“Let us all work for the Greatness of India.”

– The Mother
**THE RESURGENT INDIA**

A Monthly National Review

June 2022

**SUCCESSFUL FUTURE**

(Full of Promise and Joyful Surprises)

*Botanical name: Gaillardia Pulchella*

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

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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)
AGNIPATH SCHEME FOR MILITARY RECRUITMENT: A BOLD STEP FORWARD

Reforms in the military and its timely upgradation to keep pace with the changing global advancements forms among the most important elements of national security. Failure to undertake military reforms may result – if not in immediate security costs – in long-term erosion of capabilities. It is in this context that the Agnipath Scheme has been launched by the government. The scheme has corresponding models already in existence in all major military powers in the world, such as the U.S, the U.K, Russia, Israel, France and Germany, which were studied extensively over the past two years before the scheme for India was formulated.

The scheme aims to contribute to military reforms by changing the profile of the non-officer rank military personnel and by ensuring that more resources can go towards military modernization, which is the need of the hour. It also ensures tangible and intangible benefits for the ‘Agniveer’ graduating from this scheme into the society, towards the larger cause of nation-building.

STILTED TRAJECTORY OF MILITARY REFORM

India has had an uneasy relationship with military reforms. The country’s civilian leadership – for several previous decades – was unwilling to cede military control to military brass itself, opting instead to keep the military under the control of civilian leadership. This was done by populating the defence decision-making arena with civilian bureaucrats, who also happened to be non-experts in military matters. In the immediate post-
Independence period, such an approach may have been rational. For, around us abounded examples of newly decolonized countries in Asia and Africa who had, after brief stints with democracy, fallen into the trap of dictatorships.

However, this combination of overpowering civil control over a large, semi-autonomous military soon became outdated. Civilian bureaucratic control had its disadvantages, the most prominent amongst them being the compromise of military effectiveness, the tendency of services to operate in silos and manipulation and corruption in defence contracts and procurement. Indeed, such was the state of affairs that the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) was constituted only in the mid-1990s. Until then, national security issues were handled by the Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs (CCPA) in addition to its various other wide political responsibilities. Prior to the Kargil War of 1999, defence reforms were undertaken in an ad hoc, sporadic and reactionary manner in response to occurrences rather than with a long-term strategy or vision (Kanwal & Kohli, 2019).

Despite our operational difficulties in the initial phase of the Kargil War and the subsequent recommendations made by the Kargil Review Committee, military reforms were not adequately undertaken. Indeed, the Kargil Review Committee, under the Prime Ministership of Atal Bihari Vajpayee, was the first instance of sweeping defence reforms being deliberated at all. It made wide-ranging recommendations in various areas pertaining to defence preparedness, procurement, and military expenditure, including recommendations for integration of the military through the creation of the post of Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) and reducing the age of personnel being recruited.
to the military. Many of the recommendations were adopted, while many critical ones were left out.

Under the subsequent governments of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh (2004 to 2014), military reforms were completely put on the backburner and, indeed, relations between political and military leadership were highly strained (Mukherjee, 2021). It was only after Prime Minister Modi assumed power in 2014 that military reform began to take priority.

While in the first term of the government military expenditure fell to an all-time low, in the second term of the government sweeping military reforms began to be undertaken, which had been pending for the last three decades. Key reforms include the creation of the post of CDS tasked with theaterization of military command and the creation of the Department of Military Affairs (DMA). Reforms also included a special focus on infrastructural projects – such as the construction of roads, bridges and other connectivity projects – with a strategic value in border areas of the country.

The government also laid immense emphasis on accelerating the production of the indigenous defence industry, by increasing defence exports and undertaking reforms like the corporatization of the ordnance factories. In this, the biggest psychological change has been to overcome the historically friction-ridden relationship between the defence industry and the military sector and make them work with each other, thereby mitigating the suspicious military attitude towards the private sector. Finally, the government also began to involve the military in diplomatic and foreign policy priorities, unlike in the past when the military was often left guessing about the foreign policy priorities.
AGNIPATH – A REFORM LONG DUE

It is in this long line of military reforms undertaken under the Modi government that the Agnipath or ‘Tour of Duty’ scheme was launched in mid-June 2022. It is a scheme for recruitment of Personnel Below Officer Ranks (PBORs) to the army, navy, and air force. The scheme – with recruitment effective from July-August 2022 – will now be the only mode of recruitment of soldiers, sailors and airmen. It will recruit youth aged between 17.5 and 21 years – with the upper age limit being raised to 23 years for 2022 as a concession to protestors – for a period of four years, which includes six months of the training period. After the end of the four-year period, 25% of these Agniveer will have the option of continuing forward to regular military service, while the rest of the 75% will enter the society.

The reform has echoes in some of the recommendations of the Kargil Review Committee which had suggested reducing the age of the military personnel and made recommendations regarding streamlining defence expenditure. The Agniveer

- Salary package of Agniveer will be around INR 4.76 lakh in the first year and can go up to INR 6.92 lakh by the fourth year.
- One-time tax-free Seva Nidhi package, amounting to around 11.71 lakh rupees, will be given to the Agniveer at the end of 4 years.
- Agniveer will also be offered a contributory severance package besides non-contributory death and disability compensation.
- They will not be eligible for pension or gratuity.
- Every year around 45,000 soldiers will be enlisted in the three services under this scheme.
scheme fulfils all these imperatives. It effectively brings down the average age of personnel from the present 32 years to 25 years. The requirement for a younger profile of the military cannot be emphasized enough. For, a youthful profile of the army not only provides more energy and spirit to the forces and is more amenable to the latest technological integration, but also moulds and shapes impressionable young minds in a positive direction before the venom of the present utilitarian education system could seep into them.

Presently, the average age of soldiers in the Indian army is around 32 to 33 years. Only 19% of the personnel below officer’s rank (PBOR) are below the age of 25 years; 27% are in the age group of 26 to 30 years, 20% are in the 31-35 years bracket, 19% are in 36-40 years category; around 10.2% are in 41-45 years category and 4.4% are in 46-50 years bracket (Gupta, 2022).

Besides reducing the average age of the personnel, the scheme also ensures that a larger share of the defence budget is made available for capital expenditure for the acquisition of high-technology military equipment and platforms over time. This will be ensured as – due to the Agnipath scheme – the expenditure on defence pensions is expected to drop substantially over time.

**MYTH VERSUS REALITY – WHAT THE SCHEME IS REALLY ABOUT**

While the scheme is a concrete measure – based on other countries’ experiences and needs of the hour – to revamp the military and also have an impact on society, the objections to it appear to be based on superficial grounds, projected too far
into the realm of speculations. These objections have been raised from political quarters and retired army veterans. The immediate negative reactions of the Opposition have also led to planned protests, violence, and arson in various states, such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Uttarakhand, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. In many cases, these protests were pre-planned, and a result of a conspiracy, with coaching centres being busted for masterminding protests and inciting people.

As is the norm with reactions spawned from mass mentality, even in the case of this scheme the objections are born more out of speculative insecurity and fear of the unknown rather than anything concrete. They need to be addressed to show their superficiality.

First, the objections assume that the government’s attempt to save on revenue expenditure will be at the cost of the ‘operational capabilities and efficiency’ of the forces. There is no concrete proof to support this assumption. Indeed, facts show the reality to be the exact opposite. Major defence expenditure goes towards pensions and salaries, while very little is left for spending on equipment that can enhance the ‘capabilities and efficiency’ of the forces. The Agnipath scheme, by saving on pensions, is actually allocating a huge chunk of expenditure to capital expenses that, in turn, can help improve the efficiency of the forces.

Presently, more than half the defence budget is allocated for pensions every year while less than 5% is allocated for research and development.
In the last seven years alone, the number of defence pensioners has increased by around 10 lakh personnel. In the defence allocation, about 70% of the defence budget is being
used for revenue expenditure (operating expenses), while only about 30% is spent on capital expenditure, which is meant for the modernization of the military (Varghese, Radhakrishnan, & Nihalani, 2022).
Thanks to the amount of money spent on pensions – which has increased enormously due to the Prime Minister’s fulfilment of the One Rank One Pension (OROP) pledge – the modernization of forces has taken a hit. It is estimated that the Indian Air Force (IAF) presently has 30 squadrons of fighter jets against the 42 that are needed, and the Indian navy has 130 ships as against the 200 that it envisages (Singh, 2022).

In the years to come, India will be faced with a much more insecure world and new forms of warfare for which we need to be appropriately geared up. The global insecurity is visible in the field of the arbitrariness with which certain countries are ready to violate principles of sovereignty and upend the international order – as is visible in Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. This has led to new forms of alliances, arms race and massive economic fallout.

The world is also facing new forms of warfare which will be increasingly driven by non-contact warfare, automated warfare driven by Artificial Intelligence technologies and warfare based on other forms of advancing, manipulative/deceptive technologies and fifth-generation weapons and military systems. It will be based less on numbers and more on technology, driven by stand-off weapons, cyberspace and space-based ISR (Intelligence Surveillance and Reconnaissance) (Chinoy, 2022). Therefore, the need of the hour – as acknowledged by the whole world – is a thinning, rather than an expansion of armed forces, and more induction of automated weapons systems, including the capability to manufacture them indigenously.
Second, the objections assume that at the end of the four-year period, the 75% of the youth entering society would be ‘unemployable’. This is yet another baseless assumption. In fact, the rest – 75% – of the **Agniveer will enter society armed with the advantages of military discipline, feeling of nationalism and character-building and with numerous material benefits as well. They will be expected to provide an inspirational and leadership role in society that is moving toward nationalism as an important part of nation-building.**

They will also – due to the education and training imparted to them – be expected to come with an advanced skill set that will provide them material opportunities in various sectors where they can contribute. In terms of material benefits to be given to them, they will have a good salary package, certification in terms of specially-designed government education, skills as well as options to avail special reservations announced by various states and departments. The Seva Nidhi package that will be given to them can be used to start their own business or can be invested.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Central/State Government</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ministry of Home Affairs</td>
<td>10 percent reservations in vacancies in Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) and Assam Rifles (AR)</td>
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<td>Relaxation of upper age limit by three years (5 years for the first batch of Agniveers) in recruitment in CAPF and AR</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ministry of Defence</td>
<td>10 percent reservation in job vacancies in the Indian Coast Guard, defence civilian posts and 16 Defence Public Sector Undertakings (DPSUs)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways</td>
<td>Job opportunities for Agniveers in six sectors in the Merchant Navy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Education</td>
<td>Special educational programme to enable Agniveers who are 10 class pass to obtain 12 class pass certificate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Government of Assam</td>
<td>Assam Police to absorb Agniveers who are permanent residents of the State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governments of Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Madhya Pradesh</td>
<td>Priority in recruitment in state police forces</td>
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Various business leaders across the country have also welcomed the scheme and announced their eagerness to employ the disciplined Agniveers who enter the society. In other words, the Agniveer will be much better off than their peers who would – given the present state of the economy worldwide and in India, and the rapidly deteriorating psychological and material conditions of the mass of humanity – be likely unemployable and saddled with futile degrees.

**MOVING BEYOND INERTIA**

The working of the scheme and its impacts will become clearer over time. Presently, Indian Air Force (IAF) Agnipath recruitment has seen around 7.5 lakh applications, showing that the youth is applying with full enthusiasm. The virulent protests against the scheme lasted for barely a few days. As soon as the government made its intent clear that the scheme will not be rolled back and that those participating in the protests will not be allowed to compete for recruitment to the scheme, the protests were quick to dissipate. The Opposition – as expected – kept attempting unsuccessfully to resurrect the fires of anarchy long after the protests had quietened down.

Despite the dissipation of protests, a new facet of the country was revealed. The manner in which the protestors engaged in violence, involving damage, burning and destruction of national property like trains and other infrastructure, showed how divided we still are, as a country. It is ironic that the arsonists and rioters engaging in such national damage are the ones who planned to be recruited to the task of serving the nation through the military. The mentality that the appeal of military service should hinge on a life-long pension and a life
of comfort after serving for 15 years is akin to the mentality seeking government service as a secure way of economic survival. These utilitarian notions of comfort and security are now being challenged as the country moves forward after a sustained collective inertia of many decades.

It is this utilitarian thinking which has prevented nationalism from taking root among the mass of people. Defence constitutes one of the most critical public services, but under the onslaught of utilitarianism, the very meaning of service itself has been subverted. Instead of motivating the spirit of serving others or serving an aim higher than ourselves (such as the nation or the Divine), the term service has begun to imply a professionalized catering to one’s own selfish interests instead of serving the country or society. Livelihood is a necessity, but when service becomes a means for only serving ourselves at the cost of the country, it becomes perverted. This is what is visible in the India of today. It is visible not only in the Agnipath protests but also in the mass mentality of the Hindus on other issues, where abhorrent fear and insecurity about our own narrow interests prevent us from uniting as a nation. Such fear – an outgrowth of tamasic inertia – is perhaps as perverted, if not worse than utilitarianism.

The overwhelming concern with our own future and security – especially for those engaged in public service – ought to give way to more of the spirit of self-giving. Such a spirit would be particularly needed, in the area of defence, if a nation were to face a crisis. For instance, the manner in which Ukrainian people united to fight against the Russians is exemplary and unlikely to be seen in a divided India of the present times. This state of affairs needs to change and tinkering with the mere outer machinery by introducing new laws or policies or systems cannot bring about such a change. In that
sense, Agnipath is only a partial and a small step in the right direction. But it appears that the nation is poised to go through much collective hardship before it gets rid of its self-serving inertia and truly awakens the dynamic national spirit from within. Until that is done, these outer steps will merely serve symbolic and decorative purposes.

**Bibliography**


HIGHLIGHTS

DEVELOPMENTS IN RUSSIA-Ukraine War: Deeper Costs for Russia

There are two components to the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war. On the one hand is the visible component – that which is conveyed to us based on information on temporary gains and losses in the ongoing war. On the other hand is the less visible component – that which is based on near-permanent, long-lasting effects of this war, on both Russia and Ukraine.

On the visible front, Russian gains in the eastern Donbas region of Ukraine have been clear. Russia is steadily expanding in the eastern region, albeit at a slower pace and riddled with setbacks. However, on the less visible front, the costs of this expansion are not discussed much. These costs – ranging from military fatigue of the Russian military and underground rebellions in Russia to steady de-modernization of the country – are going to have a highly damaging and long-lasting effect. In particular, the de-modernization of the country has been progressing even as Russia seeks to desperately make some gains in the war.

Since the war began, Russia is gradually and deliberately reversing whatever modernization took place in its state system, economy and society in the post-Soviet period. It is undertaking this de-modernization as a part of its massive unspoken policy change, in a bid to ‘self-sustain’ amidst rising global isolation. It is a huge and risky gamble, as post-Soviet Russia had gained access to the most high-tech products and services and still remains deeply involved in global supply chains.
Manifestations of this de-modernization can be seen in the form of Russian reversion to crude warfare techniques harking to the Second World War period and in the form of import substitution policies for which Russia doesn’t have the resources. Russian announcement of ‘import substitution’ as an answer to Western sanctions is set to lead to de-modernization as it relies on a return to low-tech industrial structures and designs. This is visible in the unmodern Russian technique of attempting to liberate Donbas by destroying it completely. Even Moscow experts admit that this will prevent Russia from establishing airspace control over Ukraine, further aggravated by logistics obstacles due to Western sanctions. The manpower shortages in the Russian military are so pronounced that Russia is recruiting soldiers from volunteer units formed in North Caucasus republics to involve them more in the war effort and tame down their opposition.

Indeed, since the war began Russia exhausted most of its missile arsenal at around over 2,100 cruise missiles and short-range ballistic missiles in Ukraine, leading to questions about how long it will take or even if Russia will ever be able to fully restore its depleted missile arsenal. This also includes hundreds of Soviet-era missiles which are close to exhaustion and are non-reproducible. Before 2011, Russia relied mostly on tanks and armoured vehicles built in the Soviet era and had not invested much into rearmament. Before the invasion of Ukraine, the total number of modernized and newly manufactured tanks and armoured vehicles stood at 650.

Overall, the Russian Armed Forces have lost, at a minimum, over 830 tanks and 1,650 different types of armoured vehicles as well as dozens of combat aircraft and helicopters and many other pieces of military equipment. Another issue Russia faces
in Ukraine is a looming deficit in artillery munitions, which will become almost inevitable by the end of 2022. Russian reliance on mass artillery shelling raises questions about the amount of ammunition Russia still has in storage or that will need to be replaced.

All these difficulties will take several years to solve, even under favorable economic circumstances. *This means that Russia will have to increase its rate of manufacturing modern missile variants. Thus, the paradox of resorting to the old Soviet way of war based on the massive application of force, while having neither the human resources nor the industrial base necessary to carry it out, undercuts whatever gains Russian forces are able to make in Donbas.* With every delivery of Western weapon systems, the Armed Forces of Ukraine take a step forward in modernization, while the Russian military falls back to unsustainable World War II patterns.

This process will have a devastating effect on an already battered Russian economy. Economic indicators do not reflect this. For, the quality of the Russian recession is sharply different from the quality of possible recessions in Western countries. For instance, in Russia, the main driver of inflation is the severe cuts in imports, which helps to keep a positive trade balance but results in a steady expansion of poverty. New measures of social support announced have limited real scope compared to rise in consumer prices.

Due to de-modernization and economic contraction, Russia doesn’t even have the wherewithal to build basic infrastructure and is increasingly relying on China for that, as Chinese firms build railways in the Russian north in order to secure access to the enormous reserves of natural resources there. This is yet another indication of how far Russia has fallen behind the
outside world over the last three decades, as China today feels entitled to enter Siberia and the Russian Far East—precisely reminiscent of the European colonial powers’ attitudes toward Africa and Asia in the past.

The de-modernizing trends in Russia will also have a devastating impact on Russian society. The war has become a major tool used by Russian authorities to re-cast the society into an old-fashioned paternalistic mode, dominated by the oppression of freedom. Already, young Russians with means are fleeing this oppressive state of affairs geared towards turning Russia inward.

**COMMUNAL RIOTS OVER NUPUR SHARMA’S COMMENTS**

The unity of the Islamic world was on full display in recent times – against India and her ruling Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP). The Islamic world – all major Arab countries, Maldives, Indonesia, Pakistan and Afghanistan – was united in its varying degrees of condemnation of BJP spokesperson, Nupur Sharma’s comments on Prophet Mohammad. The latter had – in a television debate – allegedly made ‘derogatory’ comments against the Prophet by saying that he married Aisha when she was six years old and consummated the marriage when she was nine years old.

Her comments were made in retaliation against the jokes, derogatory remarks and pointed innuendos being made about the Shiv Lingam found at the Gyanvapi mosque. In response, her life was openly threatened and Muslims staged arson and riots in Kanpur and various other cities. Nine days after her comments, Qatar became the first country to summon the Indian envoy over the remarks. It was immediately followed by a
long list of other Muslim countries. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) also issued a long statement not only condemning Mrs Sharma’s remarks but also criticizing India for its list of discriminatory acts and treatment of Muslims in general.

The BJP’s response was to suspend Nupur Sharma and another party-bearer, while the Indian government distanced itself from these remarks and lambasted the OIC for crossing its boundaries. While the response of the Indian government was expected (although a country like France had not bent before the OIC), that of the BJP has polarized and demoralized the vast majority of its supporters.

First, among other things, it is being rightly perceived that BJP suspended its members under pressure from Qatar and some Arab countries, bending to external forces humiliating India for the sake of a country like Qatar. In contrast, the recent example of the French confrontation with the Muslim world in the wake of a beheading in France set an example of how not to compromise with nationalism for the sake of perceived short-term interests. The Muslim boycott of France was much more comprehensive, virulent and violent than India’s could ever be. Yet the French fought back against Islam with vigour, taking a leaf out of China’s book and responding to Muslim fundamentalism with ‘de-radicalization camps’ and other measures.

Second, it is worth mentioning that Qatar and other Muslim countries of the world have a dismal record of freedom and minority protection. Qatar, especially, has consistently hosted the Taliban, allied with Muslim Brotherhood and sheltered Iranian terror groups. For its support of terrorism, it even faced
a collective embargo from other Gulf countries. For these countries to ‘lecture’ India on minority rights and for BJP to respect their diktat particularly showed the party in a weak light at home.

The aftermath of the BJP’s display of reticence has cost the country. The fact that none of the BJP leaders stood up for Nupur shows how the party can throw one of their own to the wolves simply for political calculus. This calculation has emboldened the Islamic community. The results were visible in the form of a spate of attacks by the Muslims on Hindus – especially those Hindus perceived to be ‘supporting’ Nupur Sharma on social media. The terrorist beheading of a Hindu tailor in Udaipur, the similar lynching of a man in Amravati, incidents in Bihar and open threats issued by leaders of the Muslim community – including top management leaders of Ajmer Sharif Dargah – show that they have rightly perceived the Hindu cowardice in general and BJP cowardice in particular.

Further, the mindless comments made by a Supreme Court bench against Nupur Sharma have further whitewashed and emboldened the radicalizing Muslim community. The comments – not given as part of written order – blamed Nupur for the Udaipur and other incidents of Muslim terrorism, and refused to grant her basic Fundamental Rights, in direct contravention of the Constitution as well as its own past judgements.

Throughout all these developments, the BJP has only been concerned with its political calculations. This was evident by the PM’s unfortunate comments at the BJP’s meet in Hyderabad, where Mr Modi called for outreach to the backward classes among the minority communities. These ill-timed and misbegotten comments further show how a party claiming to
be based on ‘Hindutva’ has been plumbing utter depths of calculation and insincerity, doing more harm than good to the Hindu cause.

The only positive thing that the BJP can be credited with is arresting anti-national elements (like Mohammad Zubair who instigated the whole propaganda against Nupur Sharma) despite international hue and cry, giving police protection to Nupur Sharma, and not interfering with spontaneous Hindu expressions of anger. In the wake of the beheadings, murders and open Muslim threats to Hindus, the Hindus appear to be finally mobilizing. This was initially seen under the leadership of Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Bajrang Dal. They released helplines for Hindus to contact in case of Muslim threats and also organized a massive ‘Hindu Sankalp March’ in the heart of Delhi. The success of the march was resounding, with over 50,000 people participating in rallies, speeches and recitation of Hanuman Chalisa. It saw the participation of saints/sadhus, Hindu activists, some BJP members and common people on the streets of the capital.

The success of such events not only shows Hindu mobilization but would also send out a message to the secular-Islamic axis that Hindus are not cowards. Indeed, recent surveys show that tourism to Ajmer dargah has dropped drastically in recent days. It appears that one Nupur Sharma has led to unprecedented national changes and mobilization across the country. It appears that these changes are irreversible and set to continue.

Rajya Sabha Election Results

Elections to 57 Rajya Sabha seats were held across 15 states. While 41 seats had single candidates who were elected.
unopposed from 11 states, the real contest took place in 16 seats in 4 states – Haryana, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Karnataka – due to there being more contestants than the available seats.

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<td>1</td>
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<td>Haryana (2 seats)</td>
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In this round of Rajya Sabha elections, the BJP has managed to retain 22 of the 24 seats it held in the biennial polls. The party bagged one extra seat in each state besides retaining its own, except in Rajasthan where it was outsmarted by the Congress. The overall performance of the BJP across states underscores the ability of the BJP to attract disaffected candidates within opposition ranks and the Independents as well as its craft of causing division within opposition ranks.

The BJP’s ascent in the Rajya Sabha had lifted its tally to 95 before this round of biennial elections. Despite maintaining this number more or less, the NDA’s tally went down by one seat as BJP’s ally JD(U) saw a net loss of one seat.

The BJP’s biggest gain came from Uttar Pradesh. Out of the 11 Rajya Sabha seats that went to poll from the state, the BJP won 8 seats – an addition of three seats to its earlier tally of five. The Congress’ net gain was one seat in these elections. It won a total of 10 out of the 57 seats that went to the polls.
The party gained 3 seats in Rajasthan and one in Chhattisgarh while losing a seat each in Uttarakhand, Punjab, Karnataka and Haryana. The other big winner was the Aam Admi Party, which won both Rajya Sabha seats of Punjab that went to the polls in this round, taking its Rajya Sabha tally to 10.

These elections will further have bearing on the scheduled Presidential elections.

**Fall of Maharashtra Government**

In recent days, Maharashtra has witnessed immense political turmoil. BJP victories in recent successive elections followed by the revolt of several Shiv Sena MLAs have led to the fall of the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government. It was a grand fall indeed. After desertion by 39 MLAs led by Eknath Shinde and drama over legal proceedings between the Thackeray camp and the Shinde camp, the government finally fell. The Supreme Court ruled in favour of the Shinde camp, as anti-defection law did not apply in this case, and the constitutionality of the floor test called by the Governor was also valid. Realizing this, Thackery resigned in advance. There was little that either the Congress or the NCP led by Sharad Pawar could manipulate.

However, the real surprise was not simply the fall of the MVA, but also the fact that Shinde’s name was announced as the Chief Minister by the BJP instead of choosing their own Devendra Fadnavis. Not only that but also the decision by the BJP – and its graceful acceptance by Fadnavis – to appoint Fadnavis as the deputy Chief minister came as a huge shock to the political community. The perceived ‘demotion’ from the post of Chief Minister to a deputy Chief minister is unheard of in politics.
The acceptance of such a sacrifice signifies unselfishness and the readiness to forgo one’s own interests and ambitions for the larger welfare of the party and the country. It is a spirit that can only be evidenced among the most nationalist of people. In contemporary times, where politics has become a gross, utilitarian ‘profession’, such a spirit is rare indeed. It is reformist in nature and sets the bar high. In ancient India, this was the norm rather than an exception, where politics often implied self-giving and the following of the Dharma on the part of the ruler.

These actions on the part of the BJP have dealt an unanticipated blow to the Thackreys, the Congress and the NCP, and their echoes have been felt throughout the nation. The developments in Maharashtra have several implications –

First, it signifies an end of a culture of decadence and luxury masquerading as secularism, and the rise of a new culture based on Hindutva and nationalism. The skeletons of the Thackreys are now tumbling out. It is being acknowledged how Uddhav Thackrey was a sloppy worker slow in disposing of files, with widespread complaints that he desisted from meeting his own people and had cultivated his own exclusive ‘inner circle’. It is also well-known how the family had openly started cavorting around with the drug-consuming Bollywood elite. His mismanagement of the COVID-19 crisis is well-known, with Maharashtra not only always being at the top of infections, but also being infamous for imposing the most severe lockdowns and quarantines.

His regime was also infamous for vigilante attacks on nationalists and common people. His prominent cabinet ministers were languishing in jail, a state DGP was removed and implicated in corruption on behalf of the government,
and yet the MVA was shamelessly and complacently carrying on its propaganda. Every criticism of Thackrey or MVA – even the slightest sharing of news or jokes – was met immediately with draconian arrests of common people. Maharashtra police had openly and unabashedly become the slave of the political class. Important infrastructural projects were stalled, due to the desire to appease a section of self-proclaimed urban social workers and obstructive environmentalists. Corruption was the ever-pervasive force behind the government. The MVA constituents also constantly squabbled amongst themselves for the prioritization of their personal selfish interests and consistently lost local elections to the BJP.

Despite this massive scale of incompetence, misgovernance, and chicanery, it is a surprise that this excuse for a government managed to survive for 2.5 years. The lowest point of this government – and one that likely infuriated the public the most – was the open appeasement of the Muslim community against the Hindus. There are many instances, including the Amravati riots, to prove that. Maharashtra police arrested those supporting Nupur Sharma, and even chanting Hanuman Chalisa had become an offence. Hindu lynchings by Muslims – such as the one in Amravati over the Nupur Sharma issue – were illegally presented by the police as ‘theft’. The police now admit that they did this under the pressure of the previous government. The list of transgressions is endless. That is why ‘Hindutva’ became the main reason for Shinde and others to separate from Thackreys. Under Uddhav’s ineptitude, the Shiv Sena had become a de facto Muslim party.

Second, the events in Maharashtra herald a likely demise or at least irrelevance of the Thackrey family to Maharashtra
politics. As it is, the influence of this family was limited to areas around Mumbai. Bal Thackrey was known to have the view that Shiv Sena should wield power as king-makers instead of hankering after the crown. He probably realized the strategy of how to wield maximum power by leveraging limitations into advantages. Such thinking – as well as the commitment to Hindutva ideology – is missing in his progeny, who are known to be puppets of Sharad Pawar and the Gandhi family.

After Shinde’s rebellion, Shiv Sainiks have little to complain about. The BJP has not left even an iota of scope for that. The Chief Minister is a Shiv Sainik and a former BJP CM is his junior. The move was meant to completely cut off the roots of the Thackrey family from Shiv Sena itself, and thereby save the Sena’s future in Maharashtra’s Hindutva landscape. The results are visible in the form of support Shinde is receiving from Shiv Sainiks, as various cadre members and corporators from key municipal corporations join Shinde en masse. Municipal corporations were the de facto seat of power and earnings for the Thackreys for decades. This – and the wider support – is not coming to an end. Even the Congress legislators are known to be unhappy and may not survive long with the party, as was clear by their tactics in MLC elections which the BJP won.

The developments in Maharashtra are still at a nascent but rapidly progressing stage. They herald the beginning of a new phase for the state as well as the country.
The Future of India

“India cannot perish, our race cannot become extinct, because among all the divisions of mankind it is to India that is reserved the highest and the most splendid destiny, the most essential to the future of the human race. It is she who must send forth from herself the future religion of the entire world, the Eternal religion which is to harmonise all religion, science and philosophies and make mankind one soul.” (CWSA 6: 84)