

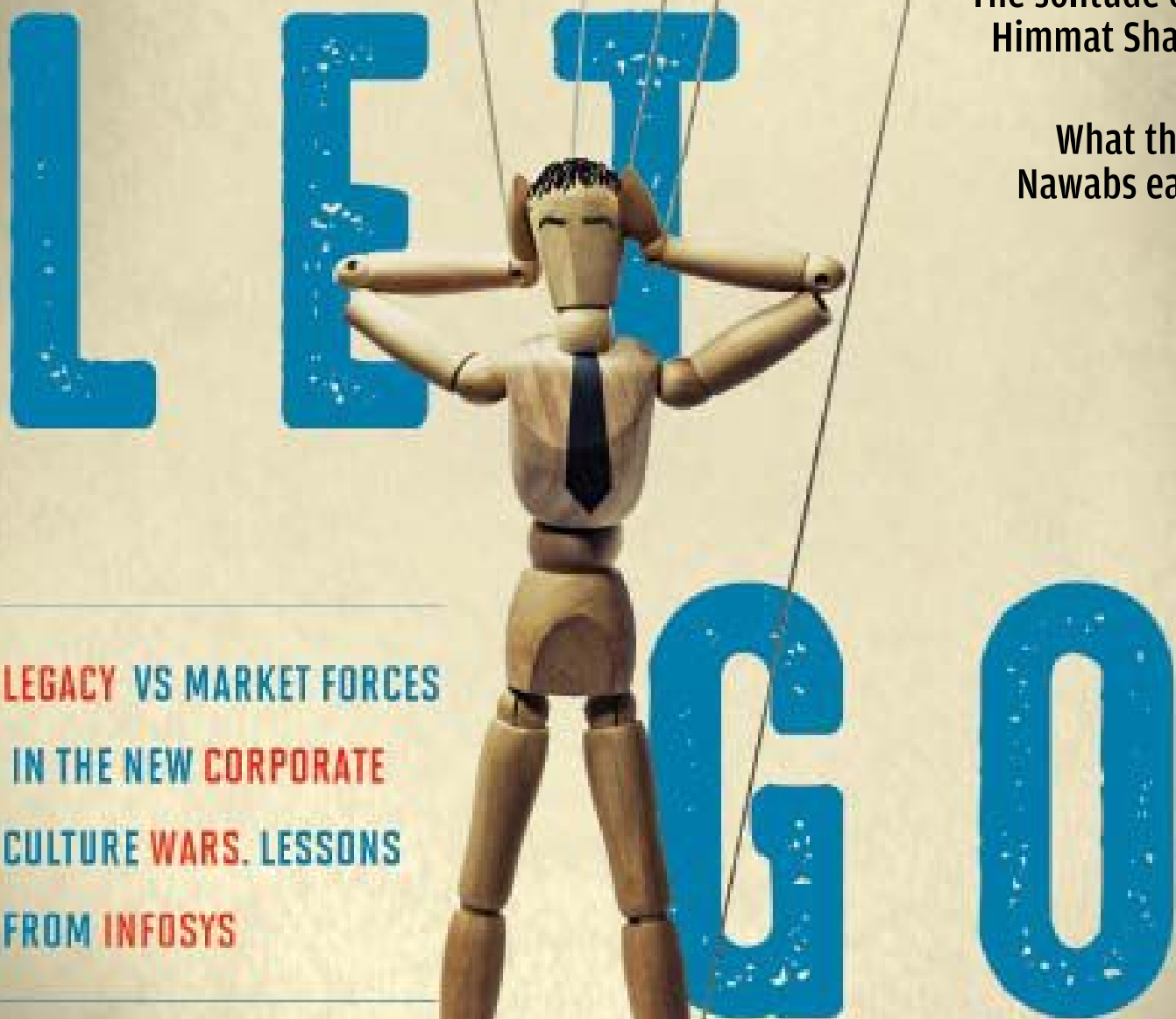
**WOMEN FOR JUSTICE IN UTTAR PRADESH  
THE POLITICS OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

**THE TRAGEDY OF TEJAS  
THE VOODOO VOTE**

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# OPEN

27 FEBRUARY 2017 / RS 50



**The fall of  
Sasikala**

**The solitude of  
Himmat Shah**

**What the  
Nawabs eat**

**LEGACY VS MARKET FORCES  
IN THE NEW CORPORATE  
CULTURE WARS. LESSONS  
FROM INFOSYS**



A man with a beard and sunglasses, wearing a white button-down shirt and white trousers, stands on a boat deck. He is holding a brown leather messenger bag with a strap over his shoulder. The background shows a curved white structure of the boat and a view of the sea and mountains.

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## NOT PEOPLE LIKE US

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## LETTER OF THE WEEK

After the Supreme Court's decision to hold Sasikala guilty of corruption, one thing is clear: fortune changes faster than you think ('In the Name of the Mother', February 20th, 2017). First she was made party chief and then she was able to gather support from the majority of AIADMK MLAs and was literally on the verge of becoming Tamil Nadu's Chief Minister. Now after this verdict, there are a few things which will be keenly watched by everyone in the country. First and foremost is the threat of violence and protests by her supporters, especially since in all probability O Panneerselvam will be asked to form the government. Whether all the MLAs who were supporting Sasikala and were there in the resort with her will support Panneerselvam is a million-dollar question. As a state, Tamil Nadu has witnessed immense political volatility in the last two months and governance has literally taken a back seat. Hopefully, sense and rationality will prevail and the AIADMK's MLAs will support Panneerselvam instead of Sasikala, a person who is now officially a criminal, as their chief ministerial choice.

Bal Govind

### TIME TO WAKE UP, CHENNAI

The writer, Vaasanthi, has aptly described the character of O Panneerselvam and how Sasikala and the party went ahead to humiliate him ('An Honourable Man, February 20th, 2017). One can only hope now that Sasikala's true nature has come to light, the people and MLAs who support her will wiser up and return Panneerselvam to his rightful post. It is for their own good that Sasikala is being put behind bars. She and her party have been fooling the people of Tamil Nadu for too long now.

Kavita Chawal

It is unfortunate that in the battle for power, an entire state now has to suffer, thanks to the wrongdoings

of one person. Sasikala has been convicted and it is up to the party now to ensure that the court's orders are followed and upheld. This is a woman who is clearly guilty of corruption and has looted Tamil Nadu and its people for years now. All the 'promises' made by AIADMK are not even close to being met. It is laughable that MLAs from the party still think of supporting her and believe a few protests are all it will take to bring a criminal to power.

Rohit Khanna

### IS RESERVATION THE ANSWER?

This refers to 'Fault Lines and False Notes' (February 20th, 2017). Even in the 21st century, age-old ideas continue to prevail in the Indian hinterland. The



Supreme Court has been completely right to have made it illegal to seek votes in the name of religion, caste, race or community. For the country's economic progress, there should be a ban on reservations of all kinds and political parties must include it as an important item in their election manifesto. Of course, the economically weaker sections need more opportunities to come up and compete. But are reservations the answer? What do they solve?

Maresh Kapasi

### ART WITHOUT BORDERS

Art is a medium that can bring together the international community like no other ('All The Flowers Are For Everyone' by Georgina Maddox, February 20th, 2017). Thus it was a great idea for the India Art Fair to bring in a variety of international art this year. It is a step towards liberating Indian society from boundaries and introducing people to truly inspirational cultures and creations from around the world. After all, art has no language or country.

Nazia Allam

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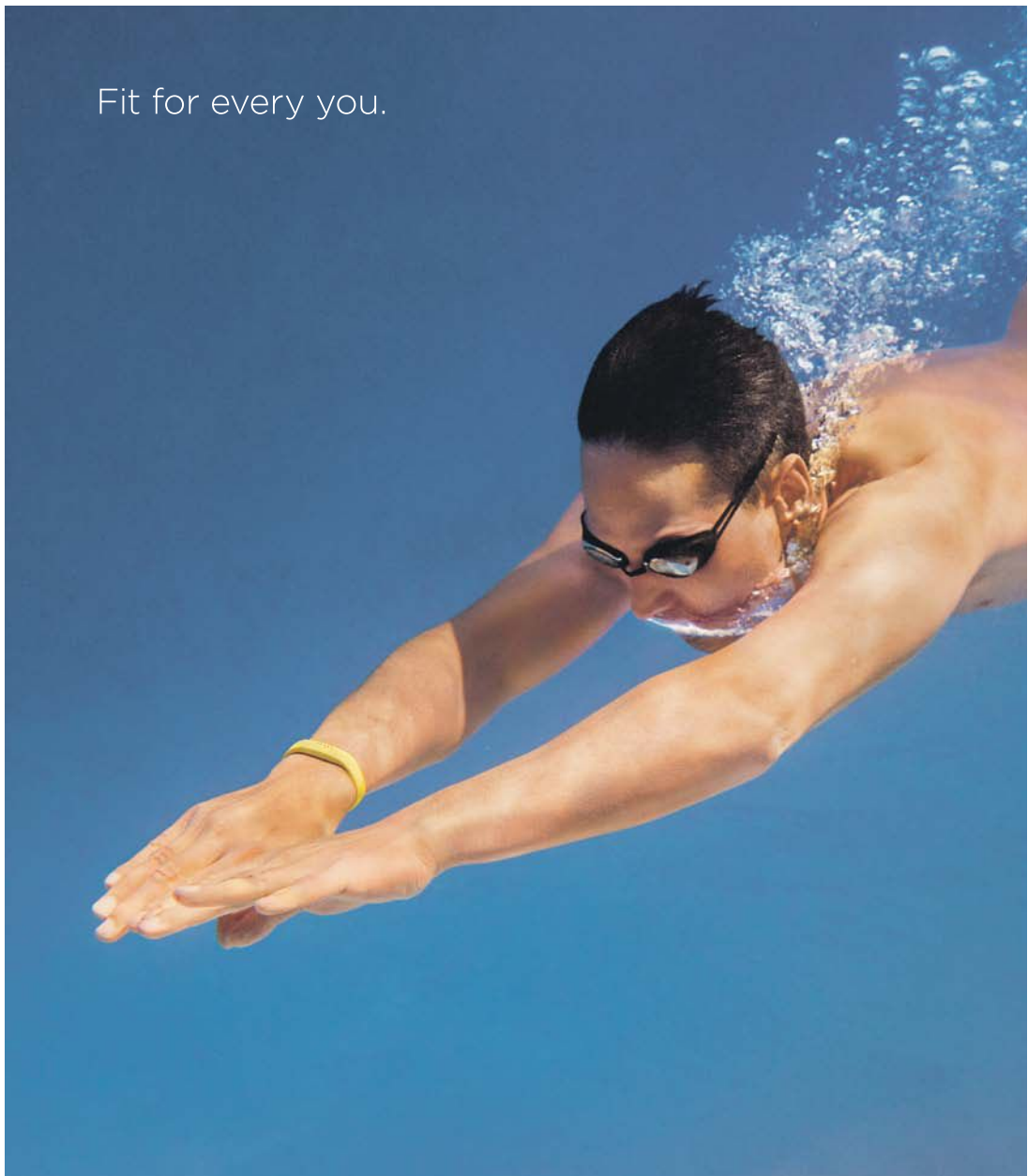
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# OPEN DIARY

Swapan Dasgupta



THE TRUMP administration's radical modification of the H-1-B visa has, quite predictably, triggered a minor storm in India. In Parliament, many politicians have expressed their indignation and even charged the Government of being mealy-mouthed in its protests. The media, which somehow has come to view infotech as an elevated state of existence, has also jumped into the battle and twinned the issue to the larger liberal crusade against Trump.

To have a contrarian view of the whole controversy is daunting, especially since it runs the risk of being charged with unconcern for Indian interests. However, I believe that the new restrictions may not necessarily be inimical to our national interests.

For the sake of argument, let us keep aside the larger issue of national sovereignty—the right of nations to choose its own norms for foreign workers and potential immigrants. Over the years, the export earnings of India's infotech giants has depended disproportionately on what is called 'body shopping.' They have supplied cheap Indian contract techies to the West for projects that would have cost much had local people been employed. This has been beneficial to India both in terms of providing employment and securing remittances from overseas.

However, the over-dependence on body shopping and the relatively easy money that came with it also created distortions. Indian infotech companies targeted the lower end of the value chain. Body shopping proved a disincentive to companies moving up the value chain. The culture of innovation that defines the infotech hubs in the Silicon Valley or even Cambridge and Tel Aviv is relatively less pronounced in India.

I feel that this has little to do with the competence of Indians. After all, people from India make up a large chunk of technical professionals in the US. Unfortunately, there is something lacking in the institutional environment of Indian companies that prevents this from being replicated in a significant way in Bengaluru, Hyderabad and Chennai. The new restrictions on body shopping will, I believe, force dynamic Indian companies to rework their corporate objectives. In the end, we may find that Trump unwittingly did India a national service.

ONE OF MY greatest regrets in life is that I went to a school where scholastic achievements were always at a discount. In particular, the school paid very little attention to the teaching of languages apart from English. There was absolutely no facility for learning a classical language—be it Sanskrit, Persian or even Latin. Even modern Indian languages such as Hindi and Bangla were taught perfunctorily with the sole aim of somehow clearing the final school leaving examination. Things started improving in my last two years of school but the changes came too late to benefit me.

I tried to compensate for my deficiency by trying to persuade my son to take his Sanskrit lessons seri-

ously. It proved an uphill task for two reasons. First, by all accounts the curriculum was dreary and the attempt to teach Sanskrit as a living—as opposed to classical—language was farcical. Secondly, the value system of the India of the 1990s was inimical to anything that deviated from the over-emphasis on science, technology and commerce. In the first flush of globalised existence, India put its intellectual inheritance on the back burner.

What many cosmopolitan Indians regard as worthwhile academic disciplines is often determined by trends in the West. I was therefore heartened by the Latin evangelist Harry Mount's article in *The Daily Telegraph* last week. Mount referred to a school in south-east London that is also offering Latin lessons to parents. The classes have been so oversubscribed that the school now holds two Latin classes for parents each Monday.

It is a commentary on changing values that the number of school goers learning Latin has doubled since 2000 in the UK. Maybe most of the budding classicists are in fee-paying schools, but the class bias doesn't matter. If India is to restore the status of Sanskrit (or, for that matter, the learning of classical languages), it is important that the subject be conferred a certain snob value.

Additionally, I hope our curriculum setters try and address some of the pressing pedagogic problems. Sanskrit will never be a mass subject but its revival is imperative if Indology as a discipline is to be reclaimed by India from its sanctuaries in the US and Europe. Indians can't complain of cultural appropriation (a silly concept that has entered the campus lexicon) if we are totally unmindful of our own civilisational ethos. ■



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By S PRASANNARAJAN

## THE RETURN OF IDEOLOGY

**T**HE NEWS FROM the *afterworld* is alarming, unless you are a Trumpian cheerleader or some other variation of the nativist. In this world, the struggle for 'Greatness' and 'Firstness' eclipses the last vestiges of dignity and decency in politics. This world, as received wisdom goes, is born *after* the death of truth and fact; it's born in the ruins of reason. It is the bastard child of emotion and fantasy. Liberals and other such noble souls, repelled by the nausea, are already fleeing this world and taking refuge in the echo chamber of angst-ridden refuseniks.

This kind of initial upheaval is unprecedented in modern American presidency. To a large extent, the circus in Washington has contributed to it. And liberal media alarmism has given it an end-of-civilisation urgency. A more sobering look at Washington—and beyond—will tell us that Trump in power is an imperfect manifestation of ideology's comeback. Beneath Trumpism and other glory-driven nationalist movements, no matter from the extreme left or right, simmers the ideology of the new New Man. We know what happened to the old New Man, assembled from the ideals of socialism. History was cruel to the most ambitious artefact of ideology, that beguiling lie.

In retrospect, ideas of the free man did not get an uninterrupted passage in the post-ideological world. The so-called 'clash of civilisations', played out in the wreckage of communism, brought out the raw furies of nationalism in the Balkans and elsewhere, and it rhymed with hatred. The transfer of power, or the assertion of the individual, was not as velvet as it was in Havel's Prague. It was bloody, divisive, but freedom nevertheless. Maybe such ruptures

were inevitable in the larger narrative of liberal democracy's triumph over the pretence and pathologies of ideology.

If there was one still on the rise, it was God's ideology. Islamism did not replace communism as the new faith in power, but in its fantasy of the perfect tomorrow on earth; and of course in its bloodlust, it was equally ambitious. Today, it is not the physical reality of the Islamic State that threatens the world. Its disruptive powers as an inspiration for jihadi groups continue to be a bigger threat to global stability. That said, in the world without the Berlin Wall, it was not ideology that changed our lives in the most dramatic ways, for better or worse, but ideas. Even as the Wall retreated in the minds of the liberated, man extended his freedom in a globalised society by stretching the limits of technology.

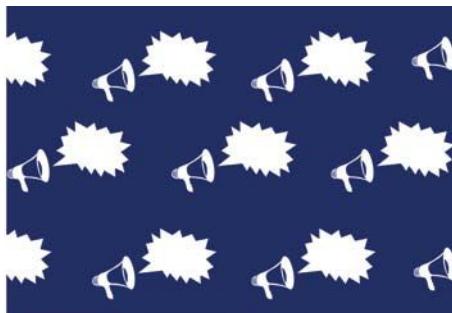
Were we getting cosier in a la-la land where ideas and people moved so effortlessly to create a fragile idyll, unaware of the telluric current of resentment? The new angry man was waiting for his moment. Ideology, this time, arose not from the book but from television bites and newspaper headlines. It was not grand theologies of salvation but revisionist tidbits of marginalisation and colonisation that swayed the 21st century proletariat in America and Europe. Revolution does not repeat itself as tragedy or farce; it is always as hope exaggerated by the impatience of the underclass. And in its vanguard is always a man who mobilises fear in the struggle for Greatness.

So Trump, or for that matter a Geert Wilders in Holland, is not all circus. There is an ideological method in his madness, and at its most fundamental level, it's all about what constitutes national identity. Back then, such doubts were made redundant by a total repudiation of the individual for the sake of the collective. Now, such questions are challenging notions of national character. It is this new consciousness that powers the anti-immigrant sentiment in Trumpistan and other such resentful places elsewhere. The soothing liberal idealism of we-are-a-nation-of-immigrants, evocatively brought out by the recent 'flameout' cover of the *New Yorker*, is being countered by the alternative of a shared value system rooted in religion and community. Are nations formed of just demographics? Or are they shaped by common affinities and the moral inheritance of a people? The struggle for an answer is the struggle of our times, and it is not just American, it is increasingly every nation's, including India's.

Liberals are in thrall of their historic battle against the man

who has no right to be president. What they don't realise is that if it is not this man, then it will be another. Out there someone is more than a Muslim or a Latino or an African American or a Hindu or a great-grandchild of a European immigrant—someone moulded by the emotional, moral and cultural covenant with the nation. The new revolutionary may not have got the perfect spearhead, but he is winning the argument for—and against—power. ■

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# OPENINGS



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Padma Shri awardee  
Shekhar Naik

## NOTEBOOK

### BLIND FAITH IN CRICKET

**I**N THE RECENTLY-CONCLUDED T20 World Cup for blind cricketers, which India won for the second time in a row by defeating Pakistan in the final, one particular individual was a regular feature in the Indian camp throughout the tournament. Although not participating on the field itself, he would sit in the team meetings, chalking up plans and strategies. He would also be seen chatting up players and officials at the games. And, occasionally, he would even send messages during drink-breaks to either cheer up or reprimand members of the Indian team. The person in question is ‘team mentor’ Shekhar Naik—a beacon of light for blind cricket in India.

Late last month, when the list for this year’s Padma Shri recipients was released, among the names of cricketers, along with current superstar Virat Kohli, was Naik. His inclusion—the first such honour for a visually-impaired cricketer, a great distinction since the blind format isn’t officially recognised by the BCCI and often struggles for financial support—galvanised the team.

On the evening of that announcement, every member of the 17-member blind India contingent called up Naik to congratulate him. “They told me they were inspired enough to win the World Cup,” Naik says.

Naik, 30, is considered one of the world’s most proficient blind batsmen. A B2 category player (someone who can see up to 3 metres), he led the Indian team to two successful blind World Cup campaigns, the T20 World Cup in 2012 and the 40-over World Cup in 2014, thereby becoming one of only two Indian captains to win two World Cup tournaments in different formats. MS Dhoni is the other.

Since 2010—when the Bengaluru-based World Blind Cricket Council, the equivalent of the International Cricket Council for blind cricket, began maintaining cricket records—Naik has scored 32 centuries across both T20 and 40-over formats. His career highlights include a 198-not-out he scored in Rawalpindi in 2004 and a 58-ball 134 he scored during the

T20 World Cup against England in 2012.

Blind cricket is said to have developed in the 1920s in Australia, when visually-impaired factory workers began using a tin can containing rocks as a ball to play a version of the game. Over the years, the game has developed with some modifications to aid such players. Every ball, made of reinforced plastic and filled with ball bearings, makes a rattling sound. Players have to give audible clues when they are ready to take strike or to bowl. And each team needs to have four players who belong to the B1 category (completely blind), three from B2 and the remaining four from B3 (who can see up to 6 metres). In India, blind cricket began to gain ground in the 1970s, when visually-challenged youngsters started following radio commentary of cricket matches and blind schools began organising inter-school cricket tournaments. Later, an organisation called The Association for Cricket for the Blind started administering and promoting the game in the country.

Naik was born completely blind in Shimoga in 1986, a small town in Karnataka. A surgery later restored about 60 per cent of vision in his right eye. After his parents' death early in his life, he was raised in a hostel for blind children. It was during this period that he began playing cricket. "I was mad about the game. I used to forget about exams and school and play it almost every day," he says. At some point in his growing up years, he acquired a transistor and began to follow cricket matches that were broadcast on All India Radio. He began to fancy Virender Sehwag's game. And like Sehwag, he began to open the batting for his school. He even modelled his batting technique on radio descriptions of his hero's shots. He was in Karnataka's blind cricket team by the time he turned 14, and in the Indian team by 16. To support his passion, he found the job of sports coordinator at Samarthanam Trust, an NGO run by CABI that administers blind cricket in India.

Naik injured his back last year. Although he was fit by the time the recently concluded T20 World Cup commenced, he decided to sit out and allow someone else a chance. "World Cup campaigns are very important for blind cricketers, financially as well. If we win, we can make between Rs 4 to 5 lakh from match fees and sponsorship. I knew I had to give somebody else that chance [to earn fame and money] this time," he says.

When his name was announced for the Padma Shri, his teammates were not the only ones struck with disbelief. He was too. When he first heard the news—a media coordinator at the Karnataka State Cricket Association who also moonlights as a cricket umpire had called him—he thought it was a prank. "*Mazaak band karr*," I told him and hung up," he says.

A full half hour passed before local reporters began to call for a sound bite, simultaneously confirming the news. Once it sank in, he had the task of convincing his wife and daughter of what had just happened. They did not believe it either. So Naik made his family wait for a news channel to announce what he already knew. 'Shekhar Naik, Padma Shri.' ■

By **LHENDUP G BHUTIA**

#### AFTERTHOUGHT

## TO THE STARS, EFFORTLESSLY

**The triumph of ISRO is both technological and economical**

**T**HE LAUNCH OF 104 satellites in one go by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) is a technical accomplishment of a high order. It also marks the arrival of ISRO as a serious competitor in the \$3-4 billion global space launch market.

What ISRO undertook on February 15th required mastering a complex set of technologies. For one, you need a powerful rocket to bear a payload of around 1,400 kg that allows the placement of so many satellites in the desired orbit. After decades of trial and error, ISRO finally has such a vehicle: the Polar Space Launch Vehicle or PSLV. For another, sequencing the release of satellites—with 90 belonging to a single client—the American firm Planet Labs—requires control and manoeuvrability. For this, ISRO developed adapters known as quadrapacks, each of which contain three to four satellites. Within hours of the PSLV's launch, all of this was carried out flawlessly.

This demonstrates India's technical prowess, but more importantly, it also shows that ISRO can launch satellites cheaply. What is charged of individual clients is, of course, confidential. But what is not secret is the fact that these costs are orders of magnitude below what the European Space Agency or American services charge. India has a niche market almost ready for it when it comes to small and 'nano' satellites that weigh 10-200 kg. This is apart from the fact that India can launch much bigger satellites that are used for remote sensing, telecommunications and weather forecasting. Again, these launches are also dirt cheap as compared to what its Western rivals offer. There is no need to say 'bigger and better' in this market: even if ISRO manages to get hold of a sizeable chunk of the small satellite market, it can be a commercial money spinner merely by garnering a larger number of deals. Its market advantage lies in price-competitiveness and not the size of its launch offerings.

Perhaps this is one reason that this particular launch has been written about so enviously—and even negatively—in the Western press. One newspaper, habitual in its criticism of India, dubbed these satellites as 'doves' to underplay the nature of the Indian achievement. A simple response would be: in that case, why do so many Western firms want ISRO to launch satellites for them? It's money. That's where the fear and the envy stem from. ■

## PORTRAIT

## SING ME HOME

**Sandeep Das, the child prodigy from Patna, is the new Grammy-winning tabla icon**

**"T**HERE IS NO east or west. It is a globe." I don't know if this is an original quote. But there is a moment in Morgan Neville's documentary *The Music of Strangers*, which tells the story of the band Silk Road Ensemble, when a musician uses this expression to articulate the idea behind the band and its music. The Silk Road Ensemble—made up of artists from such diverse traditions and genres and parts of the world that it was once referred to as the Manhattan Project of music where nobody knew what was going to come out of it—was founded by the legendary Chinese-American cellist Yo-Yo Ma. Since 2001, it has brought out several exceptional albums.

Each of its albums has been about what happens when strangers meet. Where does each one of us fit into the world. About—as the band likes to describe itself—departure and explorations and new encounters. But as much as we may journey forth, making distinctions like the East and West are mere geographic terms of little real value. As flat as the world may appear, the emotion of root and home has perhaps never been more palpable.

The Silk Road Ensemble's latest album *Sing Me Home*, which won a Grammy Award for Best World Music Album a few days ago, is about the memory of home. Every piece in the album invites listeners to explore the music of home through the individual experiences of its members. There

SAURABH SINGH



are traditional and original songs made afresh with new twists in compositions. There are Iranian string instruments, Japanese flutes, Chinese pipas, Irish fiddlers, cellos and jazz guitars. And amongst them is the heady percussive rhythm of Sandeep Das' wondrous tabla.

With the *Sing Me Home* win, Das is now one of few Indian musicians who have won a Grammy Award. Some other Indian classical maestros who have been awarded in the past include Pandit Ravi Shankar, Zakir Hussain and Vishwa Mohan Bhatt. Apart from Das' win, a Hyderabad-born percussionist, Abhiman Kaushal, was part of an album—*White Sun II* that won an award in the New Age Music category.

The preoccupation of the Silk Road Ensemble and its music is perhaps most well encapsulated in the story of its Indian tabla player. The 46-year-old Das, who now lives in the US and travels the world working on well-received experimental and collaborative projects, started off as a child prodigy in Patna. He would learn the tabla from local teachers in the city. And during weekends, by the time he turned nine years old, he would travel by train from Patna to Varanasi so he could learn from a well-known guru, Kishan Maharaj, of the Benaras Gharana. Once he was through with school, his father, a post office employee, took a transfer to Varanasi and moved his family there, so that Das could study the tabla more dedicatedly under his guru. "Sandeep was so impressive that [the] late Pandit Kishan Maharaj tied him a *ganda* [thread] when he was just 13," Raj Kumar Nahar, a tabla player and childhood friend of Das told the *Telegraph*. A *ganda* is tied by a guru when he is convinced that his student has reached a level of excellence. By the age of 15, he had made his stage debut with the sitar maestro Pandit Ravi Shankar. Das now travels the world working with well-known musicians in various collaborative projects. Apart from his work with the Silk Road Ensemble, he has also performed with the New York Philharmonic and the Boston Modern Orchestra Project.

After he won the Grammy, he expressed the pride he felt as an Indian musician, but also offered a lament. He told the *Times of India*, "I am very proud of who I am and where I come from, be it culturally or musically. I wish there was more acknowledgment from my own country for the music that is deep-rooted and in our blood over glitz and glamour... It is not a complaint, but merely a wish. I hope there is more awareness about traditional music." ■

By LHENDUP G BHUTIA



## ANGLE



# INFOMISS

## The very Indian unfair suffering of Vishal Sikka

By MADHAVANKUTTY PILLAI

**I**NFOSYS CEO Vishal Sikka, much like the infotech sector of which his company is the figurehead, has not been having a good time lately. A fat severance pay to a CFO, his travel in chartered flights and even his food bills have been put to scrutiny, triggered by a public dressing down by a company founder, NR Narayana Murthy. Business expenses that would be underwhelming in any other entity of Infosys' size have turned into an ethical issue because of what is believed to be a circumvention of the values left behind by the founders.

It is somewhat contradictory because the last couple of founders didn't exactly make the company flourish when given its reins, the reason why Sikka, an outsider, was hired as CEO. If you get someone because he is a Silicon Valley insider, then he will follow the norms of that ecosystem. When Sikka was hired, Narayana Murthy was quite okay to give him a salary that would be unthinkable for any of the founders to take.

When personalities like Murthy or Ratan Tata speak, it is taken for granted that the moral authority they possess also makes them right. Even if they mean well, that is not necessarily so. They could just be controlling patriarchs who are impossible to satisfy. Openheimer Fund, a large shareholder of Infosys, was right when it stated that the founders shouldn't confuse themselves with being the owners; they are just shareholders in a publicly listed firm.

Sikka is also getting a taste of how whimsically public opinion swings in India and the ridiculous orbits it can

mount. This is an exchange involving him from the transcript of a *CNBC* interview that has led to an entirely new controversy over casteism:

"So are you here to stay?"

Sikka: "Absolutely. I am a Kshatriya Warrior."

Consider the extraordinary interpretation of this line in an *Indian Express* editorial: "The issue of Kshatriyahood as a suitable qualification for leading arguably India's most widely respected IT company does, of course, need closer examination. If a caste qualification is, indeed, necessary, shouldn't Sikka replace himself with a Baniya?" The same argument appears in opeds of other papers and, of course, the self-referential smugness of social networking. The syllogism they employ is this:

1) Sikka, the CEO, says he will fight like a Kshatriya

2) Therefore only Kshatriyas get to be CEOs of Infosys

And from thereon, the third limb of this reasoning:

3) Therefore there is casteism in infotech companies.

These are leaps of logic with massive vacuums in between. What keeps it from being called out is the deliberate confusion between caste and caste discrimination. There is nothing inherent in today's world that makes a proud Kshatriya biased against others. He could be, but it's not a given. To take political correctness to an extreme where just the use of a word, shorn of context, becomes a mark of character is Orwellian. ■

## IDEAS



GETTY IMAGES

## HUMILITY

The Grammys have time and again proven that they are out of sync with the times. This year was no different. But their oversight was highlighted by none other than Adele, winner of five Grammy Awards this year. But the award that she felt she could not "possibly accept" was Album of the Year, even if she were humbled and grateful for it. This was after all the year of Beyoncé's "monumental" and "soul bearing" album *Lemonade*. Choking back tears, she said, "Beyoncé we fuckin' adore you. You are our light." Adele's speech proved what an artist fraternity can actually look like, where musicians not only support each other but also acknowledge that their contemporaries might be more talented than them and more relevant to the times. ■

## WORD'S WORTH

**"The reality is: sometimes you lose. And you're never too good to lose. You're never too big to lose. You're never too smart to lose. It happens"**

BEYONCÉ



By MAKARAND R. PARANJAPE

# THE WORST EJECTS THE BEST

*The crisis in Indian higher education*

IF WE TAKE a bird's eye view of our higher education system, we quickly discover that it is a very complicated one. We have over 33,000 institutions, which train close to 20 million people. The system can be broadly divided into professional and non-professional colleges, publicly funded, partially funded, and fully private. In the non-professional, that is the Arts, Sciences, Social Studies, Commerce, and so on, we find a pyramidal structure. At the top are the 42 Central universities, and below them a hodgepodge of 275 state, 90 private, and 130 universities.

When it comes to professional courses, we have seven All India Institutes of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), 23 Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), 20 Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs), an equal number of Indian Institutes of Information Technology (IIITs), 31 National Institutes of Technology (formerly Regional Engineering Colleges), seven Indian Institutes of Science Education and Research (IISERs), and one Indian Institute of Science (IISc).

Hubs like greater Bengaluru or Coimbatore produce nearly 200,000 engineering graduates between them, from nearly 200 engineering colleges. Earlier, some of these colleges had no teachers, classrooms, or labs. They only collected fees, conducted examinations, and granted degrees. Students had to live in rented rooms nearby, get private tuitions, and somehow appear for exams on their own. Of course, gradually, these very colleges have improved, with proper buildings, hostels, labs and even fairly competent teachers.

In brief, in both the non-technical and technical institutions, you find a top down structure, with few institutions of excellence at the top, many mediocre ones in the middle, and a vast majority of really useless institutions at the bottom. Studies comparing India with China have found that India had a much better start around Independence. In 1947, we had many more centres of higher education than China, but now they are far ahead of us. According to some of these studies, hardly 10 per cent of Indian graduates from non-professional institutions are employable because 90 per cent have practically no marketable skills. It is not that the other 90 per cent of our graduates remain unemployed, but they must supplement what they have got in their college with vocational courses.

To restructure such a complex system is very difficult. Some believe that all that is required is a cultural turn to make these institutions and their curricula more responsive to our national needs. But much more is needed, not just radical structural reform, but proactive and corrective legislation and policy-making. In short, what we need is nothing short of a major change in the philosophy and politics of education.

THE FIRST QUESTION to ask in today's embattled context is whether there is a difference between social justice and entitlement. What, in other words, is it that we are fighting against or disputing? In a fundamental sense, being entitled to rights and privileges by virtue of birth actually militates against the idea of natural—even though it appeals to distributive—justice.

In other words, even if we were to argue that offering reservations in educational institutions and subsequently government jobs on the basis of one's caste or community is an attempt to offset past deprivations, such a claim would still not qualify to be considered under the framework of 'justice'. At best, it might be termed 'counter-entitlement', 'compensation' or 'recompense'. By its very nature, such redress cannot be extended unto perpetuity, else it would only institute another system of hereditary privilege, albeit topsy-turvy.

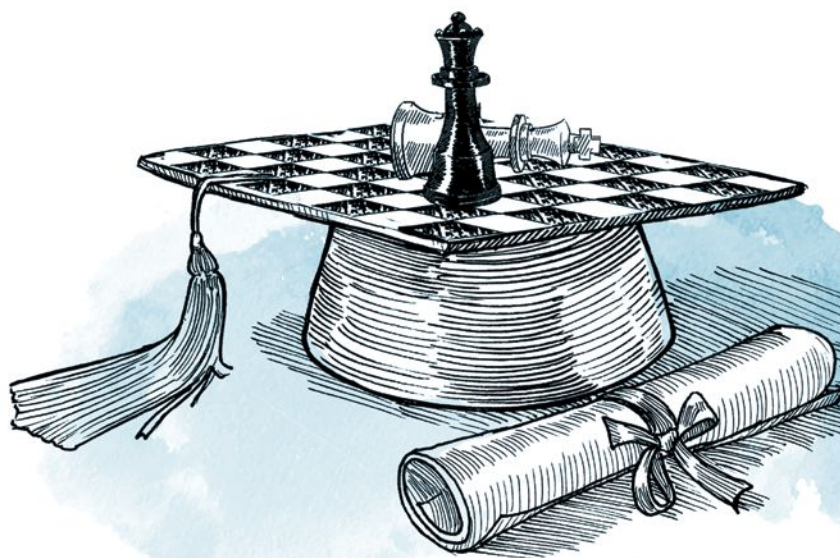
On closer and dispassionate examination of the claims and counter-claims over reservations, we notice that it is quite a different cup of tea from affirmative action. The latter implies that all other things being equal, the deprived should be preferred over the privileged. But nowhere does affirmative action imply fixed and rigid quotas, without minimum qualifications or competence. What we have in India, instead, is differential scales of 'merit' for different castes and communities. In effect, though within each category an internal order of merit is followed, it is abandoned across categories. In such instances, the only criterion of suitability is, paradoxically, one's birth. Imagine what it would mean, *reductio ad absurdum*, if one's only qualification for a Nobel Prize or an Olympic Gold Medal is being born in a certain caste or community, or to set up, say, a 'Dalit Nobel' or an 'OBC Olympics', where only those so certified could participate or be considered.

I was confronted with this lesson when a 'category' student told me, "I am against reservations for my children; I will persuade them not to claim them."

"Why?" I asked, slightly taken aback. "Because if they get things without struggling for them, they will never learn to better themselves or compete with the rest. In time, the whole community, with free hand-outs, will become thoroughly incompetent, if not corrupt." This student and several like her have gone on to do extremely well. They used reservation as an entry-point, after which they struggled to acquire real skill-sets and proficiencies in their chosen fields.

What this has taught me is that reservation makes no sense without de-reservation: that is, once they serve the purpose for which they were designed, the person ought to exit the advantage conferred by them. Such an exit has already been legislated in the case of the 'creamy layers' of Other Backward Communities (OBCs). The principle is that once a just compensation is offered for a disadvantage, it cannot be claimed over and over again. If we do not follow this principle, caste-based reservations will destroy the idea of the annihilation of caste. They will only serve to reify caste, thus dividing society and creating resentment. It will then be hardly surprising that those screaming the loudest for perpetual reservations are actually disguised supporters of the caste system, only with themselves on top. They are the least interested in equality or social justice, let alone competence or merit.

Our strategy should be to place the onus of upliftment of the most excluded upon the most privileged members of their communities by showing how the latter end up blocking the rise of the former. The question to ask is how many generations of reservation are needed before a person or his progeny can stand on their feet? By claiming reservations for another generation, aren't these privileged 'backward elites' denying benefits to those less privileged than them? In IITs, for instance, most of the SC, ST students have parents who were IAS officers, senior-level bureaucrats, bank managers, or other members of the elite. How long do such already-advantaged need reservation? Till they vacate



**Nearly seventy years of confused or dishonest policies have made Indian higher education the playground of a dangerous and dastardly political game**

their seats, how will others below them get a chance? Surely the daughter of the former President of India cannot be considered a Dalit if by 'Dalit' we mean someone oppressed and deprived.

We might not be able to altogether scrap reservations, but we must alter their basis, broadening it from caste and community alone to other parametrics of dispossession, including plain old poverty, whether rural or urban. Else, in our real or imagined fear of majoritarian consolidation, we will have institutionalised the perpetual fragmentation and weakening of Indian society.

**I**N THIS REGARD, the findings of a study conducted over ten years back at Harvard University by Devesh Kapur and Pratap Bhanu Mehta are still relevant. They assert that the Indian education system can be characterised by Gresham's Law—the bad drives out the good.

The prevailing political ideological climate in which elite institutions are seen as being anti-democratic, finds its natural

and dastardly political game. We tinker with higher education to hide or disguise our failure to provide free high-quality universal primary education. That, in fact, is the mandated responsibility of government, with its huge resources. But there is no will to do what is required at the base of the pyramid, where all other social and economic inequalities have their origin. Instead, in token or high visibility gestures, it is higher education that is interfered and tampered with. This only serves the vociferous elites, 'Dalit Brahmins' as some have dubbed them, whereas the masses of the truly deprived still remain greatly disadvantaged.

By over-politicising higher education, we send out the wrong message: what matters is not competence but entitlement. Not by really learning anything useful or productive but by playing one's caste or community card does one progress. The result is that we spend most of our time and energy on identity politics rather than learning and growing intellectually. In the end, identity politics is all that we have learned. Such dumbing down of Indian higher education has made a mockery of our academic standards.

Most Bachelor degrees in the humanities and social studies, not to mention commerce, science, and other disciplines, are practically worthless. No wonder in institutions such as Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), they never want to leave; where else will they get nearly free lodging, subsidised board, plus a stipend, that too for doing so little? Unfortunately, these same 'users' and 'losers' end up becoming future



**By over-politicising higher education, we send out the wrong message: what matters is not competence but entitlement. Not by really learning anything useful or productive but by playing one's caste or community card does one progress**

response in political control to influence admission policies, internal organisation, the structure of courses and funding. As quality deteriorates, students are less and less willing to pay the very resources without which quality cannot be improved. In India's case, the growth of private sector higher education institutions has been the answer, and, increasingly, the availing of education abroad. However, as our analysis suggests, private sector investment has been confined to professional streams, bypassing the majority of students. Furthermore, it is plagued by severe governance weaknesses, raising doubts over its ability to address the huge latent demand for quality higher education in the country.

What Kapur and Mehta argue is that most Indian institutions of higher education are only place-holders. They keep people out of trouble for a couple of years, giving them a space to be in and an affiliation to attach themselves to.

Nearly seventy years of confused or dishonest policies have made Indian higher education the playground of a dangerous

teachers, mostly reproducing their own inadequate training or levels of incompetence.

On one of my visits to China, I went on a bus tour with several Chinese colleagues. All of them had only one child, which is the state policy. The upshot was that the child of the vice-president of the university and the university driver's child went to the same school. If you want an egalitarian system, you need to start at the grassroots. Every child born in India must have access to affordable high-quality primary education. Government does not want to take up this challenge in earnest, though they have legislated education as a fundamental right. Instead, they toy and tamper at the higher end of the education spectrum. Why do they do so? Because the impact in terms of jobs and status is most visible here. No wonder, a large number of our universities have been started to cater to some political demand or the other.

One of the underlying problems is too much state interference, even dominance, in higher education. The government, as Ma-



hatma Gandhi said long back, should mainly be in the business of primary and secondary education. Looking at the end product rather than the foundation has been the mistake. Society can determine its own needs and fund what is required. Regardless of the obstacles, it will find a way of fulfilling its needs. The only 'Nehruvian' exception we might allow is institutes of national importance and excellence, where quality should never be compromised for political considerations.

If we look at the Indian infotech revolution, especially at its genesis, it is clear that the large numbers of trained programmers and engineers required did not come from conventional universities or institutes of higher education. Only the higher echelons come from IITs and IIMs, while the hundreds of thousands of programmers who actually slogged to write code came from private institutions and coaching classes or were skilled by the companies themselves. The official website of one such service provider claims that they have trained more than 5 million programmers. So our infotech revolution was not powered by the official institutions into which the government has sunk hundreds of crores, but by 'non-state' teaching shops that arose out of the colossal demand while the government and its agencies were napping.

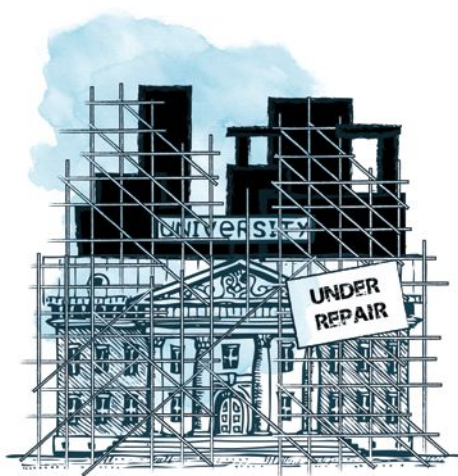
During the colonial period, too, the British tried to block the formation of the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) in Bengaluru. Lord Curzon himself opposed it, even though Jamsetji Tata was paying for it from his own funds. IISc could only be started in 1909 after Curzon left and Tata died. But today it is one of premier institutions of higher learning. Similarly, though we are blocking the privatisation of higher education, isn't it coming in through the back door via capitation fees, donations, minority institutions, not to speak of a slew of un- or semi-regulated universities mushrooming all over India, with little standardisation or accountability? Some years back, 97 universities ceased to exist in Raipur alone as a consequence of a Supreme Court order.

**A**S SOMEBODY WHO has spent all his life studying or teaching, I am worried that as a country we are not only falling behind, but will soon cease to be competitive if we continue like this. The only reason that we have survived is because of the tremendous creative energies of our people who find informal and unorthodox solutions to extremely complex problems. The entire future hangs in balance. If we lose what little we have now,

it is difficult to imagine how we can remain at the forefront of the new economy, which is a knowledge economy. This neglect of our education system is especially lamentable if we remember that we have been a knowledge society for about 5,000 years. But today, we have fallen into tremendous ignorance and apathy.

Failing to find opportunities in our own country, we witness the phenomenal flight of young Indian people out of India. Estimates say that 100,000 students go to the United States alone each year to study. Only about 10 per cent of them are on scholarship. The remaining 90 per cent pay huge fees, often taking massive loans to cover costs. We not only suffer from brain drain, but also from capital flight. The same is also true of the UK, Canada, Australia, Singapore and so on. Thus, we have created a system in India that encourages the export of both talent and money. We spend an estimated \$15 billion on these students each year, enough to fund over 150 JNUs in India.

We can change all this. India can be a profitable hub of education not only in the global south, but in the wider world. Brands

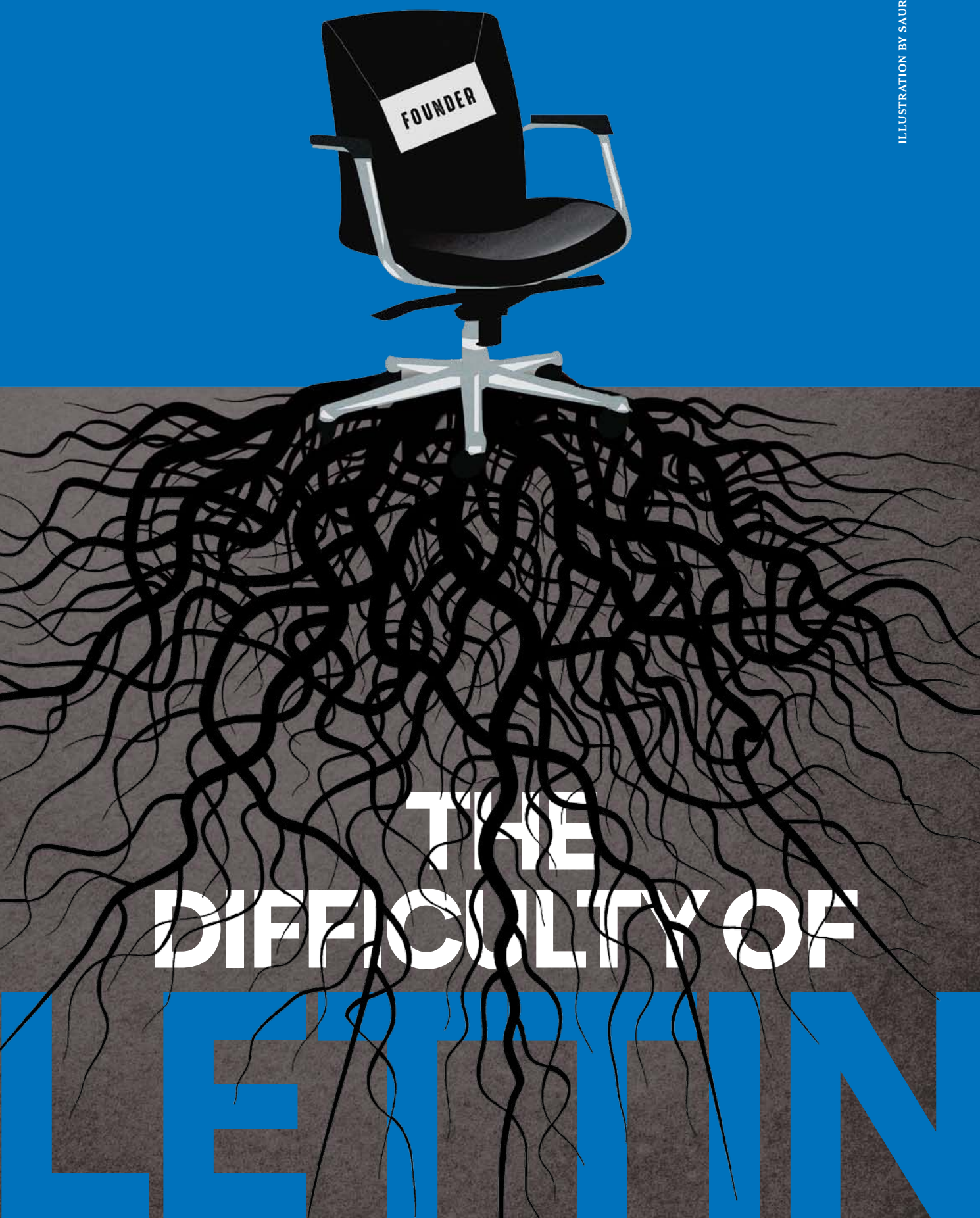


**This neglect of our education system is especially lamentable if we remember that we have been a knowledge society for about 5,000 years. But today, we have fallen into tremendous ignorance and apathy**

such as IITs and IIMs have global recognition and bandwidth. In a positive development, the Government has finally allowed the former to open a campus abroad. But there are several other Indian universities and institutions that can also be competitive, attractive and affordable if they become true centres of learning and excellence, rather than just of politicking or picnicking. If we don't respond fast, foreign universities where our best youth will prefer to study despite charging hefty fees, will overrun our own country. That, unfortunately, will be the prelude to the recolonisation of India.

A lot needs to be done. The question is: do we have the political will to do it? ■

*Makarand R Paranjape is Professor of English, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. His latest books include Cultural Politics in Modern India (2016) and The Death and Afterlife of Mahatma Gandhi (2015)*



# THE DIFFICULTY OF

# GETTING



NOBODY WANTS TO be NR Narayana Murthy right now. Not that there is any dearth of empathy with the infotech magnate whose eminence takes up space by the gigabyte on the internet. Must a man who had his leftism knocked out of him by the brute excesses of communism—he was bundled off a train once into prison for 72 hours by Bulgarian guards just for asking a co-traveller what life is like under red rule—now suffer the brute excesses of capitalism 42 years on? Must the co-founder of a great enterprise, one that has striven

to redeem business of all its alleged ills, endure intimations of his own irrelevance to his life's legacy? Must his voice be swiped off handset screens, his values admired more than adhered to, his presence reduced to that of a symbol?

Globally, far worse is known to happen, with Hollywood portrayals of America Inc offering us only the saddest of stories. It takes a hard heart not to wince as you watch Mac McDonald collapse on getting an earful from Ray Kroc in John Lee Hancock's *The Founder* (2016), the wily salesman having grabbed control of McDonald's 'crazy burger ballet' from its actual founders through a devious real estate ploy. And it takes some restraint to keep your eyes dry as the creator of Apple is fired in Danny Boyle's *Steve Jobs* by John Sculley, the professional CEO he himself had picked, for being too much of a nuisance to his own creation. Of course, Jobs' return and Apple's revival is a tale that has long achieved epic status.

Either way, in triumph or tragedy, entrepreneurs are always heroes—keepers of the halo they endow their companies with.

The trouble with that, though, is that the same glow of the past could just as easily paralyse prospects of prosperity under fresh leadership. And in a country that has

It's hard for founders, but it must sometimes be done. As the case of Infosys illustrates, their interests might be better served by placing their trust in the market

By ARESH SHIRALI

GGO



never been one for shock therapy—be it the transition of an economy or a company—effecting a genuine shift in top-level authority is all the more difficult.

That Infosys would pull it off well was once taken for granted. No longer, not after Narayana Murthy's recent outburst. At 70 now, he rarely betrays emotion, as you'd expect of a man who talks Quantum Mechanics with the software major's current CEO Vishal Sikka, but his quiet ideals are still loud and clear: his austerity, his egalitarian outlook on pay scales, his modesty with financial projections, and his overt emphasis on corporate culture and ethical governance. While the whiff of a possible 'hush money' scandal may have prompted his open confrontation with the company's Board and CEO, much else has evidently been grating on his nerves, worsened perhaps by the fact that the promoters on whose behalf he speaks own less than 13 per cent of Infosys, while institutional investors have the majority clout needed to call the shots. In 2014, reportedly, he'd wanted to be relieved of all legal liability as a 'promoter'. It didn't happen.

Is Sikka's pay packet of \$11 million way too high? Was former CFO Rajiv Bansal's eye-popping severance deal of Rs 17.4 crore a sign of something rotten in Infosys? Has the company got something to hide? The CEO and Board have denied it, offered explanations, expressed regret over Bansal's payout—now deemed a lapse of judgement—and agreed to codify all compensation contracts. Meanwhile, big investors have rallied to Sikka's defence. The prospect of a Tata style shake-up has blown over.

Narayana Murthy is still grumpy, however, and his other criticisms linger in the air. No CEO, he insists, should be paid more than twice as much as the next highest executive. Plus, the top guy's pay should not be 2,000 times that of an entry-level recruit, as he claims the Infosys ratio now is. He also quotes Peter Drucker as once having told him that "culture eats strategy for lunch", that the *way* a company works is its real basis for success.

Such admonitions get eye-rolls these days. The more he wags



AP

his finger at a company in the throes of a strategy shift in fierce rivalry with other global software players, the more outdated his views sound. Sikka's salary, for instance, is not only well in line with global norms, it's simply what the company wants to wager on a man who promises to double its revenues to \$20 billion by 2020. To hit this goal, Infosys is going all out for automation, artificial intelligence and other daring bits and bytes. It's a high-risk game with high rewards, Sikka's record so far suggests he's got what it takes, and big investors are cheering him on.

## FOUR FOUNDERS AND A GAME CHANGER: CEOs AT INFOSYS



**NR NARAYANA MURTHY**  
1981-2002

Had the longest and most impactful tenure on top. The company went public and achieved big time under him. In 2009, he turned venture capitalist with Catamaran



**NANDAN NILEKANI**  
2002-2007

A co-founder who held various posts at Infosys before taking the hot seat, he's now best known as the brain behind Aadhaar. He contested a Lok Sabha seat in 2014



**S GOPALAKRISHNAN**  
2007-2011

Popularly known as Kris, this co-founder had served at an overseas joint venture in Atlanta and was widely seen as a leader well versed with the company's values

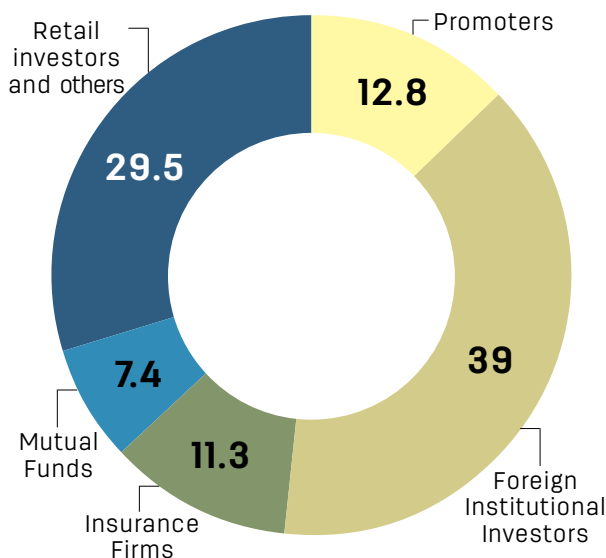




Narayana Murthy (left)  
with Vishal Sikka

## WHO OWNS HOW MUCH

Infosys shareholding pattern



Figures in per cent

“The Infosys case is partly a culture clash about how much compensation inequality between senior managers and the rest of the employees—and especially frontline ones—is good for the company in the long run,” observes Jagdish N Sheth, the Charles H Kellstadt Professor of Marketing at the Goizueta Business School of Emory University. “In this instance, it is also an issue of the ‘hands on’ culture of its founders. It is difficult for such successful leaders to watch events passively and from the sidelines.”

That entrepreneurs are often dismayed by what their succes-

sors do is no surprise. Their reward, typically, is what they have set up—the very business in which they’ve invested so much more than money. The hired CEO, however, has a daunting job to do, and taking it up has to be financially worth his career risk, a point often lost on founders. Notably, if a firm fails to generate internal leadership, it has fewer options than an outsider being lured does; and with hotshot executives being fought over out in the market for bosses, the notion of a ‘pay cap’ is woefully out of sync with modern reality. “Companies are trying to leapfrog while harnessing growth opportunities, or trying to battle disruptive trends, and so there is a call for special talent to step up and shoulder disproportionate responsibility, especially on the strategic front,” says Sachin Rajan, managing director, Russell Reynolds Associates India, a leading global executive search and assessment firm. When an outsider is called upon, he adds, compensation is usually a lengthy part of the negotiations. “This is actually healthy because it helps align expectations, even on subtle cultural considerations, early on,” says Rajan, “The situations that lend themselves to unravelling quicker are the ones where there is either a ‘blank cheque’, rare these days, or where there is a highly attractive exit package, given that there will invariably be flashpoints as well as overtures being made to the executive from the external market in the early days.”

Even so, multimillion-dollar hires do leave other managers in a sulk. While top salaries in India have gotten globalised, those of lower-level employees haven’t. This is deeply resented. “Compensation variance often results in passive resistance or open revolt. It is becoming even more critical with outrageous compensations of the CEO and top leaders. This is especially important for listed

**SD SHIBULAL**  
2011-2014

The last co-founder to head Infosys, his tenure saw a chorus arise among investors asking for a switch to professional leadership. He now runs a family-held investment firm

**VISHAL SIKKA**  
2014-present

A Silicon Valley man who earned his spurs with SAP, an enterprise software firm, before joining Infosys to address new challenges in a fast-evolving marketplace

companies,” says Professor Sheth. “The most important standing committee is the one for compensation and not audit because the latter has an outside auditor for governance,” he adds, referring to his own experience, “As a Board member in several US companies, my task was very difficult when I chaired the compensation committee as compared to the audit or succession planning ones.”

Fat severance packages are also *de rigueur* in the corporate world. As clauses in job contracts, these are justified as money for the risk of taking a high-profile new job only to find it's not working out. Elaborates Rajan, “The executive would like to be valued for his track record and potential to perform, placing the onus of failure-risk largely on future circumstances, new information on company culture, the existing talent bench, and unknown or unclear aspects of past performance.” It's not unusual for senior executives moving from the West to ask for a year's salary in case they're asked to go. The terms have been fluid, of late, and so long as job contracts are kept confidential by companies, there's no saying what pay-out sum ought to raise eyebrows.

None of that, however, has quelled rumours at Infosys over Bansal's abrupt departure in 2015, and Whatsapp whispers of a shady acquisition are said to be going against the corporate cohesion it has been so proud of. Might an open culture fostered by the founders yet get the better of its big Sikka bet? Tough question.

In general, says Professor Sheth, “I agree that culture is more important than strategy in positioning the future of a company. Therefore, one needs to articulate a strategy which will reposition the company without changing its culture.” He cites Monsanto and 3M as examples of ‘cultural DNA’ having been put to good strategic use, with Microsoft and Google doing fine jobs of it lately. “The only time strategy is more important than culture is when the company is in crisis and is taken over by a private equity firm. This is the struggle that Sears Holdings is going through today, and what HP underwent recently.”

The business guru also endorses Murthy's old mantra of ‘under promise and over deliver’ (on revenue targets): “Shaping expectations of investors or customers or employees is the real art of leadership. Unfortunately, many leaders simply respond to investor demands rather than confront or shape expectations. Ultimately, what makes a difference is selecting the right set of investors who believe in the company, its culture and strategy. The problem with investors today is that they are more traders than investors, especially those from hedge funds and large brokerage companies.”

Sikka's goal of \$20 billion by 2020 may sound a bit too pat, even bombastic to those accustomed to the decimal diligence of its old ‘guidance’ issuances, argue his backers, but it wasn't exactly pulled out of a hat. Infosys has spelt out a credible gameplan and its numbers are under the watch of fund managers who will hold him to it. So far, to Sikka's credit, the more vocal among them have given him a huge thumbs-up. Get on with it, they say.

**I**T'S HARD FOR a legendary leader to admit that his life's big burden is now for others to bear. Nor is handing over charge to a professional chief an exercise for the faint of heart. Not only do

fuzzy issues tax the promoter's nerves, he may find it hard to resist comparing the new leader with himself, little realising that this is unfair: no matter what, a professional boss will always earn a helluva lot more for achieving a helluva lot less.

There are no clones for hire.

“In theory,” says Professor Sheth, “the founders want to let go if they find a successor with the same leadership DNA. This, however, is often not the case. Both the mission and style of leadership are often different between founders and professional leaders. This results in conflict.”

Subodh Bhargava, a former president of CII who is on several corporate Boards, outlines two broad challenges in any such transition of leadership. “The promoter has a right to lay out boundaries on processes and values, and set targets. Professionals need to accept that. So challenge Number one is a mutual agreement on values and the guiding principles for the business,” he says. “The second is clarity on why the promoters are handing over. It's important to have an ‘exit policy’ for the promoter and clarity on

**“The Infosys case is partly an issue of the ‘hands-on’ culture of its founders. It is difficult for such successful leaders to watch events passively and from the sidelines”**

JAGDISH N SHETH business guru



GETTY IMAGES

what he will do. If it's not clear, there could be some heartburn..."

Even before the recent ouster of Cyrus Mistry from Tata Sons, India Inc had seen a series of unhappy partings between owners and their top recruits. At Britannia, Vinita Bali's 2014 exit was viewed by many as a sad comment on how uneasy such relations remain; Varun Berry has taken over since. Similar concerns have made the goings-on at Godrej Consumer Products Ltd under Vivek Gambhir the stuff of speculation. Of no less curiosity is the odd case of Cipla, which saw its market value double under Subhanu Saxena, a professional, before things went awry with the company's owners; he was succeeded by Umang Vohra last year. In all these, 'the family' has loomed large.

As Rajan sees it, a workable succession model that has emerged for family businesses entails the recruitment of a chief on the explicit understanding that the family's next generation will take over the role at some stage. The high-anxiety cases are usually those which envision a complete handover. Either way, he says, clarity on both sides over whether the top recruit is meant to be a

'game-changer' CEO or more of a business caretaker can set the transition up for success. Expectations matter. "A professional CEO is very challenged at the onset to replicate the performance that an iconic founder delivered, at least over the short to medium term," says Rajan, "If it were easy, they would have set up their own companies and created wealth independently."

Thankfully, there are several success stories of clear handovers, with the Max Group, Wipro, Marico and Dabur frequently cited as examples. In the US, The Coca-Cola Company, Playboy and Disney are held up as stellar cases.

"It all depends on promoters empowering professionals," says Bhargava. It's not that hired managers lack that fire in the belly or are too shy of risk, in his view, it's just that they are accountable to a senior figure and operate accordingly. How much freedom a new CEO is granted could make all the difference, then, and a realistic approach could be to calibrate the transfer of authority over an agreed period. "Patience and governance guard-rails are critical over the medium term," says Rajan, "but unfortunately, it's all too easy for either party to blink in the early days."

**"Why promoters are handing over should be clear. It's important to have an 'exit policy' for the promoter and clarity on what he will do after that. If it's not clear, there could be some heartburn"**

**SUBODH BHARGAVA** former president, CII



**W**HAT MAKES INFOSYS exceptional is that it is not closely held. Its ownership not only spans the globe, its very diversity is an assurance that no individual or family exercises more than a sliver of control. The bulk of its shares are with FIIs, no doubt, but no single institution can have its way with it. Any move to overthrow the *status quo* would need multiple minds to agree. In other words, it's as close as a business gets to the modern ideal of an entity governed by the collective will of a vast group with little in common but an interest in its well-being. Terms like 'shareholder democracy' have always been premature in India, but the fact that the Infosys spat has played out so openly could augur well for its future. First the Tata affair, and now this—for once, even investors with only a few modest shares are taking a closer look at how their companies are run.

"Investor activism is likely to grow due to the rise of social media," notes Professor Sheth, "Today, a company and its leaders are all fish in a digital aquarium. Everyone is curious about what they do. And often, a non-stakeholder becomes an activist and agitator. In this era of social acrimony, I expect greater shareholder activism across the globe and especially in emerging markets where there is less trust in regulators or public governance."

Regulatory action, of course, doesn't enter the picture unless actual rules are flouted. Scraps over direction and culture are matters only for those whose money is at stake. It's here that founders who turn their companies over to professionals might do themselves a favour by displaying a little more trust in the market to do what's best for all concerned. If a firm is badly run, or finds itself at war with itself over values, it's bound to hurt at some point; and once it shows up in the results, investors will flee and calls for the CEO's scalp will arise with brutal efficiency. While elderly advice should always be welcome, the convergent opinion of many ought to prove better for a company than the weighty voice of a few. Willy-nilly, that's the secret of capitalism's success. ■





NR Narayana Murthy

ILLUSTRATION BY SAURABH SINGH

# THE INCOMPATI

Infosys is caught between a conservative promoter and an aggressive CEO from Silicon Valley



By V SHOBA



Vishal Sikka

BLES

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HE INTERMINABLE sprawl of the Infosys campus perched on the edge of Bengaluru has set many precedents. It was here that the idea of an IT park, with all the amenities we have come to associate with a career in software engineering, was born. When heads of state visit Infosys, they see reflected in its edgy architecture the power of Indians'

ambition and the fruits of their diligent toil. The Infosys campus is the most tangible symbol of the company's striving to set standards—whether by becoming the first Indian IT firm to list on NASDAQ or by making millionaires of employees with its stock options scheme. Even as it rose to become a posterboy of India's \$150 billion IT outsourcing industry, Infosys earned a reputation as one of its most ethical corporations, with its founders laying down best practices in corporate disclosure and governance as well as leading frugal lifestyles on the personal front. It is these implacably lofty ideals, and the challenge of living up to them, that are proving to be a public relations nightmare for the company as it finds itself drawn into a controversy seemingly about salaries and severance pay.

The truth is, Infosys is caught in a clash of values between a conservative promoter and a jet-setting CEO from Silicon Valley. When Infosys co-founder and former Chairman NR Narayana Murthy, widely regarded as a beacon of virtue in corporate India, spoke of "distressing" governance lapses at the company, it kindled fears that the simmering differences between him and the Board would devolve into a damaging battle *a la* Tata Sons and Cyrus Mistry. The flashpoints were a severance package of 30 months' salary, amounting to over Rs 17 crore, that the Board had agreed to pay former CFO Rajiv Bansal upon his exit in October 2015, and 49-year-old CEO Vishal Sikka's \$11 million-a-year compensation. In Murthy's unforgiving eyes, Bansal's exorbitant severance pay was a sign of foul play and Sikka's revised remuneration—up from \$7.08 million in 2016, a 55 per cent increase that is at odds with the average single-digit salary hikes at the company—showed blatant disregard for Infosys' brand of compassionate capitalism. Murthy's two-pronged attack was flawed, however, for it not only gave credence to speculation that Bansal had been shown the door for questioning Infosys' \$200-million acquisition of Israeli software company Panaya in February 2015 (the valuation was vetted by Deutsche Bank and independent finance professionals), but also suggested that he no longer approved of a CEO of his own choosing, a respected technologist and former SAP CTO. Meanwhile, the side-stepped contenders for the CEO's chair at Infosys, former CFOs TV Mohandas Pai and V Balakrishnan, have attributed the apparent dilution of Infosian

values to Narayana Murthy's failure to groom leaders.

The Chairman of the Infosys Board, R Seshasayee, has vehemently denied any wrongdoing and clarified that much of Sikka's compensation is hinged on meeting admittedly tall targets: \$20 billion in sales at 30 per cent net margin and \$80,000 revenue per employee by 2020. He has rued the decision to grant Bansal a large severance, even if he was paid only Rs 5 crore and not the whole sum agreed upon, and said it was a mistake that would never be repeated. And in a wise if belated move, he has acknowledged the importance of consulting the founders from time to time. But the damage is done. Some of the gloss that had been restored to Infosys since Sikka's appointment in August 2014 has been rubbed out, dulled by doubts that the company is falling from its moral apogee. Corporate governance experts are busy judging Infosys against its own spotless past, and pointing out minor 'irregularities' like the appointment of DN Prahlad, a relative of Narayana Murthy and a former employee of Infosys, to the Board.

Narayana Murthy, too, has come out of the episode looking worse for wear, as analysts debate the propriety of his interference in a company where he and his family, the largest shareholders, hold just 3.4 per cent shares. The founders together own less than 13 per cent of the firm. "As a majority of shareholders are aware of these issues and have not raised any concern, the voice of the founders at best is a minority voice and must be given the same treatment as any other shareholder would deserve," says JN Gupta, managing director, Stakeholders Empowerment Services, a corporate governance advisory firm. "If the founders feel that they need to come back to the Board, they must offer themselves up for Board positions. It reflects rather poorly on the investor relations of the company, as either these founder-investors were taken for granted and ignored or they, acting *en bloc*, want to have a say in the affairs of the company."

The man at the centre of this boardroom drama, however, seems unwilling to allow the optics of it to 'distract' him from his mission. Analysts, clients and investors, including large institutional investors like Oppenheimer Funds, have remained just as steadfast in their support of Sikka, who has been making all the right noises about future-proofing Infosys at a time when the ITeS industry is slowing down and bracing for disruption. The markets, in fact, reacted positively to the row, with the stock gaining about 5 per

cent even as the controversy raged. "This is quite different from the Tata-Mistry rift, where a change was possible. In Infosys' case, who can lead, if not Sikka? Investors will not risk trying out an alternative," says a senior analyst at a securities firm in Mumbai who does not want to be named. "We are more concerned about the time the management is wasting on a needless controversy. As long as he keeps investors happy, how does it matter if he chartered a jet or bought an office in Palo Alto?"

"Today, ITeS companies need someone who can talk strategy with prospective clients and open doors for you. This kind of talent was missing in India before Sikka came in," says Sanjiv Hota, associate vice-president, research, at Sharekhan. In the two-and-a-half years since Sikka was handed the baton, Infosys' revenues have grown from \$8.2 billion to \$10 billion, attrition has plunged from 24 to 15 per cent, and margins have held steady. Infosys shares have risen 18 per cent since Sikka assumed office. But since the beginning of this fiscal, shares have dropped 18 per cent. The challenge Sikka faces is combating pricing pressure and accelerated commoditisation of the company's legacy offerings—application development and maintenance—even as it prepares to pivot to a more automation-and-innovation-driven business. Faster execution and better employee utilisation—despite a major setback in the loss of a large contract with Royal Bank of Scotland—have

**R Seshasayee has denied any wrongdoing and clarified that much of Sikka's compensation is hinged on meeting admittedly tall targets: \$20 billion in sales at 30 per cent net margin and \$80,000 revenue per employee by 2020**



Infosys Chairman R Seshasayee (left) and Infosys CEO Vishal Sikka address a press conference in Mumbai on February 13th

PTI

# Q&A

with

**Ashutosh Bishnoi,**  
Managing Director and CEO of  
Mahindra Asset Management  
Company Private Limited

helped strengthen the core business. Meanwhile, Sikka is steering a silver stream of ideas like artificial intelligence and machine learning into the ocean of mainstream business strategy. Last year, Infosys launched Mana, a machine learning platform to drive automation and innovation, with much fanfare and it is already said to be bringing in business of about \$100 million each quarter. The company claims to be freeing up over 2,000 employees every quarter—it has a total of 200,000 employees—from routine tasks that are being automated.

Sikka, whose doctoral thesis at Stanford was in the field of AI (artificial intelligence), has made automation the topic *du jour* at Infosys, even as all IT majors have adopted it in varying degrees to improve productivity and to offer richer analytics to clients. In a recent letter to employees, Sikka quoted Martin Luther King Jr on working towards his long-term vision for the company: 'If you can't fly then run, if you can't run then walk, if you can't walk then crawl, but whatever you do you have to keep moving forward.' 'He was, of course, talking about freedom,' Sikka wrote. 'But it applies equally to us. To our freedom, from the tyranny of the mundane, of the cost-driven value delivery, our freedom to think, to innovate, to create.' Some analysts say Sikka is an able word-smith who may have over-promised and under-delivered. The company, which had under co-founder-turned-CEO SD Shibulal suspended its practice of giving guidance figures, has been posting rather rosy guidances over the past year, only to subsequently revise them downwards citing external pressures. "His heart is in the right place and investors are playing for possibility by placing their faith in Sikka. But not much is going to change for any IT company in the next year or two. The 2017-18 growth will likely hover around 8 per cent and the numbers are going to be painful for Sikka," says an analyst.

The proof of an ITeS company's performance, says V Balakrishnan, lies in the pudding of revenue per employee, which has plateaued at about \$50,000 and shows no signs of nudging upwards. In some troubling ways, Sikka's vision of the future resembles Shibulal's disastrous 'Infosys 3.0', which was a futuristic strategy the company followed between 2011 and 2014 for moving up the value chain by focusing on platforms and products. Even as it signed on smaller clients, Infosys' traditional business suffered and a number of senior executives quit. If Sikka's promise of transformation takes longer than expected, markets may gnash at the issues facing the IT major. To boost investor morale and share prices, Mohandas Pai and Balakrishnan have been advocating a buyback using Infosys' copious cash reserves—over \$5 billion—citing the example of Cognizant's recent approval of the return of \$3.4 billion to its shareholders over the next two years. They had sought an \$1.8 billion buyback in 2014 when Sikka took charge. With the present ego tussle between the founders and the Board unlocking a Pandora's box, expect every aspect of Infosys to become fair game for scrutiny—from Sikka's alleged caste bias after he referred to himself as a "Kshatriya warrior" to the political connections of its Board members, the reduced hiring this year, or even the relaxed dress code on Fridays. Perhaps the founders can now rest easy in the floodlights. ■

## Q1

**I would love to invest in the stock market online to make quick money. What is your advice?**

When investing your savings emotion is needed to set a goal. It could be your children's future, your retirement plan, your intent to buy a home... these are all emotional decisions and must be made with passion.

However, when it comes to investing money, to help you reach these goals, you should throw emotions out of the window. It pays to be simply rational. The best approach is to rely on numerical data.

## Q1a

**So how do I ensure that I am investing correctly?**

When investing in a financial instrument such as equities, bonds or mutual funds, there are four questions you should ask yourself. These are: Are you investing in securities of the right business? Are you investing at the right value of the securities? Are you investing at the right time? And finally, what is the probability that your investment will deliver the desired returns?

All these questions can be answered using numbers and data. And you should use common sense to look for data. Looking at past performance is not good sense. Looking at where others, such as popular faces on TV screens, are investing is even worse. Investing and disinvesting in panic is an example of poor sense.

And if you don't want to do all this rational analysis and numerical number crunching yourself, you should call someone at Mahindra Mutual Fund.

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# PUPPET PART TWO

**Sasikala goes  
to jail and a  
dummy comes  
to power in  
Chennai**

**By V SHOBA**

PHOTOS PTI

**T**WO MONTHS AFTER former Chief Minister J Jayalithaa's death, the reality of exhausted possibilities in Tamil Nadu is sinking in. The state has seen one self-destructing narrative after another since the death of MG Ramachandran, the sole infallible hero, in 1987. It has vacillated between the two Dravidian parties, castigating the precursor and carrying on a rebound affair with the incumbent in each subsequent election. In 2016, Jayalithaa became the first to break this curse in three decades by winning twice in a row, but were she to look at Tamil Nadu today, she would despair of her own victory. In the overlong battle for her political estate, power has refracted between an officious meddler with an army of stooges and a perorative redeemer of the seduced masses. And they have each brought on their own self-destruction, VK Sasikala with her unchecked greed and O Panneerselvam by not thinking through his secession from the mother-party.

A day after her conviction by the Supreme Court in a 21-year-old disproportionate assets case, AIADMK general secretary Sasikala, on February 15th, surrendered to sessions judge Ashwath Narayana at the Parappana Agrahara prison complex in Bengaluru along with her co-conspirator J Ilavarasi. Her nephew and Jayalithaa's estranged foster son VN Sudhakaran turned

himself in later in the day. The verdict delivered by justices Pinali Chandra Ghose and Amitava Roy, which restored in full the trial court conviction of September 27th, 2014, was immediately hailed as a milestone in the fight against corruption. Justice Roy felt compelled to point out in a supplementary note to the judgment that 'the perpetrators of this malady (of corruption) have tightened their noose on the societal psyche'. 'The corrupt and the corrupter are indictable and answerable to the society and the country as a whole,' he wrote. Two days later, however, it was politics as usual in Tamil Nadu, with the new legislative party leader chosen by Sasikala, 62-year-old Edappadi K Palaniswami, a senior leader from Salem district, being appointed Chief Minister-designate and asked to seek a vote of confidence within 15 days.

The verdict should have been cathartic for many reasons. First, it shatters the halo around Jayalithaa and forces Tamil Nadu to confront the reality of its 'Amma'. Even if it comes posthumously, it brings back flashes from the Directorate of Vigilance and Anti-Corruption (DVAC) raid of her residence in 1997 that yielded riches stowed away like a teenager's sinful cigarettes in an eviscerated dictionary. Forgiveness comes easy to a state forever indebted to her welfare schemes, and a circumstantial history of modern-day Tamil Nadu may yet crown her the tallest leader



Edappadi K Palaniswami greets Tamil Nadu Governor CH Vidyasagar Rao in Chennai before his swearing-in as Chief Minister; (left) Sasikala at Jayalalithaa's memorial before leaving for Bengaluru to serve her sentence



of her times, but there is an air of disaffection with Dravidian politics today that may change the way the next generation votes.

Second, the conviction of Sasikala should have come as a relief to the people of Tamil Nadu, who have made no secret of their visceral dislike of her. By prematurely seizing power and propping herself up on the shoulders of her kin, she incurred widespread odium and remained unaffected by it. The judgment curtailed her chief ministerial ambitions in the nick of time and showed her her rightful place—as prisoner no. 9234 in Bangalore's central jail. With Sasikala in exile, the AIADMK could have potentially recovered from its moral morass and reinvented itself as a self-reflexive party without baggage. O Panneerselvam, once mocked as a Teflon-coated chief minister, had, with his inspired riff on all that was wrong with Sasikala's leadership, emerged a hero standing tall in the dissolute political space of Tamil Nadu. But while eight maverick MLAs followed their conscience to his faction, Palaniswami and 123 other MLAs, unwilling to give

## **The ultimacy of the verdict felt a lot less powerful than it should have, with Sasikala and her egregious courtiers retaining their control over the AIADMK**

up their seats, craving the security that Sasikala's money power must bring, and perhaps a little grateful for her patronage over the years, decided to follow her writ. Either that or the bonding sessions at Golden Bay Resort in Kuvathur, where they have all been lodged for days fearing mass defection to the OPS camp, really worked. An FIR has been filed against Palaniswami and Sasikala after SS Saravanan, an MLA who has said he scaled the walls of the resort dressed in shorts and t-shirt, lodged a complaint alleging that the MLAs had been kidnapped by Sasikala.

Third, the Supreme Court's verdict, and Justice John Michael D'Cunha's before it, could become the generative grammar for honest Tamil politicians to come. It could force the DMK, which is trying to resurface from the taint of the 2G scam, to govern ethically should it come to power in the next Assembly election. It could arguably empower the Tamil masses, whose resolve and grit were in evidence at the recent protests in



Panneerselvam lasted only two months as Chief Minister

Chennai, to boycott greedy politicians.

Yet, the ultimacy of the verdict, the euphoric moment of reckoning Tamil Nadu had waited for, felt a lot less powerful than it should have. For, Sasikala and her egregious courtiers continue to have near-total control of the AIADMK, lingering like sticky sap from a cut. Unlike Jayalalithaa who did not care to name a successor, Sasikala has formally handed over the reins of the party to her nephew, former MP TTV Dinakaran, who incidentally narrowly escaped conviction in the DA case. He had been arraigned as accused No. 5 in a supplementary chargesheet but did not face trial as evidence couldn't be marshalled against him. He is also a co-accused in several Foreign Exchange Regulation Act (FERA) violation cases along with Sasikala. The new deputy general secretary—and for all practical purposes, Sasikala's stand-in while she remains in jail—of the AIADMK was among the dozen party members related to Sasikala who were expelled by Jayalalithaa in 2011. Ironically, he was accused of interfering with government administration, and now has the official authority to do so. Following his appointment, senior party leader V Karuppasamy Pandian quit as organising secretary and issued a scathing statement protesting Sasikala's treatment of the AIADMK as a 'family property'.

For Sasikala, who has been refused home-cooked meals and VIP treatment, prison and a thwarted chief ministership are clearly not the end of the road. For someone who has never held public office before, the 10-year ban on contesting elections surely does not mean scrapping her dreams. She made her intentions public by thumping on the slab of Jayalalithaa's memorial before heading to Bangalore, a gesture that can only be interpreted as refusal to capitulate to a deadening fate. The Doppler effect of her thumping continues to reverberate through social media memes, but she meant it in all seriousness. No power on earth could distance her from the AIADMK, she declared a few days ago. And by that, she meant not just the heretical sect that attempted to upstage her on a Tuesday night, but also the possibility of a conviction. "This is a woman who has controlled Tamil Nadu politics from behind the scenes for years. Prison is not going to make her stop, especially when there is no authority above her. She has always

preferred to operate without accountability," points out political analyst Gnani Sankaran. This is neither an exit, nor an entrance, but merely a part that must played, to paraphrase Shakespeare.

There is still the possibility of an upset if the Election Commission declares Sasikala's election as party general secretary void, in which case Panneerselvam will have the reins back. Disabused of his relevance, he must feel expectations crumbling around him. For a while, he was the source of a passing optimism among Tamils, a fiery orphan who asked for more. As the crowds at his Greenways Road residence disperse, barely a day after hailing the judgment against Sasikala as an end to their worries, he calls plaintively for the "dharmic war" to continue. Meanwhile, the DMK, with 89 MLAs in a 233-strong Assembly, is watching patiently, hoping for a mid-term poll that may well tilt the votes in its favour.

Some days ago, walking down Marina beach, I met a fishmonger who called Sasikala a "hiccup" in the history of democracy in Tamil Nadu. "It will pass," she said, rather optimistically. "If not now, then the elections will surely wash it away." The scourge of the AIADMK, however, is also the force holding together the bricolage of a party deprived of its icon. Incomprehensibly, Sasikala's supporters now hail her as a martyr, even if they know that had she martyred her own chief ministership earlier, Panneerselvam may never have defected. "Sasikala's government is not Amma's government, it can never be. For our own dignity's sake, we have to support OPS," C Ponnaiyan, senior party leader, former minister of finance and one of the founding members of the AIADMK, told me when I asked him why he supports Panneerselvam. As Sasikala's MLAs shuffle out of Golden Bay Resort and return to face the world, they do not look relieved. Perhaps they are clutching their *veshtis* around them a little tighter, knowing they have squandered away their dignity. "The only reason the MLAs are united is that they don't want to face premature elections," says S Thirunavukkarasar, the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee president. "I hope they prove [their] majority in the House and ensure stable governance. I don't expect much change, since only two ministers have defected." That is indeed the story of Tamil Nadu over the past few weeks, where everything has changed and yet nothing has changed. ■





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“My husband and I used to migrate to Punjab every year. Now my son goes to Nasik for months. What we need is more jobs right here”

**MUNNI DEVI, 30**  
tenant farmer



# A CRY IN THE WILDERNESS

“It is not just about me, it is about the village. Our village urgently needs toilets”

**SHYAMPATI, 30**  
MGNREGA worker







“We didn’t get the house or ration card as promised. Does my vote matter at all?”

**LALITA**, 30  
tenant farmer

## What do women want? **PRIYANKA KOTAMRAJU** and **ANSHU LALIT** listen to desperate voices, from labourers to rape survivors, in Bundelkhand

O

N MAY 1ST last year, Nathu Lal died of starvation. It was a cruel summer’s day and drought had ravaged the Bundelkhand region in Uttar Pradesh. Nathu Lal left his home in Mungus village, Banda district, in the late afternoon to collect the emergency relief packets being distributed by the state government to families most affected by the drought. The Samajwadi relief packet included rice, potatoes, *dal*, *ghee* and milk powder. Nathu Lal and his family hadn’t eaten for days. He had barely left the village when he stopped to drink water, collapsed and died. He left behind a family of seven: his wife Munni Devi and six children.

In February this year, weeks before Bundelkhand goes to Assembly polls in the fourth phase, it seems like nobody remembers Nathu or what happened to his wife Munni Devi. The thirty-something Munni has become the reluctant *mukhiya* or head of her household. We travel to Bundelkhand to track down a few women whose families made headlines in the last year, whose lives have altered forever, and those who remember the promises governments have made. We attempt to listen in to their demands, aspirations and visions of *vikas*. Among these women is a farm labourer coping with the drought, women who have lost husbands and children to medical negligence, long-suffering anganwadi workers whose demands have gone unheard again, and a rape survivor seeking justice.

What do they want from their representatives and their government? They tell us they want doctors, more schools and colleges, less inequality, basic incomes, non-agricultural jobs and, more importantly, justice. A 70-year-old woman in Chitrakoot district says, “My vote is worth a lakh rupees. It matters who I vote for.”

Nathu's death, which became synonymous with the drought in Bundelkhand, made national headlines and jolted a slumberous government and administration into action. The Akhilesh Yadav government announced a slew of relief measures for the family, which included Rs 5 lakh in compensation, a *pucca* house under the Indira Awaas Yojana, a cycle, a solar lamp, and a job for Munni Devi's son and wedding expenses for her daughter. For three months after the tragedy, Munni Devi patiently received visitors who were from the state government, the district administration of Banda, and various political parties. The district magistrate gave her Rs 10,000, the current Congress candidate from Naraini assembly constituency gave her Rs 2,000, and MLAs from the Bahujan Samaj Party gave her Rs 3 lakh and clothes. Neighbours and villagers also contributed.

When we meet her, she first tells us that she can't sleep. Will she finish building the new house? Will the government give her son a job like they promised? Will they assist in her daughter's wedding? Both children are still minors but Munni Devi is anguished that the government will not keep its promises. "*Ummeed nahin hai*, I have no hope," she says.

Munni Devi's fears are not unfounded. Mungus Purwa (her village) has been forgotten before. An Ambedkar Gram under the Mayawati government (2007-2012), it fell into neglect in the Akhilesh Yadav regime. The village of 400 voters has not seen a regular *safai karamchari* since July last year. On January 26th this year, a worker came to the village, only to clean the government primary school. Sewage washes the gullies and garbage covers it. The only source of employment for villagers here is *palayan* or migration. For the last decade, Munni Devi and her children accompanied her husband Nathu Lal to Punjab every year. Her 17-year-old son Dileep also migrates twice every year to Nasik, Maharashtra, to work in ice-cream factories. "He returned earlier this year but because of demonetisation his salary of Rs 10,000 is stuck," says Munni Devi. In this campaign season, political parties are yet to come to Mungus Purwa. On the other hand, Aila village, the bigger, upper-caste gram panchayat, has already played host to a number of campaigners.

Life after her husband's death has not been easy for Munni Devi. "I live in tension. I feel like there are many problems I won't be able to face. I worry about every little thing. The district magistrate has already changed. If the government changes too, will anyone remember us?"

**S** EVEN DISTRICTS AND 19 Assembly constituencies of Bundelkhand go to polls on February 23rd. Out of 57 candidates fielded by major political parties for the 19 seats, only 20 per cent have women candidates. The major parties together have fielded only 100 women candidates for 403 Assembly seats, many of whom are legatees of parivar politics. In the last UP Assembly, only eight per cent legislators were women, ie 35 women. It appears that political parties have learnt little from the strong show of female candidates in the 2015 panchayat elections, where 43 per cent women (10 per cent over the 33 per cent quota) were elected to the local government. Caste continues to dominate

vote-bank calculations, yet women, who have better voting records, visible even in the first and second phases, have never been seen as a voting bloc. In this election, female candidates continue to be bound by domestic vocabulary of *bahu*, *beti*, *didi* or *behenji*. In party manifestos, they are a token presence. In election rhetoric and campaign rallies in Bundelkhand, women have remained conspicuously absent. In door-to-door, mass contact campaigns, candidates have rarely reached out to women in villages and small towns to ask them what they really want.

Shyampati, 30, is a *mahila kisan* (woman farmer) from Khutaha village, Chitrakoot district. *IndiaSpend* wrote about her in an article about the quiet crisis affecting women farmers in India in 2015. The piece revealed that more and more women cultivators have become agricultural labourers in the last decade. From 2001 to 2011, 24 per cent more women were engaged in farm labour as tenant farmers—just like Shyampati. Her large family of 12 members are not landowners, rather tenant farmers. Shyampati is currently working in the fields of others, sowing wheat, mustard and cucumber. She also has two buffaloes. Yet, she has to take on more work under MGNREGA to provide for the household.

Her daily routine consists of cooking for the family by 8 am, milking the buffaloes, cleaning the house and fetching water for the household. She makes five to six trips every day to meet the family's water requirement. By noon, she heads for the fields, where she works on farms owned by others. In the evening she often patrols her fields to keep away stray cattle that might ruin her crops, just like they did with her *rabri* crop a few months ago. She hasn't let her husband migrate to Punjab like many others in the village, fearing for his safety. "We'd rather have little to eat than lose him," she says.

Shyampati has five children—four girls and a boy, three of whom go to school. What does she want ahead of the election? She says, "It is not just about me, it is about the village. Our village urgently needs toilets." Shyampati and her mother-in-law Keniya walk one to two kilometres for their ablutions. "The place has become so foul now that we have to change our clothes after we return," Keniya says, with a shudder. We prod her further, what does she want for herself? "I want that, at any cost, my children don't become farmers." The village has a government primary and junior school, but Shyampati sends her eldest child Roshni to a school that is five km away so that she can study further. Roshni walks to school every day, an hour each way. "*Jisko chaith kaatna padta hai, usko pata chalta hai kheti kisani me kitni mehnat hai* (Only the one who spends a summer in the fields, sowing and harvesting, can know what hard work farming is)," she says. So far, no party or candidate is listening to Shyampati of Khutaha village.

On the campaign trail, following candidates of various political parties in Bundelkhand, we notice that the door-to-door campaign in villages is restricted to only a few households. Generally, the candidate arrives with his or her coterie in the village and goes into a huddle, mostly with the males of the village, including the *pradhan*, *kotedar* (ration shop owner), block and zila panchayat members. On many occasions, when people have approached candidates with their problems and demands, they have been simply passed





**“I want my legislator to work on reducing the gap between the rich and the poor”**

**SUSHILA PINTU, 26**  
farm labourer

on to us journalists. Where then can Shyamapati go? Whose door can she knock on?

In June last year, Lalita's family from Badokhar Bujurg village, Banda district, made an alarming request to the district magistrate. Her family of 12 members made a collective plea for *ichhamrutya* or euthanasia. Lalita's husband, Rati Ram, was a liver cancer patient. Her husband's two brothers had medical problems too: one has mental health issues and the other is physically disabled. Unable to endure the hardship, the family, in-laws and children included, wanted to end their lives. The district administration went into a tizzy and the local media made headlines of *ichhamrutya*.

At Badokhar Bujurg, on a February afternoon, we wait for Lalita to return from her fields. The 35-year-old, hesitant and quiet at first, tells us that her husband of 20 years was diagnosed with liver cancer three years ago. The family first made rounds of the government and private hospitals in Banda and Chitrakoot to no avail. Rati Ram was once poked and prodded by a compounder at the district hospital who sent him home with stomach medicine. The family then sold 12.5 *bigha* (more than two acres) of land and two buffaloes to pay for his treatment in Kanpur and

Lucknow. After they had spent nearly three lakh rupees, the Lucknow Cancer Institute told them that further surgery and treatment would require an additional Rs 3 lakh.

So, at the end of June last year, scores of residents of Badokhar Bujurg climbed into a tractor trolley with Lalita, Rati Ram and their family. They marched to the collectorate to give their appeal of euthanasia. Lalita's appeal and demand list included that the government and district administration give medical attention, a tricycle for the physically challenged brother, Samajwadi pension and an Antyodaya poverty line card. The administration and the chief medical officer exchanged a flurry of letters, in which they found the family eligible for help under the Mukhyamantri Swasthya Suraksha Kosh. This was in July. On August 2nd, the family renewed their appeal with the administration and the government. Nineteen days later, Rati Ram died. “*Ummeed thi ki koi sarkari madad milegi, isliye lekar gaye the...*” We hoped the government would help us,” says Lalita. After Rati Ram's death, Lalita and her family have issued one last appeal which reads: “We hold the government and the district administration responsible



for Rati Ram's death. Don't make us any more promises, just give us the benefits we deserve."

Lalita hugs her sons when we ask her what she wants for her future, "I don't know...I have no future but my sons do." Ankit and Sankit fish out their report cards of Class 4 and 2 respectively and proudly display their top ranks. "We went everywhere, we tried everything but nothing came of it. Does my vote matter at all," asks Lalita.

**I**N THE 2017 UP election, rural healthcare, especially for serious illnesses like cancer and mental health, finds few mentions. The Samajwadi Party manifesto mentions providing cancer specialists and mental health counsellors to rural areas but in Bundelkhand, where the average doctor to patient ratio is 1:1 lakh, is any political party making a concerted plan to attract doctors and nurses to fill the huge void at the top of the rural health pyramid?

Take the case of Manikpur Assembly constituency. Here, the doctor to patient ratio is far worse than the national average; just one government doctor for a population of over 200,000. There are no gynaecologists or female doctors. The much-touted ambulance service, introduced by the current SP government, has failed to reach all parts of the constituency, like Giduraha village, the remotest corner of Chitrakoot district. Giduraha is so far-flung that during the August floods in Bundelkhand, it was cut-off from the mainland for over a month. The village witnessed an epidemic of water-borne diseases and many pregnant women were stranded without access to the lone government health centre.

Twenty-six-year-old Sushila Pintu was the only pregnant woman rescued by the district administration during the floods. Nearly full term, Sushila travelled on a bike, an inflatable dinghy, a shared auto and an ambulance to reach the government community health centre, only to be referred to the district hospital, which was another 30 km away. When the district hospital couldn't deliver her baby because of complications, Sushila returned to the health centre where her baby was born, lived for a few minutes, and then died.

In February, nearly six months after our first visit to Giduraha, we return to find Sushila Pintu pregnant again. Despite suffering from bouts of morning sickness and occasional fever, she works as a tenant farmer for a daily sum of Rs 100, 12 hours every day. The village has seen some election activity but Sushila has missed out on this. "We never hear or see any *prachar* (campaigning) because we are in the fields all day," she says. In fact, there are few women in the village who have been part of the *jan sampark* sessions held by candidates. "We are not targeted by political parties," says Shubhrani, the village's ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activist) who had helped in Sushila's delivery. "You ask us what we want... tell me, does the government or any party address inequality? I want my legislator to work on reducing the gap between the rich and the poor," she says. "Anganwadi workers and ASHA workers protested for a month last year, what came of it? The government refused to make us permanent and increased our wages by only Rs 200. This came into effect in October but we are yet to get paid."

The Chitrakoot anganwadi union is mulling over a possible boycott of the elections. While the 2,000 anganwadi workers of the district may not carry out this threat on February 23rd, it does reveal how little attention parties, governments and candidates are paying to rural health infrastructure and its reform. Not just healthcare, but even violence against women as an election issue has found few takers among candidates and political parties who continue to harp on the '*bijli, sadak, pani*' development model. According to the National Crime Records Bureau, Uttar Pradesh tops the list for crimes against women, where a rape is recorded every 15 minutes. We travel to the village of Ananthuwa in Banda district, to meet with SV, a rape survivor, who is now fighting a solitary battle for justice. SV's fight is particularly symbolic in patriarchal Bundelkhand, and in Uttar Pradesh.

Married off in 2010, the 23-year-old is currently pursuing her BA. After she faced continuous harassment by her husband and in-laws, she moved back to her home in Ananthuwa in 2013. The next year, she joined a local non-governmental organisation called Vidhyadham Samiti as a social worker. One of the requirements of the job, SV says, was to work late hours and sometimes stay back at the office. "It was on one such day that the head of the organisation, Raja Bhaiyya, raped me," says SV. "He continued to mentally and sexually harass me. On one occasion, he told me that he had made a video and he would circulate it if I didn't keep quiet. I didn't even tell my mother about it for a long time. Many women employed by the organisation faced similar harassment but nobody dared to raise their voice."

On February 25th, 2016, SV broke her silence and walked into



a police station in Banda district to file an FIR. “*Mujhe laga ki ghut ghut ke marne se achha hai ladke mare...* I thought it is better to fight and die,” she says. Initially, the police station refused to register the FIR. Raja Bhaiyya Yadav is a well-known social activist beyond Bundelkhand. Some of the projects at his NGO were funded by the international organisation ActionAid. Almost a month later, an FIR was registered. By that time, SV had become the target of a nasty campaign mounted by local activists, NGOs and friends of Raja Bhaiyya Yadav, many of whom were women. Even Sampat Pal, the Congress candidate from Manikpur Assembly constituency and commander of Gulabi Gang, gave Raja Bhaiyya a clean chit. On March 8th, (incidentally International Womens’ Day) protests were taken out and slogans rang out against SV in the district. “*Naari nahin tu naagin hai*” was one such chant. Friends and well-wishers who supported her were slapped with counter charges. “They took out a certificate calling me character-less and even asked my village to sign on it,” says SV, “I had two options: I could die or I could fight. I chose to fight. *Dabe aur ghute hue logon ka pata nahin hota kab koi bada kadam uthade...* you never know when the oppressed will turn around and raise their voice.”

In the initial FIR, the police filed charges under Section 376 (attempt to rape) the punishment for which is not less than seven years or a life term which can extend up to 10 years. However, in

the final FIR, prepared in March, the charges have been watered down. Charges under Section 376 were modified to Section 354 (assault or criminal intent to outrage the modesty of a woman) which attracts a sentence of one-five years plus a fine. “I don’t know who changed the charges. This was done without my authorisation or consent,” says SV. It appears that the accused in the case has tampered with the FIR and still sends threats and offers of settlement. “He sends word asking me to settle in Rs 1 lakh or Rs 2 lakh. My mother wants me to, but I can’t,” SV says.

SV’s case is currently under trial in Banda district. Suspecting undue influence of the accused on the district administration, SV is trying to get her case transferred. She has also written to ActionAid, telling them of the sexual harassment, asking them to take action. Apart from an acknowledgement and terminating the contract with Vidhyadham Samiti, ActionAid has done little else. She lost her job and with that, her livelihood. She is now entirely dependent on her elderly, frail mother who is a daily wage labourer. People in the village taunt and scorn her. Even the job she found at a small property dealer in the neighbouring district went away with demonetisation.

More than anything else, including personal safety, SV wants financial security. She worries about paying bills, especially the lawyer’s fees, completing her studies and supporting her family.

## Out of the 57 candidates fielded by major political parties for the 19 seats in Bundelkhand, only 20 per cent have women candidates

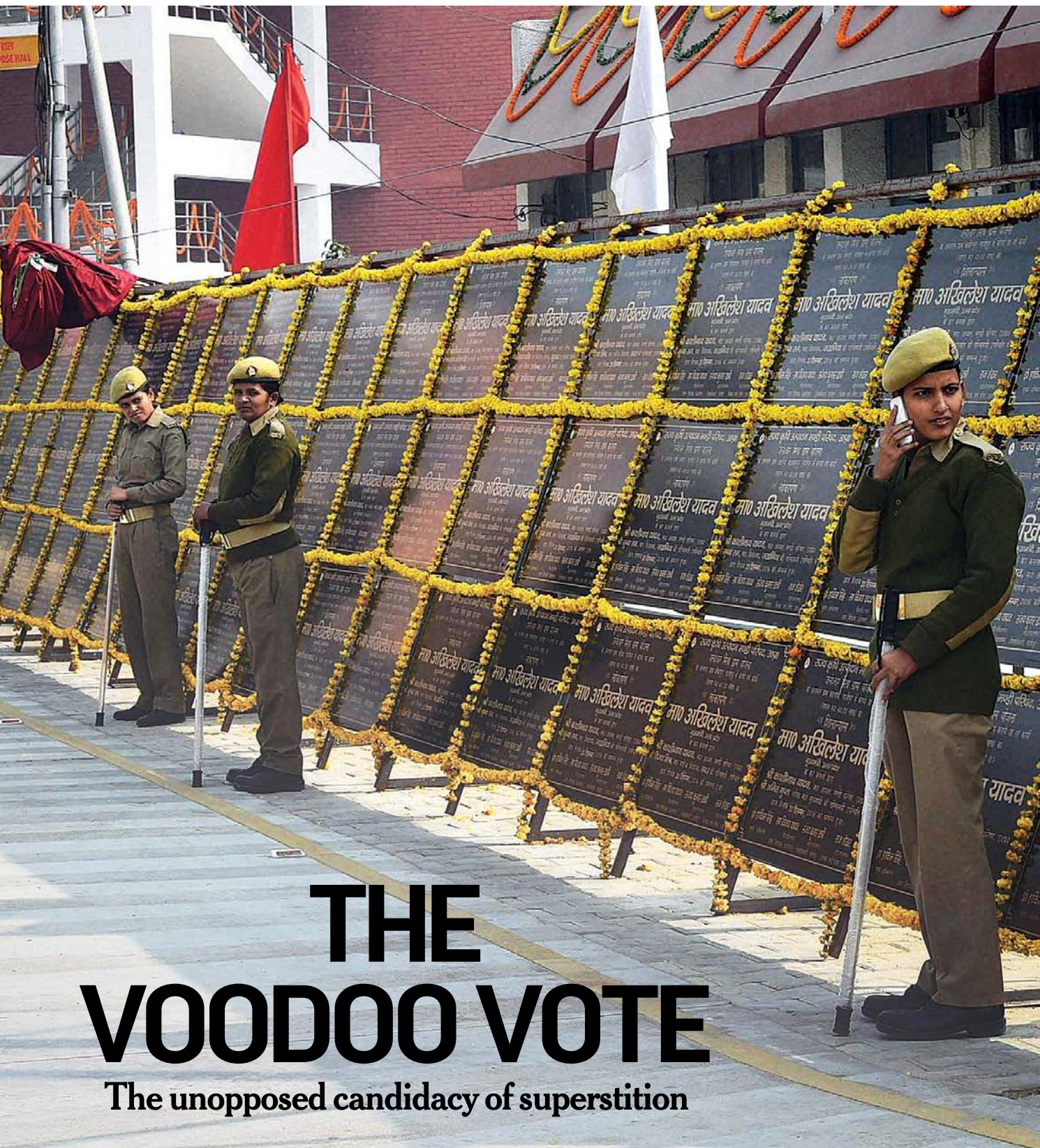


She wants a “*chota-mota job*”, stressing repeatedly on *chota-mota*, where she might go unnoticed. “The government has done nothing for me or my mother. I have no faith in these institutions. But I hope that the judge, the court will give me justice.” Out of the 30,000-odd crimes against women reported every year in Uttar Pradesh, SV is just one case. But her battle is important in Bundelkhand because along with her, more than 10 other women from the same organisation were subjected to harassment by the accused. If SV speaks, perhaps, their stories might be heard. However, this issue finds no place in the poll rhetoric of political parties in Bundelkhand.

In Mungus, Munni Devi harbours no hope that the government (present or incoming) will keep its promises. In Badokhar Bujurg, Lalita’s hopes from the sarkar were dashed. In Giduraha village, Sushila Pintu is unmoved by the sound and the fury of the most crucial election in the country. The anganwadi workers plod on, currently employed in election duty, while their demands go unmet. SV reposes no faith in government institutions to deliver her justice. But are political parties or their candidates hoping to win the Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections even listening? ■

Read The Missing Patriarch by Kuman Anshuman on  
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# THE VOODOO VOTE

The unopposed candidacy of superstition





Plaques of projects inaugurated by UP Chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav in a single day in Lucknow

## By KUMAR ANSHUMAN

**D**ECEMBER 20TH, 2016 was a busy day for Akhilesh Yadav. He had a series of inaugurations lined up. Among the early ribbons to be cut was one for a new wing of Lucknow's Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital, where he also inaugurated a Primary Health Centre for Faizabad district. Over the next six hours, the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh was on a ceremonial spree of laying foundation stones and opening new facilities within the state capital. In some places, multiple plaques were unveiled with a single tug of string. At the end of it, having spoken at 13 different spots, he had announced thousands of public projects—worth over Rs 50,000 crore—for 59 of the state's 75 districts. With Assembly elections due to start in February, he was short of time. Once polling dates were fixed, the Election Commission's model code of conduct would block him. Seen this way, it made sense to claim credit for all those projects regardless of their state of completion, and he made no bones about it. "Most of these projects would be complete and available for public use in the next few months," said Akhilesh Yadav, "But since it would be after the election notification, the government won't be able to inaugurate them. We are doing it now so that people are reminded of our efforts and commitment to development of the state."

Why that particular date was chosen, however, had an entirely other 'reason'. "After a long time, *tripushkar* and *sarva sidhhi yog* coincided on a Tuesday, which is rare. Such a *muhurat* is very auspicious," explains Arvind Mishra, a Lucknow-based astrologer, referring to a specific period of time with a special conjunction of stars and planets in the sky that's said to act on human affairs as a tripler of good deeds. "All the inaugurations were done between 11 am and 6 pm. Anything done in this phase would allow Akhilesh Yadav to do it thrice in his life, which means he will be Chief Minister for another two terms."

Yet, there is nothing official about it. Akhilesh's Samajwadi Party denies any such consideration taken into account, though if pressed, party members say 'there is no harm' in starting something at a time blessed by heavenly bodies as per Hindu tradition. "This will make Akhilesh more popular in the coming days as per astrological calculations," says Radheshyam Shastri, another astrologer who politicians of all major parties visit in Lucknow.

In election season, it seems nobody in UP wants to take a chance. With the stakes so high, what's a little superstition? This also happens to be the state with India's most infamous chief ministerial curse: the so-called Noida jinx. Any chief minister who visits this industrial outgrowth of Delhi located in UP, goes the old suburban saying, loses power in the next polls. The record seems to confirm it. Veer Bahadur Singh, Narayan Dutt Tiwari





PAWAN KUMAR

The 'lucky' chair that Narendra Modi used as he began the BJP's campaign for the 2014 General Election in UP. The chair is kept in a glass enclosure at the party's office in Kanpur and used only for special occasions

and Kalyan Singh have in the past fallen victim to it. In 1995, SP founder Mulayam Singh Yadav visited Noida as Chief Minister and lost the elections held soon after. In 2011, BSP's Mayawati made light of the curse while going there towards the end of her term to open the Dalit Smarak Sthal, but lost power within a few months at the hustings of 2012. Many observers expected Akhilesh Yadav, the next Chief Minister, to break the jinx in an effort to portray himself as a progressive leader, but he too has stayed away from Noida.

Superstitions in UP cut across party lines. Take the BJP. Aiming to end what it calls its '14-year *vanvaas*' (forest exile) in the state, it appears to be counting on both supernatural and electoral rolls for victory. What worked for it in the General Election of 2014, it hopes, will come good again. Before those polls, in a renovation of its office in Lucknow at 7 Vidhan Sabha Marg, its main gate was shifted from the southeast to face the east on astrological advice. The old entrance is now used only for VIP movement. After the party swept the state's Lok Sabha seats, the rest of the office has been redone for every room to have an eastern entrance. Even the chair on which the state BJP president sits at his desk has been arranged to face the direction of sunrise. "In Sanskrit, there is a *shloka*, *Purvanumukh*, which means an entry from the east is always good," says Hriday Narayan Dixit, chief spokesperson of the state BJP. "It is up to you whether you believe in it or not."

Dixit says his own life experiences have convinced him that many such beliefs are valid. "For a few years, I studied various superstitions and tried to contradict them with real-life happenings, and more or less I found them to be true," he says, "But there are times when what happens is the obvious outcome." As an MLA, when Dixit was appointed a minister in Kalyan Singh's cabinet, he was allotted Bungalow No 13 on Mall Avenue in Lucknow. "Everyone said that whoever gets this bungalow loses his ministerial berth in the next term," he says, "In the next elections, BJP lost its mandate and hence I lost my ministry. But this was not because of the jinx. The political scenario changes every five years now and it is difficult to hold onto power in state like UP."

The focus of the party's appeal to mystical forces, however, is a wooden chair used by Narendra Modi to address the BJP's Vijay Shankhnad rally—literally, the blowing of a conch shell for victory—at Kanpur's Indira Nagar ground on October 19th, 2013, which kicked off its campaign in UP with him as the prime ministerial candidate. For another rally in Kanpur, at Koyla Nagar, Modi was given the same lucky mascot to sit on. "It has now become a holy chair for us," says Surendra Maithani, Kanpur BJP president, "since the Prime Minister started his election campaign using this chair and went on to win a majority for the party." The BJP's rise to power at the Centre was enabled by the 71 Lok Sabha seats it won in UP, cause enough to turn the chair into a kind of

The statue of freedom fighter Chittu Pande in Ballia that is thought to bring bad electoral luck to any politician who either garlands it or passes by the chowk where it stands







museum piece. On display in a case of unbreakable glass in the party's Kanpur office, it is only for special use. "Any senior party leader who comes to Kanpur makes a point to see the chair," says Maithani. Rajnath Singh, Dr Harshvardhan and Varun Gandhi are among those who have done so.

The most recent occasion for which the chair was pulled out, cleaned and polished, was for Modi's Parivartan Rally on December 19th last year as a part of the BJP's Assembly campaign. "It will bring luck for us in the UP elections too, like it did in 2014," says Maithani. But the Special Protection Group team guarding the Prime Minister didn't allow it to be placed on the dais for security reasons, and this came as a let-down for many party leaders. "We understand that now as a prime minister, there are several restrictions on him," says Maithani, "Nevertheless we expect to do well in UP."

**T**HE RIVAL CONGRESS is no better. In Lucknow, it is said that a UP Pradesh Congress Committee chief gets the party office whitewashed only at the risk of getting straw-brushed out of the post within six months. In 1992, Mahavir Prasad had the structure painted as PCC president and lost the position. In 1995, Salman Khurshid did likewise and met the same fate. In 1998, it was Sriprakash Jaiswal. The most recent victim is Rita Bahuguna

Joshi, who had been urged by senior leaders not to have the office whitewashed, but she went ahead anyway in defiance of the curse. Nirmal Khatri, who replaced her, left the main building untouched—only having a new media conference room built—but lost his post to Raj Babbar anyway.

There is also an Ashoka tree in the Congress office compound whose height partymen have an eye on. If it grows taller than the building, some say, the party will be in deep trouble in UP. As if this isn't already the case, the tree is routinely trimmed and pruned to size. "These are all rumours circulated by some office bearers of the state Congress," says Nirmal Khatri. "I never take these considerations into mind before taking any decision in the party. I don't believe in all this."

Near the UP border in the state of Madhya Pradesh, there is a temple over which no politician hoping to win an election lets his helicopter fly. This is a temple atop the Kamadgiri Hill of Chitrakoot, which has mythological significance as the place Lord Rama is believed to have spent eleven-and-a-half years of his exile. On leaving, Lord Rama is said to have blessed the hill-ock with the power to fulfill the wishes of anyone who walks around it in a ritual *parikrama*. A part of the 5 km walkway is in UP, whose Chief Minister Mulayam Singh Yadav had visited the place by chopper in 2007 and lost the state polls right after that. In April 2013, when a BJP state executive meeting was scheduled





PAWAN KUMAR

in Chitrakoot, LK Advani, who was to address the delegates, opted to have his helicopter land in Gwalior and travel from there to the venue by road. "There is also a belief that whoever comes to Chitrakoot has to do a *parikrama* of the hill," says Mahant Divyanand Maharaj of Peeli Kothi, Chitrakoot, "Leaders of different political parties come here for this to fulfill their wishes." After the BJP meeting, he recalls, all members of the state executive had done so, praying for the success of the party in the 2014 General Election.

The SP's Raghuraj Pratap Singh, alias Raja Bhaiya, a UP minister, is said to perform this *parikrama* once every month. Congress leader Digvijay Singh also used to frequent the place when he was Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh. The state's current Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan too makes it a point to do the ritual once in a while. Akhilesh Yadav has twice visited Chitrakoot, once in 2013 to distribute laptops, and again last year to inaugurate some projects for the drought-afflicted region. "He did take out time to visit the temple, but has not performed a *parikrama*," says Divyanand Maharaj. He refuses to say if this could be a bad omen for UP's Chief Minister, but other priests attribute the turmoil in his party to this neglect. "[Akhilesh Yadav] should come and complete his visit by performing the *parikrama*," says one.

If Chitrakoot has a self-imposed no-fly zone for politicians, Balia town of UP has a no-go chowk. While Balia was the home

The Congress office in Lucknow that a chief of UP's Pradesh Congress Committee gets whitewashed at the risk of losing the post soon after, as has happened noticeably often

of Mangal Pandey, whose rebellion set off the 1857 Uprising against British Raj, its other famous freedom fighter Chittu Pande, a prominent face of the 1942 Quit India Movement—he was called 'Sher-e-Balia' by Jawaharlal Nehru—has a statue erected in his honour at a crossing named after him near Indira Market. However, Pande would have never imagined that politicians would develop a fear of his sculpted public presence. No leader garlands the statue or leads a procession past the chowk,

even though it's the shortest route to the town's election nomination office, lest it ruin his chances at the ballot. "I don't remember when it started, but everyone follows it," says Bachcha Pathak, a former state minister and Congress leader. "I don't know about new generation leaders, but people say no one dares to defy [the belief]. Former Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar was a socialist leader and he didn't care about all this, but even he avoided the chowk during elections."

"As a society, we Indians are very superstitious," says Professor AK Verma, a political scientist based in Kanpur. "Politicians are products of our society, and hence, like we have our superstitions, they have theirs. It only becomes stronger over the years when these new generation leaders don't try to break the myths." Over a period of time, he adds, it takes the shape of a local folk tale. And like in electoral politics elsewhere, para-narratives in UP often take precedence over rational appeals. ■





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# THE TRAGEDY OF TEJAS

**The Government doesn't see that the commercial bonanza for foreign countries is choking off funds for home-grown aircraft**

By BHARAT KARNAD

**D**EPENDING ON WHAT'S involved, legacy can be a good thing or a bad thing. In the case of the Indian state, bureaucracy, and especially the military, legacy has proved a liability. The colonial system and approach were retained in every aspect of government for want of ready alternatives and the fear of disruption. It has particularly hurt the armed services because they have stayed stuck in time. Thus, the Army's main force is arrayed northwestward, the Air Force thinks as a tactical regional adjunct of another out-of-area air force (with the Royal Air Force missing), and the Navy imitates the attitude and outlook of the US Navy, which replaced its British counterpart, replete with a tilt towards big ships at a time when supersonic and hypersonic cruise missiles and remote-controlled mini-submarines and attack boats are making them obsolete.

The three services also have in common the acute institutional hankering for Western military hardware, which was thwarted for 30 odd years (the mid-60s to mid-90s) by Cold War politics and the availability of Russian equipment in the Soviet era at 'friendship prices'. Now that that constraint is lifted, they are reverting wherever possible to buying cost-prohibitive Western armaments with a vengeance, often at the expense of indigenously designed and developed weapon systems, such as the Arjun Main Battle Tank and Tejas Light Combat Aircraft (LCA), that have proved as good, when not better, than foreign items.

No, a kill order by the Ministry of Defence (MoD) for the LCA programme is not in the offing because it is advisable for the politician and the military brass to talk *desi* and not openly prefer *firang* (refer the glossy AeroIndia pullouts in newspapers). A high technology 'prestige' project capable of seeding a burgeon-





The Tejas has clocked in excess of 3,000 flying hours without a single incident, a record unsurpassed by any combat aircraft under development anywhere

The AeroIndia 2017 Air Show, that opened in Bengaluru on Valentine's Day and ends on February 18th, features the foreign accomplices—the Swedish Saab Gripen E, the Super Hawk optimised for short-range air defence and touted in some quarters as the UK's answer to the LCA, the French Rafale, and the American fighter planes, the Lockheed Martin 'Block 70' F-16 and the Boeing F-18E/F with the prospective payoffs overcoming the initial resistance from President Donald Trump. Except for the Super Hawk, these are all aircraft that had been entered in IAF's Medium Multi-Role Combat Aircraft competition, won in 2012 by the Rafale. Except, new-generation warfare featuring drone swarms and advanced air defence systems are expected to make manned fighter planes extinct.

But why the immense foreign interest? Firstly, because India is expected to buy 200-250 of the chosen plane with a full weapons suite and costing \$250-\$300 million each, for a total contract with only limited holdings of spares and service support of around \$7.5 billion to \$9 billion. Every supplier also promises to set up a modern global manufacturing and servicing hub for his aircraft and a technology innovation and industrial eco-system of small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs) to generate employment, and, with full transfer of technology, a capacity locally to design and develop follow-on fighter aircraft. This will take many years to realise. So add another \$3-4 billion to the bill for hub-development. After factoring in inflation and currency fluctuations, over the 30-40 year lifetime of the aircraft, the total take from this deal for a single-engined fighter for the winning foreign firm could be as much as \$50 billion. To get perspective, this sum equals the cost of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor with networks of roads and power plants stretching from Baltistan to Gwadar, which will be that state's infrastructure and economic backbone.

Secondly, India's track record of squandering high-cost transferred technology by the Defence Public Sector Units (DPSUs) and ordnance factories, and their never venturing beyond licence manufacture (LM) entailing Meccano-level screwdriver technology, is well known. Thus, no technologies were ingested from the MiG-21, Jaguar, and Su-30MKI LM contracts nor any design bureaus for technology innovation created. The international arms peddlers are only too aware of this situation and of the likelihood that LM agreements will inevitably lead to cascading sales of tech upgrade packages and CKD (completely knocked down) and SKD (semi-knocked down) kits to assemble the aircraft with. For the foreign supplier, it is an endlessly profitable cycle ensuring that, in real terms, at least 80 per cent of the monetary value of the contract is returned to the home country, and the remaining treated as 'offsets' mandated by the Indian Government that have so far produced few real benefits.

Thirdly, just as India's buy of the Hawk trainer rescued British Aerospace, and that of 36 Rafales—with possibly another 80-100 of these planes in the pipeline—has put the French Company Dassault in the clover, New Delhi's purchase of the Gripen will

ing aerospace sector in the country and imperilling imports will, however, be undermined on the sly, by restricting funds and the offtake of the indigenous on the plea that the monies are needed to finance imports of combat aircraft to meet immediate requirements, and by simultaneously diverting the attention, effort and resources of the LCA programme into the Mk-II version and the more 'futuristic', 'super-stealthy', Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft project. By insisting on stiff specifications and delivery deadlines, these programmes will be set up for eventual rejection. Meanwhile, the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and Aeronautical Development Agency (ADA)—the progenitors of the Tejas—will be thus kept occupied and out of the IAF's hair, which will shield the service from unwanted political pressure to 'buy Indian' or to invest in the LCA. But we are getting ahead of the story.

throw a lifeline to the combat aviation industry in Sweden, and Lockheed's worn-out F-16 assembly line in Fort Worth, Texas, instead of being discarded, will be sold to India to earn revenue. Too much is at stake for the foreign companies in the race not to over-promise and under-bid. The extent of under-bidding is evidenced in Dassault's original price for 126 Rafales of around \$12 billion that actually ended up fetching the IAF a mere 36 planes. The larger pattern that has emerged over the past many decades is for an apparently 'very rich' India to subsidise and sustain defence industries in seemingly 'poor' states—namely, the United States, Russia, France, United Kingdom, France, and Israel.

US defence sources estimate India's military procurement outlays in the next few decades to be of the order of \$250 billion. If roughly 10 per cent of any contracted deal is the usual down payment—in the Rafale case, for instance, it amounts to Rs 9,700 crore—a staggering \$25 billion will have to be shelled out before a single item turns up on Indian shores. One can see why India is the consumer of choice in the international arms market.

**I**T IS WORRISOME that the Government, trapped in its 'Make in India' rhetoric, doesn't see that the commercial bonanza for foreign countries will choke off the funds necessary for the home-grown, and for investment to build a comprehensively capable defence industry in the country. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar appear not to have caught on to the fact that foreign arms suppliers are not in the business of making customers independent of them, but of bolting them down as dependents. Making the country a minor partner in the global supply chains of major transnational defence industrial corporations—the best that the present tilt of 'Make in India' policy can achieve—begs the question if this is all India should aspire to. And more, importantly, whether India will ever have the kind of financial cushion needed for \$250 billion worth of military wherewithal, even as the tradeoffs between social welfare and developmental needs on the one hand and nation security demands on the other hand get starker. If such massive defence capital expenditure is somehow managed, whether frittering away the country's wealth when it perpetuates only a hollow national security, is politically prudent. But there's no gainsaying that it will firm up the country's reputation as the largest arms importer in the world. India accounts for 14 per cent of the world's arms imports, followed by China at 4.7 per cent (except China has compensated by increasing its arms exports 143 per cent in 2010-2015 to reach \$1.6 billion). Put another way, over 2000-2015, India bought weapons valued at \$120 billion: money that could have obtained for the country sizeable defence industrial infrastructure and skilled manpower instead of military hardware that can be ground to a stop anytime any of a host of suppliers decide for whatever reasons to withhold spares. So, not only is India's security hostage to the interests of external players,

but the country is paying exorbitantly for it too.

The reason adduced for this sorry state of affairs by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute is that the Indian defence industry has 'largely failed to produce competitive indigenously-designed weapons'—a view the Indian military heartily endorses. But why is this so? Principally because the armed services obstruct indigenous arms projects from succeeding. The Tejas programme has progressed in fits and starts, and been delayed interminably, in the main, for two reasons. One, the Air Staff Requirements were changed numerous times on the plea of the IAF wanting an up-to-date plane. Thus, re-design and structural alterations became necessary, for example, when the IAF demanded installation of a refuelling probe after prototypes had already been built. It imposed significant time and cost penalties and hurt the delivery deadline. Two, the IAF insisted on a 'finished product' with all weapon trials and fitments completed and Initial Operational Clearance (IOC) and Final Operational Clearance (FOC) secured, before accepting it.

This is contrary to the procedure followed by all other major air forces. In the US, its newest joint strike fighter, the F-35, first entered squadron service with the US Air Force and the US Marines with technical refinements, structural modifications, and proper weapons and avionics integration being carried out on the basis of continuous feedback from frontline pilots after the plane's induction. Some serious problems with the F-35, such as with the zero-zero ejection seat system, helmet-mounted sensors, avionics, and the F-135 power plant, are all being corrected even as the aircraft is flying around. This rigmarole is called 'concurrency', meaning induction and capability improvements happening simultaneously after the user-service has taken charge of the combat plane. In the case of the Tejas though, the onus is entirely on the development/production unit to put in IAF's hands a battle-ready fighter

A Lockheed C-130 Hercules on display at Aero India 2017 in Bengaluru





aircraft, inclusive of the promised weapons load. It reflects IAF's reluctance to take ownership of the Tejas even after it has proved its druthers. The truly dastardly aspect is that the standard applied by the IAF to the LCA does not apply to imported aircraft. Thus, the Mirage 2000 inducted in 1985 flew unarmed for the next three years because the contracted weapons had not been delivered. It was political prompting alone that hastened the formation of the so-far-only-Tejas unit in the Air Force, the 45 Squadron with only a handful of LCAs, based in Sullur, Andhra Pradesh.

The other means adopted by IAF to undercut the Tejas programme is to order only a few aircraft at a time to deny the production units economies of scale. Thus, the official indent is just for 20 LCAs after IOC, and another 20 for post-FOC, with the possibility held out for 43 planes for a total strength of only 83 Tejas, when the actual requirement is for 200-250 single-engined combat aircraft of this type, which IAF proposes to meet by buying one of the foreign aircraft displayed at AeroIndia. This is because IAF doesn't take pride in the LCA, or care to have it in its fleet, and also perhaps, because the Tejas programme offers no material inducements for

persons in the procurement loop, such as endless trips to Paris, Stockholm, etcetera, what is risibly called 'pocket money', and so on. With the IAF variant of Tejas so stymied, its navalised version too will be emasculated, with the Indian Navy now joining the Air Force in opting for imported aircraft for its carriers—the navalised Rafale, Gripen, F-18, and the MiG-29K all seen at the Air Show.

Settling on licence manufacture of foreign planes serves yet another purpose. It preserves the monopoly of aircraft production for the highly inefficient DPSUs, like Hindustan Aerospace Ltd. DPSUs are controlled by the Department of Defence Production (DPP) in the MoD and is valuable turf that its bureaucrats are loath to lose, which can happen if, despite every obstacle, a project climbs reaches the cusp of commercial success.

Tejas is a success if only it is given a chance. A 4.5-generation aircraft, like the Rafale, the LCA is far stealthier, more agile, and with a far bigger potential for growth as a versatile fighting platform. Significantly, it has clocked in excess of 3,000 flying hours without a single incident—a record unsurpassed by any combat aircraft under development anywhere, at any time. Its sleek looks and ease of handling, evident in the demonstration flights at the Bahrain Air Show last year, evinced praise from experts and enormous interest world-wide, with many countries inquiring about its availability. Naturally, fear has arisen in HAL and DPP/MoD circles that the Tejas may elicit commercial interest in the private sector, and private sector proposals for producing this aircraft for the IAF and for profit from exports, may follow. This would set a precedent of a DPSU being bypassed, of the technologies required to be transferred to a private sector consortium by the Aeronautical Development Agency and DRDO, and the diminishing of the stake and role of the public sector and DPP/MoD in the budding Indian defence industry of the future.

It is an end-state the IAF-DPP/MoD-DPSU complex will not abide, and what it doesn't want, it will do away with. It has a stellar record of success in eliminating inconvenient indigenous conventional armaments projects that threaten its vested interests, usually by 'throttling them in the cradle'. In the late-70s, the Mk-II version of the Marut HF-24 multi-role fighter was terminated by the Indira Gandhi regime siding with the IAF to buy the Jaguar low level strike aircraft. The original Marut was designed by one of the greatest designers of the World War II-era, Dr Kurt Tank of Focke-Wulf fame, who was imaginatively brought in by Jawaharlal Nehru to design and produce the first supersonic fighter outside of the US and Europe. Tank had a prototype flying by 1961, inside of six years of his getting the commission.

Tank's most gifted Indian protégé, Raj Mahindra, designed the Mk-II, which was eliminated by the Jaguar buy, whence began India's rapid slide towards an all imported Air Force. If Mahindra's Marut successor aircraft was killed by *jhatka*, the Tejas will be bled slowly, killed by the *halaal* method. ■



*Bharat Karnad is Professor for National Security Studies at the Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi, author, most recently, of Why India is Not a Great Power (Yet), and blogs at Bharatkarnad.com*

**The Indian defence industry has 'largely failed to produce competitive indigenously-designed weapons', a view the Indian military endorses. But why is this so? Principally because the armed services obstruct indigenous arms projects from succeeding**



# Indebted to Pleasure

Discovering the Thailand beyond the clichés

By ADITYA IYER

**P**RESSED PALMS AND lowered heads are a common sight in Thailand. The greeting even has a word: 'Sawat-dee-ka'. Under the spirit house (an idol of Brahma) in Nana Plaza, though, palms pressed together are not a form of greeting. They symbolise a prayer ostensibly ignored by the gods. It's 5:45 pm on a Bangkok evening and the girls have begun entering the foyer of the plaza in batches. All lowering spines and folding hands.

Only then do they vanish behind the sparkling purple curtains of go-go bars. In less than two hours, it's show time.

Apart from the girls and the workers, the plaza is vacant. But beyond the neon-lit entrance sign that reads 'Worlds Largest Erotica Playground', the street is teeming with anticipation. On the balcony bars, men (young Indians and old Europeans, mostly) sip their beers with one eye on the clock. At 7.30 pm, the plaza will be ready to receive customers. Below the balconies, time is running out for the unemployed girls in various stages of undress.

A lady in a red skirt and yellow stilettos click-clacks her way into the plaza and makes all heads on the balconies turn. "She not a lady, she a ladyboy," says a giggling Thai girl, her hand on the knee of a British septuagenarian. They are seated on the same side of a table by a balcony. "How can you tell?" asks the old man. "Is it the Adam's apple? Or do you know her?"

"Noooooo," replies the girl, playfully angry. "If she vewy

pweety, she a ladyboy."

The plaza is split in two sections. Go-go bars with girls and go-go bars with 'ladyboys', the street term for Thailand's transgenders. Before they take the stage, they crowd the hairdresser's on the third floor of the plaza. At once the make-up artist handles curling irons and hair straighteners, eye-liners and perfumes, blush and wet wipes. The clients leave, spruced up and satisfied.

With 10 minutes to go for the show, the saloon is vacant. The make-up artist steps out for a breath, and a cigarette. "Without these girls there would be no tourism in Thailand," he says. "They have to look good." He watches the tourists from the street drain into the bars. Into Rainbow II and Shanghai. Into Spanky's and Angel Witch.

The logo nailed outside Angel Witch is misleading: a fully

PHOTOS GETTY IMAGES





The Thailand tourism festival is held every January in Bangkok



The parade is a representation of Thailand in its entirety. When the dancers move with choreographed poise, the dragon undulates like a saw-scaled viper. Up above the park, baffled crows attack recording drones

clothed girl on a broom. Step inside and you realise that the place hasn't seen a broom in days. Clothes, too, are at a premium. The club is the size of a standard living room. Seats and sofas rest against the walls, forming a concentric circle around the stage at the centre. The raised platform holds as many as 20 girls at once, all demanding the customer's attention.

Four Indians flock into the club, taking their place on the slab closest to the exit. One of them calls for the waitress. "How to get lap dance?" he asks. The waitress cannot understand. "Lap dance," he says again, this time pointing towards the stage and then patting his thighs. "If you want to talk to girl then you buy her drink. 175 baht," she says. "If you like then pay bar fine, 700 baht, and take her to hotel."

By about 10 pm, there's a queue outside almost every club. "Feels like every tourist in this country is on this street, doesn't

it?" says Desmond, a 53-year old man from Ottawa, Canada. He and his mates are in the quadrangle, overwhelmed by the crowded stairwells. But Desmond is determined to make a night of it. Tonight, he says, he turns 54. "I wouldn't necessarily pay for sex. But I wouldn't mind some female attention, if you know what I mean. Why else would I come to Thailand?"

Surely, this country has more to offer, I say. But Desmond is vehement. "If I wanted to laze on a beach, I would've gone to the Caribbean, wouldn't I?"



**T**ANASAK PATIMAPRAGORN, Deputy Prime Minister of Thailand, is seated on a throne in the middle of Lumpini Park. Before taking his seat, Patimapragorn had looked up at the towering hospital just beyond the park, and at the 20-storey poster of the late king Bhumibol Adulyadej wrapping its front facade. He then folded his hands and lowered his head in respect.

Since the death of the world's longest reigning monarch in October last year, almost all high rises in Bangkok—from banks to luxury hotels—have been draped similarly. Giant pictures of the king in his gold finery, framed by a line that reads (in Thai): 'We shall reign with righteousness, for the benefit of the Siamese people.' But this poster on the hospital is special. Here the king looms over the first Thailand Tourism Festival since his passing.

"Tourism accounts for close to a tenth of our economy," says Sarayut, one of the festival's many volunteers. I am in the country at the invitation of the Tourism Authority of Thailand. "You can see how seriously we take promoting our land. The deputy PM doesn't inaugurate just anything." The people of Bangkok take it almost as seriously. At the tourism festival, locals far outnumber the tourists. From children in school uniforms to businessmen in tuxedos, black ribbons pinned to all their bosoms (Thailand is in a state of mourning for one year), Bangkok has emptied itself into Lumpini.

Patimapragorn beats a gong and the parade begins. The parade, like the stalls spread about the park, is a representation of Thailand in its entirety. From the north, bare-chested men with painted faces wear menacing eyes and thrash at their drums. From the east, effeminate teens fan their faces and blow kisses at the crowd. From the south, sarong-clad girls twirl their colourful umbrellas. From the west, more painted bodies zig-zag their way in, hands carrying an orange dragon overhead. When they move with choreographed poise, the dragon undulates like a saw-scaled viper. Up above Lumpini Park, baffled crows attack recording drones.

"This stuff, this celebration of Thailand is exotic for us locals too," says Sarayut. "One would assume that we, Thai people, are aware of the many different cultures in our country. But we aren't. So what this festival offers is all of Thailand in one park. Now that's a great reason to leave whatever you are doing and come here, especially if you are in Bangkok."

On Sarayut's recommendation, we tear into a bowl of clams and oysters from the 'South' stalls. "I'm assuming this is your favourite part of Thailand," I say. Sarayut smiles. "All this is a celebration of the mainland. A celebration of land creatures," he says. "To really see Thailand, you must leave the land and go into the water. That's my favourite Thailand, the underwater one."

**N**ATHEYI, THE CAMBODIAN speedboat captain, slows the engine down to a purr at Koh Yak, an uninhabited island of igneous boulders and dense foliage. The island is the size of a basketball arena. He hauls his anchor into the green expanse and says, "Numbeh onesnohkeewing prace in Asia." Natheyi hands us snorkel masks, flippers and no advice; just one cursory 'go see many phishes, this is weel Thailand pawadise.' The protagonist of *The Beach*, played by Leonardo DiCaprio, had once said something

similar. "Trust me, it's paradise," the dialogue goes. "This is where the hungry come to feed. For mine is a generation that circles the globe and searches for something we haven't tried before." In this Danny Boyle film on Thailand, Richard—DiCaprio's character—leaves the tourist orgies of Pattaya and Phuket and Krabi behind, only to chance upon an untouched island. The filmmakers could well have been referring to any of the paradisiacal Kohs (meaning islands)—Koh Yak, Koh Rang, Koh Klum, Koh Wai, or even Koh Mak—satellites around the nucleus of Koh Chang.

Like the island in the movie, Koh Chang (Thai for Elephant Island) is well off the beaten path—closer to Cambodia than it is to the tourist attractions of Thailand. To get here, one must first reach the southeastern coastal city of Trat. To give you an idea of just how off-the-map Trat itself is, Bangkok Airways flies just three ATR-72s (indicating the number of seats) daily, to and from the capital. From Trat, Koh Chang is then a 45 minute ferry

The first thing that strikes you once you're afloat is the **water's visibility**. One would reckon that the corals, coloured a radioactive purple and red, must be at least 15 metres below eye level



Koh Yak is a snorkeller's paradise



# Q&A

with

**Ashutosh Bishnoi,**  
Managing Director and CEO of  
Mahindra Asset Management  
Company Private Limited

ride away. "Very few *farangs* (foreigners) coming here," the owner of Banjo Bar on Koh Chang's Lonely Beach had told me. "Injuns? I seen more sharks than Injuns." Koh Chang, and its surrounding constellation of smaller islands, is not about massage parlours or go-go bars. Neither does it boast of monasteries or temples. At least none famous enough to make the trip. "People coming here for one reason, to enter new world. Underwater world."

To do that, enter this sub-aqueous universe, one must first get to the gateway at the southern tip of the trunk of Elephant Island; the Bang Bao pier. The pier is flanked on either side all the way till the loading point by two bustling markets, a Colaba Causeway on stilts. One nameless restaurant on the pier displays this message: 'If It Swim, We Make Dish.' Natheyi, the body-art loving sailor, treats his speedboat less like a captain and more like a cowboy. He laughs his version of hee-haws as we crunch into prancing waves for an hour, *en route* to Koh Yak, the 'real Thailand paradise'.

We leap into the vastness, careful to avoid the few snorkel tubes poking out of the water. This paradise has a sprinkle of early birds; but because it is paradise, we all catch our proverbial worms. Or eels. Or rays. Or coral groupers. Or schools of fish. Or 'phishes', as Natheyi calls them in their collective.

The first thing that strikes you once you're afloat is the water's visibility. One would reckon that the corals, coloured a radioactive purple and red, must be at least 15 metres below eye level. Then, once the sound dies down (apart from the Darth Vader-like suction through the mouthpipe), the sight truly takes over.

Here you have to be blind to not find Nemo—the orange and white clownfish made famous in the Pixar animation *Finding Nemo*. A troop of sergeant majors—a flat-faced, monochromatic lot—march on towards the hypnotic reef at the bottom of the rocks and it's impossible not to follow. But you lose them when you see the majestic batfish—creatures built like Batman logos wearing striped pajamas—feeding in the crevice of the rocks.

You circumvent the island, your eyes peeled on submerged rocks, when the batfish slip deeper into cavities (they're shy and we're voyeurs), but you stop halfway around and dead float at the sight of the translucent brain, an octopus emerging from the seabed. You point and scream with joy, but no one can hear you. It only shatters your equilibrium, filling your mask and lungs with water, forcing you to resurface. By the time you recompose and dunk back in again, the octopus is gone and you will never know where.

Natheyi knows his way around the waters like we do watering holes around a city. We trot to the island of Koh Klum, where the predominant species are schools, scratch that, university towns of trumpetfish. Them with their needle snouts preying on wide expanses of yellow algae. Then we canter to Koh Wai, where seahorses and surgeonfish coexist in rural harmony.

Stung by sea urchins and growling with hunger after many daylight hours of snorkelling, we gallop away on Natheyi's 'Princess' to the island resort of Koh Mak, all white sands and jute hammocks. After a few pints of foamy beer, the waiter arrives with our lunch by the green tide. "Pla Muak," he says. "Octopus tentacles with lemon seafood sauce. Hope you enjoy." ■

## Q2 I just love buying gold. Isn't gold the best investment?

There are a lot of beliefs, myths and traditions in India around investing your savings in gold. As a nation it is our obsession to invest in gold. Did you know that India is the world's largest consumer of gold since anyone can remember?

This is mostly because of our age-old belief that gold is safe. Besides, of course, when it comes to weddings it is a necessary purchase. And we Indians love to celebrate marriages!

## Q2a So you agree? That investing in gold is the best thing?

I am not saying gold is not good, but please think about a few important facts:

1. Gold is very difficult to keep safe, although it captures value safely.
2. Gold is also very difficult to acquire or liquidate. Try to sell a small coin and you'll find out that only jewelers are interested in buying gold and they will offer anything between 8% to 12% less than the market value. That is a big loss! And when you buy it from them too you could end up paying the same 8% to 12% more.

## Q2b So, what is the correct approach to investing in Gold?

Other investment avenues generate returns—real estate offers rent, equities give dividends, bonds and deposits give interest; gold yields no natural income. It is a dead investment.

Gold is actually the highest quality of money or cash that there is. It is money by human choice for over 3,000 years. It is money in any part of the world and it can be exchanged for any commodity. It needs no government's sanction to be called money.

So, you should hold as much gold as you need to keep as safe cash. In individual portfolios that could mean anywhere between 5% to 25%. And one of the best ways to hold Gold is in the form of a highly liquid gold instrument—a Gold Mutual Fund. One can buy or sell gold at its Net Asset Value anytime on the stock exchange or from the Mutual Fund.

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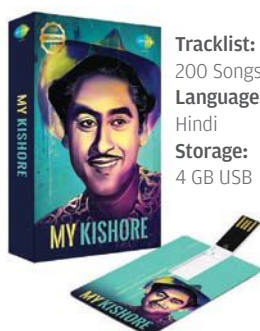
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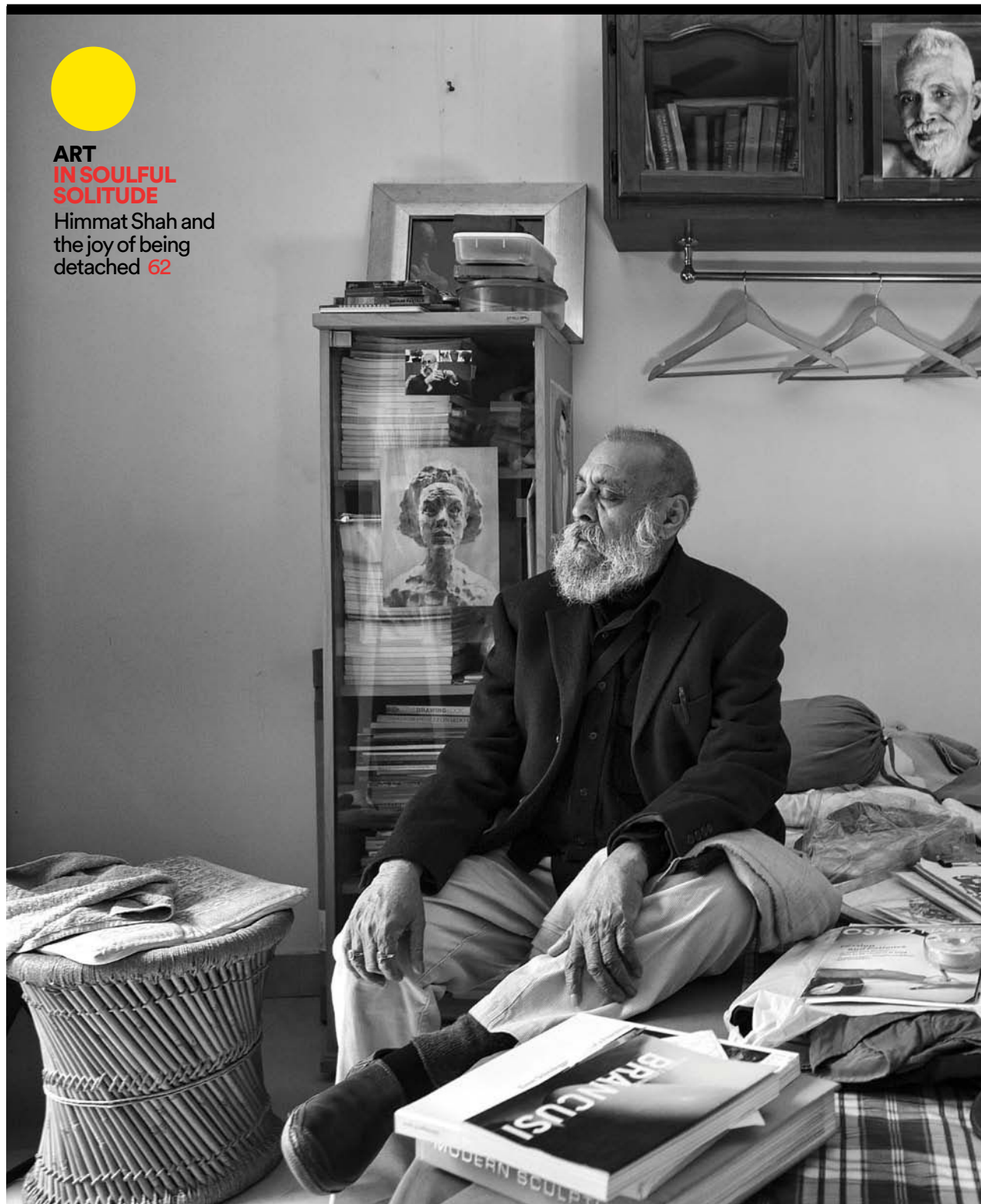
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## ART IN SOULFUL SOLITUDE

Himmat Shah and  
the joy of being  
detached **62**



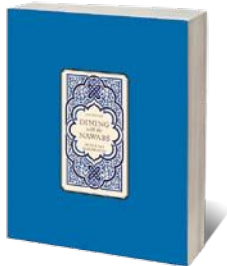
Photograph by **ROHIT CHAWLA**



# The King's Meal

A lavish culinary journey with the subcontinent's royal families

By Nandini Nair



**DINING WITH THE NAWABS**

Meera Ali

Photographs Karam Puri

Concept and editing Priya Kapoor

Lustre Press

276 Pages | Rs 4,995

**D**INING WITH THE *Nawabs* is not the kind of book that you can perch on your chest and read in bed. It is a silver-edged tome that mandates it be ceremoniously laid out on a table and be opened like the unwrapping of a gift. Clad in an aquamarine jacket with a *jaali* worked inner flap, it announces its royal credentials from the start; not for it the riffraff of parchment, only velvet and glint will do. The pages are glossy and the photos perfectly choreographed. This isn't merely a book about the royals, it is a majestic production in itself.

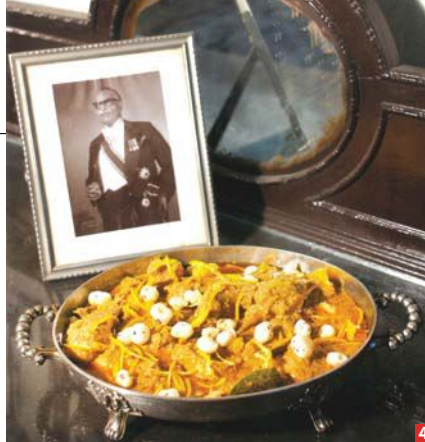
The layman's interest in royalty can seem a tad distasteful. After all, what distinguishes them from the rest of us, other than an accident of birth and the extent of riches? Yet our curiosity is aroused because the lives of kings and queens have always

been fodder for our imagination and the stuff of stories. *Dining with the Nawabs* feeds into this curiosity and satiates it many times over. It takes the reader on a guided tour of the palaces of Arcot, Bahawalpur, Bhopal, Chhatari, Hyderabad, Kamadia and Surat, Khairpur, Kotwara, Rampur and Zainabad. But what sets it apart is that it throws open the kitchens and dining halls of these families. It is here that you can gasp at the Zainabad family's fili-greed six-egg holder, or admire the mother-of-pearl monogrammed cutlery set treasured by the Chhatari family. Best of all, you can try your hand at the dishes that grace their dining tables, with the assistance of the recipes provided in the book.

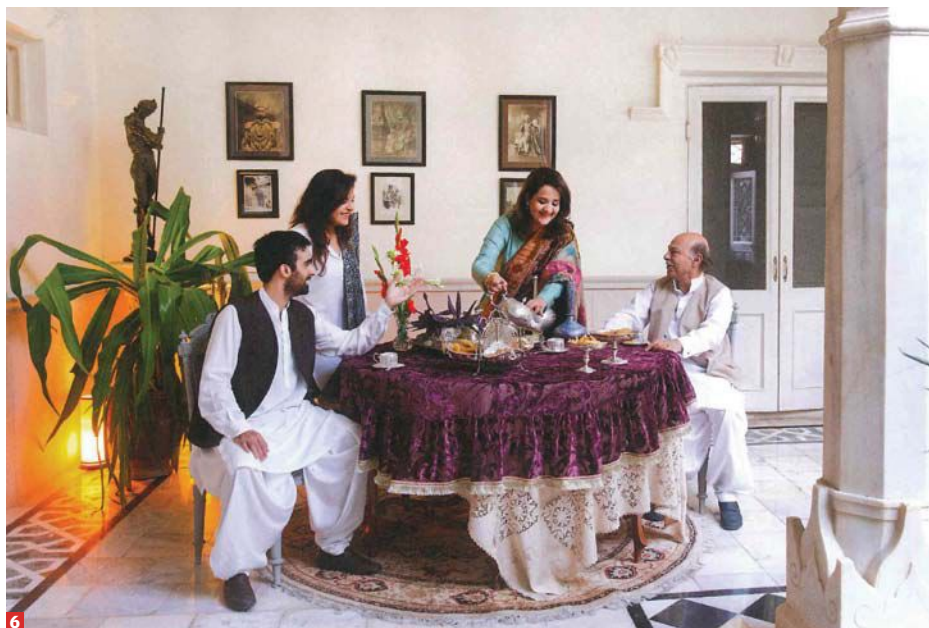
The culinary traditions of these families have been passed down for centuries, and







"IN THESE RECIPES AND STORIES OF FOOD BEING AT THE EPICENTER OF TRADITIONS AND CUSTOMS, THE LARGER STORY OF AN ANCIENT PHILOSOPHY AND A WAY OF LIFE IS REVEALED" **Meera Ali**



1. A banquet hosted by Prince Ghulam Muhammad Ali Khan, the fifth prince of Arcot;
2. Rampur's Shehzadi Naghat Abidi (seated right) with her daughters;
3. Begum Suraiya Rashid with her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren at the Shamla Kothi in Bhopal;
4. A photo of Aligarh's Nawabzada Ibne Said beside the family delicacy *narangi korma*;
5. The Talpur Mirs of Khairpur relish the curries with the traditional sweet *badam roti*;
6. Bahawalpur's Salahuddin Abbasi with his family at the Sadiqqarh Palace;
7. Nawab Jafar Imam of Surat





8



9



10



11

8. Shaami Shikampur, a specialty of the Hyderabad family 9. Fazluddin Khan and Naheed Begum after their marriage in Hyderabad; 10. Raja Muzaffar Ali and Rani Meera Ali with the family in Mumbai; 11. Zainab royals, Shabbir and Dhanraj Malik, enjoy a moment of peace in the Rann of Kutch

through generations. As Meera Ali writes in the introduction, 'In these recipes and stories of food being at the epicenter of traditions and customs, the larger story of an ancient philosophy and a way of life is revealed.' In these pages, a world of innovation and attention comes to the fore. The nawabs cajole and pamper their chefs so that from the laboratory of their kitchen, dishes fit for a king and his friends will emerge. Cooks rose to the occasion by creating meals that were works of art and made the palate dance. A chef during Nawab Waji Ali Shah's time (19th century, Lucknow) made a rice dish that looked like a plate of white pearls offset by red rubies. Another famous cook could make a *varqi parantha* consisting of 18 layers. One *parantha* would use up to 5 kg of ghee. Chef Pir Ali once placed a *samosa* and pomegranate on the plate of Nawab Nasir ud din Haider of Avadh. But of

course, it was no mortal *samosa* or fruit. When the nizam broke the *samosa*, a tiny red bird flew out of it. The 'pomegranate' was an exquisite sweet made entirely of flavoured milk and sugar.

While these old tales make for fascinating trivia, *Dining with the Nawabs* shows how some of these traditions have remained intact while changing with the times. The write-up on each royal family provides archival information (complete with rare photographs) and modern insight. The Arcot family, we are told, is the only royal family in India that continues to enjoy the title of 'prince'. In their kitchens we find a summer sherbet made from jasmine flowers and other rarities.

*Dining with the Nawabs* reminds us of the way of kings, and the habits of queens, where eating was not a matter of daily survival, but as lavish in theatre and tradition as it was in taste. ■



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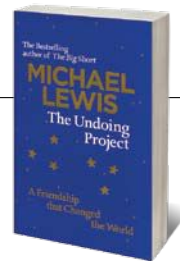
Outdoor Partner



# The Mind Readers

Tracing a remarkable friendship between two professors who demolished several myths of human nature

By Ullekh NP

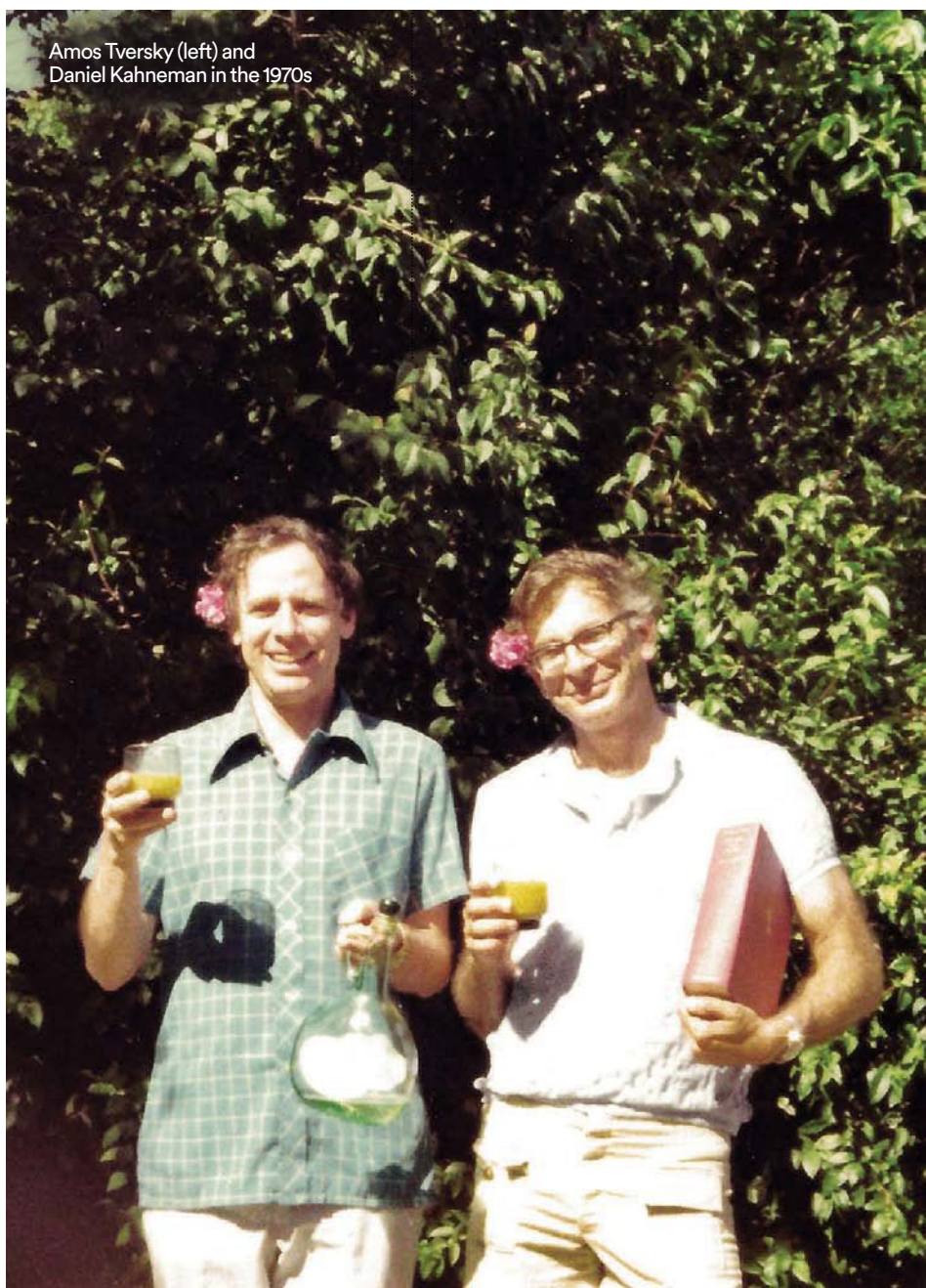


**THE UNDOING PROJECT:  
A FRIENDSHIP THAT  
CHANGED THE WORLD**

Michael Lewis

Allen Lane  
362 Pages | Rs 799

**M**AN IS A RATIONAL animal. At least that is what we all learnt in school. It sets us apart from the rest of the animal kingdom. How wrong that was. We did unlearn, over time, from Descartes to Nietzsche and from Marx to John Rawls. But the duo that demolished several myths of human nature, exposing our delusional grandeur and sense of infallibility to put the spotlight on our fallacies were Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, two unlike behavioural economists who met as young men in the backwater of Israeli academia in the 1960s. Their studies placed mistakes of intuition and action of individuals as well as groups under the lens, and were destined to have a profound impact on a range of fields, from lawmaking to data science, from personal finance to medicine and from applied physics to food production. Now comes *The Undoing Project*, Michael Lewis' new book on a collaboration of these two great minds (both trained as soldiers in war-hit Israel and had doctorates in Psychology) who altered how we look at human errors and their consequences. They have lately been compared with James Watson and Francis Crick who proposed the double-helical structure of DNA. An over-enthusiastic admirer went to the extent of comparing them to John Lennon and Paul McCartney of The Beatles. Their research findings on human attitudes towards risk and uncertainty, titled 'Prospect Theory', have proved to be especially useful in financial economics: it lays bare how people react to risks of losses *vis-a-vis* gains of various types. *The Undoing Project* is a stellar book, perhaps Lewis' best yet (and beating *The Big Short*, *Liar's Poker*,



Amos Tversky (left) and Daniel Kahneman in the 1970s



*Moneyball* and *Flash Boys* is no mean feat).

Kahneman, referred to as Danny, comes across as highly sceptical and always unsure of himself. He is the reserved dude as compared to Amos, a confident conversationalist who picks arguments easily. “I was always more sympathetic than Amos to critics,” Danny says in the book. Amos was considered by many as a mathematical psychologist, accused by non-mathematical psychologists (such as Danny) of pretending to be interested in Psychology just to flaunt his wizardry in math. Danny and others were seen by math nuts such as Amos as too ‘stupid to understand the importance of what they were saying’. When they met for the first time at Hebrew University, Amos, a University of Michigan alumnus, was an extrovert who worked on problems far removed from real-world problems in applied psychology. Danny, with a degree from University of California, Berkeley, writes Lewis ‘was consumed by real-world problems, even as he kept other people at a distance.’

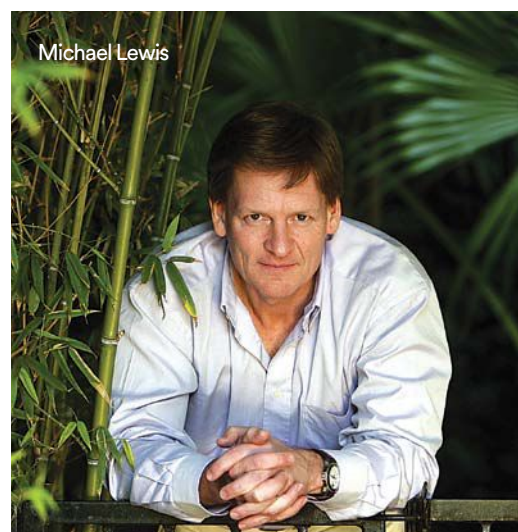
It is gratifying that these two lives are brought before you by a writer as clever as Lewis. For once, he breaks his old pattern of lapping up the story of obscure individuals and instead examines figures of the stature of Kahneman, who won the Nobel in 2002, and Tversky, who died before he won such acclaim. Lewis ran into them thanks to a review of his *Moneyball* in the *New Republic* by University of Chicago professors Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein in 2003. Lewis recalls that his book was critiqued for not realising the deeper reason for the inefficiencies in the market for baseball players, the main theme of his earlier book. The professors wrote that the book wasn’t entirely original; in it, Lewis had argued that a data-driven approach to high-stakes decision-making in baseball did not lead to immediate success. They contended that the ‘inefficiencies (of players) sprang directly from the inner workings of the human mind. The way in which some baseball expert might misjudge baseball players—the ways in which any expert’s judgements might be warped by the

expert’s own mind—had been described, years ago, by [Kahneman and Tversky]”; that the French economist Maurice Allais dwelt on this subject as early as the 1940s is another story.

That was the inspiration for this book, and the outcome is a captivating account of the lives, times and works of Danny, who has lived long enough to get top recognition, and Amos, who lived fast and died in 1996 from melanoma. The early lives of both these Holocaust children, their precarious teen years, hardships, relationship with families, life in the newly formed state of Israel—all are explained in detail. Lewis is masterful in his narration, starting with Danny’s birth in 1934 in Tel Aviv, where his mother had been on holiday; his return to Paris where he hid the Star of David badge beneath his coat so that other students didn’t despise him; his father’s life as a chemist with L’Oréal, which had bankrolled the Nazis; later the dad’s early death from diabetes; and the family’s life on the run along with a beautiful sister. Amos, on the other hand, is presented as an ordinary looking guy who invariably had a metamorphosis of sorts once he started talking; from then on, his domination of any group, even of bright scientists, was assured. The pages that describe his feats on the war front for which he won bravery awards are a treat.

Lewis writes that once they realised what one needed of the other, their relationship was like that of lovers, sans sex, a kind of bromance. However, personality clashes, as expected between two people with different outlooks towards life, became frequent. In an interview with Lewis, Danny says that he had to try hard to convince Amos that they were equal partners. “He was too willing to accept a situation that put me in his shadow,” Lewis quotes Danny as saying. Amos said nice things in private about Danny, and in the 1980s even called him “the greatest living psychologist in the world”. Lewis digs up more: “...But after Danny told Amos that Harvard had asked him to join the faculty, Amos said, ‘It is me they want ...’ Amos could not help himself from wounding Danny.” Lewis traces their ties

well into the late 1980s, by which time it had become a love-hate relationship. He quotes Amos’ wife Barbara: “I would hear their phone calls... it was worse than a divorce.” By 1992, Danny decided to put 3,000 miles between them, and joined Princeton from Berkeley, far from Stanford where Amos taught. These were radically different men, but their bonds were so intense that they decided to work together again in 1993 when they crossed paths at a conference in Turin, Italy. They stopped interacting again before they got together again. Not many months later, Danny got a call from Amos, the second person he called to announce the news: that he had malignant melanoma.



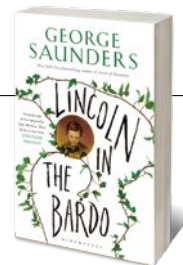
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Until Amos’ death, their work was referred to as that of ‘Tversky and Kahneman’. Soon it became ‘Kahneman and Tversky’. And Kahneman’s high point came in 2002 when he won the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences. He would go on to write the highly influential *Thinking Fast, and Slow* in 2011. But now 82, Kahneman says that the Nobel actually belonged to him and Amos, who died aged 59. Theirs is indeed a monumental tale of survival, friendship and success. But then you need someone of Michael Lewis’ genius to pick that story and turn it into a compulsively readable one. ■

# The Living and the Dead

Abraham Lincoln mourns the death of his son in this first novel of an American master

By Suman Tarafdar



**LINCOLN IN THE BARDO**  
George Saunders

Bloomsbury  
343 Pages | Rs 599

**L**INCOLN IN THE BARDO is set over the course of a night, barely a few hours actually. It's the story of a nation divided against itself, not ready to come to terms with the war and division around. It is the night of February 22th, 1862, two days after the son of arguably the most remarkable president of the US has died. Abraham Lincoln may be remembered today for leading a divided nation with moral courage and conviction, but his life was hardly uni-dimensional.

A less-known episode from Lincoln's life is the subject of George Saunders' novel. Saunders, not the best known of contemporary American writers globally, has been regarded in the US for the better part of the past three decades as the author whose definitive work was just around the corner. Well, few will argue that with *Lincoln in the Bardo*, the corner has been turned. Among his most widely recognised works have been short story collections *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline* (1996) and *Tenth of December* (2013). Awards and recognition have been aplenty. Audiences have awaited 1958-born Saunders' first novel with baited anticipation.

Now that it is finally here, readers might be a little perplexed. Sure, Saunders breaks with form and narrative as perhaps few novels ever have. For starters, it's a US president mourning the loss of his 11-year-old beloved son. According to disputed accounts, Lincoln went to the cemetery that night and visited his son's grave, alone, sobbing while embracing his child's body. Willie's death left the parents shattered, each coping differently.

Saunders however takes his tale to a different plane. Ghosts of those buried at the cemetery bustle around Lincoln, unseen to him. This book is as much about

them—the lives they led, the choices they made—as it is about a new lease in the afterlife, or *bardo*. *Bardo* is a concept from the Tibetan tradition—Saunders is Buddhist—where one's consciousness does not die with the body, but survives in metaphysical dimensions. The novel is a multitude of voices speaking from the *bardo*. The audio book has 166 voices on it (a record apparently) and includes Nick Offerman and David Sedaris who emote the lead voices, along with Lena Dunham, Ben Stiller, Susan Sarandon. These voices, led by an opinionated and omnipresent couple—Hans Vollman and Roger Bevins III—throw light on America of the mid-nineteenth century, embroiled in a bloody Civil War, and not yet a modern nation.

What also emerges from the grief is the president's steeliness. He believes the most merciful outcome of the Civil War to be its swiftest end. This decision would mean the death of many more sons. One voice even describes him as 'a person of very inferior cast of character, wholly unequal to the crisis'.

Lincoln's embrace of his dead son's

body creates consternation among the departed. But also bolsters the spirits;

'To be touched so lovingly, so fondly, as if one were still... worthy of affection and respect? It was cheering. It gave us hope,' one says. These 'voices' clutch to the hope that they will be able to communicate, and that they will be heard and acknowledged one day.

The kaleidoscope of complaints from the ghosts are everyday, banal even. Saunders however is successful in imbuing them with humanity, even a covert grace. Among the rants, peevs, the cruelty, and passionate yearnings, there is hilarity, even joy. This book should make any reader look around at fellow humans with more empathy, especially given life's uncertainties. As young Willie has just come to this new plane, his fellow travellers are, if not eager, at least willing to show him direction, as he waits once again for his father's familiar embrace. This book should make any reader look around at fellow humans with more empathy, especially given life's uncertainties.

Saunders' original style makes for its own genre. His gift for myriad voices, evident in his earlier writings as well, is unleashed. The bizarre and the melancholy are unusual companions here. The text is even visually distinct, with each voice getting its own attribution each time, almost like a play. Which at once makes the narrative more fragmented, more multilayered and overtly chaotic. While some quotes are historic, most tap into what the author in an interview described as 'emotionally honest'. Writers and creators of historical fiction in India could do well to take some lessons on how to capture historical figures beyond their factual histories. *Lincoln in the Bardo* is complex, richly layered and immensely humane. ■

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George Saunders



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Himmat Shah



Photographs by ROHIT CHAWLA



# In Soulful Solitude

*Himmat Shah and the joy of being detached*



By Rosalyn D'Mello

IT SEEMS unbecoming for a man of 85 to exude such effortless agility. I am amazed by the dexterity with which Himmat Shah approaches the daily ritual of prancing up and down the flight of stairs leading to his recently renovated, heat-proofed studio on the third level of his home in Jaipur. Especially since, minutes after I was ushered into the

living room, he apologises for his missing dentures, the reason for the semi-solid diet he is on, and the slight accented mumble detectable in his still elegant, baritone voice. He requests his caretaker-maid to serve us tea and biscuits, which we both relish like children, dipping each one in the hot, milky liquid, allowing the grains to melt on the surface of our tongues. Wary of the chill in his bones because of the sudden dip in temperature, he is fully garbed; a cream pashmina completing his dapper outfit of black jacket draped over black waistcoat and white trousers, with a matching black woollen cap upon his head that contrasts starkly against his thick grey beard.

It occurs to me that while Shah is wholly conscious of the not-so-mysterious ways in which time has stamped itself upon his body, slowing down his muscles, limiting the scope of his movements, his artistic vision has been richly enhanced by its passage. Where his younger counterparts, or even writers like me, still relatively unencumbered by the challenges posed by advancing age, crave the comfort of the 'zone'—that mystical in-between notional region where ideas unravel at the speed of thought and where one's practice is defined by the ability to irrigate the plane of creation with this chance fertility—Shah occupies this conceptual field as a permanent resident. He displays little sign of cynicism, senility, or ennui, three attributes usually associated with old age. Instead, his speech is marked by the simplicity of wisdom and grace. He is calm, collected, articulate, and ever eager to engage with anyone who shares his unadulterated passion for art, including his caretaker-maid's

daughter, whom he is quietly mentoring, whose still-life drawing lies in a corner of the studio upstairs. Shah has been discreetly analysing her inherent talent before he decides to intervene and suggestively alter her perspective.

What endears me to him is my history of having worked intimately on the archives of the late art critic, Richard Bartholomew, someone he knew personally during his many years in Delhi, when he used to work out of a studio in Garhi, alongside other artists such as Krishen Khanna and Sanku Chaudhuri. Bartholomew was notably critical of the ambiguity of Shah's early work, primarily paintings, but did not mince his appreciation of the spirit of experimentation and exploration that marked his sculptural practice in the early 70s. 'Along with that quality of neo-plastic discipline, his constructions offer us a sense of spatial dimension,' wrote Bartholomew in his *Times of India* review published on March 8th, 1973. 'They stir our imagination, making us rove in the immense spaces that envelope this earth of ours. They seem like fantastic landscapes of the space world with forms and patterns hanging like planets and stars in the awesome void.'

So, when I telephoned Shah out of the blue two days before I was slated to be in Jaipur for the literature festival, he graciously acquiesced to my request for an audience with him. "Come to Vrindavan Vihar," he said, citing Bank of Baroda and Liberty Shoes as landmarks. I found my way almost too easily, and when I stopped at house No 127, spotted 'Himmat' written on the gatepost wall. He emerged from within to greet me. One hour into our conversation, it feels as though we've known

does his garden, tending to it daily, rekindling regularly the odd feeling of having been wronged, and of having been vindicated. It is not a negative emotion in that it does not occupy his headspace, nor does it make him unforgiving. In fact, it is through his art that he redeems himself of these residual resentful trappings. "What made you move to Jaipur after so many years of being in Delhi?" I ask him, wanting to know what had urged such a dramatic move away from the so-called centre of artistic expression and such a deliberate, conscious inhabiting of the periphery. "Politics," he replies. "I reached a stage where I couldn't afford to buy food." I am astonished, even though I know better, having worked on Richard's life and work, I am fully conscious of the unfair, mildly horrific, manner in which the Indian state has treated its artists, compelling many to live their lives in penury, then acknowledging them belatedly with awards and taking credit for their accomplishments. There are more examples than I have fingers to count them with, the most embarrassing being MF Husain, who felt obliged to exile himself from India because he would rather make art than spend his last years in court, fighting inane cases alleging obscenity.

But Shah doesn't feed my anger, only my humour. He drops a series of chiding hints about the clusters of artists and critics he is convinced have held him back, by either influencing others of their kind not to regard his work seriously, or not to write or engage with it. Somewhere within these smarting remarks that are disguised as jokes is the insinuation that his claim to being an artist was not because the art world embraced him, but almost in spite of it.

How did he come to live in this house, I ask. He tells me a story about how, back in 2005, a client based in Gurgaon had commissioned him to create a series of bronze works. At the time, Shah didn't even have a studio from which to operate, which he communicated to said client, who offered to have Shah move into his residence in Gurgaon, converting the kitchen and bedroom into a temporary workstation. Shah received about Rs 50 lakh, which he used to buy his house in Jaipur. There was no active art scene in Jaipur to boast of, which is perhaps what made the place attractive to Shah, apart from the green

**"Politics made me move to Jaipur after so many years in Delhi. I reached a stage where I couldn't afford to buy food"**

**HIMMAT SHAH**

each other from another lifetime. I am able to identify all his many references, and I share much of his irreverence towards the artworld in general. I cannot control my laughter when he speaks somewhat derisively about a certain senior artist. "He doesn't know how to paint, he only knows how to uncork a bottle of wine," he says. I'm in splits.

Shah, I come to understand, carries many resentments within him, knotting them up into a seed. He nurtures it like he

tree toppings that marked the view. He was more lured by the presence of traditional craftsmen such as marble carvers, and foundries, both of which facilitated the production of his work. The city's proximity to Delhi also made it the perfect base, allowing him to negotiate his level of engagement with the Capital's art cognoscenti. For example, while 'Hammer on the Square', his most monumental retrospective to date, held at the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, Saket, curated by Roobina Karode,





was on view last year he was able to visit numerous times. This exhibition of over 300 of Shah's sculptures and drawings introduced younger generations to his legacy, and emphasised the art-historical significance of his unique, continuing practice that encompasses a range of material such as ceramic, terracotta, bronzes, and even the burnt collages. Made in the early 60s, no one wanted to exhibit the burnt collages at the time and so they were first shown in 1963 at the inaugural and sole show of the short-lived Group 1890 of which Shah was a co-founder, along with J Swaminathan, someone he describes as a once dear friend who'd introduced him to Octavio Paz, then the Mexican Ambassador to India. Swami and Shah eventually had a falling out, though Shah continues to extoll the larger-than-life magnificence of Swami's legendary personality. Politics, he suggests, was the possible reason behind their separation, perhaps connected with Swami's administrative role as founder of Bharat Bhavan in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh.

ONCE WE HAVE returned downstairs, instead of retreating to the living room, Shah asks if I'd like to visit his "other" studio. My enthusiasm is non-verbal but apparent. He asks his driver to bring the car around, then opens the door for me like a gentleman. It was then that I noticed the old-worldliness about his manners, the respect with which he spoke to me, the absence of attitude or ego. Later, we would have a long conversation about his issues with FN Souza's portrayal of women, how vastly it differed from that of Picasso, the artist upon whose practice Souza's very own was inherently hinged. "You must not paint through the gaze of lust," he would say. What ensued were more conversations about how women artists should have been allowed to prosper, how the world is poorer in hindsight because of the patriarchal institution.

What I remember most vividly about my visit to Shah's sculpture studio is him seated on his bed which is littered with a dozen or more books and empty A4-sized brown envelopes whose surfaces had been cluttered with his drawings. "Isn't it good?" he asked as he waved it in the air to show me, so content with the impulsiveness that sparked its creation. Beside him, to his left, was a rack full of more books with a glass cover upon which he'd tacked on a fabulous black-and-white print of a bust of a woman named Annette by Giacometti. The gaze in this work, the outward-looking magnetic posture translates superbly in Shah's own sculptures, particularly some of the newly cast ones that have recently returned from a foundry in London. Shah unwraps them from their plastic encasing and places each one on a circular stand, which he, with a flick of a finger, sends into rotational overdrive as he speaks eloquently about the patinas he has achieved. Some have a bronze glaze in certain parts, or a trail, while other parts seem hollowed out, giving it the impression of something organic and moulded; some are heads with wholly striated surfaces that are inviting to touch, one is a twin sculpture of two kissing heads rooted to



the ground with a middle leg that forms an 'm' between the two units, emphasising the union of lips. This workstation is one that is so obviously lived in but is yet to be fully utilised. Shah speaks of his plans for the long wall upon which he intends to splatter mud to build something layered and active, suggesting movements that involve every muscle of his body. I beseech him to promise to call me before he embarks on such a kinetic gesture. He happily agrees.

Leaving felt like a crude interruption, but I left nonetheless, knowing it was time to go, knowing that I was sure to return, because meeting Shah validated the need for artistic solitude despite the loneliness of it that could sometimes seem contaminating. Creating art must not necessarily entail isolation, but every now and then it is important, I learned, to isolate the self from everything that is extraneous to one's process, including the compulsive acts of hobnobbing, sucking up to the forces that be in order to advance one's aspirations, or playing 'politics'. Sometimes it is essential to extract oneself from all that is callous and non-essential in order to properly hone one's vision. For Shah, the joy of artistic being is not derived from anything external, but from everything that has emanated from the space between his own fingers. ■



**RAJEEV MASAND**

## Grumbler No 1

Remember **Govinda**? Yes, him of the yellow pants and infectious dance moves? Well, the 50-something actor grabbed headlines recently when he dissed old friends and colleagues while speaking to the media during promotions for his latest film. Chi Chi, as he was once fondly referred to, lashed out at frequent collaborator **David Dhawan**, accusing him of turning his back on the actor when his chips were down. He suggested that Dhawan—with whom he'd made 17 films—pointedly avoided him when he desperately needed work, and even 'stole' a movie idea that he had come up with.

He was equally dismissive about his once-close friend and *Partner* co-star **Salman Khan**, who he admits was helpful to a point but won't work with him anymore. "[When we worked together], I was praised in such a manner that Salman was told 'You shouldn't come in front of Govinda'."

That same feeling of persecution raises its head again when he talks about **Karan Johar**, who, he says, never invited him on his television talk show despite having featured several other film industry folk. He is equally bitter about not being invited to parties and being left out of important camps, but insists he still wants to keep the "Govinda brand" alive, and compares himself to that other ultimate survivor, Amitabh Bachchan.

Industry insiders were unperturbed by the ramblings. A top producer requesting anonymity says Govinda merely got left behind when the industry took a more professional turn. "He just didn't change with the times. He still shows up hours late to shoots, and has that mindset where he believes the producer exists in order to be exploited by the star. The tiny detail he tends to forget is that he isn't a star anymore." It's a sentiment echoed by many in Bollywood who prefer to keep a safe distance from him professionally.

## Image Defying Leap

**Kangana Ranaut**, who's back on the circuit promoting her new film *Rangoon*, does not want to be pitied.

The actress appears to have firmly decided not to spend any more energy discussing her failed relationship with **Hrithik Roshan**, although she is aware that's the only thing nosy journos want to talk to her about.

Instead, she apparently let it drop that she's in a fulfilling romantic relationship currently, and some media outlets have reported that she hinted she was hoping to tie the knot sometime this year. It's a bold change of heart from her once headline-grabbing declarations that she isn't cut out for marriage, and that she had an allergy to the idea of spending her whole life with one person.

So, who belled this cat? We'll find out soon.

## A Deliberate Lapse of Memory

A once-top filmmaker, who used to be considered ahead of his time during his golden years in the 90s, is feeling slighted by a current-day leading Bollywood actress. The director, who had a solid reputation especially when it came to mounting slick productions, directed a top female star of the 80s in one of her biggest runaway hits. But now he can't get *this* actress to so much as return his calls or respond to the messages he has sent her through multiple common acquaintances.

The filmmaker is not unaware that he is commonly regarded as a spent force, but also feels it is only fair that the actress should hear him out before making up her mind about him. The director has a script that he thinks she will be perfect for, and is open to the idea of the actress producing the project under her fledgling outfit.

But insiders of the actress' team say they have already communicated to him that she is not interested in making the kind of film he has reached out to her with—a dark thriller on the same lines as one she recently produced. She is looking to expand her range and not repeat herself. ■



*Rajeev Masand is entertainment editor and film critic at CNN-NEWS18*



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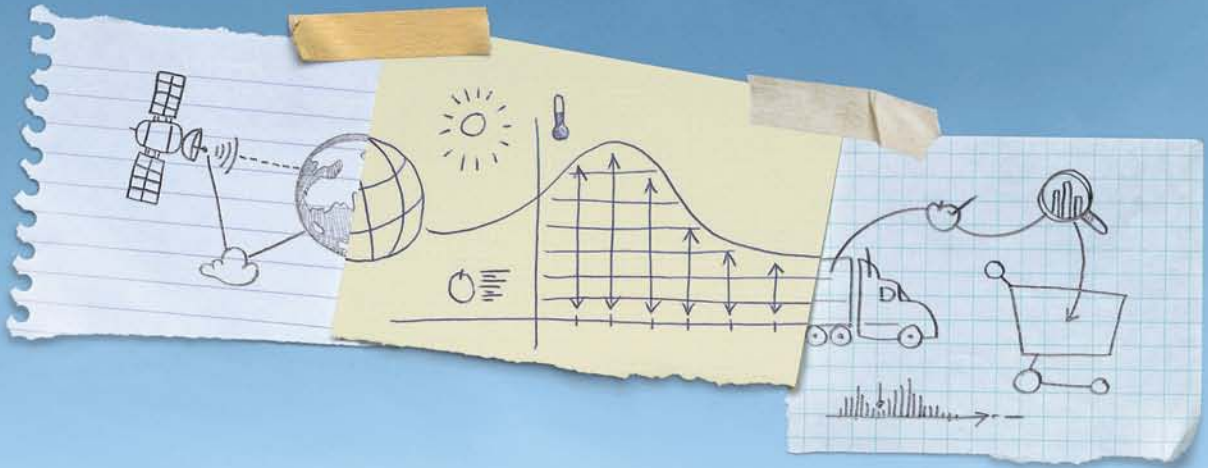
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Inspire the Next



# THE FUTURE IS OPEN TO SUGGESTIONS

Tomorrow starts with Social Innovation. All it takes is an idea: one simple thought that has the power to change the world. And it's through collaboration that these seeds of possibilities can grow, flourish and live. At Hitachi, we're developing innovative co-creation platforms for the Internet of Things. It's how we're bringing thinkers and doers together to accelerate Social Innovation for a better future.

[social-innovation.hitachi](http://social-innovation.hitachi)

Hitachi Social Innovation