

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 renting 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 de-legitimisation 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.

<u>Words</u>	<u>Kind</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
Blur		cloud, fog, obscure, dim, unfocus
Forensics		regarding, crime/court
Emerge		come out, appear, manifest one self
Chunk		lump, hunk, block, slab
Third sight		back sight
Assumptions		imagination, chimera, make believe
After math		result, out come, repercussions, upshot
Epi		Heroic, saga, legend, chronicle
Frivolous		Foolish, silly, giddy, superficial
Lutyen Elife		gathering of elites and high profiles of the coiuntry
Demographic		scientific stndy of changes of birth, death, diseases in a community
Exhumation		aigging up, disinter, disentomb
Debilitate		weaken, enfeeble, enervate, devitalize, fatigal, weary, indispose, sap, drain
Knock on		bank, thump, pound, hammer
Cannon (v)		glorify, acclaim, enshrine
Apocalypse		total destruction of the world
Impending		very near, about, imminent
Catastrophe		disaster, calamity, cataclysm, holocaust
Hurtle		speed, rush, bolt, whizz, scurry
Skewed		not exact, in appropriate, off key
Quasi		supposedly, seemingly, apparently, allegedly
Fabric		cloth, material, textiles, tissue
Transformation		change, metamorphosis, mutation, revamping
Granular		powdered, powdery, granulated
Yield		produce, bear, gire, provide
Feudal		a system of govt.

Brittle	Breakable, delicate, fragile, splintery
Nexus	connection, agreement (secret), collusion, status quo
Conservative	traditional, orthodox, conventional hidebound
Radicalise	revolutionary, progressive, reform, sea lot
Cataclysmic	dangerous, critical, harmful, deleterious
Animated	gusto, elar, zestful, live wire, energetic, Noduled
Robust	healthy, strong, hearty, sturdy
Sever	cut out, chop off
Simmer	calm down, pacify, placate
Topple	fall, tumble, overbalance, overturn

Bonhomie to end:

The possible parting of ways between the leaders of the Bahujan Samaj Party and the Samajwadi Party, Mayawati and Akhilesh Yadav, respectively, is not unexpected (Page 1, “Future of SP-BSP turns uncertain in U.P.”, June 4). Their gathbandhan was not based on conviction, social welfare objectives and ideology. Their one-point agenda, of routing the BJP, did not gain any traction. Politicians may attempt to grab power using any means but it is only the intelligence of voters that will ultimately prevail. In the same way, one can expect the bonhomie between the DMK and the Congress to fade.

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<u>Words</u>	<u>Kind</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
Bonhomie		friendliness, geniality, affability, cordiality conviviality, amiability, joviality
Conviction		belief, tenet, persuasions
Traction		Crop, friction, adhesion
Grab		Seize, grasp, snatch