

Modi Has Too Much to Lose and Much More to Cover up by Retaining Power at Any Cost

The Wire Staff 2 mins read

What started as a completely one-sided election has slowly but surely turned into an interesting one, with all sorts of possibilities. Liberals, rationalists, pluralists, democratic, leftists and all others who have not accepted a regime that is openly opposed to these values enshrined in the Indian constitution have suffered repeated defeat, demoralisation and humiliation for 10 long years.

A large section of this motley lot has displayed extraordinary courage and drawn upon hidden reservoirs of tenacity to stand up to what it considers unacceptable and unconstitutional. Another section of people curses the regime in private with doubtless sincerity, but has chosen not to come out into the open, for different reasons. On the other hand, one has watched with horror how close family members and childhood friends, brought up in the best traditions of liberal education and plural tolerance, metamorphosed into werewolves in front of our eyes, as soon as the master of the dark howled. One can debate till kingdom come whether they are under some [Mephistophelean](#) mass hypnosis or whether they always carried boiling cauldrons of frustration deep within – that burst out like scalding lava, on call.

This never-ending period of relentless confrontation has split India right through the middle like never before. There is little point in recapitulating the retribution that the regime has inflicted, in different ways and degrees of viciousness, on those who stood against it. Of course, as in [Vichy France](#) and other occupied geographies during the last world war, many ‘practical’ citizens collaborated with their tormentors. A band of self-seekers (including many close friends) learnt to click their heels and raise ‘*seig heil*’ salutes, mouthing the regime’s buzzwords, like national glory, even as they crawled, for their own economic and social betterment. Worse still, these 10 years have also revealed a large class of self-styled neutral ‘non-political’ citizens, who blissfully overlook those who devastate and desecrate constitutional commitments. To cover up cowardice, they blame the wounded victims and fighters for ‘inviting their problems’. We have seen it all. Nevertheless, the unflinching struggle of those who oppose this dispensation gets occasional shots in the arm when someone, who was clapped in irons for weeks or several years, is let out of prison by a commendable bold section of the judiciary. Of course, another segment of the same judiciary capitulates before, or are in thrall of, illicit might.

But at the end of this decade of frustrating struggle, those, who never compromised, have a sense of confidence that the country may emerge victorious from this pitch-dark tunnel. But when? That is the question. The nearest date one can imagine is June 4, that may be our version of America’s ‘Fourth of July’. Many see positive signs that the evil empire is cracking up, but then, they had similar visions in 2019 as well. One had no clue that the corrupt Pakistani military establishment had decided to create a Pulwama massacre so that the ‘intractable enemy’ in Delhi could win through questionable belligerent retaliation.

There is no perceptible ‘wave’ in the great leader’s favour so far – despite the most expensive professional agencies working overtime for him. Neither money nor facts are any consideration, so they keep pumping vile hatred into the social, electronic, digital and print media – to boost his already blown-up image. These professionals and fanatics lie glibly about his indispensability while defaming all others. Only two weeks are left for the long-drawn election drama to end, but then, one is reminded of former British Prime Minister Harold Wilson’s famous quip: “a week is a long time in politics”. While anything is still possible, as two phases of polling for 114 seats is yet to be conducted, one can only pray that nothing involving too many lives happens, only to

swing a few seats.

The first five of the seven poll phases are over. This means that the fate of 429 of 543 Lok Sabha seats is hopefully 'locked' in 'sealed' Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), kept in tightly-guarded strong-rooms. A dedicated school of experts, however, keeps expressing fears that certain latest technologies of the 2020s can still hack, tamper or influence the ultimate results that are 'safeguarded' by EVMs. The latter are, unfortunately, products of a technology which is more than a quarter of a century old.

A two-member bench of the Supreme Court, however, was not impressed with such apprehensions and actually accepted a grossly-exaggerated sworn statement of the EC. It said on oath that election results could be delayed by several days if the voting slips of paper emanating from the EVM's printer (called VVPAT) are also to be counted.

Having conducted two parliamentary elections in a difficult state like West Bengal with 42 Lok Sabha seats, one finds this logic of the commission to be quite inflated. It simply cannot take so long to count some 600 to 700 votes on small paper slips per polling station, if the electronic votes of EVM and these VVPAT paper slips are tallied parallelly, in a well-planned manner. After all, these small slips contain just a single name — that of the candidate chosen by the voter on the EVM.

One still hopes that a larger constitutional bench of the apex court will take into cognisance the growing lack of faith of so many people with the current EC and its biased functioning. It may well order that since all EVMs and VVPATs produce votes on paper, and this costs the taxpayers large amounts to do so, we need not junk these paper slips (as is being done for 95% of polling booths) — but, may as well count them. This could settle most doubts about "stealing of elections".

Many experts have looked into the crystal ball to see what the portents are and others have gone over the possible scenarios that may emerge. Having spent 41 years in the bureaucracy at levels that matter, I can visualise some real-life possibilities. Let us recall that former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee had conceded defeat in 2004 when the BJP got only seven seats less than the Congress's 145 and the two parties were some 127 to 134 seats away from a bare majority. Both parties surely tried everything to grab other parties into their alliances, but then, we are referring to politics in a different age. Both sides believed in certain norms of decency and fair-play, that only appropriate education, upbringing and worldview can confer. This is not visible any more.

No one entertains any doubt that if this regime is short of a majority by as many as 50 or 60 seats, it would make or draw allies and simply buy up the rest. There are nearly 9 instances in the last five years when even comfortable, majority-led state governments were felled by engineered splits and defections, so that Modi-Shah could rule. So busy were their economic offences agencies in chasing the opposition (despite the Enforcement Directorate's abysmal conviction rate of only 0.3%), that none had time to check whether hundreds of crores of black money were really paid to defectors. Be that as it may, history has an annoying habit of repeating, without any lessons or consequences.

But, what happens if by chance, the INDIA opposition alliance is substantially ahead of the ruling front — so decisively that no President can reject its claim? A very thin possibility like this also needs to be discussed, only to alert ourselves that even under such positive circumstances, one simply cannot imagine Modi conceding defeat. He has too much to lose, and much more to cover up, by retaining power at any cost. US President Donald Trump showed him how to mobilise right-wing vandals to 'occupy' the seat of power, at any cost. Our man has more of this class with him, waiting for his hound-whistle, to pounce on 'the enemies of Bharat'. If the proverbial American judicial system could not yet punish Trump in four full years, one is not sure whether the Indian prosecutors or judges can even dream of trying to enforce the rule of law.

Diehard religious rightist forces in India are capable of doing anything to ensure Modi is not dethroned. Creating riots is child's play to them, especially if the 'Gujarat 2002 line' of covert state encouragement is followed, along with brutally aggressive denial. Vigilantes and lynchers have enjoyed almost total immunity from proper prosecution for 10 years and their encouraging example can always be emulated. Police forces in most states have likely never collaborated so warmly with rioters and murderous vigilantes as they have done in this last decade. We have seen how numerous magistrates and judges in the districts and towns have suddenly realised that they have a greater role to play in establishing a Hindu *rashttra*, than in going by the book. Let's also admit that the top layers of the bureaucracy are always with the government of the day — they are housetrained in this, as an essential ethic. And lucrative career benefits for these last 10 years, moving on to 15, means that its biggest section may collude to keep Modi in power, whatever be the results. The Indian army has a long tradition of staying out of politics, but Modi's excessive indulgence and encouragement of macho patriotism has surely won over a big chunk of soldiers. But the army still remains the best bet, in the sense that it may not intervene in domestic politics on anyone's behalf.

What one is saying is quite dystopian, but if the opposition comes up with a convincing majority then disturbances that are sure to occur during the possible transfer of power may be controlled. Besides, many of the opposition parties also have their band of dedicated supporters who are not expected to let this regime steal their election. Much depends on the state of mental preparedness. Sadly, democrats the world over are notorious for being outmanoeuvred by determined stormtroopers. But then, if Modi has to retain power by dubious means, suppressed sections within his party and the Sangh parivar may not remain as quiet as they have been compelled to, for so long. Cracks within the monolithic edifice can then be said to be the major victory of 2024. No regime can last forever —it's bound to signal the beginning of the end.

Indian democracy is in its relative infancy and we all pray for a peaceful transition, as mandated by the constitution. But, for some strange reason, this sentence by former U.S. President Thomas Jefferson keeps ringing in the mind: "The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants."

Jawhar Sircar is a Rajya Sabha MP of Trinamool Congress. He was earlier Secretary, Government of India, and CEO of Prasar Bharati.