused widespread fury in all the seven states of the Northeast, including Assam, with people spilling onto the street to protest the peril they believe the bill poses to their culture and language. Two days after Modi's speech, Hazarika's son Tez, who lives in the United States, described the award as a "display of short-lived cheap thrills". He said, essentially, the award counted for nothing when the Modi government was so determined to pass a bill that

flew in the face of his father's heartfelt beliefs and that rode roughshod over the wishes of the majority of people in the Northeast. It seems, he wrote on social media, "an underhanded way of pushing a law against the will and benefit of the majority in a manner that also seems to be grossly unconstitutional, undemocratic and un-Indian".

With the bill already passed in the Lok Sabha, protestors looked to the Rajya Sabha to block the bill. The Centre made attempts on February 12

and 13, to table the bill, despite its allies in Meghalaya threatening to walk out of the partnership and two BJP chief ministers—of Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh—going on record to ask that the bill be quashed in the upper house. Though, perhaps, in allowing the bill to lapse by tabling it so late, the government did take cognisance of the protests.

According to BJP sources, party president Amit Shah pushed the bill to placate the RSS, for whom the bill is an important step towards an undivided Hindu *rashtra*. The party knew they had to risk losing support in the Northeast. But the BJP's seeming indifference to protests in the region is rooted in demographic logic—the religious breakup of those who have been left out of the draft National Register of Citizens (NRC) and the demographic spread of Assam. Of the 4 million people left out of the NRC, BJP sources say, 2.2 million are Hindus, primarily Bengali immigrants from Bangladesh, as opposed to 1.8 million Muslims. “After claims and objections, around 1.2 million Hindus may remain outside the NRC. Offering citizenship to them will help us prevent Assam from becoming a Muslim-majority state,” says the state's finance minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, who has played

Himanta Biswa Sarma has convinced the BJP high command that public outrage over the bill will not cost the party in the coming Lok Sabha elections

the leading role in persuading Modi and Shah that the BJP's electoral prospects in the region will be unaffected despite the public outrage.

Sarma's confidence stems from the fact that indigenous Assamese-speaking people—who have been at the forefront of opposition to the bill—no longer have the numbers to decide elections in

any of the state's 14 Lok Sabha constituencies. “Even in the two so-called Assamese-dominated constituencies—Dibrugarh and Jorhat—Bengalis, Marwaris, Biharis, Nepalis and the tea tribes together outnumber Assamese voters,” says a BJP state leader. Also, he adds, “the announcement that a bill will be proposed to grant Scheduled Tribe (ST) status to six communities in Assam will win us new support. So the numbers are in our favour”. Sarma is confident that the BJP will win between 19 and 21 of the 25 available Lok Sabha seats from the Northeast.

While Assam, where the BJP is the dominant party, might offer a smoother ride, electoral manoeuvring will be easier said than done in Arunachal, Manipur and Tripura, where the coalitions are more fragile. Even partymen in these states, which historically have seen violent agitation against immigration of any kind, are opposed to the bill. It's a fine line the BJP is treading. On the one hand, fully backing the bill to appease its core Hindutva voters, on the other, perhaps letting the bill lapse in the upper house so that its Northeast alliances are preserved along with the party's political messaging that a bill strengthening Hindu solidarity was blocked by ‘anti-Hindu’ opposition parties. ■

RBI

DECODING DAS CAPITAL

By M.G. Arun

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI), under its new governor Shaktikanta Das, seems to be heading for a ‘course correction’ after the acrimonious war of words with the government just a couple of months ago, when Urjit Patel was at the helm. With general elections round the corner, the central bank's monetary policy committee, on February 7, decided to ease interest rates by 25 basis points, in the hope of driving growth, even as inflation fell on the back of low food prices. This was a significant departure from the RBI under Patel, which took a conservative line to keep inflation at the targeted 4 per cent. Das, a career diplomat, was the face of the government during demonetisation in his capacity as then economic affairs secretary, and was widely expected to toe the government line on the monetary policy.

While the decision to lower rates and change the RBI's policy stance to ‘neutral’ have been praised by sections of the government and industry, economists caution that such a U-turn can derail the discipline the RBI has maintained so far. “Reading between the lines, it appears that Das has changed the RBI's paradigm overnight, to one where growth is the focus of policy and inflation merely an input into decisions,” Freya Beamish, chief Asia economist at Pantheon Macroeconomics, told the *Bloomberg* news agency after the policy announcement. That opens the way for more rate cuts, she said, adding: “We are worried by the U-turn and what this week says about the RBI's frail autonomy and discipline.”

Coming just days after the interim budget, in which the government announced sops to farmers, the middle class and workers in the unorganised sector, this pump-priming could have an inflationary effect as it raises disposable income in the hands of millions. As per a Crisil report: ‘Some risks to inflation can emerge from consumption-focused expansionary fiscal policy, sticky core inflation, and normalisation of



FRANCIS MASCARENHAS/REUTERS

RBI governor Shaktikanta Das

food inflation (currently negative), which could gain speed if monsoons are sub-normal." A moderate upturn in global food prices and efforts to raise farm incomes could stoke inflation, it said. But the RBI does not seem to be too concerned and has forecast consumer price inflation at 3.8 to 4.2 per cent for the first half of fiscal 2020 and 3.9 per cent in the third quarter, while Crisil sees inflation touching 4.5 per cent in 2020.

Das's intervention also extended to another matter that generated a lot of friction between his predecessor and the government—the Prompt Corrective Action (PCA) framework, which imposed lending and expansion restrictions on banks with huge non-performing assets (NPAs) and losses. He chose to take three banks—the Bank of India, Bank of Maharashtra and Oriental Bank of Commerce—out

of the framework, leaving eight other public sector banks still in the PCA dock. Interestingly, the RBI has taken a liberal view of the three banks after they "provided a written commitment that they would comply with the norms of minimum regulatory capital, net NPA and leverage ratio on an ongoing basis". While Bank of India and Bank of Maharashtra have net NPAs of less than 6 per cent as per third quarter results, in the case of Oriental Bank of Commerce, though the net NPA was 7.15 per cent, the government has infused sufficient capital, bringing the net NPA to less than 6 per cent, the RBI said.

Meanwhile, there had been speculation over the RBI's transfer of surplus capital to the government, another matter of contention between Patel and the finance ministry. Reports say the finance ministry has sought Rs 27,380 crore from the RBI, withheld by the central bank towards risks and reserves in the previous years. The RBI held a contingency fund worth Rs 2.32 lakh crore in fiscal 2018. A decision on this is likely to be announced after the RBI's board meeting on February 18. However, Y.V. Reddy, former RBI governor, said, "There is merit in keeping the central bank's balance sheet strong if the government's fiscal balance sheet is weak." ■

THE LOWERING OF RATES, ON TOP OF THE BUDGET SOPS, COULD HAVE THE EFFECT OF STOKING INFLATION

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GAG

THE FEAR OF DISSENT

By Chinki Sinha

A clip of the veteran actor and director Amol Palekar being sharply interrupted as he drifted into criticism of the government—during a talk on the painter Prabhakar Barwe at the National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA) in Mumbai—became the catalyst for a free speech controversy last week. Palekar was told to stick to the subject, albeit as defined not by the invited speaker but by those who had invited him to speak. And then, after his talk petered out, the director of the NGMA strode up to the microphone and reminded him that he was speaking at “a government gallery”, as if this inoculated the institution from Palekar airing his misgivings.

The curator of the retrospective, Jesal Thacker, who is not formally affili-

ated to the NGMA, insisted that Palekar’s speech was digressing too much from the topic at hand—Barwe. “I stand for art and artists,” she says, “and I wasn’t opposing Palekar. My intention wasn’t to prevent him from finishing his speech, it was only to request him to share more anecdotes and fond memories about an artist who was being celebrated 24 years after his demise.” It’s a position echoed by Suhas Bahulkar, an artist and former chairman of the NGMA’s advisory committee in Mumbai.

The gist of Palekar’s complaint was that he had heard that the NGMA was planning to do away with these advisory committees and that indeed committees had already been dissolved and decisions would hence be taken by government

STAYING ON MESSAGE?

Amol Palekar (left) and Jesal Thacker (centre)

functionaries on possibly ideological or moralistic grounds. Speaking on the phone, Bahulkar says that he had written to the government about the purported procedural changes, but “Barwe’s exhibition should have been devoted to the artist’s integrity and honesty.” It is “really sad”, he adds, “that the whole issue is politicised.”

On the government’s part, the NGMA claims that the advisory committees

Was a propriety gag on Palekar necessary? Was it not okay to let him ruminate on Barwe as he saw fit

have not been scrapped, but have merely come to the end of their terms and “are in the process of being reconstituted.”

Part of Palekar’s concern also is the NGMA’s apparent desire to showcase more of its permanent collection, thereby affording less space to new work, or work it doesn’t own. This has already led, apparently, to the cancellation of proposed retrospectives of the work of artists like Sudhir Patwardhan and Mehlii Gobhai. Perhaps responding to the issues raised by Palekar, the NGMA has said the question of how much space will be available for hire is still to be settled.

In a press conference and in various interviews, Palekar said he was bemused by the misplaced concern over propriety, that there are other ways to discuss an artist’s work than to focus on the work alone. Besides, he said, had he known that he was supposed to clear the content of his talk with Thacker he would have declined the invitation. As for propriety, Palekar said he was “hurt” by the persistent interruptions and the silence of “senior artists” in the room. No explanation has been forthcoming about why he could not finish his speech, however inappropriate the organisers believed it to be. Or why an invited speaker with personal knowledge of Barwe and a considerable body of artistic work of his own cannot be trusted to ruminate as he sees fit, without being told to stay on message. ■



VIKRAM SHARMA

Q+A

“My fear for the country is not personal...the threat is real”

Former finance minister **P. CHIDAMBARAM** has been perhaps Prime Minister Narendra Modi's most vociferous critic. The Congress MP's barbs have not been personal, but couched in economic analysis and cultural concern. In *Undaunted*, a just-published collection of his newspaper columns, there is one message flashing bright red above the 'academic' tenor of his arguments: *Modi is bad for India!*

He talks to **SHOUGAT DASGUPTA**. Excerpts:

Q

What most dismays you about PM Modi's first term in office?

A. That he wasted a godsent opportunity of heading a government with an absolute majority in the Lok Sabha. With that kind of majority, the government could have implemented major structural and institutional reforms, but they blew it.

Q. What will persuade BJP supporters that *Undaunted* is not just party politics?

A. BJP supporters will resent the book because it holds a mirror to their faces. My fear for the country is not personal. My fear reflects the fear of the poor, the Dalits, the Muslims, the tribals, women, university students, scholars, NGOs, journalists and, you will be surprised, even businessmen. Is India not being compared to Turkey, Egypt, Russia and other countries where loss

of freedom and fear have grown vastly in recent years?

Q. Has it been made clear that any putative nationwide opposition alliance is not just one of political convenience but has substantial policy solutions?

A. Our manifesto will make that clear. We will present an agenda for Constitutional values, change and development. Our alliances at the state level will be built on the basis of a mutual acknowledgement of our respective manifestos. I am certain there will be a lot of common ground among the alliance parties.

Q. Have Indian elections become presidential to the extent that voters would find it difficult to trust a headless alliance?

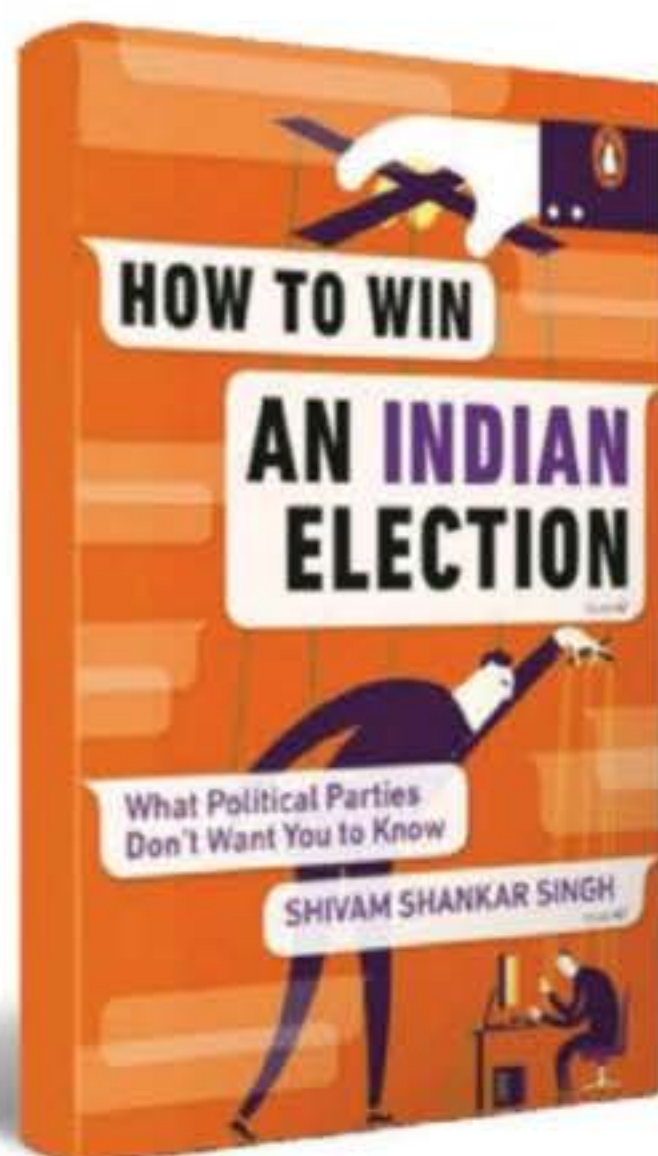
A. Not at all. Indian elections have become more federal, giving primacy to the situation in each state. The

non-BJP alliance is not headless, actually there is a head in each state. Where the Congress is the lead party, it will be the natural leader of the alliance. Where Congress is not the lead party, that role will be performed by another political party.

Q. Do you overstate the threat Modi represents to India's institutions, given episodes in the Congress's own history?

A. I agree that history holds lessons, but one cannot dwell in the past. One must move on. We are not overstating the threat; the threat is real. Several institutions have fallen or have been seriously undermined—the office of governor of the RBI, investigative agencies like the CBI and the ED, tax departments, regulatory institutions, tribunals and so on have been seriously impaired or undermined during Narendra Modi's tenure. ■

**HOW TO WIN
AN INDIAN
ELECTION**
What Political
Parties Don't Want
You to Know
by Shivam
Shankar Singh
Penguin Random
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₹299; 240 pages



**HOW TO RIG
AN ELECTION**
Tricks Despots
Play
by Nic Cheeseman
and Brian Klaas
HarperCollins
₹599; 320 pages

BOOKS

THE GREAT INDIAN (S)ELECTION

By Gilles Verniers

The greater reliance on data and new forms of communication in India's electoral campaigns has created a cottage industry of political consultants and data experts who lend their services to political parties and candidates, mapping constituencies and helping them target voters through these new tools. Shivam Shankar Singh, a data analyst and former BJP campaign analyst, provides an insider's account of digital campaigning in India. In seven chapters, Singh chronicles his journey serving various parties, detailing the part of political consultants, the role of technology and data in micro-targeting voters, and the attempts parties make to influence voters by appealing to local ascriptive identities and emotions.

One merit of the book is an insider's candid admission of what is already known: the current regulatory void regarding data and privacy in India enables parties to gather vast amounts of data on voters, data that most would not entrust political parties with were their permission explicitly sought.

The chapters dealing with graver forms of manipulation, such as fake news, are written in general terms and do

not bring much more information than what an informed reader would have already gathered in perusing the daily press. Nor does the author dwell much on the sources of disinformation, or on its organised nature.

Throughout the book, voters are often reduced to narrow sociological categories, such as OBCs, Dalits, Hindus and so on. This is what data-driven electoral mapping does: sorting voters with complex identities into reductive sociological boxes, assuming that these categories can be linked with predictable electoral behaviour. Barring a few social groups specifically aligned with certain parties, most voters belong to groups that are by themselves politically irrelevant, for being too poor, too small or too geographically scattered. Survey data tells us that the proportion of undecided voters has considerably grown in recent years and that many decide during the last phase of the campaign—two indicators that voters' decisions cannot be predicted solely based on their sociology or income level.

Those who look at electoral politics through a narrow lens often tend to overstate the importance of their own field of expertise. The BJP undoubtedly possesses competitive advantage with regard to data, voter-targeting and so-

cial media presence. But the fact that the party's electoral performances have greatly varied since 2014 shows that data handling alone is not the key to winning elections.

Recent research in India and elsewhere shows that social media-based strategies and communication have a greater mobilisation effect on a party's existing base than a persuasive one on its competitors' supporters. In other words, fake news and propaganda encourage one's supporters to mobilise and participate in elections, but rarely sways supporters of other parties. In Singh's account, voters come across as gullible and passive recipients of political propaganda.

All told, Singh's contribution contains interesting insider anecdotes on the functioning of the BJP's data operations. The book, however, falls short of providing new insights on electoral politics, especially to those already acquainted with other recent books, such as Prashant Jha's *How the BJP Wins* or Swati Chaturvedi's *I Am a Troll*. The author's choice of placing himself at the centre

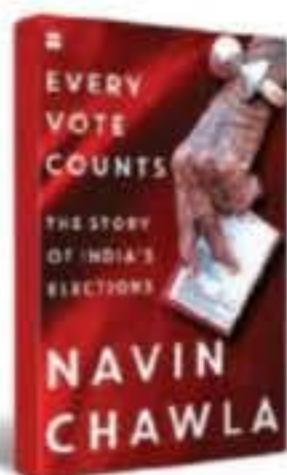
While Singh's book contains insider anecdotes, readers would gain from Cheeseman and Klaas' handbook of electoral fraud

of the book's narrative might stem from a desire to make the book accessible to a broad audience, but it does so at the expense of analytical depth and contextualisation of what is, after all, only one aspect of electoral campaign and strategies.

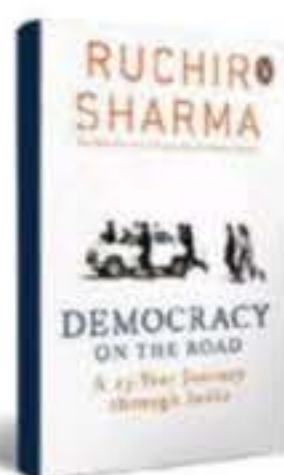
Readers interested in matters of electoral integrity would gain from reading Nic Cheeseman and Brian Klaas' riveting handbook of electoral rigging and fraud, a

clinical account of the methods used by authoritarian regimes to manipulate or coerce voters and influence electoral outcomes. Although written with authoritarian regimes in mind, the book details mechanisms that underlie some electoral practices common in India, such as vote buying, use of violence and polarisation as an electoral strategy and digital manipulation. The two political scientists' main conclusion is that improving the quality of elections is key to preventing or curbing temptations of manipulations that are inherent to the exercise of concentrated power. ■

POLL BOOKS



EVERY VOTE COUNTS
The Story of India's Elections
by **Navin Chawla**
HarperCollins India
₹524; 376 pages



DEMOCRACY ON THE ROAD
A 25 Year Journey through India
by **Ruchir Sharma**
Penguin Allen Lane
₹699; 352 pages



THE GREAT MARCH OF DEMOCRACY
Seven Decades of India's Elections
by **S.Y. Quraishi**
Penguin Viking
₹699; 320 pages

From the tale of India's first elections to a review of the major issues and controversies marking the conduct of elections today, Navin Chawla gives an account of the history of the Election Commission. The talent lies in the assemblage of interesting anecdotes and themes rather than the novelty of chronicling the role and impact of India's most trusted institution. Besides carving his place in the EC's exalted history and settling a few old scores in passing, Chawla writes a personal version of an already told story.

Among the flurry of books that will be written and published ahead of the next general elections, Ruchir Sharma's account of India's recent democratic trajectory will stand out for his ground-up outlook on electoral politics and for the range of insights on what changes and what persists in electoral politics. Based on anecdotes and acute observations gathered over 20 years of trudging through the country, Sharma provides the texture that is so often missing from this genre.

On the eve of India's 17th Lok Sabha election and celebrating the Election Commission's 70th year, former chief election commissioner S.Y. Quraishi has edited an informative volume of essays on polls. The volume covers the evolution, laws and reforms of the EC, the stranglehold of money and muscle power, the corruption and criminalisation of elections, and opinion polls and exit polls. The contributors range from former CEC T.N. Seshan to journalist Mark Tully. A foreword has been written by former president Pranab Mukherjee. However, the volume lacks a conclusion.

INDIA CALLING

For all the talk of mobile phone penetration into the Indian hinterland, numbers published this month by American 'fact tank' Pew Research Center, from a survey conducted between May and August last year, show that a significant proportion of Indians don't own any kind of mobile phone, let alone a smartphone. It follows on the heels of Pew Center research last year which

showed that a relatively small percentage of the population had online access. There is also a significant gender gap, with men more likely to own smartphones and go on the internet than women. Still, the sheer size of the Indian population means that only China is a bigger market for smartphones, with plenty of room in India for growth. Of course, Indians don't necessarily need to buy smartphones to

have access to such features as the internet. And social media, even if the numbers are surprisingly low, has an outsize influence on the national conversation. So much so that a parliamentary committee felt compelled to demand an appearance from Twitter chief executive Jack Dorsey on the grounds of the platform's supposedly "100 per cent Leftist bias", to quote one outraged BJP spokesperson.

24%

Indians report owning a smartphone, says Pew Research Center, compared to 95% people in South Korea, 88% in Israel, 60% in Brazil, 42% in Indonesia

35%

Indians don't own any kind of mobile phone, compared to 23% people in Philippines, 14% in Kenya, 10% in Tunisia, 6% in USA, 2% in Spain



37%

Indians aged 18-34 own a smartphone in 2018; up from 27% in 2015. 8% Indians aged 50 and above own a smartphone, in 2015, it was 6%

53%

Indians with "more education" use the internet at least occasionally or own a smartphone, compared to just 11% with "less education"

23%

"Adult" Indians report using social media, says Pew Research Center

1.2 BILLION

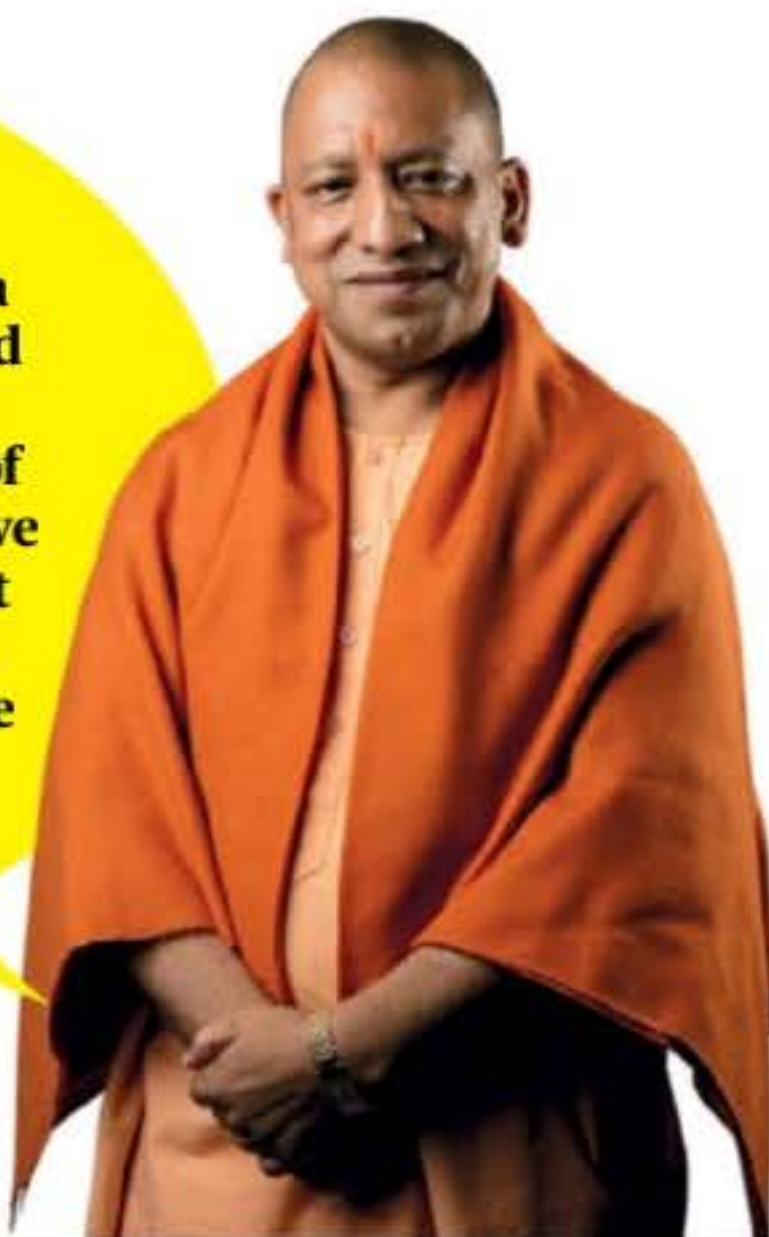
Mobile phone subscribers in March 2018, says the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India—suggesting connections for 90% of the population. But this fails to account for people with multiple subscriptions

38%

Women own mobile phones in India, says an October, 2018 Harvard Kennedy School study, compared to 71% of men. As of January, 2018, 159 million Indian men were on Facebook, 47.9 million women

PULLQUOTE

"Ayodhya is well known in India and across the world due to Lord Ram and not due to a foreign invader like Babur. The beliefs of people should be respected. I have said several times that the court should respect the sentiments of the people... it should not take more than 24 hours to find a solution"



Speaking in the Uttar Pradesh assembly, chief minister **YOGI ADITYANATH** once again called on the Supreme Court to hurry its processes and deliver a verdict on the building of a Ram temple on disputed land that will appease Hindutva sentiments. Last month, the prime minister insisted his government would wait until a verdict was delivered before taking the next steps, including an ordinance. But a verdict is unlikely to happen before the general election. The influential Shankaracharya Swaroopanand Saraswati has said that he will lead a delegation of 'saints' to Ayodhya on February 21 to lay down what is being reported as the "foundation stone" of the temple. Patience, whatever the prime minister says, does not appear to be high on the agenda.

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GLASSHOUSE

NAMO NO SHOW

The defence ministry had hoped that Prime Minister Narendra Modi would inaugurate the 12th edition of Aero India in Bengaluru on February 20. The air show seemed like the ideal stage to showcase the achievements of the Modi government in the defence sector, so close to the Lok Sabha election. However, Modi will be a no show at Aero India. No official reason has been given, but the obvious one is his cross-country electioneering schedule. A possible second is the opposition stepping up the rhetoric over the deal for procurement of 36 Rafale fighter aircraft from French company Dassault. France has the largest international presence at the show with 49 companies. Dassault will be showcasing three French air force Rafale jets and Modi clearly will not want to oblige the opposition with a photo-op of him standing next to the aircraft.



Illustration by SIDDHANT JUMDE

Political Actor

Even as the Congress and Janata Dal (Secular) work towards finalising the seat-sharing arrangements for the Lok Sabha election, **Sumalatha Ambarish**, veteran actress and wife of late Congress leader and actor Ambarish, has thrown her hat into the ring. Sumalatha, who lacks a political background, will contest from the Mandya Lok Sabha seat, currently held by the JD(S). Leaders of both parties are miffed with chief minister H.D. Kumaraswamy and have questioned her motive. **Sumalatha claims that Ambarish's fans want her to continue his legacy and will not withdraw. She may emerge as a spoilsport if the Congress rejects her candidature. That would be quite a cinematic twist.**



LONELY AT THE BOTTOM

Things have gone downhill for Rashtriya Lok Samata Party chief **Uppendra Kushwaha**, who quit the NDA in December for the opposition grand alliance. He was quick to disown two of his MLAs, who opted to stay with the NDA. Party colleague and Lok Sabha MP Arun Kumar left months ago, and, on February 10, his party vice-president Nagmani quit too.

POINT MAN

Priyanka Gandhi's new private secretary is being watched with interest. **Dhiraj Srivastava** was Rajasthan chief minister Ashok Gehlot's officer on special duty during his first tenure, which ended in 2003. After Gehlot lost power, Srivastava, who has worked with the National Advisory Council and the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation, was sought on deputation by Sonia Gandhi. Always known as Gehlot's man to the Gandhi family, Srivastava has quit his government job and moved on to the next generation.



Paying His Dues

Maharashtra Education minister **Vinod**

Tawde was mired in controversy after he ordered the arrest of a student for filming their interaction at a college in Amravati, in which he told the student to give up studies if he couldn't afford the fees. However, a changed minister addressed the NCC cadets in Mumbai on February 7, where he explained what his government was doing to reduce the high fees. This is the kind of humility election season can inspire.



POINT OF VIEW

The New Language of Politics

By Peter Ronald deSouza

When Yudhishtira lost his kingdom to Duryodhana, in a loaded game of dice, he did not call him a '*chor*' and nor did Duryodhana charge Yudhishtira with being a '*shahzad*' for demanding his kingdom back. Maybe such offensive language was not used because the epic was written in Sanskrit where such epithets are not available. Or perhaps they were not used because the language of offending and insulting, belittling and mocking one's adversaries is alien to our Indic culture. The epic stresses the courtesies that Dhritarashtra received, even on the battlefield, despite the fact that he could have avoided the war if he had been less indulgent of his eldest son. So why have we strayed so far in the language that is in use in our politics today? Is this something to worry about?

I think it is. I think we must protest against such language because it diminishes us as a people and as a nation. No prime minister of a democracy should, on the suspicion of misappropriation, be publicly called a '*chor*'. And similarly no senior leader of a major political party should be called a '*shahzad*', or be subject to the kind of personal ridicule that the BJP has regularly heaped on the president of the Congress party. This is the language of the gutter. It is unacceptable, for it crosses the red line of public decorum.

But in addition to the culture of public decency that is undermined by such language, it also soon leads to a culture of violence. Lynchings and arson are only the next step in this new public culture that presents one's adversary as a national enemy. When language is filled with courtesies, replete with the protocols of respect, it produces in the mind restraints on bad behaviour. Although we may have the inclination to physically threaten an opponent, when the speech culture is respectful, it will psychologically restrain the inclination to violence. In contrast, the spread of abusive speech weakens such restraints. We see it across the world with


racist attacks in the US, shootings in France and lynchings in India. Abusive language leads to violent behaviour. This we must work to prevent.

In the past five years, one has become inured to such abusive language. One has heard it in Bengali and Bhojpuri, Tamil and Telugu, Kannada and Konkani, and come to associate it with the everyday press briefings of the BJP. The churning of democracy seems to have brought to the top people who can only mock their opponents in the most offensive language. They seem unable to lift the public discourse to the levels that a Nehru or a Lohia or an Ambedkar or a Vajpayee were able to do. Listening to them, the public saw democracy as a path to a decent society. Not any longer.

The eminent scholar of Indian politics, W.H. Morris-Jones, in an essay published in the sixties, wrote about three idioms of Indian politics: the modern, the traditional and the saintly. The modern signified the language of constitutional politics and administration. The traditional referred, in contrast, to caste and community and to the language of rural politics. The saintly represented the language of Gandhi and Vinoba Bhave—*ahimsa*, *bhoodan*, *swadeshi* and *seva*. In the first few decades of independent India, all three idioms co-existed. Today, a fourth idiom has been added to our politics, and sadly it has eclipsed the other three. Now, we get *chor*, *pappu*, anti-national, suited-booted. Prime Minister Modi's public speeches have given such a trend popular legitimacy. Rahul Gandhi has now joined this offensive speech wagon. Listening to him was a wake-up call. The party of Nehru cannot be allowed to descend to such abusive language. Nor should the party of Golwalkar be permitted such a vocabulary. We are not like that. Only the Hindu Mahasabha is. It distributed sweets on the anniversary of Gandhi's assassination. ■

The writer is professor at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi

Illustration by TANMOY CHAKRABORTY



The party of Nehru cannot be allowed use of such abusive language. Nor should the party of Golwalkar be permitted such a vocabulary

MP: ANOTHER RAJE
JOINS BATTLE
PG 16

MAHARASHTRA:
ALLIANCE AGONY
PG 17

RAJASTHAN: GEHLOT'S
LOAN WORRIES PG 18

ANDHRA: NAIDU'S
POLL PITCH PG 19

STATES



ARIJIT SEN/GETTY IMAGES

KARNATAKA

BSY 'TAPE' TIES BJP IN KNOTS

The audio tape of Yeddyurappa's alleged attempts to buy over JD(S) MLAs has left the BJP red faced and party legislators fidgety

By Aravind Gowda



BENGALURU

A probe launched by the Karnataka government into an audio tape of BJP leader and former chief minister B.S. Yeddyurappa allegedly attempting to lure Janata Dal (Secular) MLAs with money has become an embarrassment for the party.

The tape allegedly also implicates legislative assembly speaker K.R. Ramesh Kumar as part of the conspiracy to bring down the JD(S)-Congress government. Kumar strongly denied the allegations on February 8, the day the tape was released by chief minister H.D. Kumaraswamy. "I am extremely pained to hear this allegation, considering the image I have maintained in public life. I request the government to order a thorough probe and submit the report in 15 days," Kumar said in the assembly three days

later. Kumaraswamy wasted no time in ordering the probe by a special investigation team (SIT).

The controversy is unlikely to die down easily as the taped conversation allegedly raises the names of several prominent politicians. Kumaraswamy claimed the tape captures a conversation between Yeddyurappa and JD(S) MLA Naganagouda's son Sharanagouda, with the BJP leader making an offer of Rs 10 crore. Yeddyurappa is also allegedly heard saying that 12-13 MLAs from the coalition government were ready to help instal a BJP government. Another BJP MLA Shivanagouda Naik, who organised the meeting between Yeddyurappa and Sharanagouda, is allegedly heard saying that the speaker had been taken into confidence in return for Rs 50 crore for accepting the resignation of the MLAs who had switched sides.

Yeddyurappa, who dismissed the tape as fake, now admits to have met Sharanagouda. "Kumaraswamy tried to trap me by sending his men. But they have edited the conversation between us (with Sharanagouda) to suit themselves," he said in Hubballi on February 10.

YEDDYURAPPA'S 'OBSESSION' WITH THE CM'S CHAIR HAS REPORTEDLY UPSET MANY IN THE STATE BJP

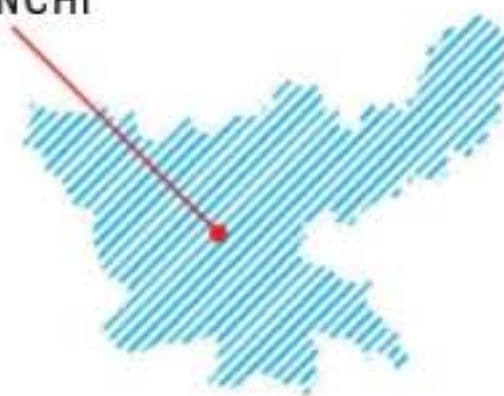
While the probe report is awaited, a section of the state BJP is reportedly upset with Yeddyurappa for what they consider his 'obsession' with the chief ministerial position. They feel the party needs to focus on the forthcoming Lok Sabha election rather than battle controversies like this. "We know this coalition will not last long. But this is not the

time for such adventures," said a former BJP minister on condition of anonymity. "We have to prepare for the forthcoming Lok Sabha election."

Some political analysts are predicting a slump in the BJP's tally in the Lok Sabha poll. "Surveys suggest the BJP may come down to 12 seats from 16 if the Congress and JD(S) strike a pre-poll alliance," says A. Veerappa, a Bengaluru-based political analyst. "It will be wiser for Yeddyurappa to focus on strengthening the party."

On February 10, another JD(S) MLA, K. Srinivasa Gowda, claimed that two BJP legislators had given him Rs 5 crore as advance to quit the party. "They offered me Rs 30 crore in all to quit the party, but I returned the money," he claimed. In January, Yeddyurappa was reportedly reprimanded by the BJP central leadership when he announced the collapse of the JD(S)-Congress government after five coalition MLAs were spotted with BJP leaders at a Mumbai hotel. The move fizzled out as the BJP failed to get 15 legislators from the ruling coalition to resign. ■

RANCHI



JHARKHAND

Congress-JMM Are Poll Pals

But the hasty alliance and seat-sharing has irked allies like former chief minister Babulal Marandi

By Amitabh Srivastava

The BJP-led alliance losing six of the seven assembly bypolls in Jharkhand since December 2015 seems to be an encouraging scenario for the Congress, with party president Rahul Gandhi striking a quick deal for the Lok Sabha election with Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) executive president Hemant Soren last week in Delhi. As per the pact, the Congress will contest seven seats in Jharkhand, leaving four for the JMM, two for the Jharkhand Vikash Morcha (JVM) and one for the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD).

The Congress and the JMM have also agreed to the idea of letting the former lead the alliance during the Lok Sabha poll. In the assembly poll, the JMM will contest most of the seats with Hemant Soren leading it. Soren, a former chief minister, reportedly accepted the deal, given the fact that Jharkhand is also scheduled to have an assembly poll later this year.

The Congress-JMM alliance, however, has a moun-

✓ **REVIVING OLD TIES** Rahul Gandhi and Hemant Soren



tain to climb. To begin with, they have opened a battle front at home, as an unhappy JVM president Babulal Marandi has threatened to pull out of the alliance. Marandi, who was Jharkhand's first chief minister, wants to field his candidates from at least three Lok Sabha seats, particularly from Godda, a seat the Congress too

“The JVM may not have won any seat in the 2014 Lok Sabha poll, but it polled more votes than the JMM,” says a Congress leader

wants to contest.

“The Congress may let go one of their seats to Marandi if the JVM chief makes it a non-negotiable condition. The JVM may not have won any seat in the 2014 Lok Sabha poll, but it polled 12.35 per cent votes—higher than the JMM's vote share of 9.42 per cent,” said a senior Congress leader.

The JMM-Congress alliance has performed well in just one of the three Lok Sabha polls held since Jharkhand's creation in 2000. In 2004, the grand alliance of Congress-JMM-RJD-CPI won 13 of the 14 Lok Sabha seats in the state. Their massive victory was largely attributed to the BJP facing strong anti-incumbency and a negative reaction to the saffron party's 'India Shining' campaign. In the 2009 Lok Sabha election, the BJP won eight seats in Jharkhand. The party further strengthened its position in the 2014 Lok Sabha election by walking away with 12 of the 14 Lok Sabha seats, bagging 40.71 per cent of the vote. ■

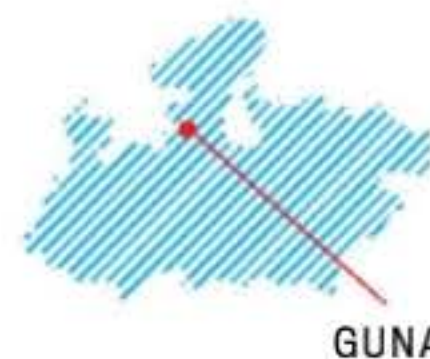
PARVEEN NEGI



▲ **POLL-READY?** Priyadarshini Raje

MADHYA PRADESH

ANOTHER RAJE JOINS BATTLE?



Will Priyadarshini Raje replace husband Jyotiraditya as the Congress's Guna candidate?

By Rahul Noronha

The possible entry of two high-profile names from the Congress in the upcoming Lok Sabha election has leaders within and outside the party abuzz. While Nakul Nath, chief minister Kamal Nath's son, is tipped to take over from his father at Chhindwara, the parliamentary constituency he has held since 1980, it is being speculated that Priyadarshini Raje, wife of former Union minister and Guna MP Jyotiraditya Scindia, will contest the Lok Sabha poll this time.

Appointed general secretary in charge of western Uttar Pradesh,

Scindia faces the tough challenge of reviving the Congress in at least 46 Lok Sabha constituencies in the neighbouring state. The situation may prompt Priyadarshini Raje to take up a bigger role in Guna. In the past, she has campaigned for her husband. In October 2017, about a year before the assembly poll, her name was added to the electoral rolls in Shivpuri, which falls under the Guna Lok Sabha constituency. Scindia had been a voter in Gwalior, and her shifting to Shivpuri had generated a lot of interest at the time. More recently, on February 11, a tour programme made public by

her office detailed her travels across Guna Lok Sabha constituency between February 18 and 26. Simultaneously, a group of Congressmen from Gwalior, camping in Delhi last week, demanded that Scindia shift base from Guna to Gwalior and Priyadarshini Raje be fielded from Guna. If this happens, the Congress will have strong candidates in both Gwalior and Guna.

This may also mark the return of the Scindias to the Gwalior seat—as was the case till 2014 when it was represented by Scindia's aunt and BJP's MLA from Shivpuri, Yashodhara Raje.

More importantly, if Priyadarshini Raje contests the election, it may lead to a reworking of political calculations within the BJP. For instance, Union minister Narendra Singh Tomar, the current Gwalior MP, may find it a tough contest; he may even decide to shift out of Gwalior to a 'safe' seat, considering his popularity in Gwalior is not at an

all-time high and the Congress did exceptionally well in Gwalior in the assembly election, winning seven of the eight seats. Secondly, it may force a decision to field Yashodhara Raje as the BJP nominee from Guna or Gwalior—whichever seat her nephew does not contest. Central to this is a Scindia family unwritten norm, which has been honoured till now, that the family members will not contest against each other.

A section of Congress leaders believe that Priyadarshini Raje will not contest and her current tour programme is being organised only to campaign for her husband.

However, Congress spokesperson Pankaj Chaturvedi says, "People like Priyadarshini Raje should be in politics, given the experience she has in social work and public life. The party leadership will decide who will contest from which seat. But party workers have been demanding that Priyadarshini Raje should be fielded from Guna." ■

MAHARASHTRA

A Make-or-Break Alliance

Regional fronts play hard to get, threatening Congress-NCP vote banks and their efforts to launch an anti-NDA tie-up

By Kiran D. Tare



▲ **ALLY HUNT** (L-R) Chhagan Bhujbal, Ashok Chavan and Manikrao Thakre with Prakash Ambedkar

As Maharashtra chief minister and deputy chief minister respectively between 2009 and 2010, Ashok Chavan of the Congress and Chhagan Bhujbal of the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) never missed an opportunity to go after each other. Nine years on, the compulsion to stay relevant has not only brought them together, efforts are also on to convince regional fronts to join a wider anti-NDA (National Democratic Alliance) alliance led by the Congress.



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These include Bharip-Bahujan Mahasangh chief Prakash Ambedkar, who has launched a third front, Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi (VBA), in association with Asaduddin Owaisi's All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM). Ambedkar is in demand since he has emerged as a strong Dalit voice against the BJP in the past one-and-a-half years. The VBA is eyeing the 13 per cent Dalit and 11 per cent Muslim vote banks—core

Congress territories.

The Congress finds the VBA's demand of 12 out of 48 Lok Sabha seats unrealistic. To make matters worse, Lok Sabha MP Raju Shetti's Swabhimani Shetkari Sanghatana (SSS) has announced a fourth front. Without the two, the Congress-NCP might face a hard time in western Maharashtra and Marathwada, where farmers, Dalits and Muslims play a decisive role in 10 seats. Sugarcane

growers are unhappy with the Congress and NCP leaders as the sugar mills have not paid them their dues for the past few months. They can create trouble for the alliance in Kolhapur, Hatkanangale, Solapur and Sangli constituencies. The VBA could dent the Congress-NCP in Aurangabad, Akola, Bhiwandi, Beed, Latur and Mumbai South.

Analysts, however, say not all Dalits and Muslims will back the VBA. "We will

support the Congress or the NCP—whoever accepts our demands," says Fakir Muhammad Thakur of the Maharashtra Muslim Manch (MMM), which has a membership of 2 million Muslims. The state has some 15 million Muslim voters. In 2014, the MMM helped the BJP get 14 per cent Muslim votes. Things may be different this time. "We are certainly not going to vote for the AIMIM or the BJP," declares Thakur. ■

RAJASTHAN

GEHLOT'S WAIVER WORRIES

Fake beneficiaries may turn the Congress's poll plank of extending loan waivers into a headache

By Rohit Parihar



JAIPUR



VIPIN KUMAR/GETTY IMAGES

▼ **PROXY WAR** Chief minister Ashok Gehlot has ordered a probe

A farm loan waiver of up to Rs 50,000—announced by the previous BJP government and rolled out in all the 33 districts of the state in early February—has put the Ashok Gehlot government in a bind, when it was hoping instead to win some goodwill from the move in the run-up to the Lok Sabha election.

The matter came to light after protests broke out over the list of loan waiver beneficiaries in the Large Multipurpose Agricultural Societies (LAMPS) of three villages—Govadi, Gamda Bamniya and Jethana—of Dungarpur district.

The list of beneficiaries allegedly included names of people who had not received loans in the first place. These 'beneficiaries' staged a protest outside the district administration, claiming they hadn't taken any loan and demanded police action against those who had misappropriated funds using their names.

The one-time loan waiver of up to Rs 50,000 for small and marginal farmers who had defaulted on short-term loans from cooperative banks was to have been extended to loans from all banks and up to Rs 2 lakh. The promised state largesse was a

key poll promise of the incumbent Congress government.

The Gehlot government has been under pressure from the opposition for the delay in processing the farm loan waiver, which was to be done by the end of December last year, as promised by Congress president Rahul Gandhi. The state government has so far distributed loan waiver certificates worth Rs 3,100 crore and it has also estimated that the loan waiver will cost the state Rs 18,000 crore.

Neeraj K. Pawan, registrar, cooperative department, told INDIA TODAY that 43 of the 127 active LAMPS of

Dungarpur are under investigation. Pawan even admitted that the manager had falsely listed beneficiaries as the eligible beneficiaries couldn't be Aadhaar verified.

While the government has insisted that only genuine, Aadhaar-verified farmers will get the benefit, an inquiry into the loan waiver lists submitted by 19 of these societies has revealed that 7,700 of the 10,600 names are wrong. Of the estimated 2.6 million eligible beneficiaries of the Rs 50,000 loan waiver, the government suspects the number of fake claimants could be around 200,000.

The authorities are yet to find out who really benefitted from the false waiver claims. In Kota, the district authorities have accused three cooperative officials of using the names of 49 farmers to pocket

OF THE 2.6 MILLION BENEFICIARIES, THE NUMBER OF FAKE CLAIMANTS COULD BE 200,000

waivers worth Rs 34 lakh. As reports of the fraud in Dungarpur became known, similar reports started pouring in from other districts. Sources say the police have refused to lodge a case in Dungarpur, terming it a civil matter. An alarmed Gehlot government has set up a committee of ministers, headed by urban development and housing minister Shanti Dhariwal, to identify the real beneficiaries and work out the modalities of the loan waiver again.

Meanwhile, deputy chief minister Sachin Pilot has described the forgery in the loan waiver scheme as a heinous crime and promised that the state government will ensure that only genuine farmers get the benefit. ■

ANDHRA PRADESH

Direct Voter Transfer

The CM woos marginal farmers with a Telangana-like support scheme

By Amarnath K. Menon

Taking a leaf out of his Telangana counterpart's book, Andhra Pradesh chief minister N. Chandrababu Naidu has launched an ambitious investment support scheme for marginal farmers, guaranteeing them Rs 5,000 an acre every season. But unlike the Rythu Bandhu scheme next door, Naidu's 'Annadata Sukhibhava' programme will cover tenant farmers too.

Out of the Rs 12,732 crore allocation for agriculture in the interim budget, Rs 5,000 crore is being set aside for the scheme. The challenge, though, lies in taking the benefit to the tenant farmers since their number is not known.

About 58 per cent of labour in Andhra Pradesh is engaged in farming, which contributes 32 per cent to the Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP). This being an assembly election year, even the rival YSR Congress has promised a similar scheme for farmers.

The Naidu government's other farmer-friendly measures include enhancing input subsidies for paddy, sugarcane, cotton and groundnut from Rs 10,000 to Rs 15,000, for maize to Rs 12,500 from Rs 8,333 and for pulses and sunflower from Rs 6,250 to Rs 10,000. This is expected to benefit more than 3.9 million farmers. The state

is also doubling the market intervention fund to Rs 1,000 crore to support crops not covered under the minimum support price. While Naidu has doubled the allowance for the unemployed to Rs 2,000 a month, the YSRC has promised Rs 3,000. The spending on social security pension schemes has been more than doubled, from Rs 5,012 crore last year to Rs 10,401 crore.

Critics say Naidu's profligacy will push the state deeper into a debt trap. Andhra's total liabilities have shot up

from Rs 1,48,744 crore in 2014-15 to Rs 2,23,706 crore in 2017-18. But state finance minister Yanamala Rama Krishnudu prefers to look at the brighter side. "Andhra Pradesh achieved an average growth rate of 10.6 per cent in the past four years and

was ahead of all-India growth in all three sectors of the economy," the minister says.

Comparisons with the Centre's budget announcements are inevitable. Agriculture minister S. Chandramohan Reddy says: "What we have announced is much better than what the NDA (National Democratic Alliance) did. They have promised just Rs 6,000 for a farmer's family while our chief minister is giving Rs 24,000 a year to each old-age pensioner and Rs 36,000 annually to the differently abled." ■



▲ **SOP BOX** Andhra chief minister N. Chandrababu Naidu

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CRORE

has been earmarked for the Annadata Sukhibhava support scheme for farmers

WHY HER VOTE COUNTS

 **MANDATE
2019**
COVER STORY

With women choosing to vote in unprecedented numbers, they can now make or break political parties. They are increasingly following their own priorities. Will they cast the decisive vote in 2019?

By Shweta Punj, Uday Mahurkar and Kaushik Deka



PANKAJ NANGIA/MAIL TODAY



Rima Pramanik, 18, a first year

student of Mathematics honours from North 24 Parganas district, will cast her vote for the first time in 2019. She is one of 60 million first-time women voters who will exercise their right in this fiercely contested general election. Pramanik is also a beneficiary of the West Bengal chief minister's Kanyashree scheme (stipend of Rs 1,000 per year for girl students of Class IX to XII and a Rs 25,000 one-time grant for continuing their higher studies after school). On her

voting choices, she is clear that she will vote for the candidate who has enabled her. "Whoever is helping us, has been with us at every bend in our life, will get my vote." She's also got a bicycle from the state to go to school and financial support for her father's operation. She knows she is a clear beneficiary of the schemes rolled out by the Mamata Banerjee government.

Nilima Mondal, 31, is from Bodai village, also in North 24 Parganas. She has used the *chullah* (a hearth which burns wood) to cook

for nearly all her life, and has developed bronchial problems for her pains. All that changed after she became a beneficiary of the Prime Minister's Ujjwala scheme and got a free LPG connection. The gas connection has improved her health, and while her daughter is a beneficiary of the state's Kanyashree scheme, she says she will plump for the prime minister who has "brought a smile to my home".

Like many other women, Rima and Nilima find themselves at the centre of a high-pitched election where the stakes are high for both, those in power and in the opposition. The non-committal woman voter with no loyalties, but an independent mind is the one the parties are targeting most determinedly. And in recent years, women have been coming out to vote in greater numbers than ever before, well-informed and independent in her choices.

Milan Vaishnav, senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington, whose research focus is the political economy of India, believes the woman voter's moment has arrived: "For the first time in history, we are seeing the gender gap close. Women are coming out to exercise their franchise, which makes them swing voters. These are people you can convince to join your side. We have seen it in 2014, in places where women's turnout increased, the BJP benefitted more."

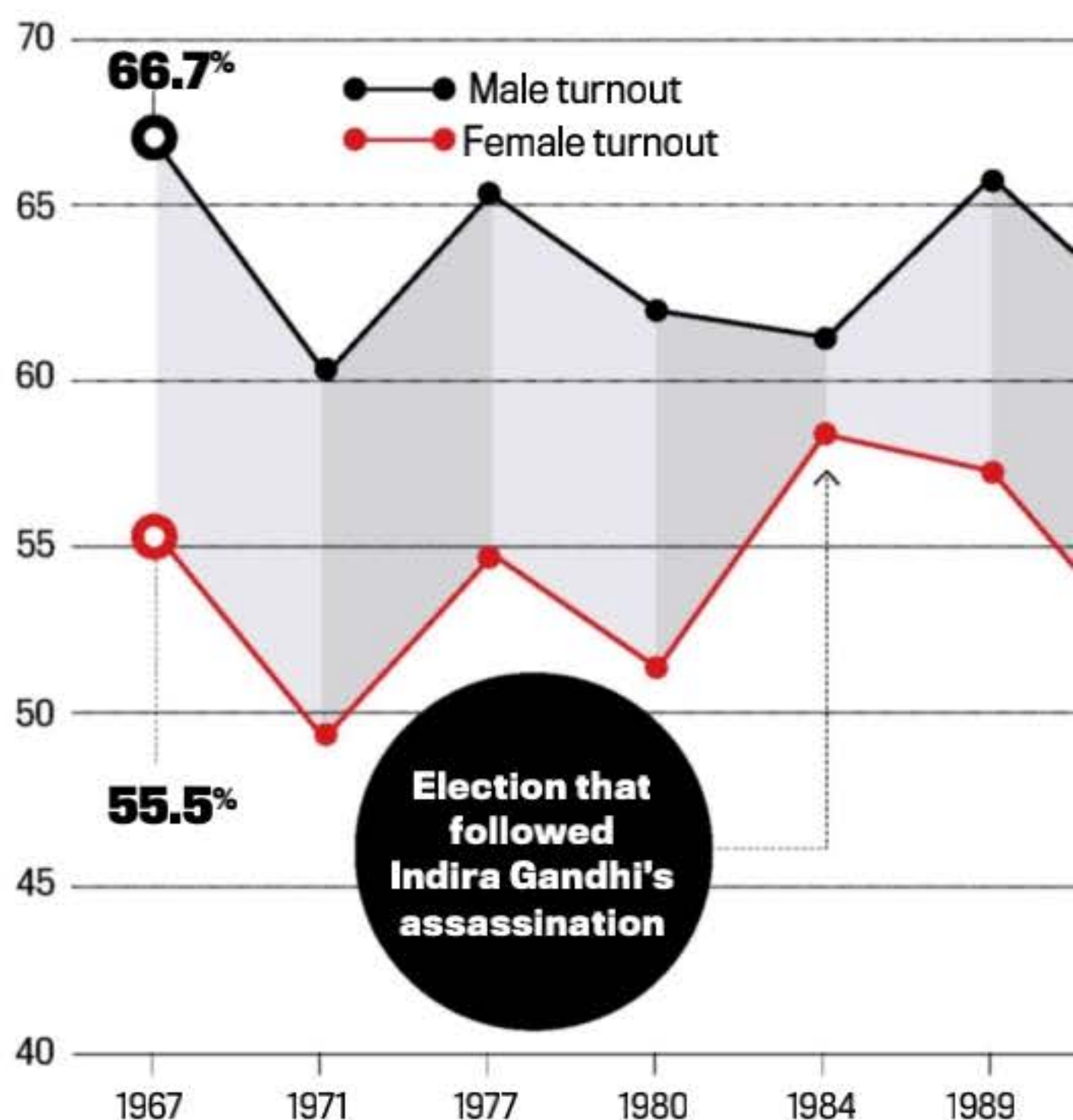
WHY IS SHE IMPORTANT?

The importance of the Indian woman voter is reflected in the political rhetoric across parties. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's flagship schemes—whether it be Ujjwala or the sanitation campaign of building toilets or prioritising ASHA (centred around maternal health)—are all focussed on women as key beneficiaries. Politicians are also extolling the virtues of women as better money managers and homemakers. "Our country is moving from women's development to women-led development," said the prime minister in a recent speech. Interim finance minister Piyush Goyal evoked "mothers and sisters" while trumpeting every flagship scheme of the Modi government. "I want to give 10 crore toilets to my sisters and mothers so that they get dignity of life," Goyal said in a post-budget interview to INDIA TODAY, invoking women to justify the government's massive off-balance sheet borrowings. "That programme cannot wait even if it means I have to borrow a little more."

The Opposition too is not far behind. Congress president Rahul Gandhi has made a fervent poll pitch, saying if voted to power his party would ensure the passage of the Women's Reservation Bill, which proposes to reserve 33 per cent of all seats in the Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies. Bringing Priyanka Gandhi to a crucial, strategic position in the party is also a move to directly reach out to women voters.

The gender gap in male and female voter turnouts is at a historic low. So, if earlier it was three women to every 10 male voters, now the numbers

GETTING THERE TO HAVE HER SAY



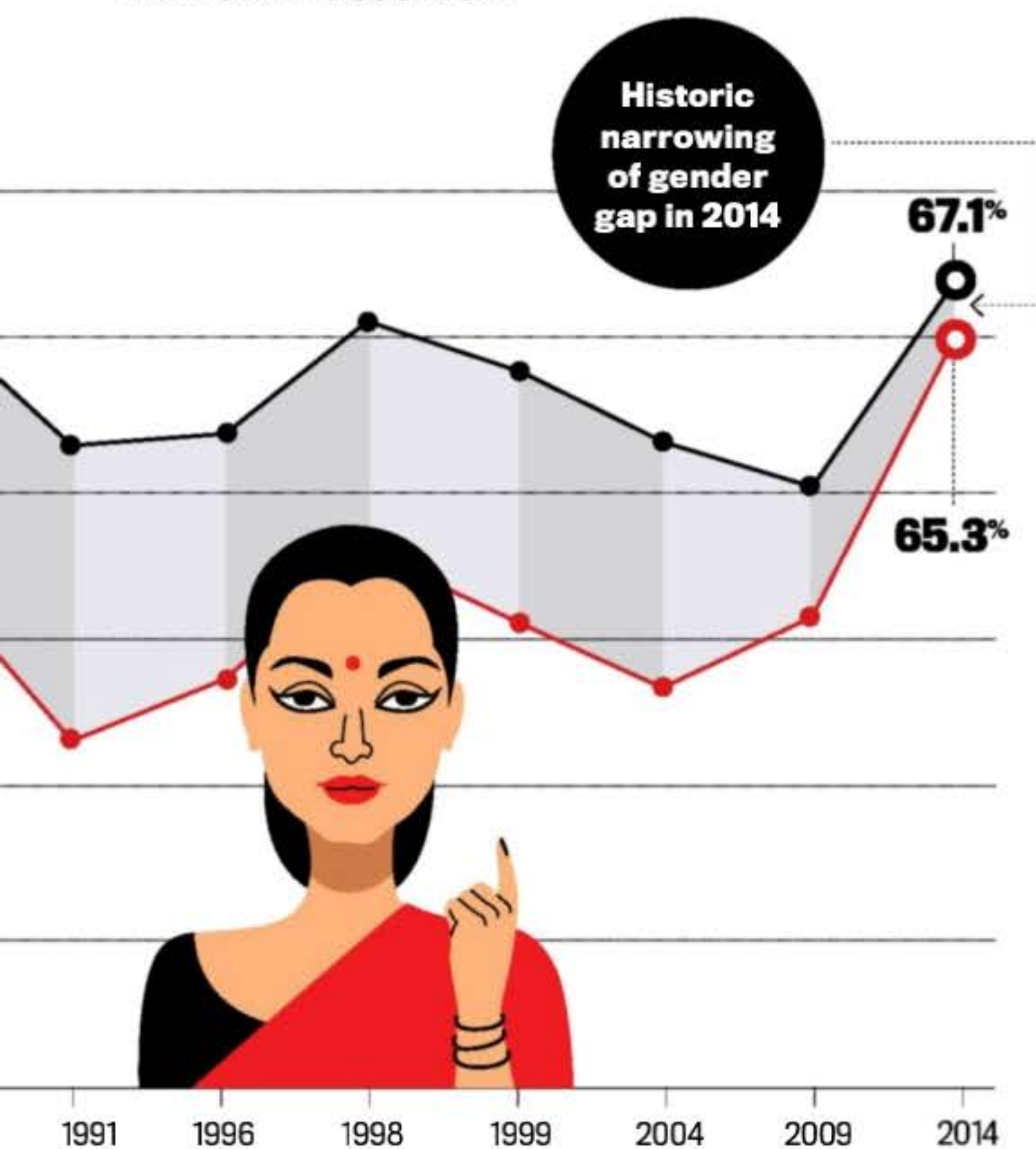
**TOTAL NO. OF
MALE VOTERS IN 2014**

29,32,36,779

**TOTAL NO. OF
FEMALE VOTERS IN 2014**

26,05,65,022

Was the 2014 election, when women voters nearly matched the turnout figures recorded for men, an inflection point, the beginning of a new era of assertion?



Source: Election Commission of India

are up to seven women voters for every 10 men. Women's participation reached an all-time high in the 2014 Lok Sabha election (260 million with a 65.63 per cent voter turnout). The difference in turnout was down to below 2 per cent in the 2014 general election.

In fact, several districts in Tamil Nadu, Nagaland and Sikkim have closed the gender gap and, in some of them, more women are voting than men. In the 2017 Uttar Pradesh assembly poll, women voters outnumbered their male counterparts. About 63.26 per cent of women voters in the politically crucial state went to the polling booths as against 59.43 per cent of the men. In Karnataka, the number of women voters increased by 13 per cent following the revision of electoral rolls in 2018.

CHANGE IS IN THE AIR

All political parties are following the data to pitch their political messaging and campaign strategies to appeal to women voters since there is enough empirical evidence now to suggest that women voters can swing elections. In December 2018, the Congress carried out a survey of about 40,000 women in Karauli, Rajasthan, to understand their

Graphics by TANMOY CHAKRABORTY

POLL CARD #ONE



SUBIR HALDER

Vote for Jobs

Name: Rupsha Mitra

Age: 21

Address: Barrackpore, West Bengal

Education: MSc. Geography

Status: First-time voter; mother is an employee on contract with the West Bengal government; father deceased

Occupation: Student

Income: Nil

Benefits received: Rs 25,000 one-time grant under the Kanyashree Prakalpa after graduation

Hopes for: Job security to support her mother

"These days even Ph.D students are sitting idle at home. These things will be in my thoughts when I go to vote"

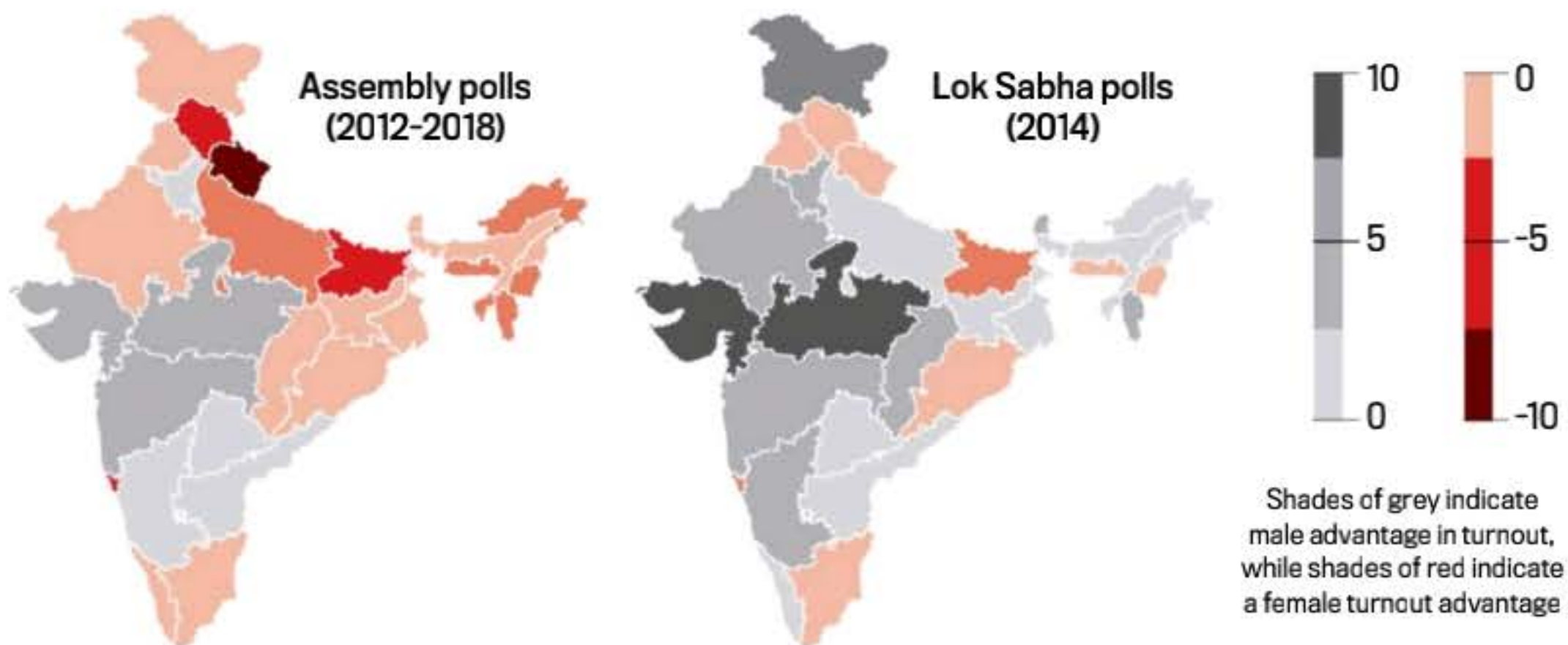
BATTLE OF THE SEXES... ER... BALLOTS

In theory, as the nation made its “tryst with destiny”, she got the same voting rights, but it took 70 long years in a free—yet sexist and patriarchal—India for her to close the gender gap in electoral assertion. Here’s how women are playing their part in India’s great show of democracy

By Damayanti Datta

The Narrowing Gender Gap

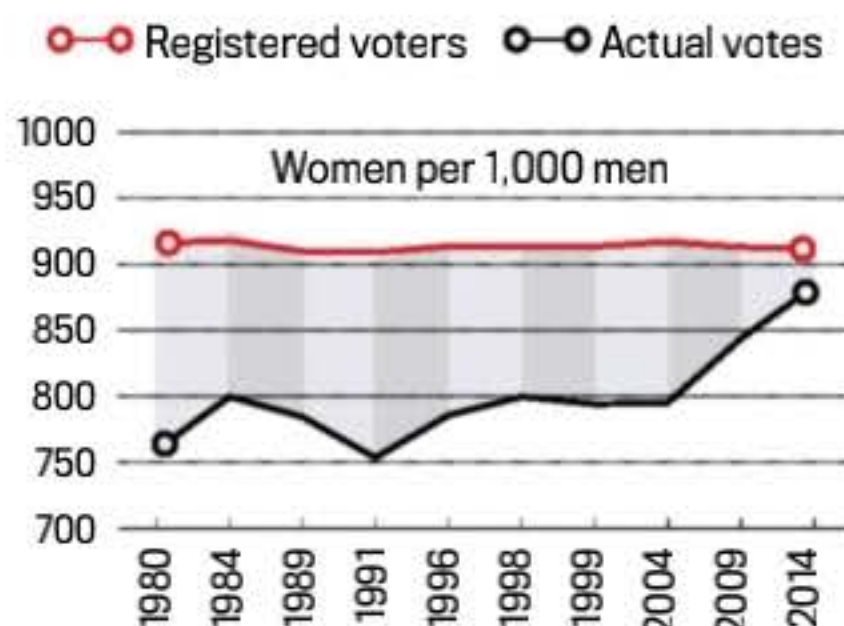
In half the states and Union territories, the turnout of women voters surpassed that of men, 2012-18



By and large, the gender skew is in favour of women more in assembly polls than in parliamentary elections, which could also be an indicator of their greater willingness to engage with local issues that tend to shape their lives. Also, they tend to be more involved in backward states than prosperous ones, where men seem to turn up in greater numbers

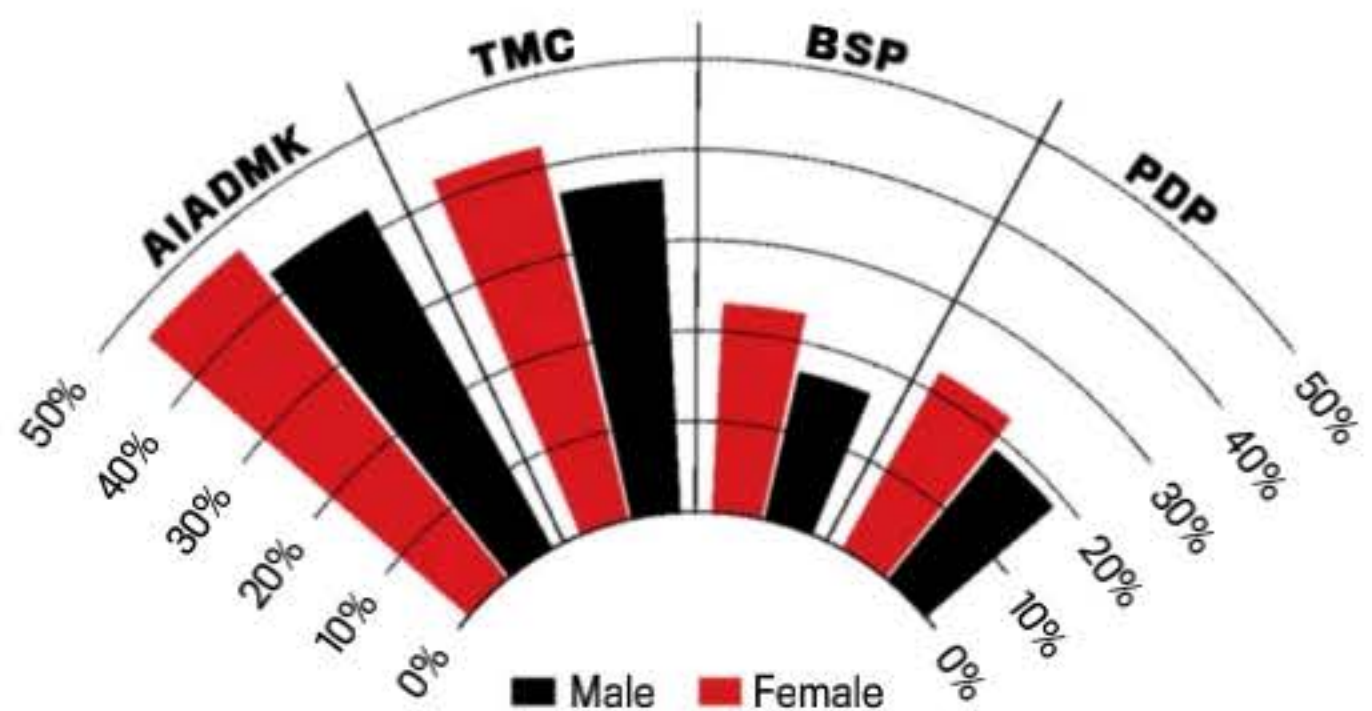
Proactive on Election Day

Figures from Lok Sabha elections, 1980-2014, show the relative increase in female voter participation is driven not by higher registrations but their desire to turn up on voting day



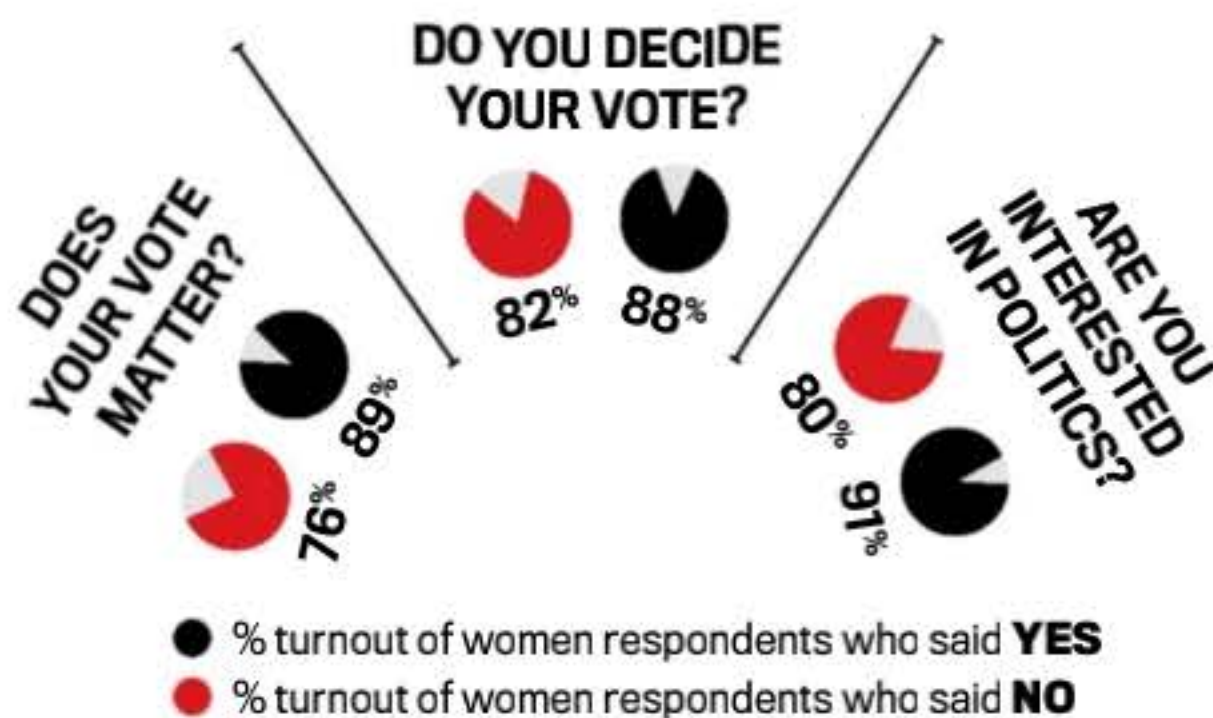
Women for Women

A post-poll survey in 2014 shows that parties led by women did better among women than among men



My Vote, My Voice?

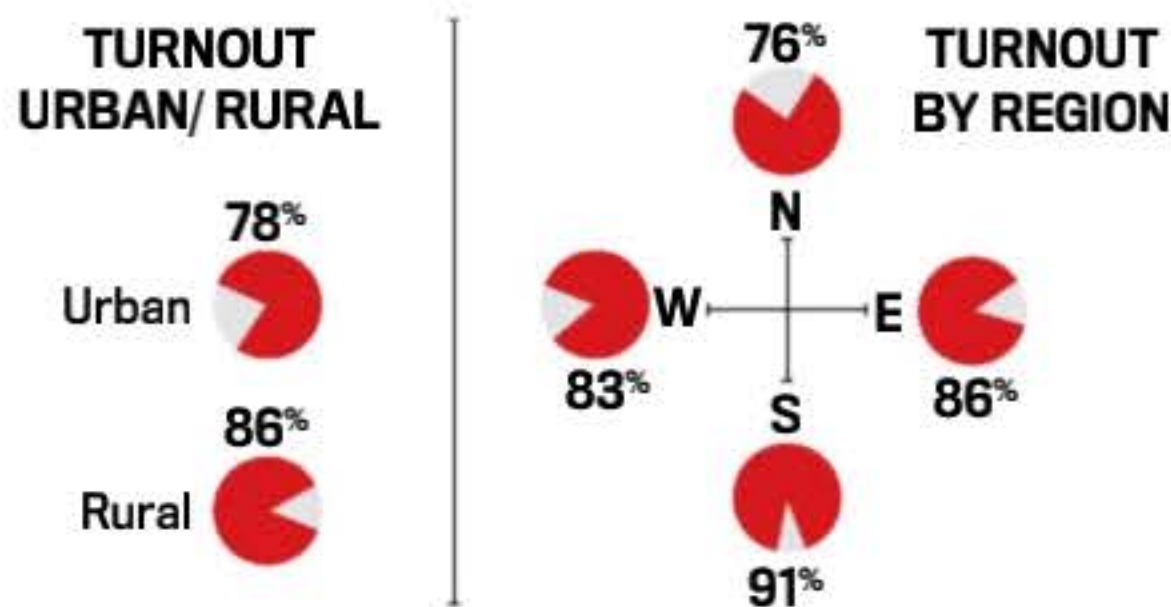
How their interest, independence and self-image influence the decision of Indian women to turn up for the vote



Source: CSDS survey 2009

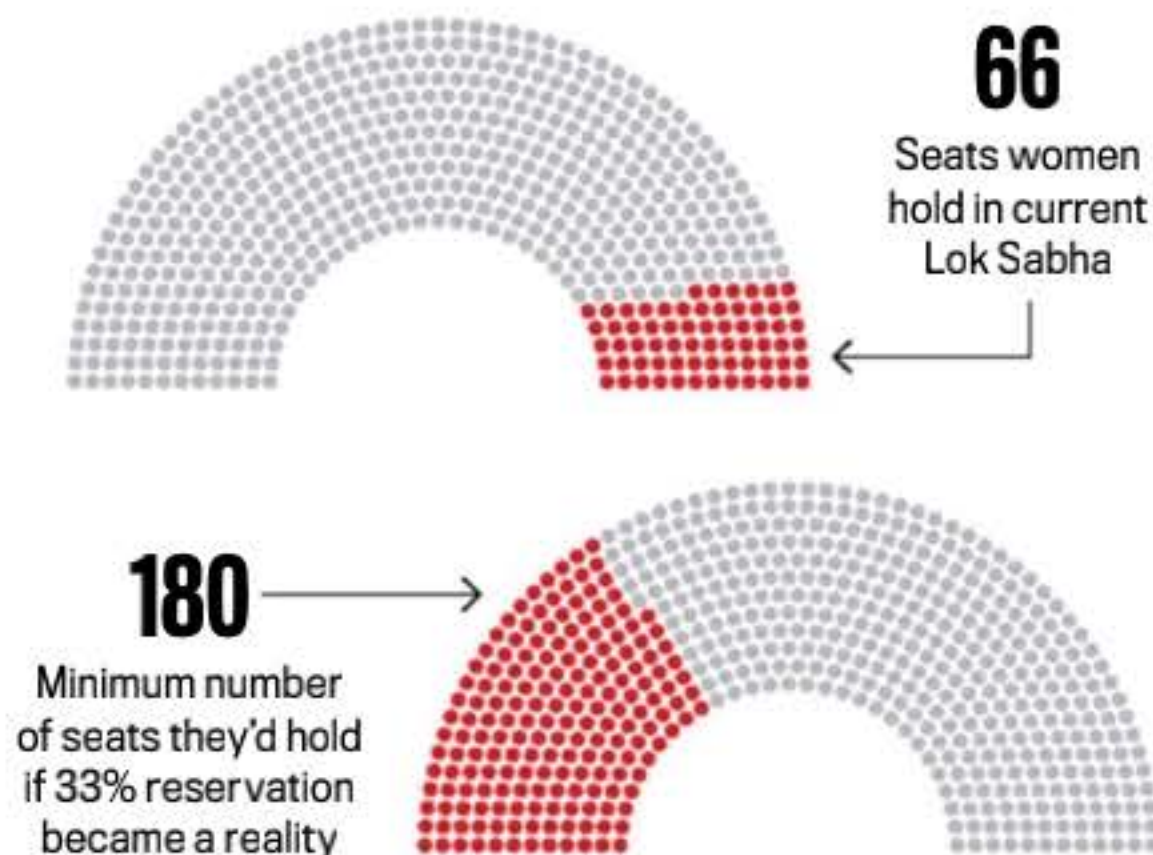
Show of Strength

Women respondents in the south were the keenest to go out and vote, followed by women in the east, west and north



All turnout figures are percentages of women polled in a CSDS study, 2009

The Case for Reservation



voting behaviour. The survey asked about their access to information, political choices (were they different from those of their husbands, brothers or fathers). The findings were striking—nearly 75 per cent respondents said they get information independently of the men and are independent in their political choices, a near complete reversal of their responses in 2009 (after the 2008 assembly election) when most said they vote for whoever the family voted. Karauli, incidentally, has a lower literacy rate than the national average and is classified as an under-developed district.

A lot of this also has to do with access to information. With over a billion mobile connections

“The year 2019 will be an information election. I think in a household now, there could be four different votes”

Praveen Chakravarty,
Chairman, Congress data analytics dept

cutting across social sectors, access to information has become easier than ever before and women are consuming it fervently. Praveen Chakravarty, chairman, data analytics department of the Congress party, explains that the concept of a 'household vote' has turned on its head. "I think in a household now, there could be four different votes," he says. "The year 2019 will be an information election. There's been a dramatic change in the way political parties are viewing this election."

Shamika Ravi, director of research at Brookings India, cites a study she conducted on Bihar's two assembly elections in 2005. With no clear winner in February, president's rule was declared, with re-elections happening eight months later in October-November. Ravi's comparative analysis of electoral outcomes for the 243 constituencies showed that the winning party changed in 87 constituencies. In other words, 36 per cent of the previous winners were voted out. "That brought an end to the RJD rule of 15 years and led to the emergence of JD(U) as the single largest party. There were no new policies in these eight months.

WOOING HER

How parties across the political spectrum are trying to appease the woman voter

By Damayanti Datta

BOOK OF LIFE



West Bengal, 2014: Rs 1,000/ year and Rs 25,000 one-time conditional cash transfer for schooling to deter early marriage

Rajasthan, 2016: Rs 15,000 for BPL school toppers; Rs 25,000 for BA and MA; education scholarships for all girls born after June 1

Bihar, 2018: Rs 54,100 from birth of a girl child till graduation

Rajasthan, 2018: Free basic computer training for 200,000 women

UP, 2019: Grants for education and marriage for girls

Assam, 2019: Nine new women's colleges; e-bikes for girl students securing first division in class XII exams

CENTRAL SCHEMES

2016: Online platform for over 2,000 courses, covers 30 million students

2018: To improve quality of school education; funding for library, digitisation and skill development; scholarship scheme for girl students who want to pursue higher education; scheme for research fellows at the IISc/IITs/NITs/IISERs/IIITs, to encourage innovation in science and technology

MEANS OF LIVELIHOOD

Rajasthan, 2015: Rs 50,000 to every girl born

Maharashtra, 2016: Rs 50,000 FD at birth for 18 years

Bihar, 2016: 35% quota for women in government jobs

Karnataka, 2016: Loans from banks/ other institutions for income generation activities

Rajasthan, 2017: Rs 1,000-1,500 pension for widows/ divorcees

Karnataka, 2018: Rs 10,000 to women street vendors

Telangana, 2018: Interest free loan (Rs 5-10 lakh) to 4.6 lakh self-help groups, covering 8.36 mn families

Andhra Pradesh, 2019: Rs 10,000 capital infusion to all 9.4 mn SHG members plus a smartphone each

Rajasthan, 2019: Rs 3,500 for jobless women with family incomes less than Rs 2 lakh



FOR THE BRIDE

Telangana, 2014: Rs 1 lakh for SC, ST & minority brides of EWS parents

Bihar, 2017: Rs 5,000 financial aid

Madhya Pradesh, 2017: Rs 2 lakh to whoever marries a widow (18-45 years)

Rajasthan, 2017: Rs 30,000 for widow remarriage, Rs 15,000 for mass marriage

Uttar Pradesh, 2017: Rs 51,000 for mass marriage scheme for BPL families

Madhya Pradesh, 2018: Rs 51,000 as remarriage assistance

West Bengal, 2018: Rs 25,000 to EWS girls for getting married

Uttar Pradesh, 2019: Budget proposes Kanya Sumangla Yojana for the education of the girl child

Assam, 2019: Budget proposes 1 tola (11 gram) gold to all brides from LIG families

CENTRAL SCHEMES

2015: Loans to encourage women to start new ventures; savings scheme to encourage parents to build a fund for their girl child

2016: Mahila e-haat, a bilingual online marketing platform for women entrepreneurs to showcase their products and services

2017: Free electricity connections to BPL households, especially beneficial for women living in rural areas



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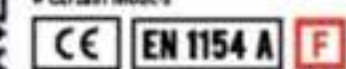
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HEALTH IS WEALTH



West Bengal, 2016: Free health insurance cover of Rs 5 lakh to women, spouse and parents in informal sector

Telangana, 2015: Wholesome meals to BPL pregnant women, lactating mothers and children below age six.

Telangana, 2017: Rs 12,000 to impoverished expectant mothers and child kit

Madhya Pradesh, 2018: Financial support to pregnant women for medical check-ups

Rajasthan, 2018: Two-year childcare leave

Assam, 2019: Budget proposes monthly stipend of Rs 600 for girls aged 12-20 for the purchase of sanitary napkins

CENTRAL SCHEMES

2014: 90 million toilets built in rural India to eradicate open defecation and

make sanitation safer, hygienic and accessible, impacting the health and dignity of women

2015: Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao campaign to stop female foeticide and promote welfare of the girl child.

2016: Clean cooking fuel -LPG cylinders-for all BPL families at subsidised rates so that they switch to clean household energy and address health issues from indoor pollution.

2017: Cash incentive of Rs 6,000 for optimum nutrition of pregnant/ lactating mothers; more than 5 million women expected to benefit every year

2017: Maternity leave upped from 12 to 26 weeks; government to refund employers for leave given

2018: Help in setting up small-scale sanitary napkin manufacturing units

DEMAND FOR DIGNITY

UP, 2015: Shelter homes and 24-hour helpline for women

Bihar, 2016: Liquor prohibition, fulfilling a pledge made to women voters

Rajasthan, 2016: Training 1.5 lakh school girls in self-defence

CENTRAL SCHEMES

2015: All-in-one centre to support women victims of violence, provide them shelter and police assistance

2016: National awards to recognise efforts made by women for the cause of women

2018: Passport rules amended in favour of single mothers: either mother or father's name can be provided, no certificate of marriage/ divorce needed. Restriction on unaccompanied women above age 45 to perform Haj removed

2019: Awards to women for taking leadership in Swachh Bharat Mission





> IN CONSULTATION

Rahul Gandhi with Mahila Congress workers in Bhopal

PANKAJ TIWARI

The explanation for the changed result was the voter turnout of women in Bihar. More women came out and voted against the previous winners the second time.” Nitish Kumar, who took over as chief minister, instantly recognised it and “has been very sensitive and responsive to the preference of female voters”. Ever since, many of his programmes, from the bicycle scheme to liquor prohibition in the state, seem to suggest that he recognises the power of this ‘vote bank’.

Ravi explains another facet of her study—the results indicated that a spurt in female voter turnout reduced the re-election chances of a party, while the rise in the number of male voters improved it. When women exercise their vote independently, they show that their interests are distinct from the other half of the society. A far cry from the time when universal suffrage was being debated, when the 19th century political theorist and economist, James Mill, had argued that to keep the expenses of a representative system down, women need not have separate voting rights because their interests were included within those of their husbands and fathers.

Traditionally, the BJP’s appeal to women voters has lagged slightly behind its acceptance by men. In a 2014 post-election survey, the party found that 33 per cent men and 29 per cent women had voted for the BJP, according to a party document accessed by INDIA TODAY. Fast forward to 2017, and a party research paper showed that the party had made big gains amongst women voters in Haryana, Odisha and West Bengal while the growth among the men was moderate. Another pre-election intra-party survey in 2018, in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan this time, showed a slight bump in popularity among female voters, from 29 per cent to 31 per cent between 2014-2018. According to a senior party strategist, it was the ‘macho bachelor’ image of PM Modi that now appealed to them.

Women have been a key constituency for Modi since he en-

POLL CARD #TWO



Vote for Safety

Name: Priya M. Varghese

Age: 42

Address: Powai, Mumbai

Status: Married, mother of two

Occupation: Software professional

Income: Undisclosed

Benefits received: Nil

Hopes for: Women’s safety, skill development and financial opportunities, especially for rural women

“Although the corporate environment ensures protection, the situation is different when I step out of office. Women, even in cities, are not safe, they live restricted lives compared to men”



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ASHOK PRIYADARSHI

POLL CARD #THREE

Vote for Opportunity

Name: Rekha Verma (R) and Shivani Verma

Age: 44 and 18

Address: Nawada, Bihar

Status: Mother and daughter

Occupation: Mother runs a beauty parlour, daughter is doing B.Com

Income: Rs 1,75,000 a month

Benefits received: Nil

Hope for: Security and reservation for women

"It's important to vote, to assert our priorities and, one day, secure reservation for women" –Rekha

"My first vote will be for security and equal opportunity. Will also post on Facebook" –Shivani

tered electoral politics. He has always projected himself as a 'protector', especially among rural women. Even after the Gujarat riots in 2002, when there was a big question mark on his return to power, he had relied on the support of women who would often come to him to get their children blessed, say Modi watchers in Gujarat. It was this image which prodded Modi to look at women as a crucial constituency. On taking charge again as CM, he took many female-centric decisions. The absence of separate toilets for girls was a major reason for parents to not send their daughters to school. He raised these issues in the 2014 election too, and they were at the centre of his campaign pitch.

The past five years have seen many schemes focused on making the lives of women easier. The Ujjwala gas kit, extension of maternity leave for government employees, the Rs 6,000 allowance for pregnant and lactating mothers, even Swachh Bharat—have all sought to engage the woman voter. "Our health cover for pregnant women under Mission Indradhanush and Poshan Abhiyan is unique in the Indian history, as it focuses on pre-natal care," says BJP presi-



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POLL CARD #FOUR

Vote for Housing

Name: Kota Rama; **Age:** 45

Address: Mogdumpuram, Warangal, Telangana

Education: Class seven dropout

Status: Single mother, leader of a women's self-help group

Occupation: Rice mill driver

Income: Rs 5,000 a month

Benefits received: Her daughter got 1 lakh under Kalyani Lakshmi scheme for poor brides; Rs 1,000 pension since Jan. 2018

Hopes for: Allotment under housing scheme for the poor



“Everybody votes for what they can get, not for what they have already”

POLL CARD #FIVE

Vote for Jobs

Name: Mamta Namdeo

Age: 35

Address: Itwara, Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh

Education: B.Ed

Status: Single, takes care of niece

Occupation: Receptionist at private hospital

Income: Rs 7,000 a month

Benefits received: Niece entitled to Rs 1 lakh at age 21, if she studies up to Class XII and is unmarried, under Laadli Laxmi scheme of state government; will receive Rs 18,000 in Class XII

Hopes for: Greater share of women in employment



“Women have reservation, but government jobs are few”

dent Amit Shah. “It’ll will have a long-term effect, as it should drastically bring down malnutrient birth rates.”

Party sources say a game-changer for the Modi government in terms of women voters is the hike of Rs 1,000 to 1,200 in honorariums to 2.5 million anganwadi and ASHA workers (announced late last year after an agitation in which they demanded a considerably higher pay hike), besides the free annual accident insurance cover of Rs 4 lakh. The party is hoping to make inroads into the Muslim women constituency through the triple *talaq* bill and performing Haj by unaccompanied Muslim women legal. Minister for minority affairs M.A. Naqvi feels “the two steps have made a deep impact even in orthodox sections of the Muslim community”.

Ravi believes that the schemes around maternal health and LPG are likely to impact electoral outcomes because respiratory ailments and indoor pollution are leading cause of death in the country’s north. So too Swachh Bharat and the open defecation-free campaign, as a leading cause of children’s deaths in poorer states is diarrhoea.

WHAT WOMEN WANT

As it turns out, women want and vote on very different issues as compared to men. While more men are likely to vote on the lines of caste, religion, nationalism and identity, women are most likely to focus on economic issues which have a direct bearing on the quality of their life. “For the

female voter, it is about the present and future, while for the male voter it’s about identity,” says the Congress’s Chakravarty. The party has carried out several surveys which show that the woman voter cannot be wooed by clichés or headlines. Findings from Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra suggest that the woman voter is angry about demonetisation and, remarkably, the cow slaughter ban (here the concerns seem to be the livelihoods of their sons and husbands, and stray cattle overrunning their farms). Women are also likely to vote over job opportunities for themselves or their children. Other top concerns are safety and security.

In Kerala, for instance, women voters outnumber the men and no political party can afford to ignore their preferences. In the 2016 assembly poll, women voted overwhelmingly in favour of the Left Democratic Front. A major factor is this was the sexual abuse cases that came to light during the United Democratic Front regime. Even Congress MP Shashi Tharoor was nearly defeated in the 2014 Lok Sabha election after the suicide of his wife, Sunanda Pushkar.

A big impetus in mobilising the woman voter in recent years has been reservations in local body polls. The probability of a woman candidate winning is strongly correlated with their numbers in a constituency. Ravi says: “Women vote for women. When more women contest, there is a pipeline effect. It lowers the barriers of entry into these public institutions.”

But in terms of actual political leadership positions held



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POLL CARD #SIX

Vote for Dignity

Name: Anita Prajapati; **Age:** 25

Address: Kurauni, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh

Education: Graduate

Status: Just married; lost father, an agricultural labourer, at age 10

Occupation: Housewife **Income:** Nil



Benefits received:

Rs 35,000 and a smartphone under the Mukhyamantri Samoochik Vivah Yojana for brides

Hopes for: State should provide jobs to girls of poor families

"I would vote for a party that supports me"

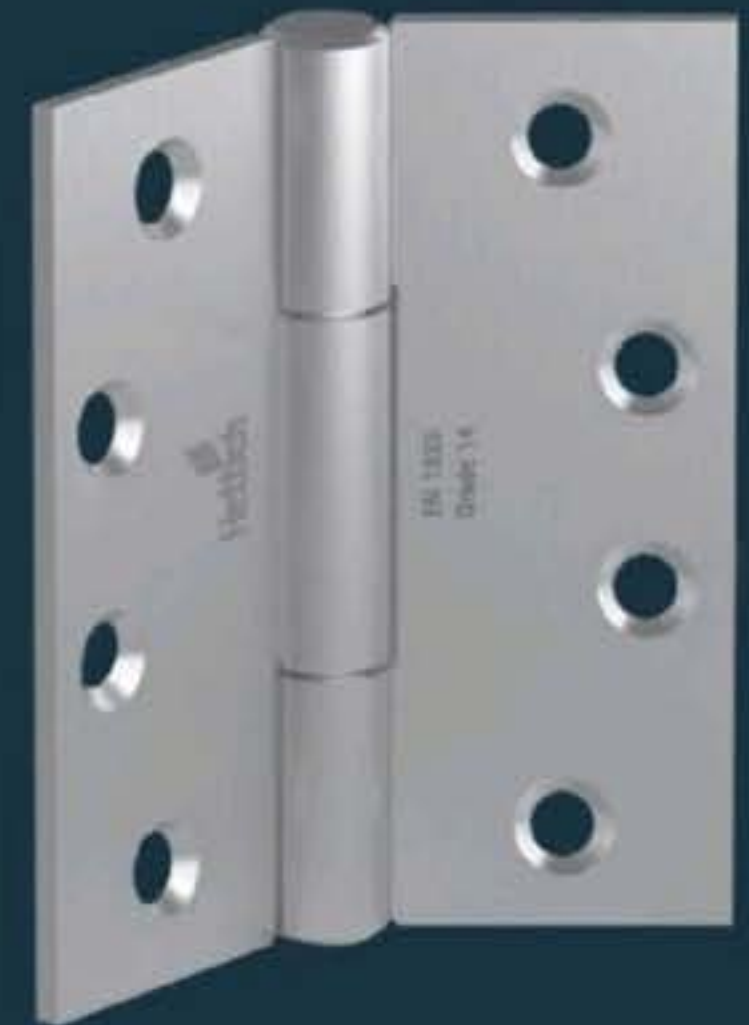
“Women vote for women. When more women contest, there is a pipeline effect. It lowers the barriers of entry into public institutions”

Shamika Ravi, Brookings India

2019 election promises to be one in which the rules of engagement will change further as will the political discourse. As women come out in greater numbers, they will seek more accountability and are more likely to vote for development than caste and identity. If that happens, the country will be the better for it. ■

with Amarnath K. Menon, Romita Datta, Rahul Noronha, Amitabh Srivastava, Rohit Parihar, Aravind Gowda, Ashish Misra, M.G. Arun, Jeemon Jacob and Kiran D. Tare

by women, the number is abysmally low. The party that has women in strategic leadership positions, ironically, happens to be the BJP—at 27 per cent. Political parties like the Aam Aadmi Party, Trinamool Congress and the Communist parties have dismal ratios. That said, both the national parties, the BJP and Congress, have now fielded their strongest women leaders as party spokespersons to gather momentum among woman voters. As elections near, the role that leaders like Priyanka Gandhi in the Congress and Smriti Irani in the BJP play could see more scrutiny. They could emerge as the flag-bearers of the rising woman electorate this year. The



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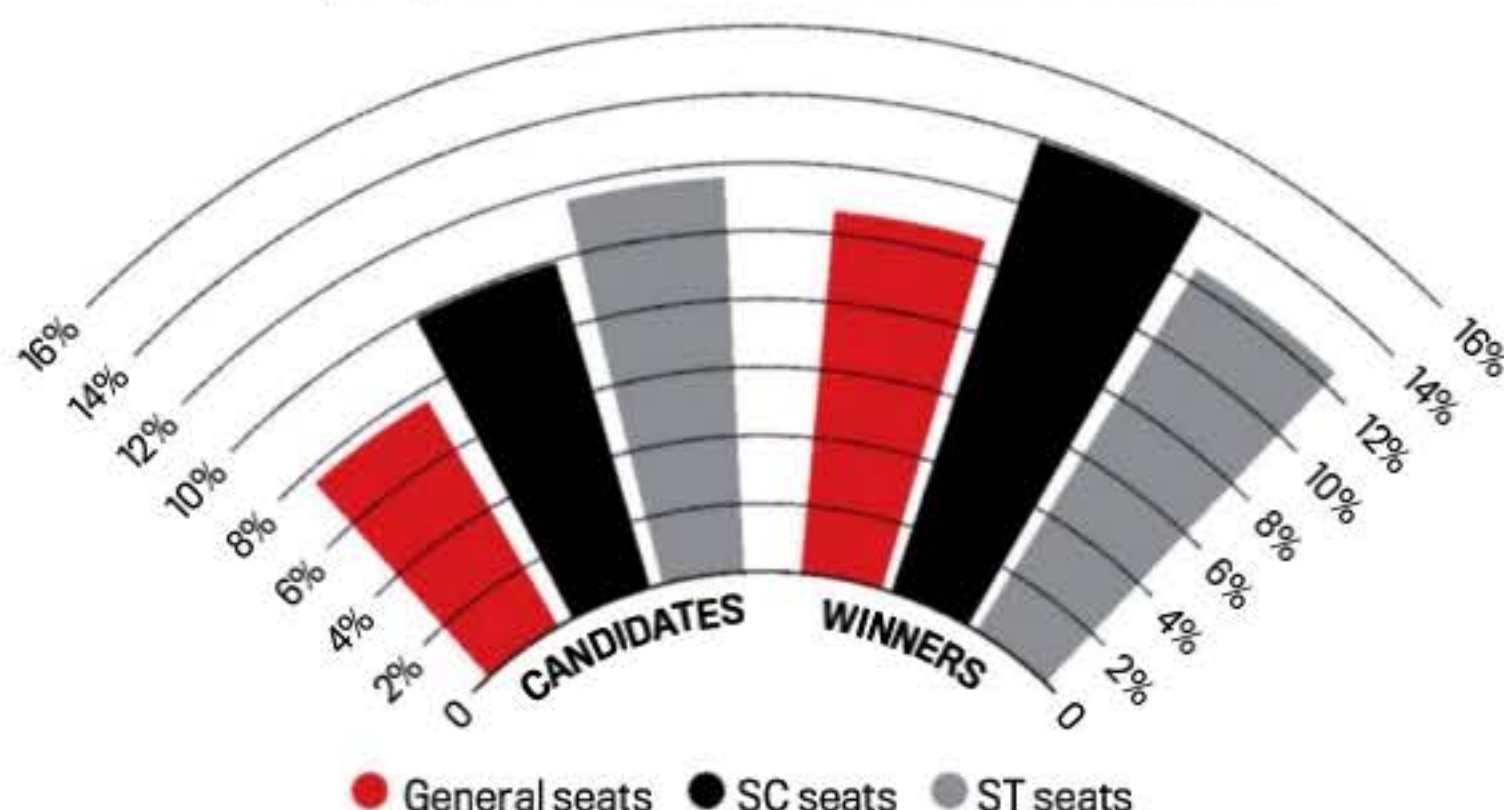


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WINSOME WOMEN

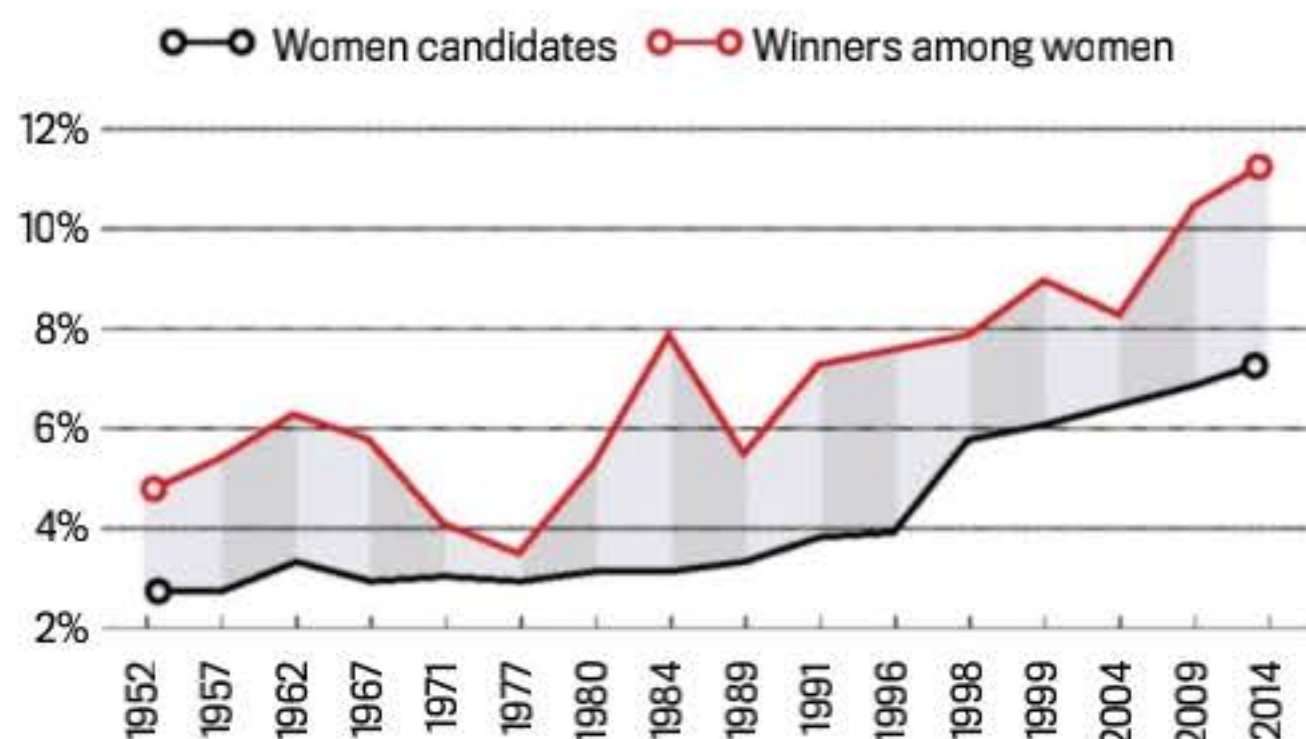
In the 2014 Lok Sabha election, political parties that put up more women candidates won more seats



The percentage of women candidates is calculated as a share of the total candidate pool while the percentage of women winners is calculated as a share of successful candidates

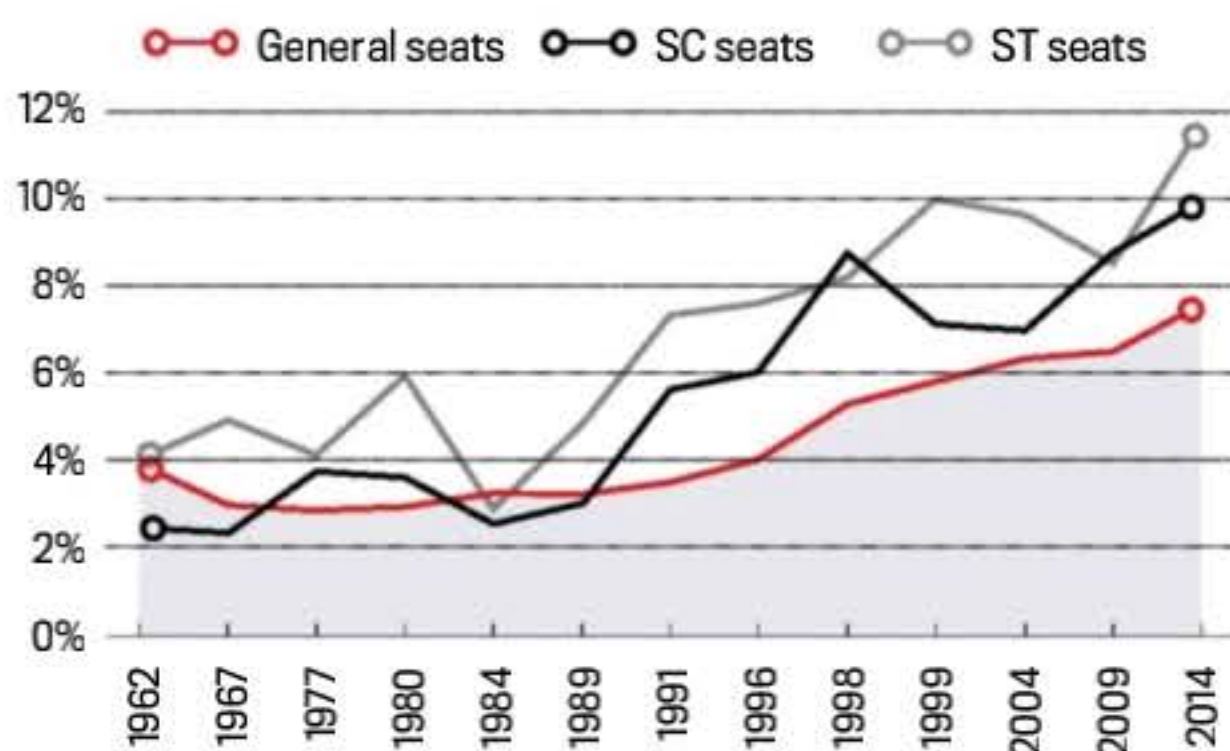
THEIR SLOW MARCH

With more women contesting the general elections, the number of women MPs has also increased—if slowly



RESERVED CATEGORY

In Lok Sabha polls, a higher proportion of women candidates have been fielded in the SC/ST category than in the general category



Source: Trivedi Centre for Political Data

This glaring paradox is contrary to the voting trends and representation ratio of other communities of voters. For example, the increasing turnout of 'backward caste' voters in the post-Mandal Commission era has led to higher representation of the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in both Parliament and state legislatures. The only parallel to women's representation being low despite their higher turnout is the minorities, especially Muslims, where higher turnouts have not meant greater representation in Parliament or state legislatures (except in Jammu and Kashmir).

Facing pressure to field more women candidates, political parties end up doing so in constituencies reserved for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Political scientist Francesca R. Jensenius of the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs says, "Political parties tend to view male politicians in reserved constituencies as more dispensable than other male officeholders. Parties often reproduce the hierarchical pathologies of the caste system within their own organisations." Between 1980 and 2014, 7 per cent of Lok Sabha candidates for the reserved seats were women. In the general seats, it was only 4.8 per cent, estimates Jamie Hinton, a James C. Gaither fellow in Carnegie Endowment.

Since political parties field more women candidates in the reserved constituencies, a higher proportion of women winning the Lok Sabha elections belong to these seats. "Since 1980, an average 16.2 per cent of women candidates in the reserved Lok Sabha constituencies have emerged victorious as against 11.5 per cent of women candidates from the general seats," argues Hinton.

Between 1952 and 1991, the gap in women's candidacy rates between reserved and unreserved seats do not appear significant. Polarising issues, such as Ayodhya and caste-based reservation for jobs, which created fierce competition among political parties after 1991, spilled over into a gender war. By 1996, the struggle for the Women's Reservation Bill had begun. As a result, the gap between reserved and unreserved constituencies for women candidates has become much more pronounced.

This paradox of lower representation despite an increasing turnout by women is not witnessed in panchayat polls as a third to half the seats are reserved for women. Since 1996, votaries of the Women's Reservation Bill have been arguing for 33 per cent reservation for women in the Lok Sabha. Yet, despite both the BJP and the Congress arguing in favour of the bill, it remains in limbo. ■

UTTAR PRADESH

STILL ROOM FOR OTHER FRIENDS

Akhilesh Yadav's remarks about the Congress being integral to an anti-BJP alliance shows a subtle shift in strategy. Is it the Priyanka effect?

By Kaushik Deka and Ashish Misra



TAP TO WATCH VIDEO

BATTLE MARCH
Priyanka with Rahul during her roadshow in Lucknow

On February 11, after the grand roadshow in Lucknow that marked Priyanka Gandhi Vadra's official entry into politics as Congress general secretary in charge of eastern Uttar Pradesh, brother and party president Rahul Gandhi issued a directive to Congress workers not to target the Samajwadi Party (SP) during the Lok Sabha campaign. Hours later, SP chief Akhilesh Yadav, attending a wedding reception in Firozabad district, sounded elated at the 'success' of Priyanka's roadshow. "It's good that parties fighting against the BJP are getting a good response. It is even better that the Congress is taking out this campaign," Akhilesh said, significantly adding that the Congress was part of the grand alliance of the SP, Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and smaller parties.

The remark was enough to create a buzz since it was only last month that the SP and BSP had declared their alliance, leaving the Congress out. The Congress retorted by announcing a solo run in UP

and, in a bold counterstrike, launching Priyanka. Congress sources say Priyanka's debut was prompted by the SP-BSP's unwillingness to concede more than 10 seats to the party and Congress grassroots workers telling Rahul that not contesting more than half the 80 Lok Sabha seats in UP would ruin the organisation in the state. Some senior Congress leaders, though, cautioned that contesting outside the SP-BSP alliance would divide the anti-BJP vote.

The past month has seen several rounds of talks between the Congress and SP

Statistical analyses laid such apprehensions to rest. "We found that in the event of a 50-50 split of non-BJP voters (Scheduled Castes, Other Backward Classes and Muslims) between the SP-BSP alliance and the Congress, our party will outscore both the BJP and the alliance, if we get decent upper caste support," says a Congress leader who was part of the exercise. Priyanka, as a Gandhi scion and Brahmin face, fitted the bill. Her entry is aimed at weaning disgruntled upper caste voters, primarily Brahmins, away from the BJP. "She enjoys massive appeal among the youth and women,"

says Praveen Chakravarty, head of the Congress's data analytics cell.

Akhilesh's statement indicates the SP-BSP leaderships are rethinking the strategy to keep the Congress out. The past month has witnessed several rounds of discussions between senior SP and Congress leaders. Priyanka, who was the catalyst behind the Congress-SP alliance in the 2017 assembly poll, has rekindled hopes that the two parties can team up again, with the BSP in tow. The Congress wants a free run in eastern UP, much to the SP's chagrin. And for a reason: in 2017, the SP won 27 of its 47 assembly seats from eastern UP. Muslims, who constitute 19 per cent of the state's population, are a crucial vote bank for both parties.

"The SP and BSP know their rise or fall is inversely proportional to the Congress's electoral success or failure," says Manish Hindvi, political analyst and associate professor at Lucknow University. The SP may be willing to renegotiate, but convincing Mayawati could be a challenge. Congress leaders are hopeful that Sonia Gandhi, who shares an excellent rapport with the BSP chief, may help break the ice—even long distance. Daughter Priyanka is more than willing to be mama's messenger girl. ■



RAJASTHAN

Of Dynasts and Royals

Deputy CM Sachin Pilot wants party workers to get preference over kin for Lok Sabha tickets from the state. But there's talk that CM Ashok Gehlot's son Vaibhav might make his poll debut. Meanwhile, the buzz in the BJP is whether it will field Jaipur royal **Diya Kumari**, from Jaipur, replacing sitting MP Ram C. Vohra—who won in 2014 by a record margin. ■

LIVING BY THE MANIFESTO

Ashok Gehlot's single focus is to improve the Congress's showing in the Lok Sabha polls. Hence, the advice to officials to live by the party manifesto—and prioritise the policies/ projects in it. Rajasthan tends to vote for the party in power in the state but Gehlot would still like the numbers to stay upwards of 20 seats (out of the total 25), especially with deputy Sachin Pilot breathing down his neck. ■

—Rohit Parihar



Getting to Know Them Better

350

BJP call centres have been set up to connect with 220 million beneficiaries of various Union government schemes. Nearly 5,000 paid executives man these hubs to call beneficiaries across 543 Lok Sabha constituencies. The BJP brass thinks the voters need to know.

UTTAR PRADESH

PK for Priyanka



Poll strategist and JD(U) vice-president **Prashant Kishor** was perhaps the first opposition leader to see merit in Priyanka Gandhi's entry into politics, dubbing it "one of the most awaited entries in Indian politics". In his stint as Congress poll strategist, Kishor had tried hard to convince RaGa to have Priyanka spearhead the Congress in UP. He sees her making a big impact in the long run. ■

—Amitabh Srivastava

MADHYA PRADESH

RETURN OF THE PRODIGALS

In the first setback to the BJP before the Lok Sabha polls, five-term party MP and ex-agriculture minister Ramkrishna Kusmaria joined the Congress in Bhopal on February 8. The party is now targeting more BJP leaders,

especially those who had switched in the run-up to the Lok Sabha polls in 2014. The names of Hoshangabad MP Rao Uday Pratap Singh and Bhind MP Bhagirath Prasad are doing the rounds. Prasad, in fact, joined the BJP after securing the Congress nomination from Bhind in 2014. He returned it and then accepted a BJP ticket. ■

—Rahul Noronha

JHARKHAND

RATH, A SPECIAL PURPOSE VEHICLE

The BJP loves raths, even oversized motorised ones, such as the ones ex-CM **Raghubar Das** flagged off recently from the party headquarters in Ranchi. Five vans, fitted with LED screens, fanning out to the state's 14 Lok Sabha constituencies. This is ostensibly to gain feedback before preparing the party manifesto, but the real reason is to start "reaching out" to voters. ■

—Amitabh Srivastava



MAHARASHTRA

Thackeray's Home Matters

Most of the Shiv Sena's 18 MPs have PDF copies of their poll campaign material all ready. The only spot left blank is near the top, for a picture of PM Narendra Modi, to be pasted alongside Sena chief **Uddhav Thackeray's**. The photo goes up if there's a pre-poll deal with the BJP. The MPs have urged Thackeray to hurry it up, but he seems to be in no rush. A Sena source says a final decision will be taken only after consultations with influential wife **Rashmi**, who has made other strategic interventions in the past. Such as at the time of the wedding of Raj Thackeray's son Amit on January 27, when "it was *Vahini* (sister-in-law, as Rashmi is known in party circles) who finally decided that Uddhav and family would show up, if only for 15 minutes". ■

-Kiran D. Tare



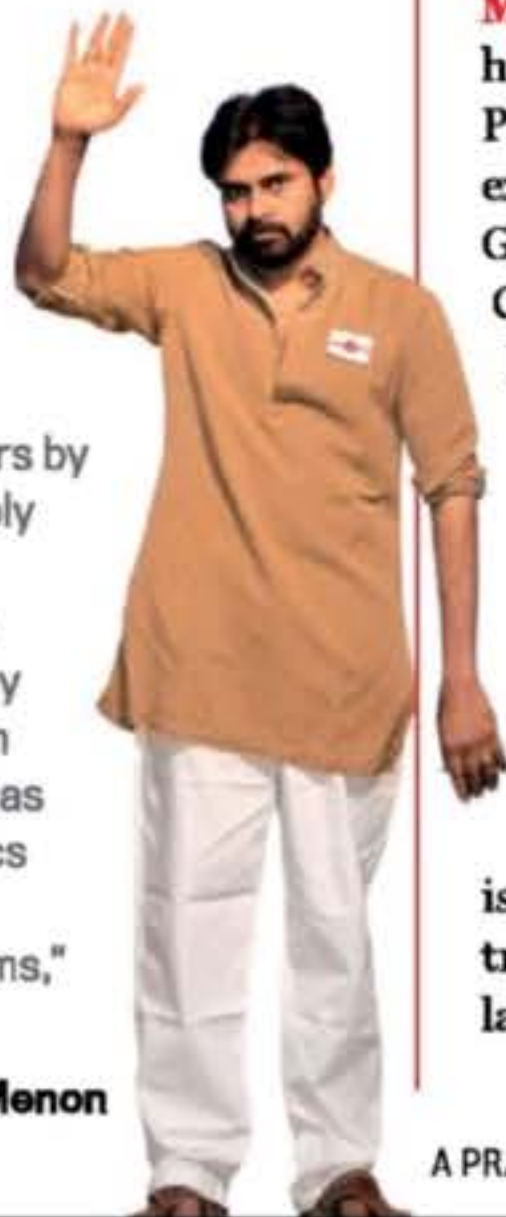
BHASKAR PAUL

ANDHRA PRADESH

PAWAN'S AMBITIONS

Actor-turned-neta **Pawan Kalyan's** (PK) Jana Sena will be fielding candidates in both Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. It hopes to fight all 25 Lok Sabha seats as well as the 175 assembly seats in Andhra Pradesh, in league with the Communist parties, CPI and CPI(M). PK is also determined to play spoiler in Telangana, where the rivalry is between the TRS and the Congress. He has some heavy-weight advisors by his side, notably controversial ex-Tamil Nadu chief secretary P. Ramamohan Rao. "Kalyan has come to politics to realise the people's dreams," says Rao. ■

-Amarnath K. Menon



ASSAM

A New Brew

A contender for the Tezpur Lok Sabha seat is retired bureaucrat **M.G.V.K. Bhanu**, who hails from Andhra Pradesh. An acolyte of ex-Assam CM Tarun Gogoi, Bhanu joined the Congress on February 11. Bhanu, who has worked for about three decades in the state, is keen on running from Tezpur, having been chairman of the Tea Board, where he initiated several schemes for small tea growers. What is more, the tea industry has migrant Telugu labour votes too. ■

-AKM

A PRABHAKAR RAO

INTERVIEW

"The EVM brouhaha was stage managed"

SUNIL ARORA,

Chief Election Commissioner of India

The 2019 general elections will be India's largest yet. The man in charge, Chief Election Commissioner Sunil Arora, talks to Rohit Parihar about the challenges, recent controversies over EVMs and pressure tactics on the EC. Excerpts:

Q

The Opposition has raised concerns over the credibility of EVMs in elections...

A. The stringent technical safeguards incorporated in EVMs and the administrative/ security measures protocol followed by us during elections as well as the non-election period rule out any doubts on the integrity of the instruments. Successive court judgments since 2001 too have clearly ruled out any tampering or manipulations in the EVMs.

Q. Is a larger sample of VVPAT (voter-verified paper audit trail) slips needed to verify EVM tallies?

A. There is already a mandatory verification of VVPAT slips with the electronic count of the EVM in one randomly selected polling station (PS) per assembly constituency in case of state elections, and in one randomly selected polling station per assembly segment in case of parliamentary constituencies.

Q. Recently you took a stand against a return to the paper ballot...

A. We have had an unblemished voting run with EVMs for over two decades now in



QAMAR SIBTAIN

India so there is no question of reverting back to the era of ballot papers. Besides being downright retrograde in our context, ballot paper based voting is prone to a variety of malpractices.

Q. You took a public stand recently against pressure tactics and bullying. Can you elaborate?

A. I did speak of pressure tactics and intimidation at an international conference organised by the Election Commission in late January. At the time, I was really disturbed by the kind of circus enacted in London (on January 22) by someone called Syed Shuja, who said he would demonstrate how EVMs can be tampered with. It turned out to be a complete flop show, a non-event. The entire thing was probably stage managed by vested interests. The ECI lodged an FIR on January 22 itself with the Delhi police. So many highly regarded technocrats have been

working to ensure that the election process remains credible and transparent, but now we are being subjected to pressure tactics from an alien country.

Q. What about duplicate names on voter lists?

A. The cases of duplicate or multiple entries of names in the electoral rolls are due to voter migration within the country. These people get their names registered in a new place of residence without disclosing previous registrations.

Q. Can registered voters be provided with postal ballot facility in India and abroad?

A. Right now, with the legal provisions as they are, it's not possible.

Q. Is the selection procedure of election commissioners fair and transparent?

A. So far, yes. However, the matter is now in the Supreme Court. So it

would not be correct to comment further on this.

Q. The 2019 general election is just months away. How different will the task be for the EC this time?

A. In size and scale, the coming election will be larger than in 2014. The challenge is greater in Maoist-affected areas. Curbing the use of money power is another major challenge. The EC has proposed to the law ministry that anonymous donations be limited to Rs 2,000 and that political parties should not receive contributions in cash exceeding Rs 20 crore or 20 per cent of the total contribution, whichever is less. The Commission has also asked that print and social media be brought within the ambit of Section 126(1) of the Representation of the People Act so that the concept of 'silence period' is honoured and opinion polls are restricted. ■



"Adopting any form of the [Citizenship Amendment] bill will have the sad effect of disrupting the quality of life, language, identity and power balance of the region, and undermine my father's position—by delivering a blow to the harmony, integrity and unity of a secular and democratic India. Bharat Ratnas and longest bridges, while needed, won't promote peace and prosperity; only just laws and foresight on the part of [the] leadership will."

Tez Hazarika, son of music maestro Bhupen Hazarika—who was posthumously awarded the Bharat Ratna this year—is clearly not impressed by the BJP's attempts to use the Citizenship Amendment Bill to play up its pro-Hindu credentials nationally while playing down the collateral damage in Assam and the entire Northeast, where the bill has triggered massive protests. Letting the bill lapse in the Rajya Sabha, the BJP will hope, will preserve tenuous electoral alliances in the Northeast, where it needs to gain seats in the coming general election, to offset expected losses in the north and west.



SPECIAL REPORT
POLITICAL / CINEMA

BOX OFFICE POLITICS

In a season of jingoism and biopics, political parties are **looking to the big screen** to spread the 'message' before the national election

By Suhani Singh, Aditi Pai and
Amarnath K. Menon





I

F 2014 WAS ALL ABOUT #ACHHEDIN for the Bharatiya Janata Party, the ruling party seems to have found another slogan to rally support in 2019. And it comes from a modelled-on-real-events Bollywood film oozing with bravado, *Uri: The Surgical Strike*. “How’s the *josh*?” asked Prime Minister Narendra Modi as he inaugurated the National Museum of Indian Cinema (NMIC) in Mumbai. An enthusiastic audience, emulating the army officers in the movie, shouted back, “High Sir!” A few days later, defence minister Nirmala Sitharaman would pose the same question at a private screening of the film in Bengaluru. Interim finance minister Piyush Goyal, while presenting the budget in Parliament, again brought up the movie before announcing sops for the film industry. To counter the BJP’s ‘all-izz-well’ narrative, the Congress spun the dialogue around—#HowsTheJobs—as the latest report of the National Sample Survey Office’s (NSSO) periodic labour force survey (PLFS) revealed that the situation was rather grim on the employment front.

← THACKERAY

MUMBAIKAR NO. 1

By casting Nawazuddin Siddiqui as Thackeray, the producers have tried to downplay the divisive stance of the party

↑ URI

THE BIG STRIKE

The love-thy-army-and-nation storyline, great action sequences and restrained jingoism has made it a big hit



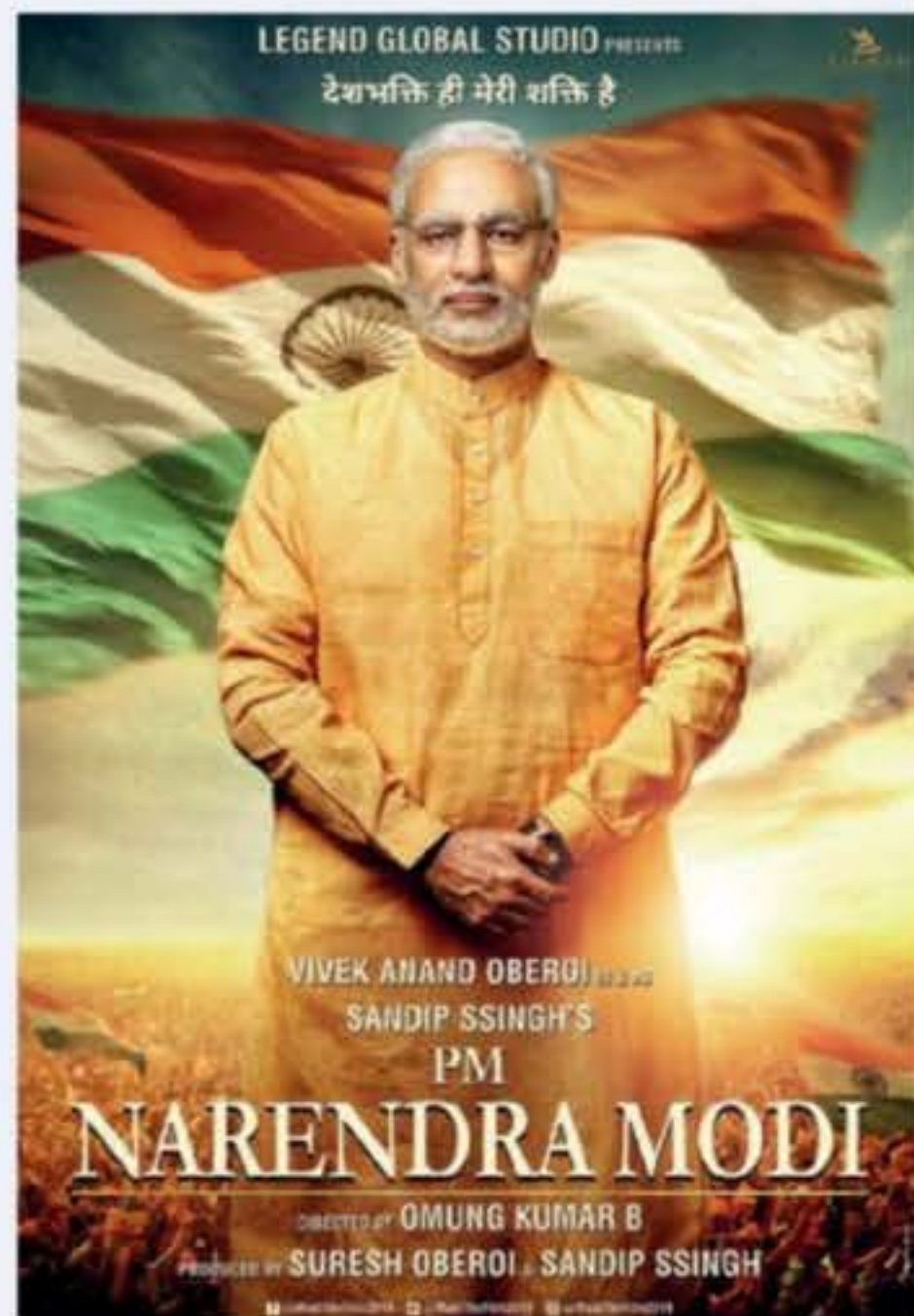


'THIS IS NOT A POLITICAL FILM'

Made on a budget of Rs 28 crore and written and directed by newcomer Aditya Dhar, *Uri* has gone on to make Rs 200 crore at the box office so far. Its love-thy-army-and-nation storyline combined with well choreographed action sequences and restrained, if hard-jawed jingoism continues to draw audiences to the cinema. Shot on location in Serbia with extensive assistance from the former Yugoslavian military, it may have taken several cinematic liberties, like building up the national security advisor character, Govind Bhardwaj (played by Paresh Rawal) and an exaggerated account of what really happened—the September 29, 2016 cross-border raid by the Indian army was a swift hit-and-run operation as opposed to the movie's lengthy climax. And no, choppers were not involved anywhere in the operation—the commandos hotfooted it across the LoC.

Yet, these aberrations were inconsequential in the final reckoning, judging by the legions of serving army personnel who have given the movie a two-thumbs up. "After a long time, we have a film which reflects the ethos of the army and realities on the ground," a senior army officer says, giving the film 9 out of 10 for its 'authenticity'. Another officer puts it on par with *Prahaar*, the 1991 movie directed by and starring Nana Patekar for its muting the patriotic flag-waving jingoism typefied in most military-themed Bollywood films. And yes, unlike Akshay Kumar's mawkish *Rustom*, *Uri* managed at least to get the uniforms and badges right. It shows, perhaps, how low the bar is for war movies in Bollywood.

Uri was just one of three January releases that included *The Accidental Prime Minister* and *Thackeray* which have spun politically loaded narratives that airbrush the past and avoid hard questions, offering one-sided accounts under the pretext of artistic licence. April will bring *My Name is RaGa*, a biopic on Congress president Rahul Gandhi which looks at his transformation from a gloomy child to a reluctant politician and a leader finally ready to inspire and govern. Its trailer alone suggests a hagiographic account and exposes the tacky production values and cringe-worthy acting. No surprise then that the Congress party's official Twitter handle hasn't shared it with supporters unlike the BJP who shared the first look of *The Accidental Prime Minister* (on former prime minister Manmohan Singh). "Anyone who has fearlessly confronted defeat and failure can relate to this story," says writer-director Paul Rupesh in the press release. That all these films have come just months before the Lok Sabha elections is proof that the filmmakers want to cash in on the political drama.



The saffron touch

What's my name? asks Thackeray's character in the film. 'Tiger', quips a young boy. With that, the biopic on the Shiv Sena founder sets the mood for its protagonist, Bal Keshav Thackeray. *Thackeray* forcefully reasserts the irreverent, pipe-smoking Thackeray but with some significant departures, a nod to the softer, more inclusive image that the Sena now seeks to portray.

His mythology is intact—messiah of the masses, caricaturist extraordinaire, fearless streetfighter and the controversial bad boy of Bombay politics who could ignite mobs with a sweep of his rudraksha garlanded wrist.

There's some irony, though, in Nawazuddin Siddiqui being picked to play Thackeray. Two years ago, he was forced to pull out of a Ramlila show in Budhana, Uttar Pradesh, after local Shiv Sena workers objected to a Muslim actor essaying a role in the religious production. While some believe the choice of Siddiqui was an attempt to whitewash the

Unlike the mawkish *Rustom*, *Uri* at least got the uniforms and badges right. It shows how low the bar is for war movies in Bollywood

From an ice-cream seller in Mumbai to producer of the Rs 100 crore film *Mary Kom*, **SANDIP SSINGH** has come a long way. "I didn't study in an English medium school," he says. "I had no money to go to film school. While doing film journalism, I'd watch shootings and try to understand the process of filmmaking. I know the struggle and pain." It's why the Narendra Modi story resonated with him so much, he says. Ssingh talks to INDIA TODAY about why he believes his latest biopic is a story that had to be told.

Q. Why a biopic on Narendra Modi now?

Why not? When other biopics are made, why aren't such questions raised? As filmmakers, it is our responsibility to tell good stories that connect with the audience. Here's a man who has given his entire life for the country. When you read about his journey, his life is an open book. This is not a political film.

Q. You don't see it as a political film?

It's a human story about a *chaiwallah* who dreams about serving the nation. It's a journey that will inspire 125 crore Indians to

dream big for the country.

The story should have been told years back. I don't know what these other filmmakers are doing.

Q. Do you have the PM and his family's support?

In *Mann ki Baat*, he says everything. There are so many books on him. There are many one-to-one interviews where he answers every question. We had a team of researchers. I am here to tell a story. I am not here to take permission. Nobody has interfered with us. That is the support we have got.

Q. When are you hoping to

release the film?

I am in no hurry. Today, there is a trend that before making the film, they block Eid, Diwali and Christmas dates. With that, the pressure is on. Once we are happy with the edit, we will decide the release date. I don't think it will take much time. I hope to release it this year if I get a good date.

Q. Why did you cast Viveik Oberoi?

I don't need a star, I needed a good actor. Viveik can play anybody, he's a gangster in *Company*, a lover boy in *Saathiya*. I needed an actor who could

give me a year of his life for the shoot. The film spans a long period, from 1957 to now. He has given 15 look tests which involve seven to eight hours of make-up. He wakes up at 2.30 am and reports to the sets by 8. That is dedication. He has even learned the PM's body language.

Q. Will you show the film to the PM before the release?

If our PM is interested, I'd love to show it to him. I have no idea if he'd want to see it, before or after. I am no one to take three hours of his time to watch a film. I think he has a lot of work to do for the country.

party's hardline stance, the film's producer and parliamentarian Sanjay Raut says he picked the actor purely for his acting prowess. "The actor's religion has nothing to do with him being offered the role," he says. "Balasaheb was never against Muslims," says Raut, who is also editor of party mouthpiece *Saamna*. "He was only against fanaticism and those who felt an emotional connect with Pakistan. He said their Mecca and Medina should be here in this country, their motherland."

If the Marathi version documented Thackeray's controversial '*Lungi uthao, pungli bajao*' campaign against South Indians coming to Mumbai for jobs, the Hindi film focused on his stand on national issues such as the Babri Masjid demolition, the Mumbai riots, the Belgaum (Kannada-Maratha) issue and India-Pakistan cricket matches. "The Congress criticised his fight for the sons of the soil and called him partisan and regional but that issue has now become the cornerstone of politics in India," says Raut.

A movie from the party, which has in the past demanded previews of films depicting the party chief, can be expected to eulogise its founder, but Raut dismisses the charges. "I have tried to show all aspects but there's only so much that can go into a two-hour film from a 50-year career in politics. We have even shown the Krishna Desai murder case, which was a turning point in his life," he says alluding to the controversy surrounding allegations that Thackeray had congratulated the suspected murderers of the Communist leader.

Biopics galore

There is a growing interest in biopics, says Raut, an avid movie lover who has produced films earlier too. "People want to see the lives of inspiring public figures," he says. Which is why producer Sandip Ssingh is currently busy with his Narendra Modi biopic, with Viveik Oberoi in the title role. "Everybody told me that you have gone mad and this film will never see the light of day because it involves such a big man. That's what kept me strong," says Ssingh who has made biopics on boxer Mary Kom and Sarabjit, the farmer and alleged spy who was killed in a Pakistan jail. In November 2016, when Modi announced demonetisation, Ssingh decided he'd go ahead with his most ambitious project. It took him another year-and-a-half to find a writer to tell the "humane" story. "Cinema is the biggest messenger with the widest reach," says Ssingh. The tagline, "*Deshbhakti hi meri shakti hai*", is proof enough that the biopic will be looking at its subject through a rosy lens.

Meanwhile, it's not just in the north, cinema in the south too is going through a political biopics phase. The Telugu Desam Party has started with a two-part biopic of party founder, actor-turned-politician N.T. Rama Rao, but it has found little traction among voters so far. The first part, *NTR: Kathanayakudu*, which hit the screens early January, drew a lukewarm response. NTR's fourth son, Balakrishna,

an actor and a TDP MLA, apparently did not want any 'negativity' in the film. Still, some amends are being made to spice up *NTR: Mahanayakudu*, the second film, devoted to his political career. It is likely to release in February end.

However, this film too will steer away from the episode where NTR was unseated as chief minister by his party MLAs led by son-in-law and current Andhra Pradesh chief minister N. Chandrababu Naidu. It's a significant phase which is why director Ram Gopal Varma was prompted to make *Lakshmi's NTR*. "NTR's last days and his relationship with Lakshmi Parvathi were full of high drama. It's about how an affair changed the entire face of Andhra Pradesh. It's Parvathi's entry which led to the twists and turns in his life, ultimately leading to his downfall and death," says Varma.

Political analysts feel these films would have had a marginal impact but given the release timing, ahead of an election, they double up as propaganda. Filmmakers argue that no film can seriously influence election outcomes. "This is the season of politics and a film is a product that has to be marketed at the right time," says filmmaker Mahi V. Raghav. "We would be overestimating our strength to believe a film can influence voters." Raghav's *Yatra* is inspired by the padayatra—1,474 kms in 90 days in 2003—by the late Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy (YSR), which helped catapult the Congress back to power in erstwhile Andhra Pradesh after a decade. It hits the screens in February. For YSR's son, Y.S. Jaganmohan Reddy, who's just finished a similar, longer march, *Yatra* may provide another connection with voters.

In Tamil Nadu, at least four projects on the late AIADMK leader J. Jayalalithaa have been announced. While director Gautham Menon is working on a web series with Ramya Krishnan essaying the role of the iconic leader, director Priyadarshini is to begin shooting of *The Iron Lady* from February 24, Jayalalithaa's birth anniversary. "I will approach the role from a human perspective. For me, everything else, including the politics, is secondary," says Nithya Menen, who stars as the actress-turned-CM. A third film is being planned by actor Vijay with Vidya Balan in the lead and there's yet another by veteran director Bharathiraja. It is unlikely, even if they are complete, that the films will hit the screens before the election.

Past imperfect

Hindi cinema in the past was much more inclined to challenge authority. The political satire *Kissa Kursi Ka* (1977) so worried leaders in the Congress that the film's negatives were destroyed. Gulzar's *Aandhi* (1975) was banned after word spread that its depiction of a troubled marriage was allegedly inspired by the lives of Indira Gandhi and her husband,



↑ NTR: KATHANAYAKUDU

UNDERWHELMING NTR's fourth son Balakrishna, seen here with Vidya Balan, plays his father onscreen

Feroze. But the party seems to have learnt from history. While many senior leaders were of the opinion that the party should take legal recourse to stop the release of *The Accidental Prime Minister* which mocked the Nehru-Gandhi family and ex-PM Manmohan Singh, Congress president Rahul Gandhi thought otherwise. He felt any move against the film would make him and the party sound like Prime Minister Modi—intolerant to adverse opinions. His decision was validated as the film, shredded by critics for its blatant propaganda and exaggerated performances, bombed at the box office.

The party, though, isn't beyond using movies to push its message. Recently, Divya Spandana, social media and digital communications head for the party, shared a photo of Rahul Gandhi on Twitter and captioned it 'Apna time aayega', the catch line of the Ranveer Singh-led street rap drama *Gully Boy*. Soon, producer Dub Sharma's track from the film *Azadi*, which begins with Kanhaiya Kumar's rousing speech during the student protests at the Jawaharlal Nehru University in 2016, would be used by both the BJP and Congress to make campaign videos to attack each other. The climax of this political drama-thriller will only be known by May after the Lok Sabha election results are in. Until then, audiences would be well advised to watch the big screen narratives with a pinch of salt. ■

WHO GAINS WHAT?

KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR THE BJP AND CONGRESS FROM THE CAG'S RAFALE REPORT



➤ CAG says Rafale 2016 price **2.86%** lower

➤ Savings on the India-Specific Enhancements: **17.08%**

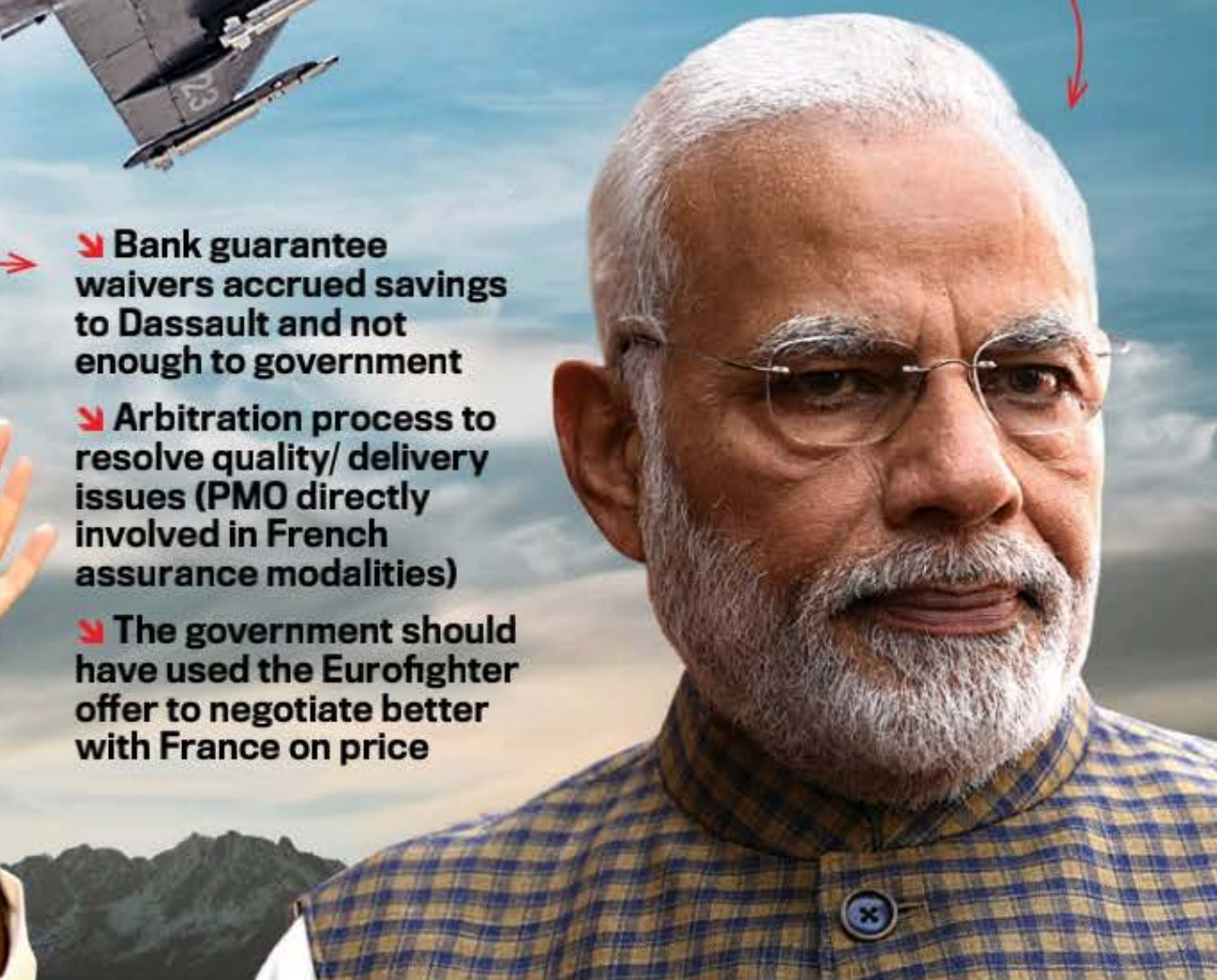
➤ Bank guarantee waivers accrued savings to Dassault and not enough to government

➤ Arbitration process to resolve quality/ delivery issues (PMO directly involved in French assurance modalities)

➤ The government should have used the Eurofighter offer to negotiate better with France on price



▶ TAP TO WATCH VIDEO



Source: Livefist.com

CAG IN THE RAFALE WHEEL

THE AUDITOR'S REPORT MAY HAVE **CLEARED THE MODI GOVERNMENT ON THE AIRCRAFT'S PRICE**, BUT IT QUESTIONS THE SEVEN-YEAR PROCESS THAT PICKED RAFALE AS THE LOWEST BIDDER

By Sandeep Unnithan

A long-awaited audit report tabled in Parliament rang the curtains down on the last day of the 16th Lok Sabha. The report by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) audited the Modi government's 2016 purchase of 36 Rafale fighter aircraft at an estimated Rs 60,000 crore. The report exonerates the government on the charge that it had bought overpriced jets from France, a key allegation by the opposition ahead of the May 2019 general election. The deal, the CAG noted, was 2.86 per cent cheaper than the one negotiated by the UPA for seven years, between 2007 and 2014.

While this assessment suggests that recent claims by government ministers of a 9 per cent saving in the 2016 negotiation were exaggerated, Congress president Ra-

hul Gandhi dismissed the report as a 'cover-up'. "It ignores the cost of the missing bank guarantee and glosses over the suspect costs for 'India-Specific Enhancements'," he said.

The CAG report comes as another boost for the Modi government after a positive verdict from the Supreme Court on December 14 last year. Responding to four PILs, the apex court had said it had no reason to doubt the government's procurement of the Rafale jets. The government has refused to reveal how much it paid for the fully-loaded Rafales, citing secrecy clauses in the deal.

The Supreme Court had received price details in sealed envelopes from the government. The CAG continued to maintain the veil of secrecy, referring to the price only as values and the differences in costs in percentages.

It examined both deals—the UPA government's tender for a Medium Multi-Role Combat Aircraft (MMRCA), in which the Rafale emerged as the frontrunner, and the NDA-2 government's inter-governmental agreement in 2015, where the Modi government scrapped the UPA deal and bought 36 flyaway Rafales directly from France. The Congress claims it had struck a better deal as 108 jets were to be licence-built in India.

The CAG is circumspect about the price because of the different nature of the two deals. "This comparison of prices under the 2007 and 2015 offers has posed its own difficulties because the package offered in 2007 included the prices of licence production while the 2015 offer included only direct flyaway aircraft," the CAG report said.

In January this year, the ministry of defence (MoD) told the CAG that it had achieved a price reduction of 9 per cent over the Rafales offered under the UPA deal. The CAG, however, discovered that the saving was only 2.86 per cent. This figure came primarily through a 17.08 per cent reduction in 'India-Specific Enhancements'—features like a high-altitude cold start, towed decoy arrays and electronic warfare systems unique to Indian Rafales. The CAG reckons the MoD could have saved more had it negotiated a better deal with Dassault Aviation, particularly regarding bank guarantees. Unlike its 2007 offer, Dassault did not provide any bank guarantees in 2015. These guarantees would be against 15 per cent of the advance payment, which would remain as outstanding till deliveries of the aircraft started.

The lack of a bank guarantee was highlighted by dissenting bureaucrats from the Indian Negotiation Team, but their objections were overruled. The CAG mentions the lack of a sovereign guarantee as a point raised by the law and justice ministry because approximately Rs 36,000 crore—almost 60 per cent of the cost—had already been paid by the Indian government to Dassault. The government only received a Letter of Comfort, not legally binding, from the French government.

The report, however, fails to elicit a crucial answer on when and how the IAF's operational requirement for 126

THE RAFALE ROW

THE CAG REPORT DOCUMENTS A **SERIES OF INEXPLICABLE DECISIONS** BY THE DEFENCE MINISTRY, BETWEEN 2007 AND 2014, THAT KEPT THE RAFALE AHEAD IN THE RACE FOR THE JET DEAL

- 1 2007:** Dassault Aviation's Rafale fails to meet nine of the IAF's Air Staff Qualitative Requirements (ASQRs). Other four contenders—Eurofighter Typhoon, Gripen, F-16 and F-18—register four deviations
- 2 2009:** The ministry of defence (MoD) waives Rafale's deviations from ASQRs and request for proposal (RFP) conditions. Violation of the Defence Procurement Procedure (DPP), which permits only 'minor deviations' and not 'enhancements of 14 parameters', is allowed for Rafale
- 3 2010:** Rafale fails to meet 14 ASQR parameters. DG Acquisitions says three of these parameters should be negotiated by the Contract Negotiation Committee (CNC)

"The CAG report ignores the cost of the missing bank guarantee and glosses over the suspect costs for 'India-Specific Enhancements'"

—Rahul Gandhi, Congress president

fighter aircraft (seven fighter squadrons), with transfer of technology, became an off-the-shelf buy of 36 aircraft. "The audit also could not find any proposal with the ministry for filling of this wide gap in the operational preparedness of the IAF," the CAG report notes. The MoD informed the CAG that to fill the gap, it had issued a request for information (RFI)—request for single-engine fighter aircraft through a strategic partnership route.

The audit is the first to offer a 19-year sweep of the IAF's original quest for 126 light fighter aircraft—the nub of the controversy. It, however, raises questions on the procurement process by which Rafale won the 2012 contest. Dassault's bid for the Rafale, the CAG notes, should have been disqualified several times during the five-year negotiations. Each time, it was saved through MoD waivers.

Complaints of irregularities in the price determina-

- 4** **2011:** Both Rafale and Eurofighter Typhoon bids do not mention firm and fixed costs as mandated by the RFP and become technically open to disqualification. However, the process continues
- 5** **2012:** Rafale is the lowest bidder (L1) in the MMRCA (Medium Multi-Role Combat Aircraft) contest. But Dassault did not submit the cost bid in the prescribed format, says the CAG. The life cycle cost was not calculated accurately because Dassault did not quote for capital expenditure for setting up licence production of the aircraft
- 6** **2012:** Dassault calculated the cost of production of licence-produced aircraft in India using French man hours. The CNC ignored this while assessing the benchmark price and the lowest bidder
- 7** **2015:** The MoD report submitted to then defence minister Manohar Parrikar lists various irregularities: Dassault was not L1 and hence the contract could not be concluded with it. The L1 calculation was faulty. Rafale didn't comply with the IAF's requirements and should have been disqualified at the technical evaluation stage itself. Acceptance of additional commercial proposals from Dassault after bid submission dates was 'unprecedented and against the canons of financial propriety'

tion process began doing the rounds soon after Dassault was declared the lowest bidder in 2012. An inquiry was ordered. The inquiry committee submitted its report in March 2015 to then defence minister Manohar Parrikar. It made six explosive conclusions—Dassault did not comply with the Air Staff Qualitative Requirements (ASQRs) and should have been disqualified at the technical evaluation stage itself; the acceptance of additional commercial proposals from Dassault after the bid submission dates was 'against the canons of financial propriety'. Dassault's price bid was not in the prescribed format. Since Dassault was not 'L1', or the lowest bidder, the contract could not be concluded with it. Eurofighter's proposal, too, didn't comply with the Request for Proposal (RFP). The MMRCA RFP was scrapped and the government opted for off-the-shelf purchase in 2016.

The CAG notes that Rafale was first rejected by the technical evaluation committee in May 2008. That was only the first of several incredible coincidences that seemed to have facilitated its downselect in 2012. It was again rejected in 2009 on grounds that it didn't meet service requirements. In May 2009, states the CAG report, the then defence minister approved waivers on deviations from the ASQRs. This, the CAG states, violated the Defence Procurement Procedure (DPP), the

document that guides the MoD's capital purchases. The CAG said the MoD's subsequent replies that there had been no DPP violations since clearance had been received from the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) didn't hold water because the DPP allowed only minor deviations. 'Hence, Dassault Aviation was treated preferentially,' the report states. With Rafale failing to meet as many as 14 ASQRs, the MoD left the technical non-compliances to the Contract Negotiation Committee to decide. The CAG noted that this was incorrect. After the Rafale and Eurofighter Typhoon finished as finalists, their bids were found to be non-compliant with the RFP for not mentioning firm and fixed costs, 'and hence, liable for rejection as non-responsive bids', notes the CAG. But nothing of the kind happened. The MoD began benchmarking the price, based on which it could decide which aircraft was cheaper. In 2012, it opened the price bids of both the Rafale and the Eurofighter. Rafale was found to be the L1, and hence the MoD appointed a Contract Negotiation Committee to discuss the price.

It was found that the benchmark price worked out by MoD for the actual deliverables was an astonishing 47 per cent below the actual price offered by the lowest bidder, the Rafale. While the French jet was found to be cheaper, there was a catch. And what the CAG suggests here is the most damning part of its report. Dassault, the CAG says, had calculated the cost of building the Rafale in India using man hours in French industry. If it had to calculate the price in India, it would have to multiply its man hours by a factor of 2.7. Had this been done, the Rafale would not have been the cheapest aircraft. The Eurofighter would have been the cheapest instead.

Even the price bid submitted by Dassault in 2007 was not in the format prescribed in the RFP, which contained seven detailed cost elements crucial for price evaluation. The makers of the Eurofighter had done this. Dassault merely declared its cost in two parts—price of the direct flyaway aircraft and the price of the transfer of technology (ToT). These were the first of many more curious deviations noted by the CAG, most of them under the Congress-led UPA government.

A key Congress allegation has been that businessman Anil Ambani unduly profited from the NDA's Rafale deal and was a beneficiary of the Rs 30,000 crore worth of defence offsets in the deal. However, the auditor does not mention offsets or any of the over 100-odd offset partners, including Dassault-Reliance Aerospace Limited (DRAL). This is because these offsets will begin to be discharged only from September 2019, three years after the signing of the deal.

With the Congress rejecting the CAG report and Rahul Gandhi stepping up his '*chowkidar chor hain*' rhetoric, the Rafale debate appears to be one that may be settled only in the general election. ■



PUNJAB IN PROGRESS

By Asit Jolly

Punjab will progress... kicking and screaming if required," said Manpreet Singh Badal, Punjab's finance and planning minister, on February 7 at the INDIA TODAY State of the State Conclave Punjab in Chandigarh. Guest speakers, like Hero Enterprise chairman Sunil Kant Munjal and Confederation of Indian Industries president and Bharti Enterprises vice-chairman, Rakesh Bharti Mittal, expressed their concerns and hopes for Punjab and offered solutions to a

state, once a leader in virtually every sector, and which continues to be so in agriculture.

There was also, at the end of the day, a candid exchange between Chief Minister Amarinder Singh and INDIA TODAY Group Editorial Director (Publishing) Raj Chengappa, which turned out to be a learning experience for many.

At the end of the day, the conclave was about awarding the deputy commissioners of the districts ranked as top performers sector, like education, health and industry, among many others. ■



Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh and INDIA TODAY Group Editorial Director (Publishing) Raj Chengappa with the deputy commissioners of the winning districts



Punjab Economy: Challenges & Priorities

Inaugural keynote address by **Manpreet Singh Badal**, minister for finance and planning, Punjab

- Punjab needs to spend more on social welfare schemes and maintain an 85,000 strong police force for its districts along the Pakistan border.
- Punjab suffers an annual loss of Rs 1,800 crore on procuring food grains for the rest of the country, as the Centre has, thus far, refused to pay for packing, transportation and related costs.
- Punjab needs to speed up economic growth before the GST compensation stops in 2022.
- Punjab is ideally placed to emerge as the 'Dairy State of India'. A little help from the Centre could also make Punjab a fruit and vegetable hub.
- The state needs to develop Amritsar and SAS Nagar as growth centres with two counterweights, one in Bathinda and one other realistically located.



THE STATE OF
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PUNJAB



Beyond the Green Revolution: The Future of Punjab's Agricultural Economy

Speakers: **Ajay Vir Jakhar** (left), chairman, Punjab Farmers' and Farm Workers' Commission, and **B.S. Dhillon** (right), vice-chancellor, Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana

➤ Thanks to mechanisation, Punjab farmers, unlike those in other states, spend as little as 60 days to cultivate wheat and paddy crops. The expansion of agro-processing in the state will help them find alternative work to augment household incomes.

➤ The PM Kisan scheme, proposing to give small and marginal farmers an annual cash assistance of Rs 6,000 each, is unlikely to help in a state where per acre earnings are higher than other states.

➤ Agricultural productivity continues to be among the highest in the world, but it hasn't helped the farmers. Profits have shrunk due to constantly rising prices of farm inputs like fertilisers, pesticides and diesel.

➤ Punjab is all set to legislate a new Land Tenancy Act to safeguard both the landowner and the tenant. It is also the first in the country to have amended the Agricultural Produce Market Committee Act to permit free trading of commodities. The state has also brought in a Nurseries Act and Livestock Feed Act.

➤ There is a dire need for Punjab to diversify its crops, but policies pursued by successive regimes at the Centre, which has continued to support and procure wheat and paddy from the state, has discouraged farmers from moving towards less water-intensive crops.



IT and Services: Driving Governance

Speakers: **V.K. Garg** (left), chairman, Punjab Governance Reform Commission and financial advisor to the chief minister and **Vijay Inder Singla** (right), minister for information technology and PWD

➤ Young talent should be harnessed for IT and other start up industries to equip them to become job creators.

➤ Punjab has joined the Centre's National Skills Qualification Framework programme, enabling its youth to compete internationally and fulfil industry requirements.

➤ The state needs to stay ahead of

the learning curve in e-governance initiatives.

➤ The current government needs to raise revenues, reduce expenditure, and build a stronger case for Centre's support.

➤ Rapidly emerging technologies like 5G, AI and blockchain will usher in change in governance.



Winners

CATEGORY	BEST DISTRICT	MOST IMPROVED DISTRICT
Overall	Jalandhar	Pathankot
Overall Special Mention- Most Improved District	Ferozepur	
Education	Rupnagar	Amritsar
Health	Hoshiarpur	Gurdaspur
Infrastructure	Jalandhar	Fazilka
Water & Sanitation	Barnala	Mansa
Agriculture	Ludhiana	SAS Nagar
Industry	Fatehgarh Sahib	Ludhiana
Law & Order	Pathankot	Pathankot
Law & Order Special Mention	Patiala	
Services	Kapurthala	Sangrur
Prosperity	SAS Nagar	Tarn Taran

An Income Revolution for Punjab

Keynote address by **Rakesh Bharti Mittal**, president, Confederation of Indian Industries and vice-chairman Bharti Enterprises

Punjab needs...

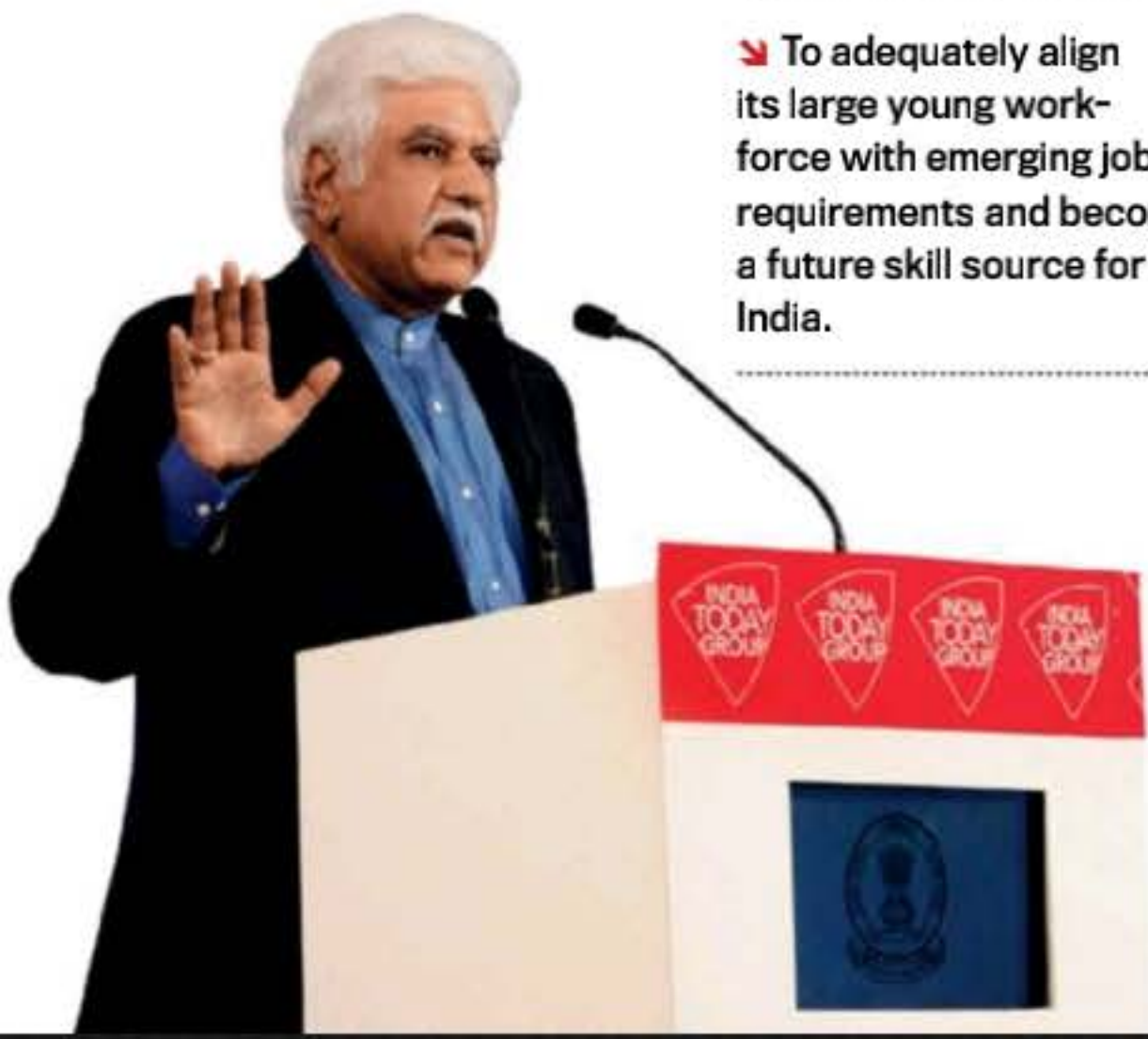
➤ A new phase of the Green Revolution to revitalise agricultural output.

➤ To reform legislations on agriculture, livestock and land for better engagement of the private sector.

➤ A strategic agriculture export promotion policy to link with the global marketplace.

➤ To assume a leading role in the emerging technology-led transformation in the industry and services sector.

➤ To adequately align its large young workforce with emerging job requirements and become a future skill source for India.



Punjab Industry: What Needs to be done

Keynote Address by **Sunil Kant Munjal**, chairman, Hero Enterprises

Punjab needs...

➤ To address the mismatch in the skill and attitude available and required to provide the right kind of workforce.

➤ To ensure that the wages permit decent livelihoods.

➤ To focus on building big, enterprising industries that

spur economic activity and create jobs.

➤ Invest in agricultural, cultivation and post harvest, value-adding technologies.

➤ To employ the network effect—within the state, between districts and outside the state.



THE STATE OF
THE STATE
PUNJAB

Building Skills: The Challenges of Education

Speakers: **R.S. Bawa**, vice-chancellor of Chandigarh University, **Ramesh Kanwar**, vice-chancellor of Lovely Professional University, and **Krishan Kumar**, secretary, school education, governance reforms and public grievances

➤ Punjab needs to improve the quality of education in its schools. The state government must simplify things by recruiting teachers locally for rural schools while making it mandatory for teachers and other government employees to enrol their children in government-run schools.

➤ Punjab's government schools have a higher dropout rate at the secondary level than that in other states. However,

unlike other states where the dropout rate of girls is higher than that of boys, in Punjab, an equal number of girls and boys dropout of schools.

➤ The poor quality of education in government schools is leading to an exodus of students to private and English medium schools; only 48 per cent of the students are enrolled in government schools.

➤ The state is seeing

a rise in the number of women enrolled in various higher education institutions. In the Lovely Professional University (LPU), a private university in Jalandhar, more than 50 per cent of the students are women.

➤ Punjab is among the first states in the country to introduce vocational training in schools; 780 of the 1,700 senior secondary schools in the state teach vocational courses.



Cultural Renaissance: Made in Punjab

Speakers: **B.N. Goswamy**, art historian, **Neelam Mansingh Chowdhry**, theatre director, **Diwan Manna**, conceptual photographer and chairman of Punjab Lalit Kala Academy, **Satinder Sartaj**, poet and singer, and **Ginni Mahi**, singer



(From left) R.S. Bawa, Krishan Kumar and Ramesh Kanwar



(From right) Neelam Mansingh Chowdhry, B.N. Goswamy and Diwan Manna

- Home to extraordinary talent, Punjab needs to create spaces where artists can experiment and showcase their work.
- The state needs to build centres of excellence to train artists.
- Every school in Punjab must fill existing vacancies for art and music teachers. Art should be used to sensitise the young

and broaden their horizons.

- Socially relevant content in popular music and cinema needs to be encouraged, besides reviving and sustaining Punjab's folk music.
- Rather than imposing restrictions and censorship, the state and other stakeholders ought to encourage proliferation of artistic and culturally rich content.

"We should not be expected to dictate taste. Our function, as entertainers, is to make people feel happy"

Satinder Sartaj
Poet, singer



Ginni Mahi



THE STATE OF THE STATE CONCLAVE PUNJAB

PRESENTED BY

CAPTAIN
AMARINDER
SINGH

△ Group Editorial Director Raj Chengappa with Punjab CM Amarinder Singh at the SOTS Conclave on February 7

REUBEN SINGH

the farmer gets for his produce and submits a comprehensive report. But then you pick and choose, do not follow it in full. What do you expect the farmer to do? The Rs 2 lakh we are giving is just to assist them because suicide rates are rising. We have had, since the last decade, 16,000 suicides in the state.

Q. Isn't this a band-aid solution because what Punjab really needs is a structural revolution in agriculture?

A. This is what I said; it is a band-aid solution. This is only to help those who are financially desperate.

Q. You can make structural changes in agriculture by diversifying into horticulture and floriculture. Has your government done anything in this regard, or is it too broke to do anything?

A. We can bring diversification through industry. You have a food processing industry coming up; we are already working

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**We have given
Rs 4,736 cr to 583,000
farmers. It will go
towards the Rs 2 lakh
debt relief for each
farmer. I know Rs 2
lakh is not the sol-
ution, but it is better
than Rs 17 a person”**

on it. But these things take time. When I left the army and took up farming, the wheat crop would be over your head and yet we wouldn't have enough. Then this new wheat came from Mexico and, suddenly, within three years, Punjab was covered with wheat. Then you went into rice, Punjab is not a rice-producing state, we may eat a little bit of *kheer* or something but, within three years, Punjab was growing rice.

If you have something to offer, farmers will do it on their own. Punjabi farmers are very enterprising, but they need to know where to sell the produce and what the end cost will be. In Punjab, we have floriculture projects going on around Malerkotla and Ludhiana, but they are small. But I don't see the need for McDonald's to import its potatoes when my potatoes are being dumped on the road. So all it needs is a change of variety and testing it, which PAU is doing. And not only here, the potatoes can be shipped anywhere since McDonald's and such food chains are everywhere. Maize is another crop we see a future in, it also helps save water. Maize is grown in the Kharif season but, again, there is no price support. You announce an MSP for it, but somebody has to support it.

Q. This is the central government you are talking about...

A. Yes, the Food Corporation of India (FCI) supports cereals like wheat and rice.

Q. What has the Narendra Modi government or food processing minister Harsimrat Kaur Badal done for agriculture?

A. Nothing that has had an impact. Every godown in Punjab is full of wheat and rice. If I have a month to go before harvest season, I do not have the space to store it because FCI or the food ministry is not lifting it. They should be moving it to Bihar or somewhere and clear the space for me. Now I'm telling our agencies to start making concrete platforms where gunny bags can be kept, but that is something the central government must do. The sugar industry is in the doldrums. There's an international glut, of course, but what happens to the sugarcane farmer? He has not been paid for years. Here, too, my minister of cooperation has been able to wiggle things around and give money to people, but things are bad.

Q. Modi and his government claim...

A. Sorry to interrupt, but Mrs Badal has done zilch for Punjab; show me one industry she has brought in and which has benefitted the farmer community. Saying I have done this and I have done that is not solving a problem. Has she brought in any cotton industry, has she done something so that the sugar industry functions, has she done something where the food industry utilises the surplus wheat we have? I had the ambassador of Kazakhstan come here and buy my wheat. I said you are welcome, but how will you take it? He said we are willing to fly it. The point is, what are you



“**Rahul's doing a great job. I've seen him come up over the years. He's open in his discussions. Priyanka's another perceptive lady; she'll be an asset**”

doing? Similarly, you can make breakfast cereals. Has she brought any industry of breakfast food for puffed rice and puffed wheat or anything else used in breakfast? I don't know what the last state government was doing, but we are doing our best.

Q. PM Modi, in his defence, says he has issued 170 million soil health cards and launched a crop insurance scheme.

A. What soil health cards is he talking about? I've never seen them and my state produces 40 per cent of the nation's food pool.

Q. What about crop insurance and neem-coated fertilisers?

A. Neem-coated fertilisers, I cannot comment on. But we are going another way, our university has cut down the use of fertilisers without affecting crop production.

Q. You continue to give farmers free power. Is it politically suicidal to stop free power?

A. No, it's not a question of being suicidal. If you go to the farmers and explain it to them, they usually fall in line. I have roughly 1.7 million farmer families who are in debt, of



them 1.2 million have under five acres, of which 1,025,000 are getting assistance from us. Yet we have had a spate of suicides, people do not have money. Who wants to commit suicide? It is the desperate person. Luckily, the percentage is falling. Now if I suddenly take away the money he's saving by not paying for power, then we are putting him under pressure again. I did say the larger farmers should pay their own bills, but nobody has come forward.

Q. There is also a lot of disguised employment in agriculture, people need to move from agriculture into industry. What are you doing on that front?

A. Agro industries, as I mentioned, have come up. I opened one with ITC, others are also coming up. That's where there is a turnaround in cropping patterns, when industry knows what they require for whatever they are making, and the farmer knows that he can sell and what he will get for it. As of now, we are ruining our soil. When we started farming years ago, we used to leave one crop fallow to retain soil texture. Traditionally, I knew Punjab's soil to be deficient in zinc and copper, but today it has manganese, iodine, boron deficiency as well. The water table is also sinking. There were about 15,000 tube wells at one time, now there are probably about 1.7 million. A small farmer is unable to pump up water and rivers are drying up. Where is Punjab heading? What are we leaving for future generations?

Q. What are you doing about industrial development?

A. We are now producing surplus power. Fortunately, I think it's going to last as long as industries are interested in coming to Punjab. It's a question of giving confidence to industry; which we have been able to do. We have an investment programme going across the world. Hopefully, we will get investments, but at the moment the pace is not there. Industry is important to us as it will create jobs. I will tell you where

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If you get the RBI to tighten screws on somebody, the police to do something and CBI to do something else, who will waste time here to do business?”

things are moving... steel, for instance. Before my government came in, while driving across the state, I would pass Gobindgarh and count chimney smoke coming out of 7 or 9 out of 300 factories. Today, I am happy to say, that all 300 factories in Gobindgarh are working. I was told electricity consumption there has gone up by 13 percentage points in one year.

Q. Have you talked to Prime Minister Modi about the Rs 2 lakh crore debt the state has? What has been his response?

A. I have met PM Modi four or five times. I have had very happy conversations with him, but that's where it ends. I am buying food on behalf of my country and yet they charge us. The food corporation and food ministry don't pay us for labour to carry bags, or for transport; it adds up to Rs 2,000 per crop. As a result, I have a bill of Rs 31,500 crore pending with the Government of India.

Q. What is your assessment of Mr Modi as Prime Minister?

A. I have known him from before, when he was in charge of the RSS in Punjab and we'd meet at functions. I think the hopes from him were much more. Our electorate has great hopes whenever somebody comes, they feel the government will perform. Then they get fed up and vote another government in. They thought the Congress had been there for 10 years, so Modi would do the same. But, what have they done for the country, for my state? Forget my state, because it is a Congress-ruled one, what have they done for their own states? I don't see anything I can put my finger on. Apart from developing Mr Adani or others like him, what have they done for the country as a whole?

Q. What did you think of the recent CBI move against the Kolkata police commissioner?

A. I am against this kind of victimisation. It is ridiculous and totally unacceptable. Vindictiveness in politics has to stop.

Q. Does the Enforcement Directorate's summons to Robert Vadra shortly after Priyanka Gandhi's entry into politics fall in the same category?

A. Again, everything smacks of vindictiveness. We left the government in 2007, but I am still facing cases. I won't let it happen in my government.

Q. You said you'll go after Akali leader Bikram Majithia.

A. Go after him legally. You can't just go to his house and pick him up, shove him behind bars.

Q. What about Parkash Singh Badal, your predecessor, and Sukhbir Badal. Are you pursuing any of those cases or have you called a truce?

A. I haven't called any truce, but if anything comes to our notice, it is sent to the appropriate agencies for investigation. But if you think I am going to go at midnight and pick up Mr Badal and Mr Sukhbir Badal or Mr Majithia, I am not going to do that. You must remember that people came to do business in this country, but left. Why? Because they don't like these sort of things. If you get the RBI to tighten the screws on somebody, the police to do something and CBI to do something else, who will waste time here? The world needs to know that India has outgrown all this.

Q. How do you view the *mahagathbandhan* of opposition parties that Mamata Banerjee is leading?

A. Time will tell. Certainly, it is anti-BJP and I hope, when the time comes, they have enough of a majority for people to realise who and which party should lead them and look towards what they can do for our states and us.

Q. And the role Rahul and the Congress should play?

A. I think Rahul is doing a great job. The way Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh responded—it was all his contribution. Over the years, I have seen him come up. I think the time has come. The BJP graph is going down and our graph is heading up.

Q. Do you think Rahul will make a good prime minister?

A. I think so. Because you can sit with him, talk to him. He is very open in his discussions. He doesn't beat around the bush or hesitate to speak his mind. You come out with the feeling you have been able to convey your point. And, he talks sense; I follow his speeches. With his sister joining, there will be added support.

Q. You welcome Priyanka Gandhi?

A. I have been asking them to bring her for four years now. She is a perceptive young lady and would be a great asset to her brother.

Q. Mr Modi says the Congress is a party of *naamdars*. You yourself have come up the hard way in politics, even being with the Akalis. Are you in favour of dynasty?

A. If people vote for you, where are you a dynasty? If tomorrow, my son stands for an election, they vote for him and not for me. Rahul is the great-grandson of Jawaharlal



Nehru, but they are voting for him because they want him as their leader.

Q. You worked with Sonia Gandhi. What is the difference between her and Rahul's style of functioning?

A. Soniaji listens to everything and says she'll get back to you on a point. She'll come up with an answer and call you back. Rahul makes instant decisions. And I like that, I am like that too.

Q. In your first term as chief minister, you convened a special session of the assembly to annul all past water-sharing pacts with Haryana and Rajasthan. Was Sonia Gandhi, the party president then, upset? Had you briefed her about it?

A. No, I hadn't. After the abrogation of the treaty, I'd go to Delhi and she wouldn't see me. It went on for six months. Then, some friends got together and told her I was her chief minister, either she remove me or see me. She agreed to see me and asked me why I did it and not tell her? I asked her if I had told her, would she have said yes? She said no, and I told her, that's why.

Q. You also dealt with Indira Gandhi before Blue Star.

A. I was with her from 1980-84. One day I was asked to come and see her. So I went to Parliament. At that time, the negotiations were on with the Akali Dal and Bhin-

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The previous Sikh extremism was home-grown, this is not, it's Pakistan-controlled. The ISI is behind it and also Sikhs for Justice, which too is ISI-controlled”



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Imran and Sidhu have played cricket together. But he should not have hugged the army chief because he's ordered his army to shoot my soldiers”

dranwale was already a power centre. There was Swaran Singh of the Congress, Sardar Balwant Singh of the Akali Dal and Comrade Harkishan Singh Surjeet from the Communist Party. Something went wrong, Swaran Singh got upset and quit. Mrs Gandhi asked if I knew Bhindranwale and I said, no ma'am. She said, but you are a Sidhu, and I said there are a million Sidhus. So she asked me if I could make contact with him and I said, yes, I can if required. From 1980 to February 1984, I worked with her. I found her to be a very fine person to work with. But, in February, things started going beyond me, and escalating. I asked her to find someone else and I think she did. I would also meet Mrs Gandhi when she or her father would come to Doon School to meet Rajiv and Sanjay. Our parents also knew each other. She would also take us out. I remember going with Panditji too. He'd take us to Circuit House and we'd play cricket.

Q. Today, the threat of Sikh extremism has surfaced in Punjab again. How serious is it and how are you dealing with it?

A. Earlier, it was home grown, this time it's not. This is Pakistan-controlled, the ISI is behind it as well as its pawns, Sikhs for Justice. Since I have been here, we have neutralised 28 ISI modules. We have caught about a hundred of their operatives and have recovered over a hundred weapons and explosives. Now they are gearing up for Referendum 2020, via the Sikhs for Justice. We have caught four operatives who were actually being used for terrorism.

Q. Would you say that Sikh extremism is under control?

A. It's not a problem here. Abroad the Trafalgar Square meeting [in London] was organised by a Lieutenant Colonel from the Pakistan army. He sponsored people to come from all over the world but it was overshadowed by the Indian presence. In New York, Sikhs for Justice was not able to collect a dozen people. The majority is pro-Indian and they want harmony in Punjab.

Q. You also accused Canada of sheltering Khalistani terrorists.

A. I met (Canadian premier Justin) Trudeau and said I will not meet (Harjit) Sajjan who accompanied him. He is the defence minister of Canada, but he is also a member of the World Sikh Organisation, where his father is the chairman. When Trudeau came, I told him that four members of his cabinet are Khalistani supporters and he should do something about it. We've given the names and I think things are better now.

Q. What are your views on the Kartarpur corridor?

A. It is being created because it had always been a demand of the Sikhs. The gurdwaras in Pakistan were meant for *khule darshan*. But I have said it should not be opened to let terrorism march through. The ISI is doing this to gain the sympathy of Sikhs for the referendum, it is all geared towards that. We have to remain vigilant and careful, which is what we are doing.

Q. Yet your cabinet minister, Navjot Singh Sidhu, went across, a hero in Pakistan's eyes, and also hugged their army chief.

A. Imran and Navjot have played cricket together, but what I disagree with is hugging the army chief, because he has given his army the order to shoot my soldiers.

Q. Do you think Kartarpur will be an issue this election?

A. Kartarpur is not a current issue. Manmohan Singh was the first to raise it. I was going there in 2004, and he asked me to meet the chief minister and the president, which I did. They were all positive and it could have happened at the time, because Musharraf was both president and army chief. Today, the army calls the shots and no one is going to listen to this cricket chap.

Q. What about drug addiction in Punjab? You promised to crack down on drug peddlers. Has it succeeded?

A. I think it has succeeded. We started two years ago but found people unwilling to come to government deaddiction centres due to social stigma and going instead to private ones. Now, government centres are being utilised, medicines are being given and people are being cured. We have initiated a buddy system where five kids are put together and look after themselves and their friends. We have got drug prevention officers, all of them volunteers. Some 556 kg of heroin has been seized, 2,149 cases have been registered; 30 policemen who were involved are behind bars. There has been a 50 per cent decline in scheduled drugs sold by chemists. But why is it happening? It has to do with unemployment.

Q. What will be the key issues this election?

A. Jobs. The responsibility should be the national government's. Leaving it in the BJP's hands is asking for more trouble. They've already been there five years and we've seen the graph go down. If it's another five years, god help my country. ■

For full text of the interview, log on to www.indiatoday.in

THE INHERITANCE OF LOSS

Just months after losing power, three former BJP chief ministers face the indignities of defeat and the sharp end of inner party rivalry

By Rahul Noronha and Rohit Parihar



TAP TO WATCH VIDEO

ALL FOR THE CAUSE

Chouhan at a party rally in Kharagpur, West Bengal, Feb. 6





THAT SINKING FEELING

- After 13 years as unchallenged CM, Chouhan is in the cross-hairs of his party rivals
- The central leadership has cut the ex-CM at every turn, be it state president's post or the *aabhaar yatra*
- Chouhan likely to stay in the state, work on the ground, though local leaders have isolated him

“**Most *netas* would have taken time off before going on the road again, but Chouhan has been at it**”

Girija Shankar
Political analyst

➤ MADHYA PRADESH: CHOUHAN IS A LONELY MAN TODAY

After 13 years as undisputed CM, Shivraj Chouhan finds he has few friends left

The election results that evicted Shivraj Singh Chouhan as chief minister of Madhya Pradesh on December 11 were, as it seems now, only among the first of the political setbacks that were in store for the veteran Bharatiya Janata Party leader.

Within two days of the verdict, Chouhan announced he would continue in MP politics and wasn't going anywhere. He said he would soon embark on an '*aabhaar yatra* (gratitude tour)' across the state—a plan the central leadership soon asked him to abandon. Then came the news that he was ready to become the leader of the opposition, a post that eventually went to former minister Gopal Bhargava (who is not considered close to him). Chouhan then evinced interest in becoming the state BJP president, an important position in the run-up to the polls. But a day before the BJP's national council meeting in Delhi, he was surprised to find himself appointed national vice-president, along with two other ex-CMs of states where the BJP had lost—Rajasthan's Vasundhara Raje and Chhattisgarh's Raman Singh.

The message from the central leadership was clear: Chouhan wasn't going to have his way anymore. After a largely unchallenged stint of 13 years as CM in which he had cut down many emerging political rivals, Chouhan is now in the cross-hairs with rivals ganging up and outmanoeuvring him at every turn. How will he get out of this *chakravyuh* he finds himself in?

Political watchers in MP are convinced the knives are out for

Chouhan. That the ex-CM isn't a favourite of the current BJP central leadership, the Narendra Modi-Amit Shah duo, is an open secret in the party. Chouhan had just about convinced them that he was their best bet before the elections. But now, even after the party performed reasonably well in MP—the BJP actually had a higher vote share than the Congress and barely missed a majority, with 109 seats in the 230-member assembly to the Congress's 114—Chouhan seems to be in the doghouse.

The options before him are few: he could contest the Lok Sabha poll, and if the BJP wins at the Centre, earn a ministerial berth and remain relevant (his positive equation with the RSS could ensure this). A second option would be to stay in the state and work towards destabilising the Congress government, given the slender majority it has. It could lead to another shot at office if he is successful. This isn't easy even though the central unit of the BJP isn't above directing a coup, as shown in Uttarakhand and Karnataka. Whoever tries it will be pitting themselves against Congress veterans like Kamal Nath and Digvijaya Singh who are past masters at the game.

A third option before Chouhan, and one he has evinced interest in, is working towards winning MP back for the BJP whenever elections are held next. This will entail a lot of hard work, touring and meeting people, which Chouhan is most keen as all this comes naturally to him.

Chouhan's strategists maintain that in the days to come he will seek more responsibility from party president Shah. A new 'vice-president', he is unlikely to want to remain in an ornamental post as most incumbents have been. "I thank PM Modi and party president Amit Shah for giving me the respon-

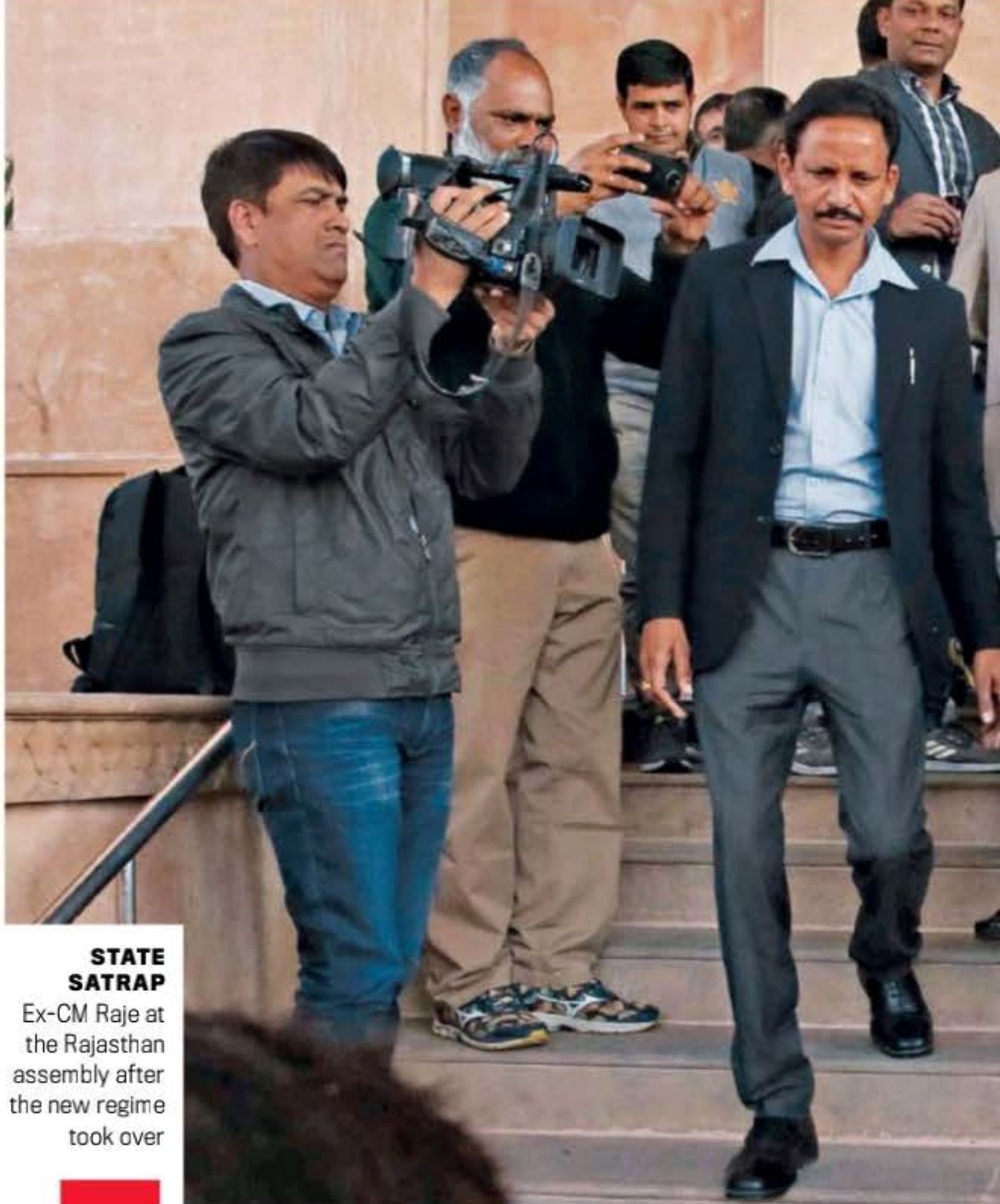
sibility of vice-president in the world's biggest organisation," he tweeted soon after his appointment on January 10, maintaining a brave front.

Chouhan will spend a majority of his time in Bhopal to enable his touring within the state. The vice-president setback apart, Chouhan can't keep himself from plunging into issues dominating state politics. Even though aides have advised him to lie low for a while, Chouhan toured the northern and western districts that had been hit by a cold wave and demanded compensation for farmers. "Chouhan is himself when he is among the people. Most politicians would have given themselves time before going on the road again, but Chouhan has been at it," says political analyst Girija Shankar.

It seems Chouhan is also driven hugely by this urge to keep his popularity intact. Opinion polls before the assembly election had given the Congress an edge but Chouhan was still the most popular leader in poll after poll. He may be out of office, but Chouhan is determined to stay in the public consciousness, the constant tours are an effort to stay relevant. But sometimes it all goes awry. On January 18, Chouhan rushed off to Mandsaur to protest the murder of local municipal chairman Prahlad Bandhwar and attack the new Congress government for the breakdown in law and order—only to learn midway that the accused was one of their own, a BJP leader.

Meanwhile, there is the local challenge from his own party. One-time ally and Union minister Narendra Singh Tomar, former minister Narottam Mishra, BJP general secretary Kailash Vijayvargiya, state BJP president Rakesh Singh, not to mention BJP vice-president Prabhat Jha, they all seem to have found a common agenda in keeping Chouhan out. A telling development is that Chouhan's publicity and press notes are now being handled by a team separate from the state BJP office which earlier did the task for him.

In the days to come, Chouhan will face more testing times. Remaining significant when not in office is a



STATE SATRAP

Ex-CM Raje at the Rajasthan assembly after the new regime took over

massive challenge for most politicians. The outcome of the Lok Sabha election will be very significant for intra-party politics in the BJP, something both the central leadership and those affected by its decisions are acutely aware of. ■

RAJASTHAN: RAJE'S BACK TO THE WALL

The ex-CM may be at loggerheads with the Modi-Shah duo, but in the state she is still numero uno

As of now, except for hoping that with a new leadership the anti-incumbency against Vasundhara Raje will fade away by the Lok Sabha poll, the BJP has no plan on how to use the former chief minister in Rajasthan.

Raje on February 10 said even if she is appointed party vice-president, she will not be leaving the state ever. She was addressing BJP workers in Jhalrapattan, her assembly constitu-

ency that falls in the Jhalawar-Baran parliamentary constituency from where her son Dushyant Singh is a three-time MP and is expected to contest this time too. Raje has tried to put an end to rumours that she will be asked to contest the general election so as to move her out of the state.

Raje has been visiting her son's constituency and has already started a sort of election campaign, hitting out at the new Congress government over the swine flu epidemic which has claimed 100 lives and the death of 10 farmers in the cold wave (the ex-CM alleges they died because the government provided power to irrigate the fields at night when temperatures drop considerably).

There has been speculation that the party wants Raje to contest the parliamentary polls. That would mean Dushyant is unlikely to get a ticket. Another section believes Raje may be asked to join the Union government if the BJP



HIMANSHU VYAS/GETTY IMAGES

STILL A FORCE TO RECKON WITH

- The central BJP has been trying to confine Raje to the background after the poll debacle
- Party rival and RSS favourite, Gulab Chand Kataria, has been named leader of the Opposition
- Raje still has the support of 54 of the 74 MLAs. They had wanted her to be Opposition leader

Raje has tried to end the rumours that she will be asked to contest the general election so as to move her out of the state. A ticket for her would be at the cost of son Dushyant, a three-time MP

wins the Lok Sabha election. This seems more likely, especially as senior ministers like Sushma Swaraj, Arun Jaitley and Manohar Parrikar are not in the best of health. But Raje might push for her son Dushyant to be made a Union minister instead. Prime Minister Modi had denied this wish last time around because she was chief minister.

So how is the BJP likely to use Raje? The party has so far tried to confine Raje to the background after the election debacle. Her rival and RSS favourite Gulab Chand Kataria, a Jain by caste and an eight-time MLA, is

leader of the opposition. Rajendra Rathore, a seven-time MLA and a Rajput by caste, is his deputy. Both have had long tenures as ministers in the state, but have limited influence over their castes. Rathore, once a target of the RSS because of his proximity to Raje, has reportedly been cultivating his connections with the RSS and anti-Raje lobbies in the party of late.

Fifty-four of the BJP's 73 MLAs were at Raje's residence asking her to be the leader of the opposition before she proposed Kataria's name last week. Incidentally, both Rathore and Kataria

have been booked for fake encounter killings in the past. Kataria was booked for the Sohrabuddin encounter (where the Gujarat police and even party president Shah were accused at one point) while Rathore spent a month in jail for bootlegger Dara Singh's death in 2006. Both were discharged later.

In Rajasthan, the BJP plan is to work on strengthening a "weakened" organisation. Current state president Madan Lal Saini, 74, was brought in before the assembly poll solely because he was a grassroots worker. There had been some friction then because Raje did not allow Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, 51, a Rajput, Union MoS and Modi's choice for the post, a look in. With Rathore now deputy leader of the opposition, the party may not get Shekhawat back as state president as there is hardly any time left for the Lok Sabha election. Union minister of state Rajyavardhan Rathore is another popular BJP leader as is his colleague Gen. V.K. Singh (both are Rajputs), but the BJP does not have any prominent Jat face except for Dushyant Singh. Raje herself is arguably a Rajput, married to a Jat and with a Gurjar daughter-in-law, thus making her above caste equations. It is her influence over voters and her hold over the MLAs that the BJP must keep in mind as elections near. ■

DISTRESS AFTER THE DEFEAT

- Raman Singh's rivals in the Chhattisgarh BJP are blaming his decisions for the assembly poll defeat

- A section of the state BJP feels a strong OBC face should be projected to thwart the Congress

- Fresh probes ordered into alleged scams during Singh's regime could put him on the back foot



INNINGS DEFEAT
Raman Singh speaks to the media after the assembly poll results

CHHATTISGARH: RAMAN SINGH DOWN BUT NOT OUT

Has BJP central leaders' backing, but push for OBC face at home is a worry

The knives are out in the Chhattisgarh BJP. And the target is former chief minister Dr Raman Singh, whose 15-year rule in the state ended in December with his party's crushing election defeat at the hands of the Congress. Rivals are projecting the BJP's slump to 15 seats in the 90-member assembly from 49 in the previous election as a referendum on Singh's policies and decisions.

Sources close to Singh, however, maintain that even though the BJP's hammering in Chhattisgarh was emphatic, the party has not been as harsh on him as it has been on Shivraj Singh Chouhan in Madhya Pradesh. They claim state BJP chief Dharamlal Kaushik's appointment as the leader of Opposition was at Singh's behest and he would even have a say if a new president were to be appointed ahead of the Lok Sabha election.

Unlike Chouhan, who has been touring Madhya Pradesh, Singh has been taking it easy. "This is because Raman Singh is not the one to run after positions and posts," claims an aide.

“Any strengthening of the OBC leadership in Chhattisgarh would be at the cost of Raman Singh”

Ruchir Garg
Media advisor to chief minister Bhupesh Baghel

"Also, he feels striving for anything at the moment won't yield results as decisions about his future are not in his hands anymore."

Singh did visit Delhi after the election. He is not only on good terms with the BJP central leadership, but is also considered close to Union ministers Rajnath Singh and Arun Jaitley. In the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, Singh enjoys a good equation with *sah-sarkaryvah* Krishna Gopal. What could still eclipse his political future is the assessment within a section of the Chhattisgarh BJP that a strong OBC (Other Backward Class) leadership needs to be promoted to thwart the Congress's consolidation in these communities.

OBCs account for roughly 50 per cent of the state's electorate—Kurmis, Sahus and Yadavs being the prominent

communities. Behind this emerging view in the BJP is the Congress's 68-seat haul under the leadership of Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel, a Kurmi leader. A trend is already apparent—leader of Opposition Kaushik is a backward community leader while Chandra Shekhar Sahu, who criticised the Singh government's pre-election decision to distribute free mobile phones while refusing to waive farm loans, is a prominent Sahu leader of the BJP. "Any strengthening of the OBC leadership in Chhattisgarh would be at the cost of Raman Singh," predicts Ruchir Garg, media advisor to Baghel.

Brijmohan Agrawal, a prominent state BJP leader, too, finds himself hemmed in by the party's push for OBC faces. The Raipur MLA is yet to get any key responsibility in the party.

Amid all this, the salvos continue. "Many more people will have such eye-opening moments now," was Singh's retort to Sahu's remarks against his government. The former chief minister also has to contend with fresh investigations ordered by Baghel into alleged scams during his regime. While Singh has challenged the new government to prove any wrongdoing, his rivals are only expected to turn up the heat. It's a battle that will be keenly watched. ■

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CINEMA

Bollywood in Berlin

The Berlinale offers a sense
of diversity in Indian cinema
rarely seen even in India

by Meenakshi Shedde in Berlin

AT THE PALAST
India and South Asia
have an exceptional
record of 29 film
delegates invited for
the Berlinale



It is freezing weather, below zero, here in Berlin. But one is always excited to return to the Berlin International Film Festival. There are many highly anticipated films at the 69th edition of the festival, on from February 7 to 17.

The international films include *Vice* by Adam McKay, starring Christian Bale and Amy Adams, a satire on Dick Cheney, vice-president to George W. Bush, with eight Oscar nominations to its name. Fatih Akin's *The Golden Glove*, a horrific, misogynist film based on a real-life German serial killer who murdered and dismembered sex workers, makes Korean horror films look like children's films. Wang Quan'an's acclaimed *Öndög* is about a tough woman herder on the Mongolian steppe; *Varda by Agnes*, by Agnès Varda, is on the life and work of the French director; Zhang Yimou's *One Second* is about a prisoner and an orphan girl, while Rob Garver's *What She Said: The Art of Pauline Kael*, is on the brilliant, acerbic film critic.

India and South Asia have an exceptional record of 29 film delegates invited for different sections. These include a record 12 films selected, 14 film-makers in Berlinale Talents, a mentoring programme, and three film projects in the Berlinale Co-production Market that helps raise funds.

The two most high-profile Indian films are Zoya Akhtar's *Gully Boy* and Ritesh Batra's *Photograph*, both playing in the Berlinale Special section screened at the gala premiere. Starring Ranveer Singh and Alia Bhatt, *Gully Boy* is set in Dharavi and follows Singh's character who dreams of becoming a rap star. It earned a roar of applause from a mixed European-Indian audience at the sold-out world premiere in Berlin on February 9, ahead of the India release on February 14. It opened at the spectacular Friedrichstadt-Palast, a nearly 1,900 seater theatre, a size rare even in India. "*Gully Boy* is so wonderful because of how it portrays a modern young Muslim woman—she is studying to be a doctor, is bold and a bit crazy, but so lovable. My mother always likes us to see Bollywood films, because it is a precious link to our culture," said engineering student Silsila Nory, whose Afghan family is settled in Germany.

Ritesh Batra's *Photograph*, not screened here at the time of writing, stars Nawazuddin Siddiqui as a photographer who persuades a woman (Sanya Malhotra)

he has photographed to pose as his fiancée, in order to appease his grandmother. In the Generation section is Rima Das' *Bulbul Can Sing*, a coming of age story of three Assamese teenagers traumatised by the moral brigade, while Tashi Gyeltshen's Bhutanese film, *Red Phallus*, is about the affair between a schoolgirl and a married man, in the Dzongkha language.

What sets the Berlinale apart are its films, its politics and its engagement with the community. Ruchir Joshi's film *Tales from Planet Kolkata* was screened at the Silent Green Kulturquartier, a former, 'decommissioned' graveyard/crematorium. The 1993 film, restored by the Arsenal Institute for Film and Video Art, superbly captures the multiple versions of Kolkata. His other film, *Egaro Mile* (11 Miles, 1991), also restored by the Arsenal, screened in the International Forum of New Cinema, is about the Baul singers, their music and politics. The Arsenal has played a significant role in restoring a number of Indian films unavailable or in poor condition in India. They have restored two more films by Yugantar, an Indian feminist film collective of the 1980s, *Tambaku Chaakila Oob Ali* (Tobacco Embers, Marathi, 1982), about women tobacco workers in Karnataka, and *Idhi Katha Matramena* (Is this just a

Story?, Telugu, 1983), on domestic violence. Both films, along with *Tales from Planet Kolkata*, are screening in the Forum and Forum Expanded section. The section is also screening Tenzing Sonam and Ritu Sarin's *Shadow Circus*, a film which revisits the audio-visual material they gathered for their 1998 documentary *The Shadow Circus: The CIA in Tibet*. The screening is accompanied by a photography and art exhibition.

Udita Bhargava's Indo-German feature, *Dust*, in which a German man retraces the footsteps of his lost love in India and stumbles upon a left-wing guerrilla movement, plays in the Perspectives on German Cinema. The Berlinale Shorts includes two films, Prantik Basu's *Rang Mahal* (Palace of Colours) on a Santhali myth of creation, and Kerala film-maker Varun Sasindran's French short *Omarska*, on a Bosnian concentration camp.

Altogether, the Berlinale offers a remarkable sense of diversity of Indian films you rarely get even in India. The film festival is nothing if not political. ■

The writer is an independent film curator and has been the South Asia Consultant to the International Berlin Film Festival for 21 years. Her email is meenakshishedde@gmail.com

What sets the
Berlin film
festival apart
is its politics
and engage-
ment with the
community



FILM GULLY BOY SOCKS IT TO US



1 Zoya Akhtar's *Gully Boy* elevates the Bollywood musical. Co-written by Reema Kagti and Akhtar, it has many elements, relatively rare, in mainstream Bollywood: intelligence, gritty realism, exploration of class and minority issues, and radical feminism—all driven by a pulsating rap score. Its song *Apna Time Ayega* is bound to become a youth anthem. It is also thrilling to see how well Bollywood's women directors have done at the Berlin film festival. Zoya Akhtar confidently takes the baton passed by Farah Khan's *Om Shanti Om* which had a full house dancing in 2008.

Gully Boy is one of the most exhilarating Bollywood films made in a long



Zoya Akhtar's **GULLY BOY** has elements that are rare in mainstream Bollywood: gritty realism, class and minority issues and radical feminism

time. Starring Ranveer Singh and Alia Bhatt, it is a rap musical set in Dharavi, in which Singh's character aspires to be a rap star. Drawn from the lives of rap stars Divine and Naezy, Akhtar cleverly uses the underground tone of (mainly black) rap music, but in Hindi, to reflect the rage and aspirations of those living in Asia's largest slum. Its addictive and haunting songs, music and lyrics have been created by a huge team including Ankur Tewari, Divine, Javed Akhtar and Karsh Kale.

While Akhtar has had a number of Muslim characters in her previous work, including in *Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara*, here, daringly for a Bollywood mainstream film, both her

lead protagonists are Muslim and the film foregrounds minority issues.

Murad (Singh) and Safeena (Bhatt) are youngsters living in Dharavi who have been dating since school, but aren't married (they keep it mostly chaste, but frequently steal passionate kisses). A doctor's daughter, Safeena is studying to be a surgeon and Murad, a driver's son, tentatively dreams of becoming a rap star. In a radical feminist move, Safeena tells Murad, "Be whatever you want to be. I'm going to be a surgeon and I'll support you." It takes courage for a Bollywood hero to accept a role where he counts on his girlfriend to financially back his career, if needed.

Singh and Bhatt are supremely confident, getting under the skin of their characters. Safeena is also feisty and possessive of Murad. He lives in a small *kholi* beset with violence: his father thrashes his mother and brings home a second wife. He plugs out of his suffocating life by plugging into music and stumbles into Mumbai's lively rap and hip-hop scene. He personifies the cynical dispossessed of India, waiting to grab their chance. The film resonates powerfully and leaves us on a giddy high. We certainly need more women driving Indian cinema, yeah! ■

—Meenakshi Shedde



REPRESENT! (from top) Zoya Akhtar; Ranveer Singh in *Gully Boy*; and Singh and Alia Bhatt at the Berlinale

GREGOR FISCHER/AP

WEB SCENES

EMPTY SHOTS

Life is unfair if you're a woman and a support system of female friends and a bartender-cum-friend to feed you shots any time, helps. Or so I'm led to believe by *Four More Shots Please!* (Amazon Prime).

The new show by Pritish Nandy Communications follows the lives of four women in Mumbai. Lives which heavily revolve around their relationships, sex and plenty of alcohol. Sound familiar? The story starts with Damini Rizvi

Roy (Sayani Gupta), an award-winning journalist and founder of Investigator.com, struggling to handle her obsessive-compulsive disorder and maintain editorial control over the company. Anjana Menon (Kirti Kulhari) is a 'great' lawyer, though we don't see her in action except once where she fumbles on being asked to speak Marathi in a courtroom. A divorcee, she hasn't had sex since her daughter was born.

Umang (Bani J) from Ludhiana, is an openly bisexual fitness instructor. Siddhi Patel (Maanvi Gagroo) is rich, lacks ambition, struggles with body image issues and an overbearing mother. The four have a chance meeting at a bar and become friends.

The series starts off happy and bubbly, slides into brief backstories of the women, throws in expected romantic entanglements, and ends on an emotional note. Two story lines surprise: one involves a camera and the other, a same sex love story. Neither explored in-depth. Beyond them, *FMSP* feeds every stereotype and rom-com trope—bisexuals who like casual sex, realising a friend can be a love interest, being jealous of an ex's new partner. There's even an impromptu trip to Goa where the four are shown doing 'typical' Goan

things like dancing at a rave and getting drunk/ high.

The conversations in the show are superficial and it's only when they discuss sex or masturbation that we get a glimpse of honesty. Nothing else feels relatable.

The men, Prateik Babbar as a bartender, Neil Bhoopalam as the ex-husband, and Ankur Rathi as a man interested in an older woman, stand out for their understated acting.

FMSP has the right ideas, but fails to execute them. A show about women doesn't have to be feminist, but if it mentions glass ceiling and gender discrimination, it should, at least, treat it with nuance. On the plus side, everyone looks stunning, and it's refreshing to see Indian women bonding on screen and selfishly trying to improve their lives, instead of being the 'perfect' daughter, mother or wife. ■

—Joanna Lobo

FMSP feeds every rom-com trope, but is refreshing in that its women are unwilling to be 'perfect' wives or daughters





REVIEW

A Post-377 Bollywood film

In one of the early sequences in *Ek Ladki ko Dekha to Aisa Laga*, the title for which comes from a 1994 song, director Shelly Chopra Dhar has Sweety (Sonam K. Ahuja) seeking refuge in an auditorium where she tells writer Saahil Mirza (Rajkummar Rao) that the play being rehearsed on stage lacks *siyappa* (conflict). She runs out of the auditorium right after to escape a bellowing man. A small chase across the Delhi Metro, and some biffing, reveal that the man in pursuit is Sweety's brother and not a jilted lover of some sort.

Saahil follows Sweety to her hometown in Moga, Punjab, and, assisted by caterer-and-wannabe actress Chatro (Juhi Chawla), arranges a theatre workshop to get to know her. It is one set piece after another, built around schemes and anxiety within Sweety's family about the Muslim boy after her. It all culminates in a party, where a drunken Saahil confesses his love to Sweety, only to be told that she loves another, and a woman no less. After this, the film follows Saahil as he helps Sweety, whose closeted life thus far plays out on the screen.

Sweety's father Balbir (Anil Kapoor), in-

spired by Chatro and her outlook in life, decides to do the decent thing and, much to Sweety's alarm, allows her to marry Saahil, who decides that a play about two women falling in love is the only way to catch the conscience of the throng. However, before it can be performed, Sweety is outed by her brother. The play is performed, speeches are made and the show, at the end of which Sweety and her love Kuhu (Regina Cassandra) find acceptance from her father, is a success.

There's much well-meaning psychologising about queerness, but no actual sense of how to represent the trajectories of desire. Deepa Mehta's *Fire*, for all its problems, didn't flinch from showing that desire and the body are mutual destinations. The closest we come is when Kuhu approaches Sweety for the first time to, initially, talk her brother up, but tacks and starts talking about having crushes on women, winning a bright smile from Sweety. Their characters, otherwise, have as much chemistry as a pair of embracing greeting cards.

If the post-377 film is here to sanitise, it might as well be given a quick burial. ■

—Arul Mani

A WELL-MEANING TAKE ON QUEERNESS, THE FILM FAILS TO EXPLORE THE TRAJECTORIES OF DESIRE



STREAMING

Kondo Mania

F or a show focusing on the activity of cleaning up, *Tidying Up with Marie Kondo* is surprisingly watchable.

Kondo's YouTube channel advocating the KonMari method of organising has had a large following for a few years. The Netflix show sells decluttered serenity, bolstered by Kondo's reputation and her Japanese nationality, that lends credence to the minimalism she encourages.

She flits in and out of American homes stuffed with things in various degrees of disorder. The Akiyama house, with its piles of clutter, hoarded over generations, will make many Indians smile. The idea is to keep only the things that 'spark joy'. You may wince at that phrase, but it works. She categorises items into clothing, books, papers, *komono* (ranging from bathroom to kitchen and other



miscellany) and sentimental items.

To Indians, the KonMari method is perplexing. Kondo is a huge fan of storing things in drawers and boxes, which in Indian homes mean large trunks of blankets and woollens. All things spare are kept because they might be useful in the future. However, for the middle-class urban Indian occupying tiny apartments, the KonMari method is probably going to become a mantra for high living.

Tidying Up keeps the drama low and the old-style makeover quotient high. It is television for the busy professional who needs to get their act together. Unfortunately, it also refuses to shame consumerism and ask, 'What happens to your trash?' ■

—Farah Yameen

BOOKS

PARABLE OF TRIUMPH & TRAGEDY

Often described as a 'parable about Pakistan' or a 'political parable', Zarrar Said's debut novel, *Pureland*, is a racy first-person narrative by an assassin called the 'Scimitar' hired to kill the Nobel Prize-winning scientist, Salim Agha, from the fictional country. Through the entire confession, in the shape of the book, the assassin tries to justify the murder.

The protagonist, Salim, is built in Dr Abdus Salam's mould. Dr Salam was the first scientist from Pakistan to win the Nobel Prize. As Salim slowly falls prey to the right-wingers/ the Caliphate's hatred, and

the subsequent *fatwa*, his journey from stardom and popularity to ostracism and shame brings the theme of science versus religion, reason versus blind belief to the fore.

As the traditional ugly duckling, Salim is an ordinary drunken painter's son from the alienated Ahmadiyya community in an ordinary village. Salim's life changes completely when General Khan discovers him and decides to take him in as a protégé. At that time, Salim doesn't even have a proper name; he is simply called Potato. And, as Potato enters Khan House in Lorr, he discovers the general's daughter, Laila, who instantly becomes his celestial and unreachable object of desire. Several familiar elements of magic realism appear in the novel from time to time—a levitating *fakir*, Khan's mother who, once her aversion for Salim becomes too evident, dies a mysterious death; archangel Gabriel, who appears and disappears at the most strategic moments in Salim's life.

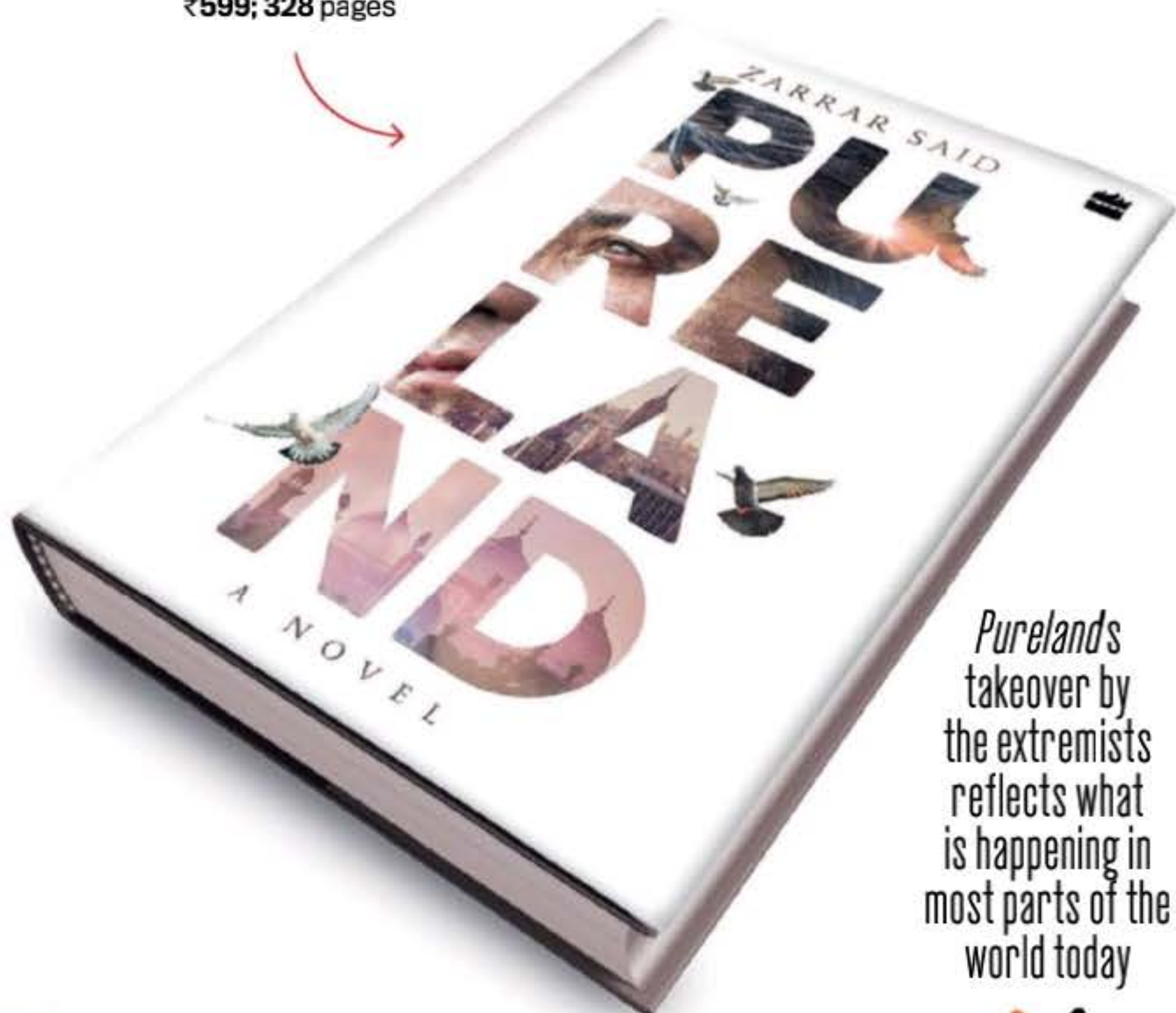
Despite these elements, the novel does not come across as a prototype of the genre. For the most part, the author maintains realism, especially social and political realism that actually define the crux of his work. And the timing could not be more appropriate, since *Pureland*'s takeover by the extremist Caliphate reflects what is happening in most parts of the world today.

As the Scimitar says, 'Yes, Zaid was a disaster, but he was allowed to come to power by the citizens of the state. We had become a rudderless people, ripe for the taking....'

After a certain point, one can perhaps guess the identity of the assassin—there are enough clues thrown in by the writer, but that does not spoil or take away from the book in any way. ■

—Divya Dubey

Pureland
by Zarrar Said
HARPERCOLLINS INDIA
₹599; 328 pages



Pureland's takeover by the extremists reflects what is happening in most parts of the world today



FIRST WORLD PROBLEMS



**IF YOU SEE ME,
DON'T SAY HI**
by Neel Patel
PENGUIN INDIA
224 pages, ₹399

Neel Patel acknowledges (sort of) his debt to Jhumpa Lahiri by quoting from *The Namesake* for the epigraph of *If You See Me, Don't Say Hi*, his debut collection of short stories, published in the US last year to some acclaim and now available in Indian bookshops. But, there is a point at which the homage becomes merely derivative, and the stories blurbled as undermining stereotypes become their own kind of stereotype.

Perhaps Indian-Americans are still so new to the general American reader that they are surprised when a writer argues, as the cover illustrates, that there is more than just one shade of brown. That Indian-Americans too are defeated and confounded by love and its demands, the same as everyone else. Perhaps Indian-Americans, as a community, feel so underrepresented in American literature that there is room for a Lahiri-lite, even if he offers little more than a parade of unlovable young people,

chafing under the aspirations of prosperous immigrant parents who appear to want little more than that their children should be extensions of themselves, ambassadors of family pride.

Of course, the parents have issues, brought on by migration, that they have failed to acknowledge, let alone address. And among the stock characters are educated, professional Indian men, who

leave their wives, inevitably for young, blond secretaries and, just as inevitably, return. The children of these wayward men and their angry, if always forgiving, wives are left to navigate the US, with its paradoxical freedom (that is freedom to behave in narrowly prescribed ways), alone.

Much of the 'love' in these stories, whether sexual or familial, is unrequited. We cannot, Patel appears to be arguing, control the dictates of the heart, whatever Indian parents might think. But Patel himself is too controlling, his hands stiffly jerking the strings to which his puppets are so tightly tethered. ■

—by Shougat Dasgupta

**The stories,
meant to
subvert stereo-
types, become
their own
stereotypes**



SITA'S VOICE

Having translated the Valmiki Ramayana, I know of the itch to

make the text what you want it to be—Sita should have said this, Rama should have done that. While a translator, bound to the imagination of the original composer, can't scratch the itch, a reteller of the story can. Author Amit Majmudar grabs the opportunity by the

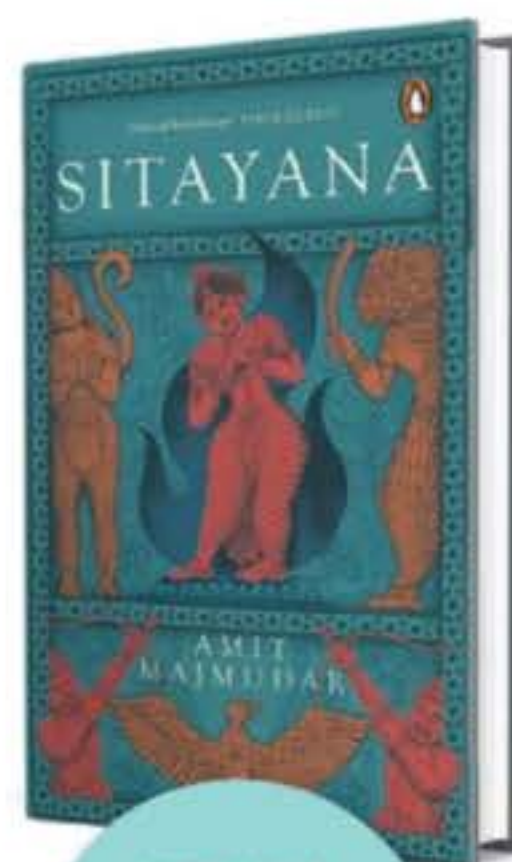
proverbial horns and lets his imagination soar in his version of the Rama story, which he names 'Sitayana'.

In this glorious mish-mash of many Ramayanas and multiple commentaries, we are treated to new motivations for action, revised etymologies, puns and poetry. Hanuman meets Surasa on his journey to fetch the *sanjivani* (rather than on his leap to Lanka) and

offers to 'come in her mouth'; Rama has brought Sanskrit to the monkeys and elevated them by explaining that *vanara* is but a combination of *vana* (forest) and *nara* (man).

Majmudar's story runs at a mile a minute and the reader must huff along, wondering why it's called *Sitayana* when so many other voices clamour for attention. I was happy to huff along but had to sit down when I encountered Rama's mother's name: 'Causalya' with a C. That was one pun too many for my gasping lungs. ■

—by Arshia Sattar



SITAYANA
by Amit Majmudar
PENGUIN INDIA
256 pages, ₹399

THE MAT MASTER

Bajrang Punia, champion wrestler, on preparing for the Tokyo Olympics, his 2019 goals, and favourite sportsperson

Q. How does the Pro Wrestling League help?

We get to compete with the European and Olympic medallists and build on our experience. Earlier, people used to recognise us only when we won medals, but now people who watch Pro Wrestling League know wrestlers by their name.

Q. Many see you as our best bet to win gold at the Tokyo Olympics.

I feel great that I am worthy of such great expectations. I will work hard to ensure that I live up to the hope that has been invested in me for 2020. I feel motivated to do better.

Q. What are your targets for 2019?

The Asian Championships in April and then World Championships in August are the two big tournaments where I have to do well to qualify for the Tokyo Olympics.

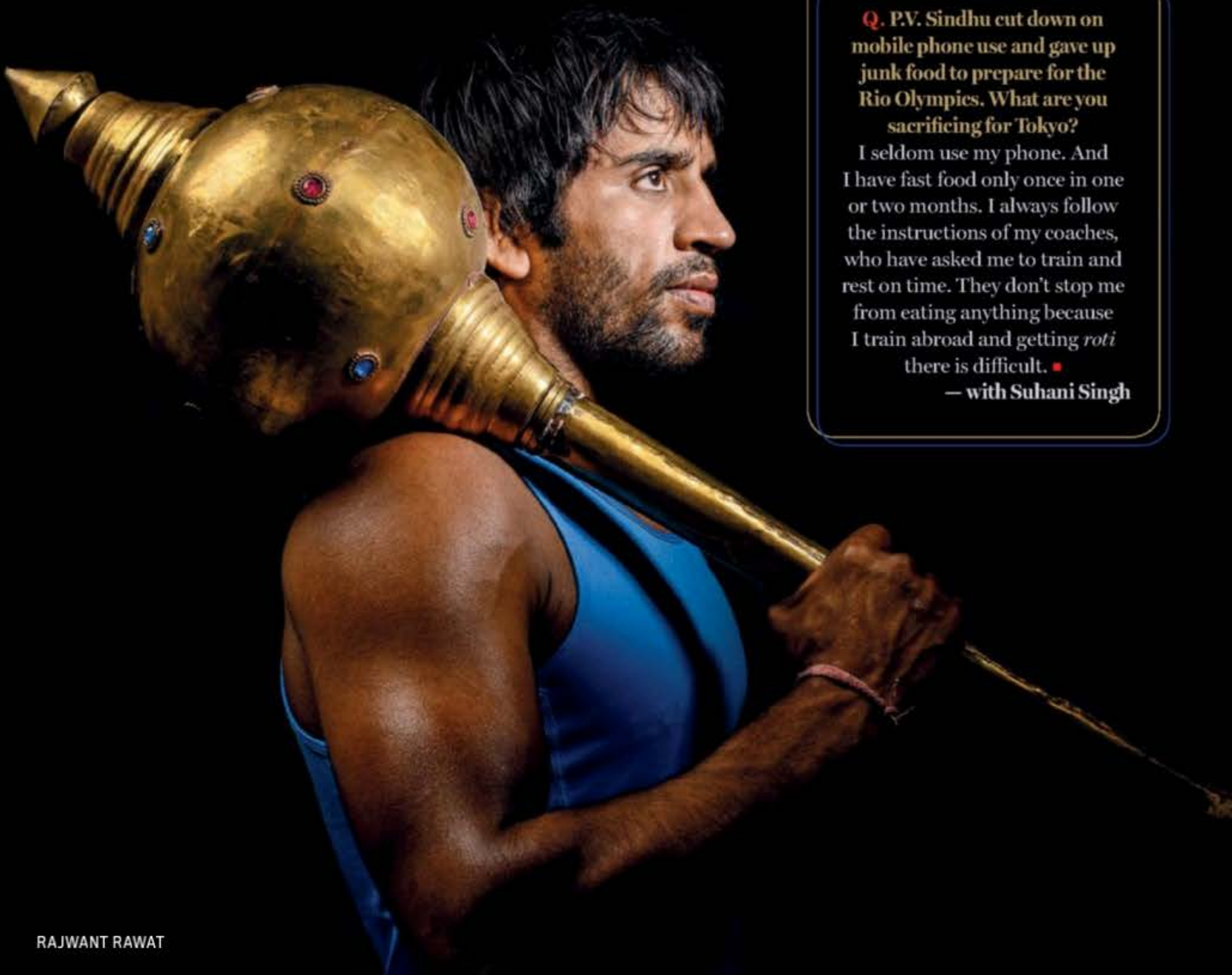
Q. Who is your favourite athlete?

Yogeshwar Dutt. He's my inspiration since I began wrestling. I remember this bout in 2009 where he tore his ligament and still went on to win it. He's always there to motivate and help me, whether it is wrestling or life.

Q. P.V. Sindhu cut down on mobile phone use and gave up junk food to prepare for the Rio Olympics. What are you sacrificing for Tokyo?

I seldom use my phone. And I have fast food only once in one or two months. I always follow the instructions of my coaches, who have asked me to train and rest on time. They don't stop me from eating anything because I train abroad and getting *roti* there is difficult. ■

— with Suhani Singh



INDIA TODAY

DIGITAL EDITION

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INDIA
TODAY

HOME

FEBRUARY 2019

Stylish metal finish defines this kitchen in Ahmedabad by Hsc Designs



INSIDE

A DELHI FARMHOUSE
STYLED TO PERFECTION

GROUND REPORT

WHAT'S TRENDING
IN FLOORING

KITCHENS OF THE FUTURE

Top chefs and industry experts tell
you how to make this the most
happening space in your home

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Photograph courtesy IKEA

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Kitchen Special

GOOD DESIGN

A tour of interior stylist Manuu Mansheet's Delhi farmhouse, where sustainable design meets style

PRICE CONSCIOUS

Want the kitchen of your dreams? Choose one that works best in your budget

EXPERT ADVICE

Top architects share their favourite designs

THE TASTEMAKERS

Chefs take you inside their personal kitchens

COVER PHOTOGRAPH BY: PHOTOGRAPHIX | SEBASTIAN + IRA

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Photograph by SUBHASH PATIL

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This beautiful bungalow in Pune by Sunil Patil and Associates is just the right mix colour, art and craft

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FLOOR SHOW

Wood or parquet, marble or terrazzo, we help you select the right flooring for your home



Photograph courtesy XYLOS

Photograph by DANESH JASSAWALA



24 profile

DOUBLE THE FUN

Architects Kayzad Shroff and Maria Leon of SHROFFLEON share their design journey so far

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LAST LOOK

iSpy

Your guide to the hottest
new stores and products

Text By RIDHI KALE



SIP IN STYLE

Drink the way royals did with
Frazer and Haws' rice hammered silver
glasses. They also make great gifts.

PRICE ₹16,500 (per glass)
AT www.frazerandhaws.com



SKY HIGH

Rustomjee Crown is set to bring luxurious living to
Mumbai's Prabhadevi area with three skyscrapers spread
over 5.75 acres and a 2.52 acre open-to-the-sky podium,
swimming pools, cinema halls and recreation facilities.

PRICE ₹5.65 crore to ₹12.25 crore (approx)
AT www.rustomjeecrownmumbai.com

WASH WARE

Kaff has launched a new range of stylish sinks. Functional,
durable and hygienic, they are made of high grade stainless
steel. What's more? The underside of the sink has sound
deadening pads along with anti-condensation coating.

PRICE ₹4,990 to ₹31,990
AT www.kaff.in



Plate Up

As far as collaborations go, master chef Gary Mehigan and his wife Mandy's association with Nicobar tops the list. The collaborative collection comprises serveware and home decor inspired by India, Australia and other locations.

PRICE ₹950 to ₹7,200
AT www.nicobar.com



It's a Wrap

Intiki, that means home in Telugu, has added Intiki Paper to its repertoire. Taking inspiration from terrazzo, you can buy wrapping paper, gift bags, wine bags, money envelopes and gift cards here.

PRICE on request
AT www.intiki.in



STORE SMART

Want an organised kitchen? Get hold of Aspire from Sleek. It is a wall accessory that combines elegance and ease. It also comes with anti-skid mats to hold items in place.

PRICE ₹5,000 to ₹5,800
AT www.sleekworld.com



FABRIC OF LIFE

A tribute to India marks IKEA's second textile collection in the country. On display are posters, cushion covers, throws, sheets, pillowcases, bedspreads, bolster cases, sofas and fabrics in indigo and red.

PRICE ₹399 to ₹16,990
AT www.ikea.com

INSIDE OUT

Balconies and verandahs are perhaps the toughest to style. That's where MADS Creations steps in. The furniture brand has launched a stylish collection of outdoor furniture. Featured here is a pretty bench with vibrant cushions.

PRICE ₹27,000
AT www.madscreations.in



TRUE BLUE

The Padmavati Invite from Izhaar finds its inspiration from Padmavat Palace in Rajasthan. It is a wedding invite that can also be used as a colourful showpiece in your home.

PRICE on request
AT www.izhaar.co.in

DINE IN STYLE

The Jason Dining Room collection from Visionnaire is perfect for the modern home. Featured here is an oval dining table with a marble top from the collection. It is a macro-mosaic in three types of marble, inlaid with stainless steel.

PRICE on request
AT www.visionnaire-home.com





A DREAMER'S DEN

Step inside interior stylist Manuu Mansheet's Delhi farmhouse and discover an art-filled space that is as colourful as his personality

By RIDHI KALE

Most days, the interior stylist-cum-lecturer-cum-visual merchandiser Manuu Mansheet can be found moving his furniture, changing the position of his many antiques, rotating the dizzying array of art on his walls or pottering in the kitchen. Located in Mehrauli, Delhi, the yellow bungalow is in stark contrast to its dusty surroundings. However, even the colourful exteriors and the artwork in the verandah does not prepare you for the kaleidoscope of art, craft and hues indoors. But then, nothing less would be expected of Mansheet, who is known for his ability to style any space, even something as functional as the kitchen.

So, we started our home tour with the cook room. "My mother and I knew that we did not want a very fancy kitchen. I work with Alsorg (an international kitchen and wardrobe company), but I wanted to build my own," says Mansheet adding, "I just made a platform, created open shelv-





COLOUR CUES

(clockwise from left) Manuu Mansheet in his kitchen; bedrooms open into the family lounge; the master bedroom

Photographs by RAJWANT RAWAT

ing underneath and had no shelves on top. I even bought cloth and created curtains for the shelves below. People loved it." He later added shutters made from waste and leftover wood from Alsorg. However, what stands out is the layout of this space. It is divided into wet and dry areas. The former is located behind a walled partition that is decorated with pretty wallpa-

per on one side and cabinets on the other. In fact, the 4,000 sq ft home is full of such fun and functional elements.

Mansheet moved into this farmhouse four years ago. It took him nine months to build it from scratch. "I was very smart about it. I did not build floors or a basement. I also saved time, energy and cost by not plastering the ceil-



MIXED BAG
The colourful living room is home to Indian art, craft and artefacts

ing or using plaster of Paris,” he says. The floors use tiles in a neutral tone so that this does not take away from the decor or art.

Another smart move was the result of a tip-off from a builder friend, who was breaking a home in south Delhi. Mansheet made a deal with the scrap dealer and bought all old doors and windows, along with the mesh and grill at a steal. It turned out that the wood was 80 to 100

years old seasoned Nagpur teak. “We fit whatever we could wherever it worked,” he says. What was left was the door for the living room. So, he placed one of smaller doors and framed it with glass panels. Inside the glass panel he placed a French newspaper dating back to 1894.

While he has art that he has collected over decades, Mansheet keeps adding new works to his collections and has a lot of fun changing



HUE KNEW

A large artwork sets the tone for the dining room, where a Jamawar replaces the tablecloth (left); the central courtyard is a perfect place to relax (below)



their placement in the house. He has artworks by Raja Ravi Varma, MF Hussain, A Ramachandran, G Raman, Sivabalan, Dipak Ghosh, Damyanti Sharma and Durga Charan Das to name a few.

The four-bedroom home has also been designed keeping vastu principles in mind. "The entrance and mandir are in the north east, my

mother's bedroom is in the south west, the kitchen is the north west, water in the north and the sewage system in the south," explains Mansheet. He also created a central courtyard. "There is something intrinsically Indian about my home," says the stylist. Looking at his choice of art, traditional artefacts and colour scheme, we could not agree more.



PRECIOUS METAL

Architect Hiloni S is redefining the way one perceives the kitchen. She has given the cook room in a outhouse in Makarba, Ahmedabad a unique spin. For starters the space is curved, and has a beautiful metallic finish. "The kitchen is designed for entertaining with the pantry built to anthropometrically fit this purpose in the least amount of square footage. To save space the storage in the kitchen and all the appliances are placed in the curves of the cabinet. In fact, this whole amorphous cabinet encompasses all the functional necessities of the room," says Hiloni. But that's not all. "The kitchen is designed to not only discreetly turn into a formal entertainment area but also open into a bar for a more informal gathering," adds Hiloni.

TOP TIP

"Keep the lifestyle of the end user in mind and design the kitchen in a way that the flow of their activities is smooth, making it not just a functional centre but a conversational centre as well."



HILONI S

Founder and Lead Architect,
Hsc Designs, Ahmedabad
www.hsc-designs.com

CURVE BALL

The storage and appliances are built into the curve of the kitchen (left); the structure is designed for formal and informal gatherings (above)



COLOUR CUES

The high gloss cabinets complement the rustic brick walls; a view of the kitchen from the dining (below)



SNEHAL SUTHAR

Co-founder and Principal Architect,
THE gRID Architects, Ahmedabad
www.thegrid-arch.com

EARTHY ELEGANCE

Located on the 5th floor of a building in Ahmedabad is the Brick Apartment designed by architect Snehal Suthar. "The client wanted an open plan with the dining adjoining the kitchen. He also wanted visual connectivity to the dining room, which was already connected to a green balcony. Brick a humble material became the soul of the



QUICK FIX

"In a kitchen a simple and clean approach to design magnifies and harmonises the space's functionality."

room," says Suthar. The use of diffused natural light adds to the rustic charm of the space. "Yellow is both modern and classic, while the black designer granite wall blends well with the brick and wood. The carefully selected artwork is in harmony with its surroundings," he says.

OPEN AND SHUT CASE

For a bungalow at Bilimora, Gujarat, architect Amit Shastri was asked to create a kitchen for a large family where two or more children and pets could use the space to socialise and spend time together. So Shastri created a modern, open kitchen. "The special feature of this metallic, glass finish kitchen is the Z-shape counter that acts as both a divider and a counter," says the architect adding, "Another interesting aspect is the storage that has been divided into two. One part can be accessed from the inside and the other from outside." As for the size; it is a 275 sq ft by 110 sq ft space with a store and a washing area.

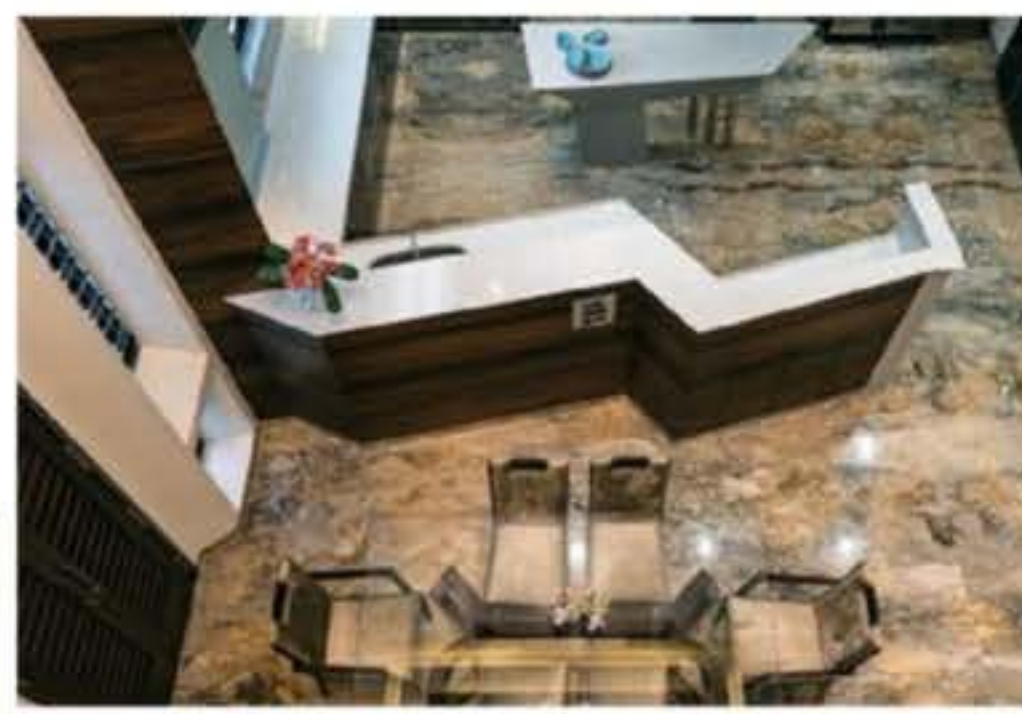
FACT CHECK

"When designing a kitchen bear in mind the family's lifestyle, routine, interests in cooking and interaction priorities. Focus on storage, lighting, colour palette, ventilation and appliances that can weather rigorous daily workouts. The quality needs to stand the test of time."



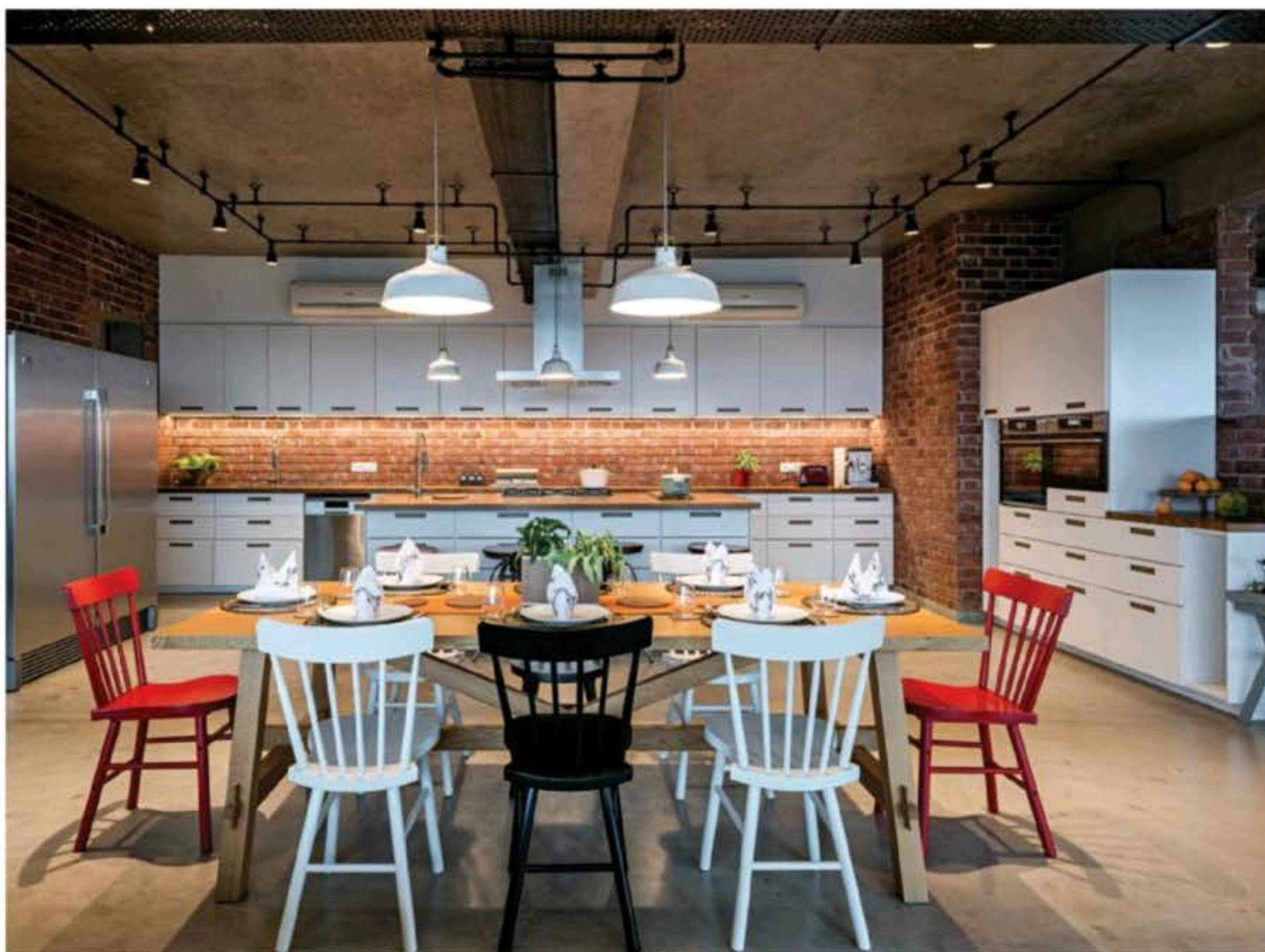
AMIT SHASTRI

Principal Architect,
Amit Shastri Architects &
Interior Designer, Mumbai
www.amitshastriarchitects.com



ZIG ZAG

The Z-shape counter acts as a room divider and hides storage; an ariel view of the kitchen (above)



HARSH BOGHANI

Principal Architect
The Crossboundaries, Vadodara
@The Crossboundaries (Facebook)

PRO TIP

"The kitchen space should be designed in such a way that one does not get isolated or confined to that place. It should be an interactive social area in the house just like the living, dining or the entertainment areas."

BRICK BY BRICK

In a 3,200 sq ft home in Vadodara, Gujarat called 'Awakening, by the Pool', architect Harsh Boghani had to accommodate the living demands of a young industrialist who had come back from the US and wanted a New York-style exposed loft design. "This is why the 300 sq ft kitchen is designed based on the industrial style loft kitchen concept. This combines minimalistic industrial elements with natural elements from the rustic style characterised by lightness and harmony," says Boghani. So the bare walls are devoid of decorative finishes and there is a raw exposed look and large windows. These are then juxtaposed with high-tech household appliances. "The most interesting feature is the connectivity that is created between the kitchen and the island table with the dining and the outdoor lounge, allowing one space to flow into the other," he adds.



Photograph by SUBIR HALDER

CHEF'S TABLE

From talking about their favourite tools and appliances to sharing their vision for future-ready cooking spaces—a chefs take us inside their home kitchens

Auroni Mookerjee, 30

Chef and GM

The Salt House, Kolkata

Auroni Mookerjee's favourite kitchen gadget is so basic that he was a child when he received it. His grandmother gifted him a heavy bottomed frying pan when he was high enough to reach the stove. "It seems so obvious but many people discount the value of it. A good quality heavy bottomed frying pan conducts heat evenly and ensures that you get an even cook," says Mookerjee. Other things he swears by are his kitchen thermometer, (which he uses more to check on the temperature of wine rather than a roast), a good set of knives, and a microplane grater. He loves to experiment with drinks and so the cocktail mixing set is another favourite. He also enjoys a perfect cup of coffee every morning, making his smart drip coffee pot another favoured gadget.

Looking Ahead A kitchen of the future should focus on being as energy efficient as possible. "Cooking on an induction cooker at home makes me wonder what is more energy efficient, since in this part of India electricity is still produced by burning coal. Energy efficiency and ways to store food longer to reduce wastage are what we should aim to look for," he says.

-By Malini Banerjee





Pooja Dhingra, 32
Pastry chef, founder,
Le 15 Patisserie, Mumbai

The home kitchen isn't one that Pooja Dhingra uses too often since she spends long hours working in her professional central kitchen that dishes out some of the best desserts in the city. "I am lucky my parents let me use their kitchen. I like that it's spacious and cool because as a pastry chef, I am used to working in cool rooms," she says. While she rarely bakes at home, Dhingra steps in to make her "special seven minute cake" only when the family has unan-

nounced guests. Her favourite kitchen tools include a whisk, steel bowls, a lemon squeezer and a grater.

Future Forward "I think the kitchen is becoming a space of sharing and conversation. I see more kitchens incorporating a seating or dining area which most Indian homes currently don't have. I also feel people are investing a lot more in their kitchens and on relevant equipment and a lot of technology will come into play in the kitchen of the future," she says.

– By Aditi Pai

Abhishek Gupta, 34
Executive Sous Chef
The Leela Ambience
Gurugram Hotel, Gurgaon

While Abhishek Gupta may be spending a lot of time in the hotel kitchen, it's his kitchen at home that truly inspires him. "It's the one place I live in. From my refrigerator to my shelves and cabinets, it is always full of ingredients, sauces, bottles, fruits and chocolate that I love. I cook at home at least once in two weeks. Even though I am away from home most of the time, I still like to make the most of the odd hours when everybody is asleep, to experiment and come up with unique ideas," says Gupta. His favourite tools include a mortar pestle, Llyod's hallogen oven and high grade non stick pan sets.

Dream Room Gupta believes that the kitchen is a space that's all about the family, more than any other room in the house. "The kitchens of the future will be more interactive, spacious, colourful and fun, loaded with lots of gadgets, and small, easy-to-use equipment. I strongly believe that good conversations start over good food and so kitchens will be the mainstream living spaces in the future."

— By Mohini Mehrotra

Photograph by RAJWANT RAWAT





WHAT'S COOKING

Channel your inner master chef with these stylish kitchen concepts. There are ideas and designs to suit every budget.

By RIDHI KALE



WHITE IS RIGHT

The L-shaped modular kitchen from EVOK has an ergonomic layout. Not only is there space to stack, stash and store everyday kitchen items, the high-quality fixtures make it long-lasting.

Price ₹1.5 lakh onwards
At www.evok.in



COLOUR CODED

Do not let the lack of square footage be an excuse for not opting for a stylish kitchen. Just take a cue from this one from Mangiamo, available at Pepperfry. The straight kitchen is ideal for homes where space is at a premium.

Another plus is that the cabinets have been made ergonomically with sufficient storage for kitchen utensils.

Price ₹1 lakh to ₹5 lakh
AT www.pepperfry.com





MAKE IT LARGE

For those who want their cooking space to be the hub of the home, this open plan kitchen concept from Oasis Studio is just the thing for you. Features include veneer finish white oak wood with natural polish, attached dining slab, island cooking hob and vegetable sink. It also has integrated wall storage built-in fridge and oven with black high gloss lacquer.

Price ₹1 lakh to ₹5 lakh

At www.oasisstudio.co.in



OPEN PLAN

Part of the new wooden modular kitchens, Willow Wok by Godrej Interio perfectly blends the classic, natural wooden finish with functionality. Made from waterproof prelaminated Marine Ply, it comes with a wide range of accessories, drawers, hinged doors, and shutter materials and finishes to help you personalise this space. The L-shape kitchen works well for almost any size home.

Price ₹70,000 onwards; **AT** www.godrejinterio.com



TRUE BLUE

A bold shade of blue forms the perfect focal point for the white and ceramic dishware in this kitchen by Homelane. The roller shutter unit hides the appliances.

Price ₹6.81 lakh
At www.homelane.com



SPACE SAVER

This kitchen from Nikoo Interiors with a polymeric finish is designed to make use of every inch of available space. Every appliance and every piece of cutlery has a designated place. As a plus, the doors and shelves have been created to open and shut perfectly for years to come.

Price ₹6.45 lakh
At www.nikoointeriors.com

**BETWEEN
₹5 LAKH AND
₹10 LAKH**



MELLOW YELLOW

The pop of yellow adds a dash of playfulness to this kitchen by Livspace. For the backsplash, handpicked photographs of flowers have been used. The countertop is in Corian stone, lower cabinets have a membrane finish, and the overhead cabinets use laminate. A roller shutter is also fitted to tuck away electrical appliances, wicker baskets are placed for potatoes and onions, and there are plenty of drawers along with overhead lofts are there to stash essentials.

Price ₹5 lakh to ₹10 lakh
At www.livspace.com





OVER
₹10 LAKH



A CLASS APART

Häcker has introduced ceramic fronts to create this sleek and sophisticated look. To create this a mixture of clay, feldspar and quartz sand is fired at temperatures of around 1,200 degrees Celsius. The fired surface is impermeable to water, recyclable and absolutely safe for food, which means waterproofing is not required. Ceramic is also scratch and acid resistant, and very easy to clean. It's all you need to turn your kitchen into functional art.

Price ₹10 lakh onwards

At www.haecker-india.com



CONTEMPORARY CALL

Straight and simple lines define this beautiful modular kitchen unit. Part of Nolte's Tavola & Softlack range, the cabinets use oak pinot (veneer) and Arctic white (soft matte lacquer) finishes; the worktop is made from toughened white glass. Appliances such as an induction hob, inbuilt hood, oven, steam oven, warmer drawer and fridge freezer are included. The kitchen also has a small display shelving unit with lights.

Price ₹10 lakh onwards

At www.nolteindia.com

this & that

Architects of the Month



Photograph by SULEIMAN MERCHANT

“OUR WORK HAS A CERTAIN HONESTY AND WE DON’T DILUTE THAT”

Kayzad Shroff and Maria Leon have a long history. One that starts with being classmates and goes on to them becoming life partners and co-founders of SHROFFLEON, a Mumbai-based architecture and design studio.

By **ADITI PAI**



Photograph by DANESH JASSAWALA

SPACE CRAFT

Apartment 701 (left) in Mumbai designed by architects Maria Leon and Kayzad Shroff (above)

Their first project, less than a decade ago, was a 300 sq ft terrace in suburban Mumbai which they did up with customised waterproof lights that took three months to complete. A framed photograph of that, and several other projects, proudly stands on the walls of the cosy Churchgate office of SHROFFLEON led by the young Cornell University-educated architects Kayzad Shroff, 39 and Maria Isabel Leon, 36. Their Alibaug design, called Aurelia—House Under a Pool, won them international attention as it was a runner-up for the 'Most Beautiful and Innovative Pool' at a competition. Nine years later, they are working on a 20,000 sq ft building project, large residential projects and designing landscapes.

What's memorable about your first project?

There was a terrace attached to a home in Juhu and

we had to redo the terrace. That's the only project we had back then but since we had the luxury of time, it allowed us to be innovative with the design. The beauty of working in India is that you can customise everything so we got waterproof lights made and set them such that they created a light pattern on the terrace.

How do you choose projects?

We are a small, young office so we tend to put a little more importance on quality rather than quantity. We take on only a few projects where we can be individually tied into every aspect. Since we want to retain that small size, we are forced to say no to projects which we feel may not be in sync in what we want to do. We once had a client who wanted European period aesthetic in his house. It is alien to the way our studio thinks and to the way we practice so we didn't take it up.

What materials do you like working with?

We tend to use relatively few materials and those are mostly natural. We like materials which when placed next to each other have different colours and textures. We also spend a lot of time on detailing and on how things are made. We like wood, marble and metals; we experiment with finishes in veneers. We work with an artist who creates different textures in metals like copper and tin. Every material has its own size and limitation and that in itself gives rise to its own aesthetic.

Some of the best projects so far

Our projects have got us international and national appreciation, the 'House Under a Pool' in Alibaug being one of such projects. It was an extension to an existing home where various aspects were involved—the landscape and pool. We met the client only three times and they came to the site only once during the course of a year. When a client gives you that kind of trust, the responsibility on you as an architect is much more and you also enjoy working on the project.

Your take on sustainable architecture

Sustainable has become a buzz word these days. We are both LEED-certified so a lot of sustainable practices are inbuilt into the decisions we make. Using local materials as opposed to something that's flown in from somewhere, using local labour and resources are all sustainable. Materials come in specific sizes; while making a canopy out of cotton steel, we based our design on its

this & that

Architects of the Month

Photograph by KAYZAD SHROFF



INNOVATIVE DESIGNS

A moon deck overlooking the Arabian Sea (left); a contemporary family room (below), both projects by SHROFFLEON



Photograph by PHOTOGRAPHIX | SEBASTIAN + IRA

specific size to avoid minimum wastage. The same goes for veneer or marble. We use old wood all the time especially because there is no shrinkage and the defects in the wood give it a certain character. We clad a residential building in zinc which is more sustainable because it can be recycled. Sustainable choices end up having a cost factor and sometimes developers agree because it adds to the expectation of the building. But to get an individual to do it can be sometimes difficult.

Projects in the pipeline

While we predominantly do residential spaces, we are excited about taking up commercial spaces and landscapes. We are doing a landscape project on the podium for a developer where we have created a monolithic landscape of terrazzo using a very interesting concept of concentric rings that would form if you have a pool of water with a few drops falling on it. In the middle of that design, we have made a pool and a playing area. We are also doing up the pool area for Khar Gymkhana and two residential projects in Imperial Towers, Tardeo.

AT www.shroffleon.com

NEW LOOK

An old flooring material gets a new lease of life in Bharat Flooring & Tiles' latest project. Here, cast in situ terrazzo floor makes a statement.

Price on request

At www.bharatfloorings.com

STAY GROUNDED

Considered works of art that you can walk on, the market is full of flooring options in every colour, size and shape. Here's a look at what's on offer.

By RIDHI KALE

Interiors by MUSELAB DESIGN ENGINE



ITALIAN JOB

Orient Bell Limited has launched a range of Italian marble tiles. These polished glazed vitrified tiles are stain-resistant, strong and have low water porosity, making them perfect for the home.

*Price ₹45 per sq ft
(for 600 x 60 mm)
At www.orientbell.com*



TILE STYLE

To create the Ultima range of body tiles, Kajaria Ceramics uses high technology. The result? The large-size glazed vitrified tiles are available in six different sizes. They look like real marble and come in an array of attractive finishes with easy and quick installation.

*Price on request
At www.kajariaceramics.com*



WOODEN WONDER

Pergo's new wood parquet flooring range is crafted from engineered wood for maximum durability.

The new extra matte lacquer offers the look of an oiled floor, but with easy maintenance and protection of lacquer. The floor is treated with seven layers of protective lacquer, resulting in the uniquely matte look of an oiled or even untreated wood floor.

*Price ₹450 per sq ft onwards
At www.pergo.co.in*



this & that

Flooring



WALK ON IT

Inspired by large-size inlaid marble flooring, Stonex India has launched its Edifice collection. The range includes over 300 varieties of marble and natural stones in an array of colours and textures.

Price on request

At www.stonexindia.net



MARVELLOUS MARBLE

Somany Ceramics has introduced Duragres Max, a range of large format glazed vitrified tiles that are a part of the brand's luxury collection.

The tiles are designed to give a seamless look with minimal joints and maximum coverage. They capture the beauty of marble and are available in a variety of colours.

Price ₹190 to ₹340 per sq.ft
At www.somanyceramics.com



TWICE AS NICE

Two flooring collections, Oak Sea Mist and Oak Winter by Mikasa premium engineered wood floors from Greenlam Industries, have been used here to create a stunning chequered floor.

Price on request

At www.mikasafloors.com





STEP UP

Span Floors has introduced a new range of natural oiled engineered wood flooring. It is durable, eco-friendly and as it withstands harsh conditions.

Price on request

At www.spanfloors.com



KEEP KNOCKING ON WOOD

Want to transform your floor? Then vinyl planks from Wonderfloor are just the thing for you. Their new range of Timberland Luxury Vinyl Planks are water and termite proof with PUR surface guard for low maintenance. They are available in 6" x 36" size in a variety of shades and wooden textures of 1.5 mm / 2 mm thickness.

Price ₹46 to ₹55 per sq ft

At www.wonderfloor.co.in



A CLASS APART

Classic Marble Company's recent offering Breccia Versailles is a beige natural marble with subtle brown and white veins. A glazed surface further accentuates its magnificence.

Price on request

At www.classicmarble.com



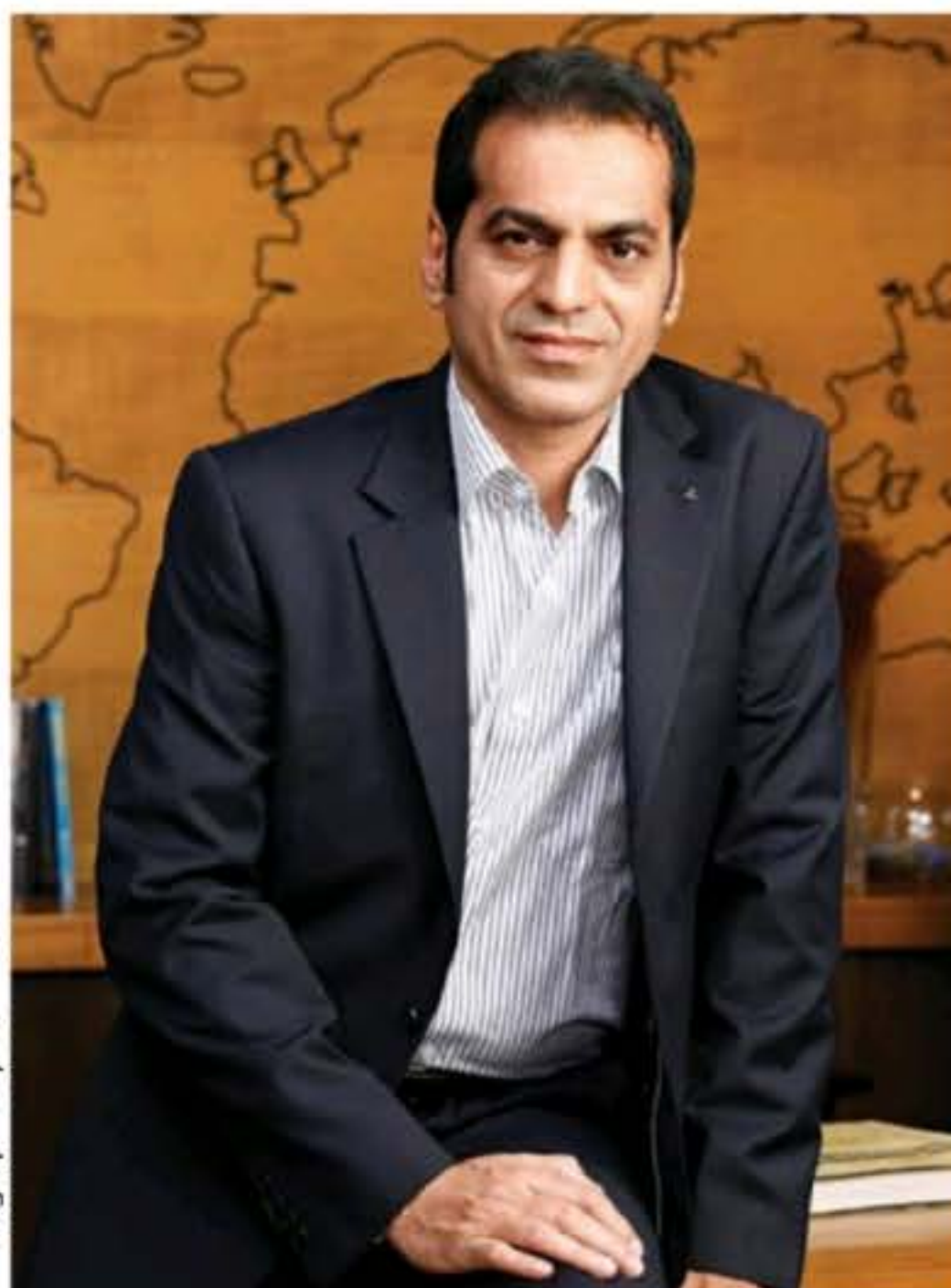


WHEN FORM MET FUNCTION

A bungalow in Pune uses a simple colour palette, art and craft to make it an extension of its surroundings

By **SUNIL PATIL**

Photographs by SUBHASH PATIL





ART OF DESIGN

(clockwise from left)
The vertical garden in
the front lawn; a mural
made from saree print-
ing blocks; the front
elevation of the home;
one of the bedrooms;
architect Sunil Patil



The site, climate and surroundings, gave shape and form to this bungalow we call 'The Long House'. The home, as the name suggests, is a long plot, the result of amalgamation of two square plots where the longer side faces the road. Located on the outskirts of Pune, it has fantastic views of a beautiful sugarcane farm on the east side, while the north side peeps into the neighbour's garden. We took advantage of this and created a garden that looks

like the continuation of the neighbouring one.

The project has four bedrooms apart from the living room, dining room, kitchen, family room, puja room and home theatre. It also has service areas, servants' rooms, parking, store and utility. The planning was done in such a way that the spaces are split on three levels.

An interesting feature is the wall behind the staircase in the living room, clad with saree printing blocks creating a unique mural. The skylight

on top of this wall creates a play of shadows when the sun moves through the day. The puja room is designed as a continuous space flowing from the ground to the first floor. The art work on the wall symbolises a shower of flowers from the sky that starts from the skylight and runs through this double height space.

The family room in the central part of the house can be converted into a guest bedroom. A convertible sofa and sliding partition make the space flexible.



SPACED OUT
The dining over-looks the living room (left); the living room (below)

Furniture is designed as an extension of the architecture. Rustic grey tile forms a base for these simplistic forms. In-built seating and benches made around the courtyards and common areas create an informal feel. The vertical wooden louvers which run from home theatre to the living room act as a partition between the spaces while connect them visually.

Paintings in the entrance lobby follow a unique concept where a partition is formed using 9+9 pivoted paintings. The infinite combinations of these 9+9 paintings create a very dynamic space in both the entrance lobby and the dining.

The wooden louvers on the south facade filter the light and solar radiation and provide privacy in the kitchen and dining area. The large overhang created by the roof and balconies protect the main façade from the heat and help in keeping the house cool. All areas of the house are well lit and cross ventilated.

National Award winning, Sunil Patil and Associates (SPA) was founded by Sunil Patil first in Kolhapur in 1994 and later in Pune in the 2010.
www.architectsunilpatil.com



Last look

CREATING BESPOKE furniture has been Theodore Alexander's forte since 1996, when Paul Maitland Smith founded it. The brand recently launched the Althorp Living History collection, designed in partnership with Charles Spencer (9th Earl Spencer) in India. The collection, inspired by the Althorp Estate showcases reproductions and pieces from there. We caught up with Lord Spencer at the launch.

WHAT LED TO THE COLLABORATION?

I was approached by agents. They introduced me to various people but I wasn't convinced. Then they introduced me to Paul Maitland Smith.



“It's the Rolls Royce of furniture”

Each piece in the Althorp Living History collection by Theodore Alexander has a story to tell

By **RIDHI KALE**



CLASS APART
Curiosities Bar Cabinet (left);
Ad Victoriam Chair (top)

He was nearing retirement and wanted to go out on an absolute high. He wanted a premium product, the Rolls Royce of furniture. I was right to trust him.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE PIECE?

My favourite piece is the Washington Chest. It is an oak chest from the 1600s. George Washington's ancestors were our cousins. They fell on hard times 400 years ago. We looked after them and put them in a house. They left behind a blanket chest when they moved to America. When you open the chest by Theodore Alexander, on the inside, much like the original, it has a framed written affidavit from the priest from the 1800s. There's also a scar inside and a red wine glass stain on the top.

Price on request; At www.theodorealexander.com

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RESTAURANT SPECIAL

NEW DINING
EXPERIENCES
IN THE CITY

KO SESSHA,
OWNER, STORIES
LIBRARY CAFE



inside

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Feature

Old Pitch New Innings

Here's what's new at some of the city's old favourites.



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Cover Story

Fresh On Your Plate

As the city's palate expands, new restaurants are wowing diners with novel themes, truffle-topped pizzas and in one case, an entire library.

Cover photograph by **SUMANTH KUMAR**

OUR PICK of the month



Go Electronic

The electronic music festival *Go:Madras* is back with its 10th edition this time. Featuring a line-up of Indian and International acts such as Ash Roy, Tuhin Mehta and Calm Chor, this is a party you must attend.

AT Four Points by Sheraton, Mahabalipuram

Price Rs 1,750 onwards

Tickets on www.bookmyshow.com

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Hearty Meals That Mallu Joint

We are often told that the best Malayali food comes from the small old eateries in town that are packed with people. Other than that, it's available at fine dining restaurants with skillful presentation. However, now there's a new place in town that gives you something in between—a fine dining ambience and delicious homely food. Called That Mallu Joint, this Kerala eatery espouses simplicity in all other aspects including an airy dine-in space with contemporary décor and none of the cringe-worthy touristy boats and elephants.

The lunch-time sadya is quick, affordable and mildly spiced. The a-la-carte menu is short but doesn't miss out on quintessential Kerala delicacies. The crispy fried prawn varrattiyathu is fresh, delicate and a great way to start your meal. The meen tawa fry is spiced to perfection, comes gently off the bones and makes this place truly worth a visit.

The authentically prepared fresh main course makes up for the lack of variety in the menu. The meen maanga curry with its tomato-based gravy and the tang of raw mangoes is a clear winner. Paired with soft, fluffy egg appams, it makes for a meal in itself.

Give the Thalassery mutton biryani a pass for the curries and save space for dessert. The house-made tender coconut ice-cream is smooth and creamy with bits of real coconut and no artificial flavouring.

Must try Meen maanga curry, egg appam, tender coconut ice cream

At 2nd floor, 159/72, Gopathi Narayanaswami Chetty Rd, Parthasarathi Puram, T Nagar

Tel 9384255672

Meal for two Rs 800



Ashwin Ninan and Roshina Tharakan, founders, That Mallu Joint

Photograph by SUMANTH KUMAR

FRESH ON YOUR PLATE

As the city's palate expands, new restaurants are wowing diners with novel themes, truffle-topped pizzas and in one case, an entire library.

PRACHI SIBAL

Photograph by JAISON G



Ramesh Velu, owner, Locofeast

Technology on your Plate

Locofeast

If the existing robot-theme restaurant in Chennai had you excited, here's another one that will enchant you with the way it serves its food. Walk in and you'll feel you have hit a mix of a racing track and a railway station. The large dining area is divided into halves, where you either choose to sit in booths named after Chennai's railway stations, or ones modelled on racing circuits around the world. The walls are covered in similar art work and the mood is conducive for a dinner experience with a difference.

Adjacent to each table is a track leading to the kitchen. Your food arrives in a small Ferrari car or a Shinkansen train (bullet train) depending on which side you picked. The car slows down and stops for you to pick up your order before it returns swiftly to the kitchen. A selfie spot with an engine jutting out of the walls gives you an illusion of posing next to a bullet train. In a first, a London street-style calling booth doubles up



as a feeding room for infants.

Most of the novelty ends here as the food ceases to live up to the high expectations set by the themed setting. We suggest you stick to Indian cuisine for the murg tikka masala and lachcha paratha don't disappoint. South Indian preparations like kurumilagu kozhi pirattal too hit the right spot with the spice and seasoning. The real surprise comes in the form of a saffron-scented panacotta, firmly set with a hint of golden saffron syrup.

Must try Saffron panacotta

At Nungambakkam High Rd, Tirumurthy Nagar, Thousand Lights

Tel 48606947

Meal for Two Rs 1,200



Photograph by JAISON G

By the written Word Stories Library Café

(Top) Ko Sessa, owner,
Stories Library Cafe



It isn't often that you come across a café that has the stuff dreams are made of. And we aren't talking about the odd collection of books placed precariously on shelves and tables for aesthetic value. Aptly named Stories Library Café, this space is as much about the books as it is about the food.

In an attempt to save his father's lending library, one of the last surviving private ones in the city, lyricist Ko Sessa, 29, turned entrepreneur and decided to open Stories, which is now a café, a performance space and a revamped version of the lending library. While the interiors have been given a facelift and the lighting improved, the essence of the library has been kept intact.

The books also make their way into décor, with a wall full of open titles, encyclopaedias turned into lamps and quotes from your favourite authors used generously in the interiors. You can pick a book and settle down at a cozy table for a meal, snack or a cup of flavoured tea.

Though the focus may be literary, the food at Stories is quite the attraction too. The tangy, spiced zucchini crisps make a great first impression and pair well as a savoury snack with a cup of caramel tea from The Hillcart Tales. The thin crust pesto pizza is crunchy with a thick layer of homemade pesto and a generous topping of veggies. There are pastas, sandwiches, waffles and pancakes that make up the rest of the vegetarian menu. All the food here much like the space is warm and comforting, not so much gourmet or experimental.

Must try Zucchini crisps and waffles

At 575/2, Alagirisamy Salai, Next to TNSC Bank, Santosh Colony, Sector 9, KK Nagar

Tel 99406 58327

Meal for Two Rs 600

With love, from Italy

Nolita

The newest entrant on the city's gourmet map is the unmissable Nolita. Housed in an old roomy bungalow in Nungambakkam, the name pays tribute to North Italy and its exquisite food. The vibe is decidedly Mediterranean with white walls and blue doors and windows, the kind that's so common you can picture it with your eyes closed. The open courtyard with trees and an open pizza oven give you the option of dining outdoors while the weather is still kind.

The menu is divided into two sections—Pizzas and Everything Else, signalling early on that a pizza order may be wise. However, start your meal with a salad. The grape and roasted almond preparation is the right amount of light, crunchy and tart. The pizza bianca anti-pasti is their sourdough bread topped with cheese, herbs and olive oil served with a marinara dip. While a good side to have with your other anti-pasti order, it is also how you can taste the pizza bread without the toppings.

The true winner here expectedly is the pizza itself. Choose from bianca or marinara sauce

and toppings as varied as cauliflowers, prosciutto ham, lamb meatballs and zoodles. The egg, truffle oil and rocket pizza is just that, a white pizza with fresh wild rocket, cheese and topped with an egg. The crust is the right amount of chewy and crumbly and the truffle oil is fragrant.

The lemon cream and tarragon pasta comes a close second for its novelty.

If you haven't had too big a meal already, don't miss the traditional tiramisu to end your time here.

Must try Lemon cream and tarragon pasta, egg, truffle oil and rocket pizza

At 6 Nawab Habibullah Avenue, 1st Street, Off, Anderson Rd, Nungambakkam

Tel 56206305

Meal for Two Rs 1,500



(L to R) Partners Sandesh Reddy, Kanakadhara, Shanmugam Raj, Rakesh Prakash and Shreya Bajaj

Photograph by SUMANTH KUMAR



Nithin Kalkiraju,
founder, Hamsa

Photograph by JAISON G

Feature

OLD PITCH, NEW INNINGS

Here's what's new at some of the city's old favourites

By PRACHI SIBAL

Luxuriously Vegetarian *Hamsa*

Opened in 2016, Hamsa introduced the city to a new kind of vegetarian dining with carefully selected ingredients and a luxurious ambience. While the old favourites remain, a host of new items have also made their way to the menu. The popular ones include kofta Brindavan, grilled vazhaithand (banana stem topped with spices), vagharwali sabz, Brindavan (spinach dumplings stuffed with paneer in tomato gravy) and beet-root galouti. "We stay true to our initial promise of seasonal produce sourced from farmers' markets, no frozen items and no artificial colours or

flavours," explains Nithin Kalkiraju, 32, founder. "In fact, we have no freezers," he adds. Feel like a more luxurious experience? Opt for a nine-course meal in the Chandibagh, a private dining room at the restaurant where the crockery, cutlery and parts of the décor are sterling silver. The menu here is specially curated for a personalised experience.

AT New #40, Old #71-A, B Ramachandra,
Adithanar Rd, Gandhi Nagar, Adyar
TEL 2445 9999 **MEAL FOR TWO** Rs 2,000

Truly South Indian *Tamrind*

The go-to place for Kongunadu, Chettinadu, Nanjilnadu cuisine and delicacies from other regions in the South, Tamarind has always prided itself on authenticity. With an outlet in Pondicherry and two in Chennai at Mayajaal cinema and the original one in Nungambakkam, the restaurant has now expanded its menu to include North Indian cuisine too. "This gives us the option to cater other tastes, move away from only rice-based items to wheat breads as well," says Col D Pradeep Kumar, 62, MD.

AT 28/18, Khader Nawaz Khan Road, Nungambakkam
TEL 94453 13311
MEAL FOR TWO Rs 1,000



Col D Pradeep Kumar, MD and Bina P Kumar, Director of Tamarind

Photograph by SUMANTH KUMAR

Steaks with a side of VR *Tangerine*

Your old favourite sizzler joint has got itself an upgrade. And it isn't just the food we are talking about. Taking a cue from digital menus in restaurants, Tangerine has taken this idea a notch up by introducing a virtual reality enabled app due to launch this month. Log in and it tells your friends you are dining there with a chef's toque selfie filter, you can look at items on the menu in 3D where they appear exactly as they would on your table and place your order right there. "You can also keep a tab on the monthly art and music events we host, your visits and reward points," says Arun Rao, 59, partner. The 16-year-old restaurant also has new items on the menu like a popular

chicken chorizo, Cajun fish and a traditional Greek Moussaka.

AT 5, Murrays Gate Road, Alwarpet
TEL 4211 0888

MEAL FOR TWO
Rs 1,200



Photograph by JAISON G

PROMOTION



Blow Moulded Range



A concept relatively new in the country. Supreme is the first company to launch durable multi-purpose folding tables in India. The blow moulding technology imparts extra toughness and a smooth finish to these table tops due to their double-walled construction.

Very sturdy, easy to fold, store and transport, these tables are perfect for the catering & tent house industry. Besides, they are also an ideal option for parties at home. These tables are much convenient, maintenance-free, and more hygienic than their conventional counterparts.

www.supreme.co.in