

# **The Resurgent India**

**A Monthly National Review**

**November 2018**



***“Let us all work for the Greatness of India.”***  
***– The Mother***

**Year 9**

**Issue 8**

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# THE RESURGENT INDIA

## A Monthly National Review

November 2018



### SUCCESSFUL FUTURE

(Full of Promise and Joyful Surprises)

*Botanical name: Gaillardia Pulchella*

*Common name: Indian blanket, Blanket flower, Fire-wheels*

Year 9

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# **CONTENTS**

<b>The Changing Security and Political Situation in Kashmir.....</b>	<b>6</b>
The Most Recent Security Scenario .....	12
Radical Political Changes .....	13
Significant Policy Changes .....	16
<b>The Kashoggi Affair and Its Implications .....</b>	<b>21</b>
Geopolitical Implications: Yemen, Palestine and Iran .....	25
The Future .....	28

## A Declaration

We do not fight against any creed, any religion.

We do not fight against any form of government.

We do not fight against any social class.

We do not fight against any nation or civilisation.

We are fighting division, unconsciousness, ignorance, inertia and falsehood.

We are endeavouring to establish upon earth union, knowledge, consciousness, Truth, and we fight whatever opposes the advent of this new creation of Light, Peace, Truth and Love.

— The Mother

(Collected works of the Mother, Vol. 13, pp. 124-25)

## THE CHANGING SECURITY AND POLITICAL SITUATION IN KASHMIR

A number of rapid developments in Kashmir in the last few months – coupled with the gains of the Centre’s efficient policy of the last four years – reveal how the Valley’s politics is changing and also enables us to understand better why things went wrong in the past.

In recent times, the scenario after the PDP-BJP break-up – with the alliance becoming more damaging by the day, as Mehbooba’s high handedness, communalization and opacity in the Kathua case showed, coupled with her party’s intense nepotism and corruption – has been particularly positive, laying the foundations for the emergence of a non-dynastic third political front. The front is led by Sajjad Lone of People’s Conference (PC) and supported by the BJP and about a dozen rebel PDP legislators.

Most recently, with Governor Malik dissolving the assembly and rejecting the claims to government of both Congress-PDP-NC and the BJP-PC factions, speculation is rife about where politics in the Valley is headed – naysayers can detect nothing but confusion. Yet, we are at a point where things have been their best.

A closer scrutiny of the Governor’s actions, combined with political developments over the last few months, shows that the centre – irrespective of the state BJP leadership – is following an intelligent and systematic strategy of not only sidelining the PDP and NC, but also not letting Lone emerge as a parallel power centre, even as it keeps the pillars of the ‘third front’ strong in order to check the old parties. *Instead of going after expected*

***short-term gains by installing Lone as the Chief Minister and risking turning him into another Abdullah or Mufti, the central BJP is clearly working towards bringing permanent, long term changes in Kashmir politics, whereby no single Kashmiri party will ever become too powerful for its boots, as has happened over the last few decades***, thanks to Congress's opportunistic power play with NC.

Combined with the security scenario in the Valley, both the situations show that the centre is very much on track to achieve its stated policy on Kashmir, in as holistic a manner as it can get.

That we need alternatives to the PDP and National Conference (NC) – and the Congress's avatar in the Valley, which simply ends up clinging on to whichever of the two parties is in power – should no longer be in doubt. We are all familiar with the history of NC since 1947 and of Sheikh Abdullah's opportunistic politics since the 1930s. This does not have to do only with how the 'pristine and untouchable' Article 370 – with all its near-independent provisions – came to be, but also of ***how the Abdullahs and the Congress systematically alienated the people of the Valley and allowed terrorism to have its way, for the sake of their personal or familial gains and ambitions.***

The level of people's alienation was scarce in 1947 – much easily managed by a state that could control secessionism in the southern, north-eastern states and Punjab, all of which were much worse than Kashmir at the time – and could have been managed, had the entrenched interests and political unwillingness not come in the way.

***Since the outset, it can justifiably be said that Article 370 was negotiated not for the people of Kashmir, but for***

***entrenching the dynastic power of the Abdullah family, and by the conditions put forward by the Sheikh himself.*** It is a myth that is often propagated that during the time of Sheikh Abdullah, his immense popularity and policies representative of Kashmiri people kept the populace close to India, negligible levels of militancy or rebellion. However, what is ignored is that fact that had it not been for the emergence of Sheikh Abdullah and his Muslim Conference in the 1930s, the sharply distinctive and rebellious articulation of Kashmiri Muslim interests would never have occurred in the first place. Certainly, Kashmiri politics after Sheikh Abdullah has become even worse and an open field was given to Pakistani terrorists.

***The watershed moment when Congress and NC rigged the 1987 elections, conspired bloody conspiracies to further personal ends of individuals and did not care about ‘public opinion’ then showed that they viewed Kashmir as little more than their vassalage. Brutalize the people when it suits and, later, appeal to the Muslim identity and mollycoddle separatists and terrorists whenever convenient. The exceptionalism of Article 370 has performed an exceptional service, not for the people, but for the unholy marriage of convenience formed between Abdullahs, Congress, separatists and later – after 2000s – the Muftis.*** The money trails and hawala networks ruthlessly pursued by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) during 2016-17 showed the reach and exchange of money to sustain terrorists.

***What has been labelled as ‘peace’ and ‘insaniyat’ by the self-proclaimed proponents of secularism is nothing but a monetary devil’s bargain with terrorists, designed to keep the Kashmir issue forever beyond resolve, so that material interests of few families like Abdullahs, Muftis, Geelanis, Maliks etc. could***

*remain plush. Neither do these family fiefdoms want to join Pakistan, knowing that their separative interests would be crushed under that regime, and, at the same time, they want to keep India hostage to their perpetual blackmail, retaining the separative status of the state that has resulted in stifling all economic enterprise and given the lion's share of corrupt proceeds to the Kashmiri parties. They already know that an 'azad Kashmir' in between India and Pakistan is a fantasy and would soon be invaded by either country. Therefore, the most practical and convenient option for them is to keep the Kashmir cauldron burning and the Kashmiris befooled – the moment it gets resolved in any direction, these selfish interests will lose their relevance and footing.*

*The current Kashmiri parties are continuing with the strategy of Sheikh Abdullah – romancing with India, Pakistan and terrorists/separatists, but wanting to remain with India, knowing their Pakistan will kill their interests and that the Indian government has always adopted a soft, dialogue-based approach, treating them with respect.* It is important to understand these motivations to grasp why the Kashmir issue has remained unresolved. That the moral corruption and brutalization of successive generations of youth since the 1990s, is being termed a state of 'peace' now, is indeed a travesty of basic common sense.

It is in this context – without ever forgetting the historically brutal, greedy and corrupt role played by the current proponents of peace and secularism – that we should look at the failure that is Kashmir. *It is to the credit of the present government at the centre that the approach to Kashmir has been so determinedly in larger national interest, rather than in the interest of some petty family or person – the facts show that*

***the Modi government, at the Centre, has ruthlessly sidelined the Kashmiri parties, NC and PDP, stripping the false veneer of undeserved space that the Centre has always accorded them, and refusing completely to be taken hostage to their whims and blackmail.***

The present government, in the first four years of its tenure, discarded the traditional ‘political’ approach – based on mollycoddling the separatists through illusions like dialogue – in favour of a ‘security’ approach. The latter is based on adopting a tough stand, directly targeting the corrupt networks of separatist preachers like Geelani, eliminating as many terrorists as possible and dealing toughly with all those local Kashmiri youth who become over-ground workers and informants for terrorists.

After the first four years and the lapse of the PDP-BJP coalition, the government decided to apply its own unique political approach, since a strong foundation had already been built – the terrorists were rattled and in a state of disarray due to both internal and external factors. The funding from Pakistan was not forthcoming, as revealed by Hizbul’s Riyaz Naikoo’s desperate public display denouncing their Pakistani handlers for not being able to supply money and arms.

Zakir Musa, founder of an al-Qaeda cell in the Valley, emerged as a dark horse and become popular, dealing a blow to the interests of the United Jihad Council (UJC) that has waged terror in Kashmir and directly threatening them. Musa broke away from Hizbul in 2017 and founded his own small terror group – owing allegiance to al-Qaeda, which has about near-zero presence in the Valley. Terror organizations of the Gulf – like al-Qaeda – have rarely targeted India and have been created mainly for the West. They are unlike the Kashmir-specific terror

outfits. So, when Musa founded an al-Qaeda cell, it put him at odds with Hizbul and other Kashmiri terror outfits.

Musa was seen as digressing from the so-called core objectives of the Kashmir struggle viz. waging a war against the Indian state and overthrowing the latter. Musa, in a complete turnaround, rubbished these goals and said that jihad's only objective should be establish the rule of Sharia in Kashmir. He publicly threatened to behead the Hizbul militants if they persisted with their political objectives against India. Incidentally, Musa went onto acquire a hero's status in Kashmir, much like how Burhan Wani had acquired.

*The Zakir Musa episode – in which the Indian state is also speculated to have daringly played a secret role – not only greatly weakened the terror organization in Kashmir, but also opened up cases of rising violence amongst extremists themselves. Thus, there were cases where rival factions of extremists opened fire on each other outside a mosque after prayers and where rivalry among extremist factions has gone up – the results of mutual intolerance in the Muslim world is now being seen in Kashmir too.*

Combined with these internal dynamics, the Indian forces have been exceptionally successful in their 'operation all-out', having been given a free hand by the central government. *They eliminated a record number of terrorists this year, even totally wiping out the JeM and LeT networks.*

So, the successes – like NIA's cracking down on money networks – are now more visible than ever, on both political and security fronts, enabling us to declare that Modi has had the most neutral, systematic and organized policy on Kashmir so far.

## THE MOST RECENT SECURITY SCENARIO

Amongst the most outstanding successes of the Centre has been the wiping out of a record number of terrorists – through, both, outright force by the Army and the police, and, through deft foreign policy with the US and Arab countries (coupled with changing global political conditions) that has ensured a near-total drying up of Pakistani funding to the UJC.

Top commanders of key terrorist outfits – Hizbul Mujahideen, LeT, JeM – have been killed this year. ***From the JeM alone, around 50 terrorists and top commanders have been killed in 2018, including Massod Azhar's nephews. And, recently, the killing of Naveed Jutt of LeT, responsible for the murder journalist Shujaat Bukhari, has created a situation where the LeT is staring at a near total wipe-out in the Valley.*** Concretely, terrorists have begun losing ground and support in what used to, previously, be their strongholds. Reportedly, ***only 5 tehsils in J&K account for between 60-70 per cent of violence*** – this concentration of terror activity is important (Sahni 2018).

***A total of 206 terrorists have been killed in the Valley this year*** (Economic Times 2018), ***in less than eight months, if we count the Ramzan ceasefire.*** The numbers show that since the killing of Hizbul's young Burhan Wani in 2016 and the immense outpouring of local support for militancy that followed thereafter, things have now reached a full circle. ***At present, militant strength is at its lowest in the valley, with reports suggesting nearly 90% of the top leadership of the terrorist organizations being wiped out, with the forces killing the militants on a daily basis and adopting the strategy of targeting the top leadership,*** thereby striking at the very roots (Firstpost 2018).

The result is that *militants are in a state of complete disarray. They have started resorting to new tactics which are making them unpopular among the civilians – such as series of recent perpetual kidnappings of Kashmiri youth and their brutal murders* after accusing them of being informants. This shows the desperation of the militants who had, for a long time, become complacent and started thinking of themselves as people's representatives. Now, *with their leadership gone, funding dried up and rising vulnerability to easily being tracked by the Indian forces, they are staring at an utter failure. Even the levels of recruitment have gone down, since they no longer have the resources or the conditions to recruit local youth. As the Governor recently reported, the recruitment level is at near 'zero' at present.*

Naysayers often brandish meaningless figures to say that Kashmir is in a disarray because of the rising graph of killings – forgetting that such figures make no sense unless they are put in a larger perspective to see that the Kashmir policy is shaping up in a coherent and more successful way than ever before. Clearly, with India following a successful policy with the full application of force, there will obviously be a rise in cross-border incidents, a rise in soldiers killed on both sides and a rise in deaths of both foreign and Kashmiri militants. One fails to understand what is wrong with these numbers. More than anything, they show that India's policy is actually working.

## RADICAL POLITICAL CHANGES

Thus, on the security front, for the first time, one can discern concrete results and say that, yes, it is possible to permanently resolve the Kashmir issue. On the political front, things seem to be mobile, but here too, if noted carefully, the centre is following a shrewd and intelligent political strategy.

The dissolving of PDP-BJP coalition and the appointment of Mr. Malik as Governor has undoubtedly lent stability to the state and relief to the people. The Governor, being a political person and not a bureaucrat, is making sure that correct actions are undertaken, with a modicum of controversy being kept alive, from time-to-time, to keep the Kashmiri political parties on tenterhooks and confused and unable to launch any kind of attack on the centre. He has not behaved in a black-and-white way as a stooge of the centre and yet has got real work done, which has ***diminished the strength of parties like PDP, NC and Congress, and left them unable to launch any coherent attack on him or the centre.***

The holding of successful and peaceful elections – first urban local body (ULB) polls and then the Panchayat polls – despite the boycott by PDP and NC has dealt a severe blow to the organization of these parties. While the ULB polls did not witness a major turnout, the later Panchayat polls – occurring in five phases – saw nearly 75% turnout in Kashmir and nearly 89% in Jammu. The boycott logic of NC and PDP was skewed, since in the past also, leaders like Farooq Abdullah have managed to cast themselves as ‘representatives’ and sit in the assembly with very little turnouts and popular votes.

This time their boycott calls were not welcomed by their party members and many of them deserted their parties to fulfill their political ambitions elsewhere. For instance, Junaid Mattu – a fresh young face of NC – joined Sajjad Lone’s People’s Conference and became the mayor of Srinagar. Similarly, amongst themselves, BJP, Congress and People’s Conference managed to get ULB positions.

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### ***The PDP-NC boycott, irrespective of expectedly low***

*turnouts – turned out to be a bad political strategy, making them lose vital governance positions and ultimately eroding their local power base. In the process, even if forcefully and persistently, the BJP managed to carve out a space for itself in the psyche of the people. That there are new permanent political players on the ground has now become established, thanks to the illogic of PDP and NC.*

The aftermath of the polls has ultimately fed into the rise of the ‘third front’ in Kashmir politics, ostensibly led by Lone’s People’s Conference. Apparently, while Lone has just 2 MLAs in the assembly, the calculation that with the assured support of 25 MLAs of BJP and a dozen or so of PDP rebels – many of them prominent old PDP hands who can persuade others too – he can easily put together 40 MLAs. The needed number is 44 in the J&K assembly, which can be managed subsequently through independents and others.

With the coalition of Congress, NC and PDP staking claim to form government (with a total of 55 MLAs) and a similar claim being staked by Lone, the Governor has dissolved the assembly. The Governor’s term of six month lapses in early December. This was a intelligent step by the Governor and, most likely, a well-thought move by the BJP at the centre. *The Governor could have easily invited Lone – with BJP’s support – to form the government, as the recent experiments in other Indian states show. And, Lone too had been, for the past several months, petitioning the central BJP leaders to facilitate such an outcome. But the BJP has not done this*, as it could have easily done a long time back.

We must discern the reason behind this. *Clearly, had the central BJP leaders – often at odds with local Kashmiri BJP*

*leadership – allowed Lone to form the government with outside support, it would have resulted in only passing benefits to the national party. In fact, it would have permanently created another – third – Kashmiri power centre and entrenched Kashmiri political party, which could have, subsequently, gone the way of NC and PDP. Lone, let us remember, has no common thinking with the BJP. He has already made it clear that Article 370 is ‘sacred’ to him. The only common causes between Lone and BJP are political and temporary.*

It is to the credit of central BJP’s political strategy that it discarded local-level ambitions of political power and *deftly prevented Lone from becoming too powerful or bigger than his shoes. Yet, they want to keep this third front alive as a potent political force – to further erode the bases of PDP and NC and Congress – in the Valley, without allowing it to grab political power. This move has been a political masterstroke, which narrowly selfish parties like NDA-I or the UPA would never have been able to pull off.* It is this that can reasonably explain why Governor Malik dissolved the assembly and what is the national BJP’s political thinking behind the recent political developments in the Valley.

## SIGNIFICANT POLICY CHANGES

Besides, significant strides made in the political and security scenario of the state, for the first time, concrete steps are being taken to roll-back harmful, anti-India policies that have operated in the state. While, certainly, it is a given that something as humongous as Article 370 or Article 35-A cannot be dismantled outrightly and immediately, but steps towards that ultimate goal have speeded up since Mr. Malik became the Governor. In terms of policy, it is a fact that the PDP-BJP coalition till June this year

was useless. The PDP left no stones unturned in creating obstructions and Mufti's PDP has had a single-pointed agenda of corruption and nepotism, which has been proven by how most of the old PDP leaders have now deserted her for allegedly promoting her own family members. In a basic PDP rally, even the workers refuse to turn up.

And this is a separatist party that emerged due to its stronghold in South Kashmir – the hotbed of militancy. Now that it has permanently eroded its radicalized support base, the recent actions of Mr. Malik's State Administrative Council (SAC) cast a further damning light on it.

The most significant change by Mr. Malik, in recent times, has been the repealing of the 'Roshini Act' or The Jammu and Kashmir State Lands (Vesting of Ownership to the Occupants) Act, 2001. It was passed in 2001 by the Congress-PDP coalition government, under the leadership of Congress's Ghulam Nabi Azad. Its purported objective was to generate resources for power projects in the state and to give proprietary possession to those inhabitants who had been in unauthorized possession of government land. The government's stated that it wants to raise funds to the tune of 25,448 crore rupees by selling 20, 64,972 kanals of State land under unauthorized occupation. The amount was to be invested for generating electricity in the State.

Not only did it turn out to be a huge scam unearthed by the CAG with only a few crores being raised and substantial portions of the land being given to influential people, but also had a more sinister motive behind it – in Jammu, it was widely wielded to alter the region's demography by settling huge numbers of Muslims and Gujjar-Bakerwal Muslims on the state land.

The SAC, in taking a decision to repeal it, made a reference to the fact that Ankur Sharma of the Ikkjutt Jammu group had filed a PIL against this Act. According to data provided in this PIL, under this Act, in Jammu, over 90% of the applications were successfully processed in favour of Muslims, including Gujjars and Bakerwals. While corruption and nepotism may have dented this subtle Islamic invasion of Jammu, yet the intent behind the operation of the Act in Jammu reveals the motives of the then state government, led by the Congress.

The issue has taken centerstage with Mr. Malik's decision, but it had become the bone of contention during the proceedings of the Kathua rape case, when Jammu residents widely began agitating to protest Kashmiri Muslim conspiracies against the Hindus, not just in the Kathua trial, but also by saying that things had reached a boiling point in Jammu ever since this Act started showing its diabolical results.

Besides this progressive decision by Mr. Malik, the Governor has also asked the bureaucrats to speed up the process of issuing Permanent Residency Certificate applications for Kashmir. For years, these applications have remained stuck. Thanks to the previous governments in the state, they never wanted to grant residency to outsiders for the fear of affecting the Muslim demography of Kashmir – stark opposite of the manipulations done through Roshni Act in Jammu. As a result, applications for permanent residency were rarely processed and this vested bureaucratic non-response was taken for granted – the politics behind it accepted by the centre.

But now with Mr. Malik trying subtly to get these applications moving, there has been an instant backlash, including from Sajjad Lone. All Kashmiri parties have united to state that they will never allow anything that changes the

demography of the state.

In yet another related development, Mr. Malik's SAC further, recently, granted a PSU (Public Sector Undertaking) status to the J&K Bank. That means now it will come under rules applicable to all state entities in the country viz. accountability under the Right to Information (RTI) Act and under the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC).

This comes at a time when Ms. Mufti has been accused of appointing thousands of candidates to the bank irregularly and routing dubious money transactions to her family members. The backlash of SAC's action was immediate – not only did political parties and separatists like Hurriyat unite to condemn the SAC for interfering with the state's autonomy, but even the Kashmiri Muslim businessmen who should have logically supported the step, spoke out against the SAC's action which would target numerous 'hawala transactions'.

These are commendable concrete policy steps which weigh more than two decades of secular deviousness displayed by all the previous governments and bureaucratic governors. They show that Kashmir was being systematically sold out and deliberately being alienated from India. The process needed to be ruthlessly stopped. For the naysayers, what more 'proof' is needed that things are moving at lightening speed in Kashmir?

Thus, on both security and political fronts, we can see concrete patterns and results. While, on the security front, the militants are facing a near total wipe-out and are handicapped due to the killings of all their top leaders, on the political front, the last four years, have seen a completely hapless, helpless and sidelined avatars of NC, PDP and Congress, for the first time in what are turning out to be drastic changes in Kashmiri politics.

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## THE KASHOGGI AFFAIR AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

If there is one thing that the murder of dissident Saudi journalist, Jamal Kashoggi, has brought into sharp focus it is the changing political equations in the Middle-east, which have been occurring behind the scenes for the last several years, but were brought into public attention only recently. It is clear that the murder was premeditated by the top Saudi leadership – a fact which Turkey's Erdogan has enjoyed drip-feeding to the hungry Western media – and by aides closest to the new crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman (MbS), with fingers pointing directly at him.

Yet, the entire global drama of sensational investigation that has played out over obvious facts has more to do with politics and little to do with justice – after all, the details of the crime show that it was nothing compared to the kind of torture Turkey, Russia, US and others regularly mete out to the suspects and dissidents kept in their jails.

The episode only further cements the evidence of the immaturity and recklessness of the new crown prince, to the advantage of his seasoned political opponents. The botched nature of the murder itself – with killers leaving behind easy traces and not realizing that the Turks might be tapping the Saudi embassy in Istanbul – shows Saudi Arabia's naivete and overconfidence. This is especially so, since Turkey – and Erdogan's increasing obsession with the past Ottoman glory predating Kemal Ataturk – and Saudi Arabia are two big Sunni rivals, with Turkey sometimes allying with the Saudi enemy, Iran.

The fact that MbS may have had to order Kashoggi to be killed, in the first place, for publishing harmless – and relatively neutral – columns in the Washington Post, further shows that

the Saudi regime, in the hands of MbS, is more unstable and impulsive, than even the new crop of such leaders like Trump, Bolsonaro, Duterte, Erdogan and Putin. Recall, how, sometime before the Kashoggi episode, Saudi Arabia lashed out at Canada by taking extreme steps – pulling out investments, dismissing the ambassador, recalling its students – simply because Canada had raised questions about the country’s human rights record.

The Kashoggi affair has, therefore, brought into sharp focus that Saudi politics has changed and this will have a long-term impact in the region. Since MbS took power last year, many of his actions have already proven that he was different from the conservative, older generation. He belongs to the category of populist leaders like Trump, Bolsonaro, Putin, Hungary’s Orban and others, with popularity among the masses, repudiating the old order and appealing to national interests.

His actions of jailing top members of the royal family and businessmen at Ritz-Carlton – where they are still jailed after more than a year – leading a Gulf economic blockade against Qatar (which houses the world’s largest US military base outside the US) and later impulsively kidnapping Lebanon’s PM, Hariri to force his resignation and yielding only after French pressure, were populist and Trumpian actions that the older Saudi royals would never have undertaken. ***For the Kingdom, the most important political factors have been to project and maintain internal as well as regional stability in order to keep in the good graces of Western allies and continue the existing oil-for-security arrangement that it has had with its staunchest ally, U.S, since the 1960s, and, to maintain a steady flow of radical Islamic activities through its jihadi proxies world over and especially in the Middle-east to keep Iran in check and retain control over other Muslim powers.***

The Saudi-US relationship has been so strong that even after 9/11 – wherein some 15 terrorists who hit the World Trade Centre were all Saudi nationals – Saudi citizens were easily allowed to leave the U.S before they could be interrogated by the FBI. Some U.S. Presidents – especially Bush and Trump – have even had personal business relations with Saudi Arabia in oil and real estate and extremely cordial family relations with the royal family. Before his Presidency, Trump had sold millions of dollars' worth of real estate to the Saudis and during his campaign claimed that of course he “liked them very much”.

Currently, even though US is no longer dependent on Saudi oil, having become a completely energy-independent country with shale fracking – although, it produces surplus oil now, the process is very expensive and it cannot hope to export it to rival the Gulf oil, whose prices can easily be brought down – yet, Saudi Arabia is amongst the biggest importers of the US arms. And most importantly, western powers and the Saudi-bloc have a sworn common enemy in Iran.

MbS, personally, has been even better for the US. Notwithstanding his impulsive actions regarding his rivals and dissidents, he completely curbed the powers of the hardline Wahhabi Islamic preachers who have been exporting terror to the whole world since 1979. The Iranian Shiite Islamic revolution of 1979 threatened the Saudi power base in the region and that is when the Kingdom decided to start the policy of funding terror proxies all over the world and mainly in the region, to keep Iran in check and gain supremacy among other countries in the Muslim world in line with the tribalistic, territorial Arab mentality. MbS checked the unbridled powers of this clerical militia.

He has also – for the first time in Saudi history – brought in

the policy of finally letting women drive, besides touring the world and leveraging foreign investments. Most importantly, it was under MbS, that the US finally succeeded in getting Saudi Arabia to publicly soften towards Israel like never before, since all have a common enemy in Iran. MbS, at one point, in an interaction with American Jews in Washington a few months ago, lambasted the Palestinians, by declaring that either they should come to the negotiating table or just ‘shut up’. In return, in the Kashoggi case, Israel has defended Saudi Arabia and MbS openly and has been counselling Washington to do the same, which the latter is doing.

Therefore, compared to the geopolitical reality and the changing regional equations under MbS, the Kashoggi affair is just a blip. It is an inconvenience for the West – since Erdogan is taking full advantage to settle scores with the Kingdom – over which they are expressing fake moral outrage. The attempt in Washington and other Western powers, since day one, has been to absolve MbS. In fact, Britain has already publicly endorsed an arms deal with the Kingdom recently. With investigations coming to a close, the US has sanctioned only the hit squad of 17 Saudi nationals who murdered Kashoggi and even the CIA has claimed that while the crown prince may have been involved, there was no audio evidence suggesting that he directly ordered the killing, while the Saudi prosecutor has sought death penalty for five. A thorough whitewashing of MbS is going on, including in Washington.

Erdogan’s sensational drip-feeding of news bytes to the media, in this case, has failed and become stale and passé by now. The American media, despite best efforts, is already fizzling out on the issue and can no longer corner Trump despite all efforts. The Congress lawmakers may demand more action, but

that is yet to be seen, depending on what ‘conclusion’ the White House reaches on the CIA investigation. The latter’s support base of Evangelicals and outlets like Fox news has already done a good job of maligning Kashoggi’s character and justifying Saudi actions. Turkey was not able to gain any kind of leverage over Saudi Arabia and the status quo remains.

## **GEOPOLITICAL IMPLICATIONS: YEMEN, PALESTINE AND IRAN**

The Kashoggi affair has changed little for MbS personally. But some slight restraints have been put on the impulses of MbS by his father, King Salman, and by the US, which may see a positive outcome in the Yemen war – a failed war which MbS has been relentlessly waging and in which Saudi Arabia has proven to the world that despite all the material and moral support from the West, the Saudi-West alliance (with complete Gulf and Emirati support) is yet completely inept and immature against Iran.

***Saudi Arabia has been waging this failed war in Yemen against Iranian-funded Houthi rebels, since 2015. Despite having a solid Western and Emirati alliance behind it, with full intelligence sharing from Pentagon, the entire alliance has been no match for Iran.*** They have only ended up killing a horrific number of Yemeni civilians – with the Emirati alliance ensconced comfortably in the safe Yemeni city of Aden and not even directly facing the rebels in the war-torn port city of Hodeidah, and launching missiles from there. The Iranian-backed Houthis have become quite confident by now. They know they can easily wait out the Saudi Arabian alliance and keep them in check.

And now, after the Kashoggi affair, the US has refused to refuel Saudi warplanes mid-air and is prevailing upon the

Kingdom to end the Yemen war. The Kingdom has started making noises that it wants peace in Yemen, after all the global pressure from the Kashoggi affair. The Yemen and Syria wars are yet another instance that showed the immaturity and relative incapability of Saudi Arabia vis-à-vis Iran.

In Yemen, what could have been an easy Arab-West victory against the Houthis was brought to a grinding halt after Iran backed the latter. *In Syria, what seemed like an easy, imminent downfall of Assad by the Arab-West coalition (like they did with Gaddafi) saw a 360-degree turnaround, once Russia entered, and along with Turkey and Iran, wiped out the gains of the coalition making Assad stronger than ever.*

*Saudi's youth and tribalistic thinking is no match against Iran's ancient culture, its deep-rooted flair for geopolitics and diplomacy, the high educational culture of its citizens and, most importantly, its seasoned, nationalist and famous Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guards. It has been surviving hostility from the West and Saudi Arabia and Israel since 1979 and more so, since 2001 and the regular sanctions regime. The US botched up the Iraq war and a few years later, and especially now, we see Iran and Iranian-backed political parties have a strong, popular base in Iraq.* Iran has cultivated friends with the supposedly counter-West alliance – especially, Russia, China, India (only economic relations), Syria, Afghanistan. Onam is a neutral player that keeps good offices on both the sides, while Turkey, despite its Sunni dislike of Iran, has allied with it, to beat the Saudi-coalition in the Syria war.

*Iran – combining wisdom and military might – maintains a shrewd political policy in the region. Its loyal proxies – Houthis in Yemen, Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Palestine – have served it well to keep the Sunni influence in check.* The success

is evident through the fact that Hezbollah is a part of power sharing arrangement in Lebanon's Parliament, while Hamas runs a government in Gaza since 2007. What should have been an Israel-Palestine conflict was complicated by the creation of Hamas and its winning of Gaza elections, effectively cementing a deep divide between the Arafat-led Palestinian Authority (PA) in West Bank and Hamas in Gaza.

The upshot was that *Israel, PA, Western powers like US, Saudi Arabia, UAE and Egypt, all secretly ganged up against Hamas and yet could not defeat it. PA is as good as a vassalage of Israel, and corruption and disillusionment remains in both Gaza and West Bank. Palestinians are suppressed in both places and corruption has become so entrenched that to maintain the status quo is more in interests of PA and Hamas and they alone can do a good job of it and no longer need Israel. These entrenched realities and secret Israeli diplomacy with the Arab powers have changed the rules of the game. The secret Arab diplomacy with Israel to check the Persians is now very much public, thanks to MbS*. Recently, Saudi Arabia, in an unprecedented move, granted Air India direct flights over its airspace from India to Israel, after Netanyahu-Modi meeting in New Delhi.

The rise of MbS and the persistent *Kashoggi affair has brought most of these alliances out in the open, revealing that Arab empathies with Palestine are a hogwash designed to periodically appease their own domestic citizens and keep alive a false sense of solidarity and trust in the Muslim world, where none exists. In reality, geopolitics and entrenched power arrangements are most important. The UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Egypt have, for years, been using the services of Israel's private security firms and mercenaries to spy on their*

*own enemies and citizens, with the UAE even putting them in an advisory role. After the Kashoggi case and the growing bonhomie between the Kingdom and Israel, the world witnessed Netanyahu embarking on a series of unprecedented visits to Oman and Bahrain, where in a sports event, Israel's national anthem was played and open bilateral diplomacy conducted. MbS had already declared that Israel has a right to national self-determination, thus repudiating the Palestinians.*

## THE FUTURE

The Kashoggi affair has, thus, brought full focus on what the ascendancy of MbS means for the Kingdom and the region. While Iran equation will remain the same, critical issues like Israel-Palestine, failed wars in Syria and Yemen, Saudi Arabia's shunning of conservatism in favour of populism, curbing powers of Muslim clerics and corrupt royal conservative interests bent on deriving the powers of the House of Saud from these clerics, are all witnessing marked changes. The Kashoggi murder was not a surprise, but very much in line with other actions like arrests of royals, businessmen, dissidents and feminists (MbS is ready to concede women's rights issues, but has not taken kindly to the feminist bandwagon claiming credit or leadership or a parallel power constituency).

The last thing that one can expect from MbS is to spread any false illusions of Muslim unity all over the world. Migrants from South Asia – Muslim or otherwise – are being turned back. *Recently, Saudi Arabia has started the process of forcible repatriation of Rohingya Muslims – lodged in Saudi detention camps – to Bangladesh. It can be expected that funding to countries like Pakistan and Bangladesh will be more symbolic and formal than enthusiastic or expansive, since clerics are no longer as powerful. This may, to some extent at least, dry up*

*the roots of Pakistani terror outfits, spreading terror in Kashmir.*

With the rise of MbS, we are about to come a full circle since the Arab Spring of 2011. *In retrospect, it is clear that the point of Arab Spring was not democratic political systems – as western commentators had confidently predicted – but an unravelling of the carefully established Sunni Muslim order and lapsing back into the Arab roots of tribalism. Saudi's sworn enemies like the Muslim Brotherhood – given refuge by Turkey – and the Houthis, are all a product of the Arab Spring.*

*The carefully cultivated façade of Muslim unity, Israel enmity and sophistication born of acquired material wealth – although behind the scenes it was always different: the appearances were just for the masses – is giving way to the inherent desert tribalism of Arab societies (not Persian, since it has always been a great and ancient civilization). Under this mental outlook, forget nation-states, even the common Arab citizens do not trust each other at all.*

Paradoxically, instead of the Arab world imitating the western democratic systems as was expected after 2011, it is the West that has itself ended up witnessing a similar, parallel movement, with European governments and American systems (now, even Brazil), going back to the pre-World War II mentality, *completely unravelling the liberal-secular young “international order” less than 70 years old, but in its abstract arrogance considering itself to be older than any past or national histories. While it was the “liberal order” in the West, it was the “Islamic” order for the Arabs. Both – superficially imposed and forcefully and brutally maintained – are now rapidly unravelling.*

This has resulted in a search for an alternative system of stability, pointing to the shining beacon of light in Asia, which is

witnessing rapid material progress, solid political stability, rising military power, and, most importantly, a confident upholding of its own culture and spiritual values. Its stability is not based on artificial foundations with some false political façade created to maintain stability among the people, but flows from its own cultures and unites the system and the society.

## Will India Yet Arise?

*“Will she yet arise, new combine her past and continue the great dream where she left it off, shaking off on the one hand the soils and filth that have grown on her in her period of downfall and futile struggle, and re-asserting on the other her peculiar individuality and national type against the callow civilisation of the West with its dogmatic and intolerant knowledge, its still more dogmatic and intolerant ignorance, its deification of selfishness and force, its violence and its ungoverned Titanism? In doing so lies her one chance of salvation.”*

— Sri Aurobindo

(Collected Works of Sri Aurobindo, Vol. 1: p. 167)