

Sustaining legacy beyond the founder



KAVIL RAMACHANDRAN & SOUGATA RAY

It is natural for founder entrepreneurs or similar leaders to start worrying about the future of their creations as they approach the time when leadership has to be handed over to someone. Their anxiety levels are higher if the successor is not a clone of their own, or turns out to be different afterwards. Several uncomfortable experiences in recent times raise the need to address the challenges of sustaining the legacy of such leaders.

Why is it a challenge?

The primary custodians of the legacy of an organisation are its owner and the CEO. So long as both ownership and management responsibilities are controlled by the same person, legacy gets built and strengthened continuously. However, when the founder steps down from management and the custodianship responsibilities are split between two individuals, there are potential challenges for sustaining the legacy. This is because the assumptions about the capabilities and conduct of the successors may or may not hold good.

The situation may become complicated if there are simultaneous or even sequential changes in both the levels of control of ownership and management. An extreme situation is when the founder no longer holds a significant per cent of shares (and, hence, has no significant say in anything), and does not have his "appointees" still calling the shots on the board and management, resulting in little management control. This is akin to a king without a kingdom. Unfortunately, some founders who keep diluting their shareholding do not realise that sooner than later they would lose management control, too. Some day, they start noticing that the organisational policies, practices and priorities are different from what they had carefully crafted and followed for years. This is essentially the "Murphy Phenomenon" that we have witnessed recently. The "Tata Phenomenon" of high ownership control with low management control precipitated a situation when the non-family successor reportedly did not carry the legacy of the predecessor and deviated from the values of the group.

When ownership and management controls change

It is natural for ownership and management controls to change as organisations evolve. As shown in the figure, Quadrant I has both ownership and management controls vested in the same individual. This is the only "stable" situation that will continue so long as the founding family keeps the ownership high and has capable family members or family nominees with the same values as that of the founder leading the board and the management.

Quadrant II can be somewhat paradoxical with the founder, while retaining high ownership and therefore control on the board, practically losing control of operations. Tragedy hits if the founder makes mistakes in selecting the successor who turns out to have different priorities, capabilities, style or values as compared to the founder and starts undoing the legacy of the predecessors. A similar challenge may crop up if there is lack of alignment within the owner family; in a recent case, the founder of a very large group took back the reins of leadership from his elder son when he realised that the son, under the influence of a team of expensive new recruits, had started undoing several things that he thought were core to the organisation. Apparently, the founder did not do the due diligence to confirm that the son had the institutional values, leadership potential and managerial capabilities to succeed him. Founders and family business leaders should realise that not everyone can be an excellent operating leader; some may be better off as strategists or simply as investors. Families with high control, such as Dabur in India and Merck in Germany, have always appointed non-family leaders very carefully.

Firms in Quadrant III have diluted their holding as part of business expansion. Investors allow the founder family to choose the CEOs so long as they deliver results and enjoy their trust. Several industry leaders in India hold sway over their group companies even though their ownership control is quite modest. In the absence of capable successors, the founding family will lose management control as well. Therefore, to avoid sliding into the fourth quadrant it must focus on grooming leadership talents in the family and choose and promote successors with similar values and orientation respectful to legacy.

Select successors who believe in legacy

For a capable successor to retain the proud legacy of a founder or a tall predecessor, it is critical that he is passionate about the organisation, proud of its heritage and is likely to adhere to the core institutional values set by the founder and nurtured by the predecessors. Believing in continuity as the purpose, they should strengthen the basket of values, not summarily discard these. It is a necessary condition that is often forgotten in the process of identifying and inducting a successor. Grooming of leaders with stewardship values, right leadership and managerial capabilities combined with an empowered board to provide an active oversight helps an organisation sustain the legacy of the organisation to the satisfaction of the founder.

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What lies ahead for Bihar

The CM-with-BJP-support will propel the political debate around corruption and pulverise the Opposition



PLAIN POLITICS

ADITI PHADNIS

It is in July that Indian socialists tend to set water on fire. On July 19, 1979, as industry minister in the Morarji Desai government, George Fernandes gave a fire and brimstone speech defending his prime minister and damning to hell forever those attempting to destabilise it. On July 20, he signed a letter pledging allegiance to Charan Singh as the new PM. His statement/justification? "I personally don't think that there has been a sustained effort to make the ordinary man feel that it is his government and

he is participating in it... No one is prepared to accept today that there can be people of integrity in public life," he was quoted as telling *The Statesman* on July 21, 1979.

For the circa 2017 version of the same script, consider what Nitish Kumar said in February. Speaking at the launch of a book by P Chidambaram, Nitish Kumar said: "Right now, the need of the nation is Opposition unity. The day this Opposition unity comes, you see what happens... There is nothing to fear. Everything will be all right. We should follow our agenda 90 per cent and only 10 per cent we should react to the agenda of others. We should move forward after setting our own agenda with maximum Opposition unity."

In July 2017, Nitish Kumar gracefully accepted the congratulations of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) upholding him as the crusader leading the struggle against corruption after Nitish Kumar had jettisoned Lalu Prasad and family, pleading his inability to "suffer corruption" any more. The BJP elbowed Prasad out to take its place beside Nitish Kumar to form a government.

LUNCH WITH BS ▶ AJAY SRINIVASAN, CEO, ADITYA BIRLA CAPITAL

Of start-ups and scaling up

Srinivasan tells Niraj Bhatt why the financial services firm chose to focus on small and medium-size enterprises, digital and analytics

Ajay Srinivasan has started new businesses, entered new countries or grown businesses in India or Asia in his two-decade career as CEO. But one thing Srinivasan hadn't done so far is deal directly with regulators and investors as the CEO of a listed company, which will soon change as Aditya Birla Group's financial services arm gets listed in the next few weeks.

Aditya Birla Nuvo's subsidiary, Aditya Birla Financial Services, was recently renamed Aditya Birla Capital, and will be separated from the new company that is formed with the merger of Grasim and Aditya Birla Nuvo. Srinivasan is excited about the next phase of growth for his company and his future when we meet for lunch at The Mekong, the Chinese restaurant at the St Regis Hotel in central Mumbai.

Srinivasan returned to India in 2007 to head the Aditya Birla Group's fledgling financial services business after a six-year-plus stint at UK's Prudential where he had set up a pan-Asia asset management company. Aditya Birla had five businesses of modest size when he became CEO; today, it has 12. "We are among the top five in life insurance, asset management, non-banking financial services, general insurance broking, and our MyUniverse website is the number one personal finance portal," says Srinivasan.

Our fresh lime and soda arrives and we order potatoes with shitake mushrooms, crystal vegetable dumplings and som tam salad. A vegetarian, Srinivasan is an expert on vegetarian food across Asia. Hong Kong is not a difficult place for vegetarians, but Korea and Taiwan are, he says.

After about three years as CEO at ICICI Prudential Mutual Fund, Srinivasan moved to Hong Kong to set up insurer Prudential's asset management business across Asia. Even as a late entrant, Srinivasan built a \$10-billion business across 10 countries in Asia through both organic and inorganic routes. "When I left we were the second-largest retail fund manager in the region," he says.

"I am excited about building something out of nothing and then bringing it to scale. To my mind, it is not only a challenge, but also a great thrill if you can do it," he says. After passing out of the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, in 1987, Srinivasan joined ICICI and moved to ITC Group's financial services division in 1991, where he established several businesses. In 1995, he moved to the group's mutual fund start-up ITC Threadneedle as deputy CEO. In 1998, he was appointed CEO of ICICI

Prudential, which was ranked 14th. His mandate was to make it the largest private sector asset management company after market leader UTI. "We got there in a year and a half," says Srinivasan. That is when Prudential asked him to move to Hong Kong.

After running the asset management business for Prudential, he was looking for a more challenging role. "In 2007 I decided I would come back to India and build a financial conglomerate. The Aditya Birla Group was the perfect place to create such a business as it was a great brand and a great platform. So it was easy to kind of start and build from there. That's how this whole journey started," he says.

At Aditya Birla Group, Srinivasan is differentiating his customer base from that of conventional banks and financial services firms. He is targeting the SME sector in a big way, where the group provides loans, loans against property, general insurance and even wealth management services to the entrepreneur. In home loans, banks dominate the salaried employees segment, but Srinivasan is targeting the self-employed. "The opportunity is much larger compared to the salaried segment, which is highly competitive, while this market is under-penetrated." He has also started the affordable housing business targeting first-time homebuyers. "We see that as a big growth engine for the business," he says.

The group has also launched its health insurance business since November 2016 — and that space is also under-penetrated, says Srinivasan. He is targeting two extreme segments. One, people, 45 and above, who typically have a pre-existing condition such as diabetes, hypertension, cholesterol etc. and most insurance companies don't cover them. This is about 40-45 per cent of the population that doesn't get covered today because health insurance doesn't cover them. And then there are the healthy young who don't see value because they will not make a claim. "Our model tries to cater to these two values, and obviously we cater to the middle, too," says Srinivasan. "So from day one we will cover someone with a pre-existing disease, and we cover five pre-existing conditions," he adds.

The joint venture partner, MMI Holdings, a South African company, has the intellectual property to address both categories. It allows you to manage your condition over a period of time using technology like wearables and being connected to gyms, and if the insurer manages the condition, costs come down. For the healthy person,

The Congress is convinced this is a script thought up more than three months ago. The party cites as evidence Nitish Kumar's support to Ramnath Kovind as the candidate for president. While Congress President Sonia Gandhi was able to persuade Sharad Pawar to stay in the Opposition and support the Congress candidate Meira Kumar (at that meeting to sign Meira Kumar's papers, Gandhi dimpled charmingly at Sharad Pawar's efforts to postpone signing the papers and insisted he sign them there and then), Nitish Kumar slipped out of the *mahagathbandhan*'s grasp. He got a front-row seat in the Central Hall of Parliament when Kovind was sworn in.

So what happens now? Bihar will now get the economic package it has been asking for. The central government will now shower economic largesse and uphold Bihar pride (Nitish Kumar won the Assembly election on the back of the insult to Bihar pride by Narendra Modi and his cohorts). The CM-with-BJP-support will propel the political debate around corruption, and slip effortlessly back into the lingo of the Emergency and the bad, bad things the Congress did. As general elections draw near, the BJP and the Janata Dal-United (in whatever form it is) will do a deal — the state to the JD-U in return for support at the Centre for the BJP. It will help both of them if Assembly and Lok Sabha elections are held together (Assembly

elections are due in Bihar in 2020).

What of caste calculation, which is central to Bihar politics? Muslims and Yadavs add up to around 30 per cent of Bihar's population. In the Lok Sabha elections of 2014 — where Nitish Kumar suffered such a blow that he abandoned the BJP and joined hands with Prasad — many upper-class Yadavs abandoned Prasad and voted for the BJP. Nitish Kumar will be the National Democratic Alliance's delivery vehicle for the support of his own caste and other lower castes. The BJP will make significant dents in the Lalu vote base.

That leaves the Muslims. During his last tenure as CM with BJP support, Kumar was vicious with that party, largely for the demonstration effect he knew this would have on the Muslims. He reviled, insulted and slighted them at every available opportunity, knowing they had nowhere to go. This caused Muslims even in places like Kishanganj, to support Nitish Kumar, even though he in turn was propping up a government in which the BJP was a big player. An action replay of that script should not be a problem.

What this will effectively mean is a pulverisation of the Opposition as we know it. But then Kumar would be the first to say that he is not, after all, Jesus Christ to die on the cross. He has a government and he has managed to live to fight another day. The question is what will he do with the government now.

first two choices were to teach economics or join the civil services, but he got through IIM, Ahmedabad. "I guess I started out in financial services and never moved out of that. A lot of these things happened, I had never thought of them," he says.

He is one of the most experienced people in India's mutual fund industry. "I have seen the industry from 1993 to now and the change has been phenomenal. I think the acceptance of mutual funds has clearly become much bigger than it has ever been before and the most noteworthy thing for me, though, is the systematic investment plan, which has now become an integral part of the industry."

The other pieces that he is excited about are digital and data analytics. The Aditya Birla Group has an end-to-end digital lending platform and its personal finance portal, which allows users to aggregate their financial information in one place, has 3.5 million users. With the aggregated data, it is able to provide advice to users on mutual funds. "It then becomes a multi-product platform providing aggregation, advice and transaction," he says. The company is using data analytics to answer questions like what kind of life insurance agent is likely to be more successful, which parts of the country are most susceptible to fraud, what kind of customer should it avoid etc.

Talent management is another area where Srinivasan is investing time. "To be able to build a business of this scale and to get scalability in all our businesses we need a talent pool, which is able to grow both functionally as well as in leadership roles. We have a talent council, which I chair, and everybody over a certain level gets reviewed," he says. These future leaders are trained to step into bigger roles across the group.

Srinivasan is into sports and plays the CEOs' cricket tournament every year. He also plays golf and swims and works out regularly. However, he laments the difficulty in putting together cricket teams for intra-office tournaments as the younger generation is not into playing sports.

He skips dessert, and he says he would like to write a book some day and has many ideas. One of them is on the mutual fund industry, which he has seen for 25 years, and the other is leadership as he has been "a CEO of CEOs" for a major part of his career. How does he coach his CEOs? "It is very different as you have to work

through two levels. If you are a CEO you still have some ability to direct things yourself. When you are working through a CEO you are one step away, and it requires a very different set of skills," he adds. He gives regular and event-based feedback and does not believe in half-yearly or quarterly discussions. "We have great demographics, and are the fastest growing large economy. And we save. All of which is great for financial services," he says as we leave the restaurant.



ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA

Srinivasan has a new concept called "health return". If you buy the policy and you continue to remain healthy, up to 30 per cent of your premium is returned to you over and above the no-claim bonus.

Our main course of fried rice and stir fried vegetables is served. His favourite cuisine is Indian — he loves his *dal-roti* — with Chinese coming after Italian. I ask him how he chose management. "I chose economics over science but after that a lot of things have been kind of accidental," he says. His

A country of overqualified housewives



PEOPLE LIKE THEM

GEETANJALI KRISHNA

Indian housewives, I recently read online, are amongst the most over-qualified demographic groups in the world. It made me think. As a society, perhaps our focus has been more on educating girls than on helping them become financially independent and productive members of the country's workforce. Statistics bear this out: The National Sample Survey 2014-15 found that for every 100 men enrolled in higher education (college and above) there were 85 women. On the other hand, the 2015-16 National Family Health Survey shows that the proportion of working women, who were paid for their work, has fallen four percentage points over the past decade. People Research on India's Consumer Economy reported in 2016 that over 60 per cent of households had only one wage earner each. So, while more people seem to be following

the government's Beti Padhao (educate daughters) diktat, more and more of our educated girls seem to be growing up to be overqualified housewives.

A couple of informal conversations proved useful in putting human faces to these statistics. I spoke to Om Prakash, a driver with two daughters studying in Delhi University. The elder one is studying law, the other pursuing a BA in history and wants to join the civil services. "I want to see my daughters complete their education successfully and marry suitable boys," he said. "With their educational qualifications, they're likely to marry into very good families." What about their careers, I asked. Surely, after having invested so much in their higher education, he wanted to see them well-placed professionally. "Their careers will depend on the requirements of the families they marry into," he said. "I feel my fatherly duties don't go beyond educating them to the best of my ability."

Nusrat Bano of Sheikh Sarai, herself unlettered, told me how happy she was that her daughter was in school. "She's now in Class VIII and very good in her studies," she told me proudly. The child wanted to become a doctor when she grew up. "I'll do what I can to make her dream a reality," she said. "I'll take on extra domestic work to ensure she goes to a good preparatory class for medical entrance exams." I asked her if she thought her daughter would be able to

work after she was married. "Of course she would," she exclaimed. "We'll ensure she goes to an enlightened family." Then she added: "Obviously, once she becomes a mother, she will have to give up working — unless of course, god forbid, straitened circumstances force her to work."

The last conversation I had was with 20-year-old Seema, a domestic worker who wants to put her two-year-old daughter in an expensive playschool. "I want her to go to a good school and speak fluent English so that she can get a good job," she said. "We'd like our daughter to be the first graduate in our family, but we worry that the jobs she will want then will not give her the flexibility that we had when she was born." In the absence of family support, Seema was able to work as a part-time domestic help after her daughter was born only because her husband, a security guard, and she were able to juggle their schedules. "Anyway, at present, we just want her to go to a good playschool," she said, "and leave the rest to fate."

These conversations made me realise that while ensuring every girl's access to education can't be undermined, it's not enough. Societal attitudes towards women's work need to change as well. And unless we incentivise our female workforce with state-sponsored childcare and other benefits, the huge resources that the government invests in the education of girls every year will sink without any discernable impact.

Those who live without doors



PEOPLE LIKE US

KISHORE SINGH

Two summers ago, past the park where we sometimes walk, work began on a house. First, there was the groundbreaking ceremony followed by a thanksgiving party in another empty plot opposite it. We saw garlands and discarded decorations and thrown scraps of catered food among which the strays foraged, appearing like foolish grooms when marigold petals stuck to their coats. As the family's designated "walker of the dog" who preferred the route over others, I saw the ground being cleared, little tents for workers spring up, and bricks, sand, cement and metal rods appeared on the site.

The seasons changed and slowly the house began to take shape, floor by floor. Meanwhile, in the tiny tented habitation, a baby was born, then another.

Slightly older children played in the sand. Mothers who worked by day, woke to light kindling in makeshift stoves over which they cooked their *dal-bhat*. As the days passed, the children would occasionally call out to us, stopping to fondle the dog, or try and lift him in the air — they usually failed, for though they were the same size, the dog was heavier. Mostly, servants walked other dogs, and they ignored the rabble of construction workers and their families. In the evening, music played on their mobile phones. When an electricity connection was obtained for the under-construction house, a line was pulled in to electrify the shabby cluster of makeshift homes, but, of course, there was no TV, no fridge, just illumination, so at least they could avoid the occasional snake, the frequent scorpions.

Over time, as the dog and the urchins became friends, they would sometimes save him a treat — a biscuit hoarded from a sibling's precious stock, which I allowed them to feed the pooch even though he has gluten allergy. The dog wagged his tail whenever he saw them, and would tug at the leash should I wish to change his walking route: He preferred the path he'd gotten used to, and had his friends to cheer him along. Meanwhile, I wondered how so many of them fit into the tiny huts, which had only plastic sheets as

protection against the monsoons. In the summer, they slept on the sidewalks, under mosquito netting, but in the winter the ground under their mattresses must have been freezing.

As the house neared completion, the fittings began to arrive along with the marble for the floors and glazing for the windows. At least then, the workers could move in should the rain be unceasing and flood the roads — which was more often than not, the drainage system choked with construction debris and garden refuse. It was evident that they had begun to use the facilities of the bathrooms they had built, though they tried to remove any evidence before the arrival of the supervisor, or the owners, who came only sporadically. When the landscapist arrived to lay the gardens, they were forced to move further away, or indoors — at any rate, I rarely spotted the kids any more, and I could sense the dog missed his friends.

Then, just as suddenly, they were gone, replaced by the owners. It has been a month now, and as I walk past the house, I see cars in the driveway, lights blazing from windows, and a semblance of habitation. But of the inhabitants, I have no idea, our new neighbours preferring to stay indoors, leading us to miss those who'd built and lived clandestinely in the house before it had doors.

WEEKEND RUMINATIONS

T N NINAN

Not always soft

Half a century ago, the Swedish economist and Nobel laureate Gunnar Myrdal penned the three-volume *Asian Drama: An Inquiry into the Poverty of Nations*. In this magnum opus, he called India a “soft state”, a term that encapsulated the “indiscipline” reflected in poor respect for the law by the police (broadly defined) as well as the policed, and the collusion of public officials with the big and powerful. You could say, for instance, that the soft state was unable to enforce land reform legislation. Myrdal and subsequently others have argued that low respect for the law (from the point of both observance and enforcement) flowed partly from a freedom movement that had involved deliberately defying the law.

This inherited attitude — that the law is some kind of colonial imposition which must be resisted, ignored, or by-passed — finds current reflection in students at Jawaharlal Nehru University, who had disrupted a university meeting, objecting to the university’s insistence that they pay a fine for their misconduct. In other parliaments, a member speaking out of turn can get thrown out of the house; here the opposition protests when the Speaker takes such action against even those who have flouted all parliamentary norms of conduct.

But with the Narendra Modi government, we may be seeing the Indian state willing to adopt hard stances more often than before, even if this new approach is only selectively applied. A case in point is the troubled state of Jammu & Kashmir, with everyone from Yashwant Sinha downwards suggesting in the last few months that the Centre reach out to the people of the state in order to address what was generally seen as a new level of alienation. Not only has the Modi government ignored this widely-proffered advice, it has gone on the offensive by attacking separatist leaders on a vulnerable point: The source of their funding, which everyone has long known is Pakistan. The battle has been taken to the separatists.

The border stand-off at Doklam may be a second example of the new refusal to play the soft card. With the army having moved pre-emptively into a position of advantage in that narrow piece of territory, India has refused to back off despite heavy shelling by the Chinese media. This follows the tough posture adopted on the Belt and Road, and the persistence in pushing other agenda items like Indian membership of the Nuclear Suppliers Group in the face of clear Chinese opposition. The Chinese are being given the message that India does not want conflict but is not so timid that it will not pursue its interests. The last time such a message was given quite so bluntly was probably in 1986 at Sumdorongchu, by a flamboyant Gen K Sundarji.

The Modi government’s multi-faceted attack on corruption is a third example of the state deciding that it won’t be soft any longer. The targeting of the Lulu clan and other opposition politicians has a questionable selectivity, but a slew of initiatives linked to demonetisation, Aadhaar, the goods and services tax, and the new bankruptcy law have a common underlying thread: The law must be respected, and those who flout it will pay a price. The message about the new toughness has gone home in at least some circles, and finds reflection in the sharp surge in the number of people paying income tax (from 36 million reported earlier to 60 million now), as well as the reduced amount of Indian money in Swiss bank accounts.

The problem with this attempt at being less of a soft state is that the approach is strictly selective. The long arm of the law has not reached out so far to anyone aligned with the ruling establishment, in the way that critics and those in the opposition have been delivered hammer-blows. Besides, the encouragement given to vigilante groups to take the law into their own hands runs directly counter to the respect for the law that is being enforced in other spheres. The difference between a putative autocracy and a purely rule-based system is precisely such selectiveness, which operates in one and not the other.

ILLUSTRATION BY BINAY SINHA



Hamara desh badal gaya hai

Why Nitish Kumar’s latest defection is actually a desertion of an ideological offering which has run its course in the new, I-don’t-owe-you-nothing India

There is no better pointer of the short-termism of our public debate than the fact that it is confined to the presumption that Nitish Kumar and his party’s mass defection from one political grouping to its ideological opposite means Narendra Modi and Amit Shah have sealed the 2019 election. To argue the opposite, you will either have to be recklessly brave or drinking some dangerous moonshine sold illegally in Bihar. The real implication of this shift will last way beyond 2019.

It is how it signals a change in Indian politics and society, in short, public opinion. It also means the rise of a political giant more powerful and successful than Indira Gandhi. Don’t jump in protest saying Indira ruled more states, won three general elections. Because she had inherited a party already well-settled in power with little opposition. Modi won his, fighting against opposition within his (then) fractious party but also many ideological adversaries with large vote banks.

Now he and his party president control their party more strongly than Indira ever did. The opposition is at its weakest since 1952 (never mind its lower numbers in 1984-89 after Rajiv Gandhi’s sweep). The media is mostly and happily down on its knees, cheering from the sidelines, afraid to even ask a question like how the RBI is unable to count demonetised currency in full nine months when ordinary human beings can produce another in that much time.

The judiciary, when not running Indian cricket, is engaged in such vital pursuits as teaching us unpatriotic half-wits respect for the national anthem, and now a national song besides imposing a ₹5,000 fine for defecating along the Yamuna. The only instance of constitutional defiance by the Supreme Court lately has been the striking down of the National Judicial Appointments Commission to protect its own freedom — of hire and fire over its own. And some are complaining about a vice-chancellor asking for a souvenir tank to sit astride his unrichly armoured car, if not a real

tank, with live ammunition on his unruly campus. This is just a listing of facts as we see them at the end of what feels like a very long time in politics in Churchillian terms. Political analysis has to be divorced from the writer’s voting preferences, so we will refrain from calling it a good or a bad turn. But a turn it has been that dumps all existing assumptions, equations, and linkages of our politics. Let us, therefore, only paint a picture of our politics post-Nitish, and after three years into the Modi-Shah project.



NATIONAL INTEREST
SHEKHAR GUPTA

India now has a new kind of political dispensation and a mood to match. Many of the values and ideas, some good, some not so good or obsolete, concepts of virtuosity and morality, and most importantly ideology, are now dead and cremated. It is tough to convince Indian millennials — an overwhelming majority of our voters now — of the virtues of secularism when every standard-bearer of the idea is a corrupt and controversial dynast. Or, the Left, whose hypocritical idea of irreligious secularism is compounded by its globally failed economics.

It is impossible to peddle an idea of relaxed nationalism when your leaders have been raising questions over a catastrophic terror attack such as 26/11, speaking against death sentences to terrorists though confirmed by the Supreme Court, or calling the Batla House encounter fake although it took place under your own government’s watch, which gave the nation’s highest gallantry award to the police inspector killed. You might claim you have freedom of expression, but then also use it to speak the truth about your party’s leader.

How convincing will protests sound if the road leading to JNU was named after Savarkar or Golwalkar now? Remember, you named an auditorium in Jamia Millia after Edward Said, the road leading to it Shahra-e-Arjun Singh. Or, your concept of pro-poor governance when all you managed to deliver were leaky, populist, vote-catching yojanas mostly named after

your own ancestors. Check the great promise of social equality with the record of all the parties that would have constituted the fantasy of mahagathabandhan. Not one Muslim, Dalit, or tribal leader has been allowed to rise, barring those leading their own mini-dynasties. And finally the commitment to liberalism had been reduced to this farcical opposition to Aadhaar, which was your own idea.

The fundamental mood change in India implied that what is virtuous in politics has been redefined by not one but two generations of voters. The past was rooted in the politics of freedom movement. So self-denial and sacrifice, submission to a call of conscience, an exaggerated sense of political correctness are all dated. Today’s currency is power, and the ability to wield it without ever having to say sorry. Modi’s political CV tells you he passes this test more than any other political contestant today. Neither did he offer to resign, nor asked for anybody else’s resignation after the 2002 riots despite pressure from Atal Bihari Vajpayee. He ignored the Lalit Modi and Vyapam scandals with total nonchalance. Smriti Irani may have been moved to a less important position, but her rehabilitation is on. Want still more evidence of his approach: He hasn’t even fired the one man who has brought his government more embarrassment and ridicule than any dozen others: CBFC Chairman Pahlaj Nihalani.

In my first comment on the 2014 election results I had said that the new Indian voter had a post-ideological, I-don’t-owe-you-nothing and what’s-in-it-for-me mindset. The BJP’s continuing success doesn’t mean that Indian secularism and liberalism have ended. The question it raises is, how deep-set was the belief we seemed to have earlier? It is more likely that it wasn’t too deep. So a large majority now see a justification for what they always believed, but were constrained from speaking out because of old-generation morality, political correctness, or hypocries. The Modi-Shah BJP has relieved new India of that old baggage. And Indians are loving it.

At this point, no opposition leader or grouping has a counter to this. The Congress has shrunk to nothing and will nearly die if it loses Karnataka. Amarinder Singh, in Punjab, will then find himself in a Nitish kind of pincer, alternately pressured and charmed by the Centre, and handling interference and suspicions of the high command. Naveen Patnaik, Mamata Banerjee, Arvind Kejriwal will hold out for some time but won’t be able to keep the mighty BJP at bay. Kerala still has some time to go, but the Congress will yield some space there to the BJP.

Fair or not, it is inaccurate to call Nitish a defector. It might be more apt to describe his flight to the BJP as a desertion, a flight-in-fright and then seeking asylum with the BJP. He had the realism to acknowledge the futility of a fig-Your data has been trunctated.

Fair or not, it is inaccurate to call Nitish a defector. It might be more apt to describe his flight to BJP as a desertion, a flight-in-fright and then seeking asylum with the BJP. He had the realism to acknowledge the futility of a fight to the finish which could have ended only one way. He is survivor durable enough to know it’s a changed, me-first, self- and self-obsessed Indian voter. The slogans he used so far, especially socialism and secularism, have no sex appeal. He has no fresh ideas. So better be a colonial-style Indian Raj and cede sovereignty for power over your subjects. Sooner than later, most remaining opposition leaders will face the same choices: Desert or die. Or if you have the imagination, find a marketable new proposition.

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India’s insuperable bureaucracy



AL FRESCO
SUNIL SETHI

After politicians if there is one class of public officials that looks after itself generously it is the bureaucracy. For years the country’s elite services of the IAS, IPS, and IFS, and IAS complained that their salaries and perks were hardly commensurate with the levers of powers they controlled; and that in retirement they were relegated not only to lives of relative obscurity but also impecuniousness. It was one reason suggested for declining levels of probity and increase in influence-peddling and corruption among the “officer class”, including the defence services. Compared to their peers in the private sector or

professional services like doctors, accountants, and engineers, they earned pitifully, never mind the passing glory of occupying bungalows in Lutyens’ Delhi or state capitals with all the panoply of official cars and subordinate flunkies.

Several memoirs of the period, for example, *The Service of the State: The IAS Reconsidered* (Penguin, 2011) by the upstanding civil servant Bhaskar Ghose, give an accurate portrait of challenges faced in the districts and the Centre. He doesn’t much remember entertaining even a close group of friends simply because there wasn’t cash to spare on anything more than a few bottles of beer. Then came the 7th Pay Commission with a substantial jump in salaries and pensions — and you would think the carping might stop. But no. Although the Commission was wound up a couple of years ago, this week central government employees accused the Finance Minister of “cheating” them. Why wasn’t their minimum pay hiked beyond ₹18,000 a day as promised?

Like Mrs Gummidge, the chronic complainer in *David Copperfield*, everything is much worse for this class of Indians than for any other.

This week, too, one Col. Mukul Dev served a legal notice on the defence secretary for replacing free rations to officers in non-conflict areas with an allowance of ₹96 a day. An army officer of my acquaintance wholeheartedly agrees. “Daily withdrawal of free rations could feed a family of two or three,” he rues. “But what will ₹96 buy you these days?”

Cast a colder eye on what civil servants earn by way of enhanced pay scales and retirement benefits and the picture is actually quite rosy. At the top of the pecking order a secretary-level IAS officer (or an equivalent director-general of police) receives a salary of ₹2.5 lakh a month; at the bottom of the step-ladder the starting pay is ₹56,000. Pensions are half of the last-drawn salary so the hallowed brethren get about ₹1 lakh a month after turning 60 plus full health cover at most hospitals. Some of my widowed aunts, wives of long-deceased soldiers and officials, are quietly smiling after years of scrimping and saving.

Despite every government’s commitment to cost-cutting and reducing staff strength, the administrative machine’s expansionist notions greedily demand more.

Jitendra Singh, current minister of personnel and pensions, stated in the Lok Sabha recently that in the last four years the annual intake of IAS officers has increased to 180, of IFS to 110 and IPS to 150. Yet he expressed “serious concern...[over] the persistent shortage” of authorised numbers in the three services — 1,400 in the IAS, 560 in the IFS, and 900 in the IPS (against their present strength of 4,926 IAS, 2,597 IFS, and 908 IPS serving officers).

Expectedly, the highest number of vacancies are in the Hindi heartland of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh where the race to join the powerful “*afsar*” class ensures lifetime security apart from vastly improved marriage prospects. Increased numbers of women in government employment have altered the matrimonial equation, however. There’s a higher “bride price” for such women looking for suitable boys. As one prospective father-of-the-bride said, “My daughter will bring “*kiraya-maafi*” (rent-free) accommodation for life.”

Heavily subsidised grace-and-favour housing is one of the biggest perks of *sarkari* life. In Delhi, with its hordes of central

and state government officials, most neighbourhoods are mixed, punctuated with large swathes of dwellings to house the badomd’s innumerable layers. Many of these are now undergoing the most dramatic and visibly ostentatious makeover by the government’s richest redevelopment agency, National Buildings & Construction Corporation. Gigantic fluorescent screens are transforming huge government colonies such as Nauroji Nagar, Sarojini Nagar, and Netaji Nagar into lavish commercial high rises and new government housing. The NBCC, a listed company with revenues of ₹600 crore, recently sold a 10-floor tower (the first of 12) in Nauroji Nagar for a record ₹1,100 crore, higher than Connaught Place prices. Part of the proceeds, says the NBCC’s chairman, will double the existing government housing units from 12,970 to 25,667 at a cost of ₹32,835 crore. Private real estate developers can only dream of such unattainable prices and locations.

In his magisterial, as yet unmatched, history of the origins of India’s bureaucracy Philip Mason rightly called it the “heaven-born” service. In our time, its grasp and growth is yet more self-perpetuating, privileged, and insuperable.

Choice for secularists

EYE CULTURE

UDDALOK BHATTACHARYA

In the supposed treachery and deception in the upheavals of Bihar politics, several things have come to the forefront in such a clear manner that not being able to see them would do one enormous discredit. First, without going into the ethicality of what Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar did, let those who are angry with him take note that this is not the first time that he has done such a thing. As an astute political observer has pointed out on Facebook, Mr Kumar did almost exactly the same thing four years ago, when, in protest against Narendra Modi being nominated the National Democratic Alliance’s prime ministerial candidate, he snapped the alliance with the BJP. Before that, in 2010, he fumed when, in an advertisement put out allegedly by the BJP (the party said it had nothing to do with it), he was seen holding Mr Modi’s raised hand, in a celebratory mood at that. But there he justified his stand by saying that it was Modi who was his bugbear (the advertisement did not suggest that and his anger went unquestioned) and not the BJP that had been given shape by Atal Bihari Vajpayee and L K Advani. And now that Mr Modi is no more the prime ministerial candidate but the prime minister, Mr Kumar has not made clear how he would adjust to the new BJP and how he would justify his realignment with it.

At a personal level also, his treatment of George Fernandez, who was his senior party colleague when they were both in the Samata Party before it merged into the Janata Dal(U), does not give a good account of him being a most excellent human being. So today Lalu Prasad, who should be aware of Mr Kumar’s political career, should not feel too let down.

Nitish Kumar, through his actions over the years, has shown he is the quintessential Indian politician who finally falls prey to his own conscience. But where does all this leave the liberal intelligentsia, the class that is otherwise admirable for upholding values and keeping alive the ideas of a just and humane society. Why do they go wrong very often? The answer lies in the fact that while they sometimes identify ideological enemies correctly, they are generally wrong in their choice of friends when it comes to choosing individuals or parties. In other words, they too are guided by convenience. The best example of this is the very fateful year, 1989, perhaps the most important one since 1947. This year changed many things that 1947

had promised to bring in. What happened in 1989?

Rajiv Gandhi went out as prime minister. What else happened? The Left shared power at the Centre in a big way with the BJP after Rajiv Gandhi. And who supported this? Perhaps the entire intelligentsia, fed on the belief that the “bad guy” was Rajiv Gandhi. It still baffles the imagination as to why the Congress had to be opposed when much that the party in power was doing had an easy commerce with what the articulate classes had, or have, been asking for? Social welfare programmes were on the upswing, and the central government was attacking communalism in a most forthright manner. The answer is if Rajiv Gandhi was bad, inevitably those who opposed him were good. Was this stupidity? Or just plain innocence?

The BJP is without doubt a divisive party and its history conclusively proves that. But is opposing the BJP enough to establish a party or an individual’s secular credentials? Here the problem has been compounded by the fact that while secularism in India and that in Europe are by broad definition the same, that is, separating church from state, in India, owing to the diverse nature of the country, a whole lot of things have got loaded into it. It is not happenstance that words ‘secular’ and ‘socialist’ were inserted into the Constitution in the same year. Socialism came gradually to be seen as germane to secularism and sometimes acquired primacy over it.

This gave an opportunity to people such as Ram Manohar Lohia, for whom socialism meant just being anti-Nehru and serving their own constituencies, to have occasional flirtations with the Jan Sangh. This trend continues today if you look at the tallest Lohiaite, Mulayam Singh Yadav. And so long as these parties and individuals remain opposed to the BJP, they are acceptable even to the finest minds. Remember Amartya Sen’s praise of Nitish Kumar?

Secularism and democracy in India, though both were adjuncts of the Congress-led freedom movement, have not acquired a strong domain because there were no mass movements specifically in their support. ‘Not in my name’ is wonderful, but the liberals cannot afford to restrict themselves to that. Without feeling embarrassed, they have to take their message forward. They must realise secularism has to be worked upon, unlike communalism, which feeds itself largely on people’s fears and anxieties. If they don’t, they would always be hoodwinked by people — just ask anyone from Bihar.

PG-13 nation



INTER ALIA
MITALI SARAN

Another day, another state. The Opposition alliance stands shell-shocked at the altar as Nitish Kumar runs in slo-mo through tulip fields, hair streaming prettily, into the arms of his old flame the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Much has been forgiven and forgotten. As @atti_cus observed on Twitter, Nitish suddenly remembered that Lalu is corrupt, and suddenly forgot that Modi is communal. With Bihar in the bag, the Opposition alliance in shreds, and a friendly President at the head of the Republic, things are

looking bright and shiny for the BJP and the Sangh Parivar in their relentless quest to turn India into a PG-13 country with a mean streak.

Besides cynically using soldiers on the border, besides tacitly-approved lynching, besides failing to make any economic headway, besides creating communal tinderboxes, besides trying to get everyone to accept Hindi as the national language, the thing that most irritates Indians is the way in which we are being culturally infantilised and sanitised.

Fully grown Indians are being nursed by patriarchal relics like Pahlaj Nihalani at the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC), who upholds his loopy version of family values by, for example, saving ladies from themselves. The CBFC refused to certify *Lipstick Under My Burqa* on the following grounds: “The story is lady oriented, their fantasy about life. There are continuous sexual scenes, abusive words, audio pornography and a bit sensitive touch about one particular section of society, hence film refused [sic to all of that].” The Film

Certification Appellate Tribunal overturned the decision, and the film is currently in theatres, but my god, should the arts be at the mercy of people like Nihalani?

We’re being supervised by people like Dinanath Batra, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh educator and educational activist who advocates post-truth textbooks that re-design history in alignment with the Sangh’s views. He’s willing to junk scholarship and academic integrity wholesale, in favour of propaganda. Kids really don’t need to know too much about Nehru or Tagore. Manmohan Singh’s public apology about the 1984 anti-Sikh riots in Delhi should be removed because it was only put there to make the Congress look good — plus, it automatically makes everyone’s eyeballs swivel to where Mr Modi stands, not being contrite about the 2002 Gujarat riots. Kids don’t need to know that Hindu society didn’t treat women well, or that Mughal rulers could be benevolent, or that the destruction of the Babri Masjid helped the BJP grow. And why not tell the kids that Maharana Pratap, not emperor Akbar, won the legendary battle of Haldighati? Truth is entirely expendable in the all-consuming quest to somehow,

by whatever means possible, feel proud.

We’re being administered by a central government whose opinion of Indians is that we are too poor and socially backward to deserve a fundamental right to privacy, and should instead be proud and happy to let proud and happy businesses exploit our data. This is not only the very definition of paternalism, but also at sharp and confusing odds with the same government’s insistence on our mega-global-super-greatness.

We’re being ordered, by our courts, to love and respect India — or, since that’s not enforceable, being ordered to put on ritualistic displays of such love and respect by standing for the anthem and singing patriotic songs and installing flagpoles and bits of military hardware in universities.

Confident countries that believe in themselves don’t feel the need to regulate citizens in this pathological fashion. It is the ferment of plurality, dissent, individuality, and liberty that fosters creativity, innovation, betterment, and excellence. It’s the feeling of being free, and treated fairly, that makes people feel they have a stake in their country. That feel-

ing, of having skin in the game, is the definition of patriotism, and it is earned, not legislated.

The Sangh seems tormented by self-esteem that is not just low, but infected and seeping. How terrible this unquenchable thirst for cultural validation, a thirst so great that you’d think that the Hindu right has been a tiny muzzled minority since Independence. They now have the political and possibly even the cultural majority. Why, then, are they still hankering to be included by the despised left-leaning media? Pride typically manifests in calmly and confidently going about normal life, so why are they spending their time insisting on red-eyed, frothy-mouthed assertions of pride? If their worldview is so self-evident, why are they having to force peony into their way of life? Why so much bluster?

The Sangh stayed largely aloof from the freedom struggle. It may be that its own preferences are for structure and instruction over freedom. Its version of freedom may be the freedom to be culturally restrictive. But you can boss around fully grown adults for only so long before they turn around and start giving you lip.