

Depths of field, defined and blurred

When the history of our time is written, how will the year 2019 come to be assessed?

When the forensics of the 2019 Lok Sabha election are done in the future, strange things may emerge from the examination. While some answers might be surprising, the questions themselves might be quite different from those many are asking today. Given a chunk of hindsight time and a thicker sandwich of context around this moment, some of our current assumptions and head-scratchings might look extremely droll to people conducting the review. Just as we now see historic events in their 'totality' — for instance, the toppling of different dominoes that led to the start of the First World War, or how Partition could perhaps have been avoided in 1947 — people may look back at the period leading up to these elections and the aftermath, and see both the funny and epically tragic sides of the moment.

At a frivolous level, people may chuckle at how the Sangh Parivar successfully managed to dub different liberal pockets with unifying negative labels such 'Lutyens Elite' and 'Khan Market Gang', even as the Sangh Parivar strengthened its already tight hold on the bungalows and secretariats of the actual Lutyens' Delhi, while so many people frequenting the actual Khan Market were from the demographic that either worked for the Sangh power circles or enthusiastically voted for them.

On a more serious note, the exhumation of the bones of Election 2019 might well be conducted after far more seismic historic events have occurred: a trade war between China and the U.S. that debilitated the world economy for years to come; or an armed conflict between the U.S./Israel and Iran with major knock-on effects that turn India into just another nation-state billiard ball, cannoning out of control. In such a case there might even be a recognition already in place that it was the BJP-RSS 'victors' who caught the short straw, and the Congress and other 'losers' who got lucky, because it was a very good time *not* to be in charge of this country.

Impending catastrophes

Leave aside an economic meltdown or missile-apocalypse, there could also be an understanding that no Indian political party was equipped to handle the ecological-disaster meteor hurtling towards the country, that none of them even saw it coming, and it was Modi 2.0 which was in charge when it struck. Today, we are already in the midst of a catastrophic air-pollution crisis and heading swiftly towards a major water-crisis; we could well be looking at a food crisis of almost 1943 proportions, where our harvests are adequate but our skewed distribution systems lead to quasi-famine situations. If ignored or mis-handled — and this regime has a terrific record of doing both — this could leave future historians looking at a huge rentening of the fabric of the nation, a huge transformation, but not of the sort the Sangh Parivar imagines in its fevered dreams.

What could a granular political archaeology yield in the future? 2019 might be seen as the first serious beginning of a north-south division of the country, the moment where the south begins to understand that they want no part of the Hindutva agenda, that it is of no advantage for advanced, educated people of different religions who are confident in their own secularism, the Hindu majority of whom are confident in their own kinds of Hindu practice, to be sucked down by the horribly feudal, backward notions of nation and society being offered by the zealots in control of the central north. These recently executed elections might throw up yet

another irony of abusive labelling: posterity might see the Sangh Parivar and its vassal parties and media as the *real* Tukde-Tukde gang, the ones who turned the Union of India into a brittle biscuit.

The health of the nation

There would also have to be an examination of the changing character and role of the Indian Deep State at this moment. If we define the phrase 'Deep State' to mean a covert nexus between industrial corporations and the security services, with their self-defined mission being to keep the country at a working status quo tilted conservatively, then what was this Deep State's reaction to the second victory of the Narendra Modi-Amit Shah combination? To what extent did they participate? Was there any concern that the country would be radicalised beyond their control? Was there any recognition that the attempted suppression and delegitimisation of nearly 200 million Indians might have cataclysmic effects that were not in the Deep State's own long-term interests?

Let's imagine that our future historians have as an instrument one of those animated infographic maps of South Asia, with the countries differentiated by patterns indicating different elements that make up the 'health' of each nation: clear separation between state and religion, between state and military; operational democracy at all levels of society, democracy that is constant and not just noduled around elections; the rule of law and order; effective public health systems; unassailable human rights; freedom of expression and a free media under a diverse ownership; a properly competitive business environment with checks and balances; a cross-institutional understanding of environmental problems and robust programmes to deal with those challenges; and, most importantly, reliable indicators for food security and poverty levels. In such a map, will 2019 be the point when the patterns of our favourite failed state, Pakistan, and India begin to merge with increasing speed? Will people say that this was the tipping point where the Pakistanisation of India gathered full pace? When the moral gangrene infecting the so-called 'severed limb' was invited back into the main body? As the years slide by on this map, do the colours indicating military conflict and, simultaneously, the shifting of massive refugee populations begin to sweep and bleed into each other? Does the Bay of Bengal rise at the same time and start biting into the Sunderbans? Does the desert start to spread across the forehead of the subcontinent?

On a longer graph

If the terms of reference are somewhat different, could the historians ask very different questions? For instance, might they be able to see a continuity of the graph of liberalisation in the 25 or 30 years following 1991 where succeeding governments ignored the immediate needs of the majority of India's population and paid the price? Instead of being the moment of great victory for the Hindutva project, could 2019 be the tipping point where the diverse, slowly simmering protest movements gathered critical mass and within a few years toppled the old order and all the old parties completely? Equally, could the period of 1991-2014 be seen as a time of a thinly maintained peace, followed by a period of extreme upheaval for the next 25 years, with 2019 being merely a minor punctuation point, a blip of no great consequence?

In photographic terms, when examining our own time and the current moment, we have no choice but to deal with a very short depth of field, a lot of the past and everything in the future is out of focus, beyond and before the 'today' which is most sharply defined. Looking back at points of **history** the depth of field is greater, with a lot more things rendered sharply. Perhaps

this is a good analogy to remember, both for those bathing themselves in triumphant celebrations today as well as for those who are morose and disheartened and prematurely mourning the death of our precious Republic.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

1. **depth of field** (noun) – the distance between the closest and farthest objects in a photo that appears acceptably sharp focus in an image.
2. **blur** (verb) – make indistinct/unclear, make vague, unfocus.
3. **forensics** (noun) – the application of scientific knowledge & methods to legal problems and legal proceeding.
4. **chunk** of (noun) – a significant amount of.
5. **hindsight** (noun) – the ability to understand a situation or event only after it has happened.
6. **head-scratching** (noun) – deep thought.
7. **droll** (noun) – comedian, funny man, comic.
8. **frivolous** (adjective) – relating to something which is having no serious, sensible, useful purpose or value and it will also be a waste of time; valueless, insignificant, silly.
9. **chuckle** (verb) – laugh quietly.
10. **Lutyen's Delhi** (noun) – the term referred originally to the government buildings and surrounding bungalow zone that the British built as their new Indian capital a century ago. An area in New Delhi, India, named after the British architect Edwin Lutyens, one of the chief architects. Sociologically and politically Lutyens is used to refer to persons/politicians who command significant hold in government decision making.
11. **frequent** (verb) – visit, go to repeatedly, be a regular visitor to.
12. **demographic** (noun) – the statistical study/structure of populations, especially human beings.
13. **exhumation** (noun) – the process of digging up something buried.
14. **seismic** (adjective) – of huge damaging effort.
15. **trade war** (noun) – a condition in which a country increase tariffs on foreign goods and impose quota restrictions to restrict other countries' trade.
16. **debilitate** (verb) – weaken, make weak, tire.
17. **knock-on** (modifier) – secondary, indirect, cumulative (effect).
18. **cannon** (verb) – hit, collide with, run into.
19. **catch/get/draw the short straw** (phrase) – be an unlucky person in a group to be selected to do an undesirable task.
20. **impending** (adjective) – at hand, near/close; approaching/forthcoming.
21. **catastrophe** (noun) – destruction, damage, disaster.
22. **leave aside** (phrasal verb) – neglect, ignore, snub/brush off.
23. **meltdown** (noun) – collapse, complete failure, decline.
24. **apocalypse** (noun) – an event involving destruction or damage.
25. **ecological** (adjective) – relating to the branch of biology which studies the interactions among organisms and their environment.
26. **meteor** (noun) – fireball, falling star, shooting star.
27. **hurtle** (verb) – move, run, rush (in an uncontrolled manner).
28. **in the midst of** (phrase) – in the middle of.
29. **swiftly** (adverb) – quickly, rapidly, fast.
30. **harvest** (noun) – yield, return/result, fruits.

31. **skewed** (adjective) – uneven, lopsided, partisan.
32. **quasi-** (combining form) – seemingly, apparently; partly/somewhat.
33. **famine** (noun) – scarcity of food, food shortages; paucity/poverty.
34. **fabric** (noun) – constitution, framework, organization.
35. **granular** (adjective) – detailed, precise, minute.
36. **archaeology** (noun) – the study of humanity and its past.
37. **secularism** (noun) – the belief that religion should not have a strong influence in education or other public parts of society.
38. **suck down** (phrasal verb) – pull down all of something quickly.
39. **feudal** (adjective) – relating to someone who supports feudalism. Feudalism is a system of land ownership and duties. All the land in a kingdom was the king's. However, the king would give some of the land to the lords or nobles who fought for him. This social system existed in Europe between the medieval (9th and 15th) centuries.
40. **zealot** (noun) – extremist, radical, activist.
41. **irony** (adjective) – paradox, incongruity, peculiarity.
42. **posterity** (noun) – future generations; descendants, successors.
43. **vassal** (adjective) – subordinate, deputy, aide.
44. **brittle** (adjective) – delicate, sensitive, rigid, but breakable.
45. **deep state** (noun) – shadow government; influential decision-making bodies believed to be within government and it can be any agencies (e.g., military or any other).
46. **covert** (adjective) – secret, furtive, stealthy/hidden.
47. **nexus** (noun) – junction/juncture, link; central point.
48. **status quo** (noun) – the present situation, the current state, the existing state of affairs.
49. **tilt** (verb) – lean, incline, list.
50. **radicalise** (verb) – to cause to follow radical ways particularly in politics (& society).
51. **suppression** (noun) – concealment, restraint/control, stifling/repression.
52. **cataclysmic** (adjective) – disastrous, catastrophic, devastating.
53. **differentiate** (verb) – distinguish, discriminate, separate.
54. **nodule** (verb) – grow, swell, project/bulge.
55. **unassailable** (adjective) – indisputable, undeniable, unquestionable.
56. **checks and balances** (plural noun) – a system in which all departments of a government organization have right to amend/limit the powers of the other departments in order to avoid dominance of one department.
57. **tipping point** (noun) – the point in a condition at which a small development/change causes major & unstoppable changes.
58. **gangrene** (noun) – rotting of flesh, usually caused by lack of blood supply (figuratively a damaging/corrupting influence)
59. **severed** (adjective) – cut, broken off.
60. **limb** (noun) – arm, leg.
61. **slide** (verb) – fall, decline, drop.
62. **sweep** (verb) – affect, engulf, overwhelm,
63. **sundarbans** (proper noun) – a mangrove area in the delta formed by the confluence/junction of Ganges, Brahmaputra and Meghna Rivers in the Bay of Bengal.
64. **liberalisation** (noun) – removal or loosening of restrictions on something, typically an economic or political system.
65. **simmering** (adjective) – fuming, seething, intensified/severe.

66. **topple** (verb) – overthrow, oust, unseat.
 67. **upheaval** (noun) – disruption, disorder, turmoil.
 68. **blip** (noun) – a small/very short & temporary deviation.
 69. **analogy** (noun) – similarity, parallel, relation.
 70. **triumphant** (adjective) – victorious; delighted, elated.
 71. **morose** (adjective) – unresponsive, depressed, unhappy.
 72. **disheartened** (adjective) – hopeless, distressed, hungry.
- Crisis defused: on Hindi imposition

Compulsory learning should be limited to the child's mother tongue

The Centre has moved quickly to defuse a potentially volatile controversy over the charge of Hindi imposition. It is quite apparent that the Narendra Modi government did not want the language issue to acquire disproportionate importance at a time when it is embarking on its second innings with a huge mandate. Further, given the impression that the ruling party does not have much of a presence in South India, barring Karnataka, it did not want to be seen as being insensitive to the concerns of southern States, especially Tamil Nadu. The reference in the newly unveiled draft National Education Policy to **mandatory teaching of Hindi in all States was withdrawn** following an outcry from political leaders in Tamil Nadu, a State that is quite sensitive to any hint of 'Hindi imposition' by the Centre. The modified draft under the heading 'Flexibility in the choice of languages', has omitted references to the language that students may choose. However, the broader recommendation regarding the implementation of a three-language formula remains, something Tamil Nadu, which will not budge from its two-language formula, is averse to. The gist of the original sentence in the draft NEP was that students could change one of the three languages of study in Grade 6, provided that in Hindi-speaking States they continued to study Hindi, English and one other Indian language of their choice, and those in non-Hindi-speaking States would study their regional language, besides Hindi and English. The revised draft merely says students may change one or more of their three languages in Grade 6 or 7, "so long as they still demonstrate proficiency in three languages (one language at the literature level) in their modular Board examinations some time during secondary school". It may not amount to a complete reversal, but is still important in terms of conciliatory messaging.

However, there is a larger issue here. Ever since the Constitution adopted Hindi as the official language, with English also as an official language for 15 years initially, there has been considerable tension between those who favour the indefinite usage of English and those who want to phase it out and give Hindi primacy. **In Tamil Nadu, it is seen as a creeping imposition** of Hindi in subtle and not-so-subtle forms. The tension has been managed based on the statesmanship behind Jawaharlal Nehru's assurance in 1959 that English would be an associate language as long as there are States that desire it. One would have thought that with the ascent of coalition politics the instinct to stoke differences based on language would die out. Unfortunately, it keeps coming up, especially in the form of imposing the three-language formula on States. Language is primarily a utilitarian tool. While acquisition of additional tools can indeed be beneficial, compulsory learning should be limited to one's mother tongue and

English as the language that provides access to global knowledge and as a link language within India. It is time attempts to force Indians proficient in their mother tongue and English to acquire proficiency in a third are given up.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

1. **defuse** (verb) – reduce, lessen/diminish, ease/mitigate.
2. **imposition** (noun) – imposing, forcing, pressing.
3. **volatile** (adjective) – unpredictable/unsettled, variable, turbulent/tense.
4. **apparent** (adjective) – clear, evident, obvious.
5. **disproportionate** (adjective) – inordinate, unreasonable, excessive.
6. **embark on** (phrasal verb) – begin, start, undertake.
7. **barring** (preposition) – except for, with the exception of, apart from.
8. **insensitive** (adjective) – impervious to, oblivious to, unaware of/ unresponsive/indifferent to.
9. **unveil** (verb) – present, announce, disclose/make public.
10. **outcry** (noun) – protest, objections, opposition.
11. **budge** (verb) – move, shift, change position.
12. **averse** (adjective) – opposed to, against, hostile.
13. **gist** (noun) – essence, substance, main idea.
14. **merely** (adverb) – only, simply, just.
15. **amount to** (verb) – be regarded as, classified as, be equal to/be tantamount to.
16. **conciliatory** (adjective) – appeasing, pacifying, peacemaking.
17. **phase out** (verb) – discontinue, stop using, run down.
18. **primacy** (noun) – priority, greater importance, preference.
19. **creeping** (adjective) – (of a negative manner) occurring, developing gradually.
20. **subtle** (adjective) – understated, low-key, toned down/subdued.
21. **statesmanship** (noun) – statecraft, negotiations/discussions; the skilful management of a country's public affairs.
22. **ascent** (noun) – rise, increase, upward movement.
23. **instinct** (noun) – inclination, desire, tendency/urge.
24. **stoke** (verb) – incite, encourage, fuel.
25. **die out** (verb) – perish, vanish, disappear.
26. **utilitarian** (adjective) – functional, realistic, practical.
27. **acquisition** (noun) – acquiring, the learning (of a new skill).
28. **give up** (phrasal verb) – forgo, abandon, stop trying.

PM Modi's new Council

There is a clear realignment of power in the second Modi government

His self-assurance boosted by a massive popular mandate, Prime Minister Narendra Modi **constituted a 58-member Council of Ministers**, with more than 20 fresh faces, on Thursday. In a group far outshone by its leader, analysing individual talent is not easy, and may be irrelevant too. Mr. Modi, characteristically, sees to it that his imprimatur on all executive decisions is unmistakable. Still, the composition of the council throws light on Mr. Modi's

thinking. The induction of his long-time lieutenant and BJP president Amit Shah as Home Minister not only fortifies the Prime Minister's authority, it might be the precursor to further changes in the party organisation and the national security architecture. While Mr. Shah's entry into the Cabinet was expected, the **surprise induction of former Foreign Secretary S. Jaishankar** as the External Affairs Minister is evidently meant to deal with the choppy international waters that rock India's sailing. Mr. Jaishankar has been a close confidant of Mr. Modi. He has his task cut out, as India faces challenges with its most important international partner, the U.S. The spillover effects impact the country's interests in multiple ways, including its objectives of economic and technological advancement. By placing the two confidants in critical Ministries, Mr. Modi appears to loosen the grip of his own office on the government; the effects will be felt by National Security Adviser Ajit Doval if he continues into a second term, as is widely expected. The triumvirate of Mr. Modi, Mr. Shah and Mr. Jaishankar will form the centre of power.

Rajnath Singh as Defence Minister and Nirmala Sitharaman as Finance Minister are next in the pecking order. While the top layer of the Council is infused with fresh talent and is expected to generate new momentum, its representative character is skewed. It has only six women, one less than the previous one; the majority community and the Hindi heartland States have disproportionate representation. While Mr. Modi rewarded the upper caste groups that supported him wholeheartedly, the OBCs and Dalits who shifted to his party significantly in 2019 have had to be content with lower representation, at least for now. There is an argument that it is healthy that Mr. Modi does not bargain with caste, linguistic and region-oriented interests groups. Apna Dal leader Anupriya Patel from Uttar Pradesh was dropped; the Janata Dal (United) from Bihar was offered only one berth, which it refused to accept; and the Shiv Sena wanted at least three but has had to be content with one. As equations change, Mr. Modi might have to rethink these positions and there is scope to expand. A Council more representative in nature, in terms of gender, social and linguistic backgrounds and religion, will better reflect the mosaic that is India.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

1. **outshine** (verb) – be superior to, outdo/outrun, surpass.
2. **characteristically** (adverb) – (of a particular person) typically, usually, habitually.
3. **imprimatur** (noun) – authorization, approval, confirmation.
4. **unmistakable** (adjective) – distinctive, distinct, well defined.
5. **composition** (noun) – formation, structure, organization.
6. **throw light on** (phrase) – explain, clarify, elucidate/clear up.
7. **induction** (noun) – inauguration, introduction, swearing in (to a new job or position).
8. **lieutenant** (noun) – subordinate, deputy, second in command.
9. **fortify** (verb) – strengthen, reinforce, support.
10. **precursor** (noun) – sign, signal, indication.
11. **architecture** (noun) – structure, organization, formation.

12. **evidently** (adverb) – seemingly, apparently, on the face of it.
13. **choppy** (adjective) – full of waves; turbulent, heavy/stormy.
14. **rock** (verb) – shake up, disconcert.
15. **sailing** (noun) – journey, quest, crusade.
16. **confidant** (noun) – companion, close friend, best friend.
17. **have one's task cut out** (phrase) – be faced with a tough task/work.
18. **spillover** (noun) – repercussion, consequence, outcome (unexpected one).
19. **objective** (noun) – aim, intention, purpose.
20. **triumvirate** (noun) – a group of three powerful or notable people/things.
21. **pecking order** (noun) – range, scale, gamut.
22. **infuse** (verb) – add, introduce, impart/inculcate.
23. **skew** (verb) – distort, misrepresent, falsify.
24. **heartland** (noun) – the most important part of a field of activity; the central part of something.
25. **disproportionate** (adjective) – inordinate, unreasonable, excessive.
26. **wholeheartedly** (adverb) – committedly, dedicatedly, enthusiastically.
27. **content with** (verb) – satisfy, make happy, appease.
28. **linguistic** (adjective) – relating to language; lingual.
29. **equation** (noun) – association, connection, likening.
30. **representative** (noun) – (of a legislative assembly) consisting of people selected from a wider group.
31. **in terms of** (phrase) – with regard to, regarding/concerning, in connection with.
32. **reflect** (verb) – indicate, show/display, demonstrate.
33. **mosaic** (noun) – diverse, but coherent society.

“DO IT BY YOURSELF BECAUSE NOBODY IS GOING TO DO IT FOR YOU”