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## Lessons from the Infosys saga

Its CEO stayed an outsider geographically and otherwise

**A** divided board, a visionary US-based CEO, a company in the throes of change and an industry in the midst of disruption, a founder unable and unwilling to let go, allegations of scandals and wrongdoing and hush money – the Infosys saga sounds like a boardroom mash-up of House of Cards and Game of Thrones.

As the company starts to look for a new CEO and the stock nurses its bruises after losing almost 10% on Friday, it is important to look at the lessons from India's latest corporate drama.

**ourtake**

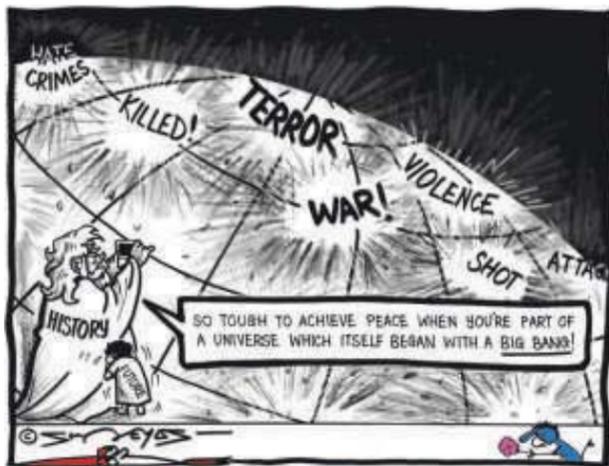
The first lesson is on the importance of cultural fit. Infosys was founded in 1981. It had four CEOs till 2014, all co-founders. For 33 years, the company was run in a particular way by the four CEOs who, despite differences, shared the same values. And then, in 2014, it hired an outsider as CEO and agreed to let him continue to be based outside India. Did he assimilate enough? Or did he remain an outsider – geographically and otherwise?

The second lesson is on letting go. At some family-managed businesses, family members who run the business never really have to worry about letting go. When they do let go, it is to a biological relative. In contrast, at board-run, professionally managed companies, there is no question of chairpersons or CEOs not letting go once their term is over. Infosys is neither. For long, it was a promoter-managed, albeit widely held company. And even after they stopped managing it, the promoters continued to be influential shareholders, holding around 12% of the company's equity. Some of them, it now emerges, never stopped thinking of Infosys as anything but their company.

The third, and by far, most important lesson from l'affaire Infosys, though is on the role of the board. A board's primary concern should be the company's shareholders; its primary focus, governance and compliance. It is also essential that the board figure out a way to engage and deal with the promoters of the company should they choose not to sit on it. A good board shouldn't become the B-team of a company's management nor a hostage of large and influential shareholders. The Infosys board may have been first one, then another, and then, caught in the middle and divided, to boot.

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ANIRUDH BHATTACHARYYA



## Democracy is an equal opportunity offender

**L**ast year, a young Chinese citizen and I were trying to connect for a conversation. Skype seemed to be the most convenient medium, although once our chat commenced, she started apologising. That was not just for the quality of the connection, which kept dropping as during a cellphone conversation in Delhi. It was also because she had to use a virtual private network since she was in Beijing and foreign-owned instant messaging services are considered

illegal there. The virtual private network (VPN), anonymising her local network, bypassed that block. This year, we wouldn't be able to re-connect on Skype, since VPNs are now blocked by China. Obviously, VPNs with their ability to circumvent the Chinese checkers and gatekeepers of the Great Firewall, allowed access to content that the Communists find abhorrent, like those about same-sex relationships.

Silicon Valley's behemoths that have been at the forefront of social justice combat

in the United States, have happily capitulated before Beijing as is their collective track record since the advent of the Web. Freedom of expression, in their corporate calculus, is an optional extra, one, that at times is unaffordable.

But in coddling the Chinese censor, they compensate by getting a little more strident where free speech is protected. These are, obviously, democracies, like the US, Canada and India, three countries where I've spent the majority of my life. As a journalist, I've found each of their leaders has attracted less than laudatory lines, though the current US President, Donald Trump, has taken that to another level.

As India celebrated the 70th year of its freedom, it has largely maintained the part of its destiny that relates to being home to particularly argumentative people. Social media have amplified that noisy contest for duelling ideas, even if trolls go to war with weaponised words. In the US, Trump attracts historic opprobrium. Even Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, a global liberal darling, isn't exempt from extreme opinions, both of the fawning and

flaming varieties.

Which is great, actually. The thing about democracy is that it's an equal opportunity offender; it often leaves half, sometimes more, of the population miserable. And the volume of that angst has been pumped up recently. This right to debate and dissent exists in exactly one system. As British author EM Forster wrote in *What I Believe*: "Two Cheers for Democracy: one because it admits variety and two because it permits criticism. Two cheers are quite enough: there is no occasion to give three." And it offers plenty of latitude for jeers, as with the righteous chorus of outrage against the neo-Nazi extremists storming Charlottesville, Virginia.

This, then is a pause for praise before returning to our regular panning. And often that residents of democracies don't often require VPNs to get their messages across. Today, I will take a deep breath and thank a system that allows me the space to vent; tomorrow, I can do just that, if I so wish.

Anirudh Bhattacharyya is a Toronto-based commentator on American affairs. The views expressed are personal.

**comment**

## Don't blame Narendra Modi for the demise of the idea of India

Our self-proclaimed prophets, who are whining about the state of the country, are wrong



MAKARAND R. PARANJAPE

**I**would be the last person to highlight the compulsive Hindu bashing or India-bashing as we celebrate the 70th anniversary of our nation. But almost as striking as India's achievements are some of our mean and mealy-mouthed detractors. Don't get me wrong. I am all for a genuine introspection, even far-reaching criticism, especially if the latter is constructive. What better conjuncture than our Independence Day for such conjecture and reflection?

But the bellyaching niggling and whining, especially of our celebrity pedants and self-proclaimed prophets, is in such bad taste on such an occasion. 'India at 70, and the Passing of Another Illusion' by Pankaj Mishra (August 11, New York Times) is an example. The entire piece is one unremitting jeremiad on "religious-racial supremacists," "xenophobic and racial" Hindus, "lynching of Muslims," "assaults on couples," "threats of rape against women," "Hindu supremacists' troll army," "mob frenzy," "jingoistic television," "nationwide hunt for enemies," "reactionary upper-caste Hindus," "India's lynch mobs," and so on. The damning conclusion is as predictable as it is prejudiced: "Mr Modi's rule represents the most devastating, and perhaps final, defeat of India's noble postcolonial ambition to create a moral world order." As if this were not enough, Mishra asks us to "mourn this August 15 as marking the end of India's tryst with destiny or, more accurately, the collapse of our exalted ideas about ourselves."

"Ourselves"? Mishra must be delusional. If not in solitary confinement, he stands isolated with a few fellow doomsayers, similarly

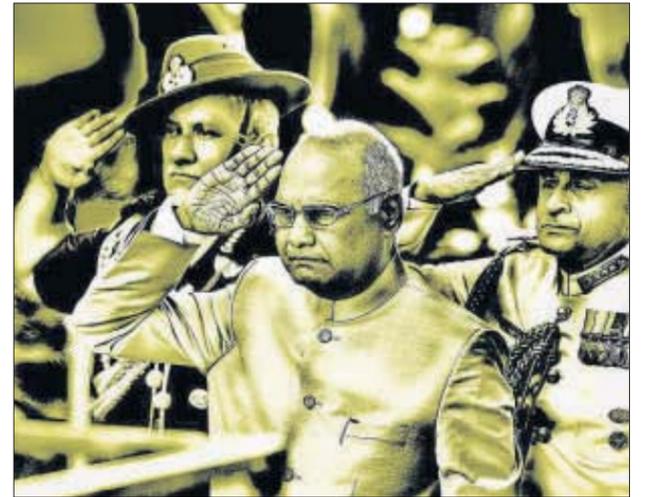
marooned in their solipsistic, if not sponsored, splendour.

Married well or highly privileged, talented writers like Mishra routinely fall into the gadfly trap — or should I say, trip? Do they consider themselves the divinely ordained conscience keepers of a people who would remain eternally benighted but for their gloomy auguries? Of course, it pays to trash India. What other motive can we ascribe to such egregious self-reproach?

But these disgruntled Hindus don't seem to do it purely for the money. They are not your ordinary sepoys or mercenaries. It is their passion, even pathology perhaps. But complain as they may till they go blue in the face, their carping amounts to little more than baying at the moon. For all practical purposes, India has passed them by.

In Mishra's case, by tracing the rot way back to 1948, via the 1984 Congress pogrom of Sikhs in Delhi, he seriously undermines his condemnation of Modi. If, as he alleges, "up to 40,000 Muslims were killed," under Jawaharlal Nehru's watch in the police action on Hyderabad in 1948, how is Modi responsible for the demise of the idea of India? With the ravages of Partition and creation of a theocratic Muslim state, wasn't Nehru's tryst with destiny already a disaster? How could August 15, 1947, in the words of W.E.B. Du Bois, be celebrated "as the greatest historical date" in modern times with the lonely Mahatma fire-fighting Hindu-Muslim riots in Calcutta on this very day instead of presiding over the honours in the Viceregal Palace? If the idea of India was still-born, then why blame Modi for killing it?

If Mishra's sense of history is wrong even more is his ethical inclination mistaken. In the case of Hyderabad he confidently maintains that the 40,000 killed were Muslims without substantiating either claim. The Razakara atrocities and excesses on Hindus, the Nizam's plan to create another Pakistan within India, Hyderabad's appeal to the UN Security Council against India — all this is conveniently elided. If his figure of 40,000



President Ram Nath Kovind (centre) with Army chief Bipin Singh Rawat and Navy chief Sunil Lanba (right) at Amar Jawan Jyoti on Independence Day

killed is from the Pandit Sunderal Committee, then the actual number in the report is between 26,000-40,000, with the religion of the casualties not clearly identified. Mishra shows himself up not as a true critic, let alone friend of India, but as partisan, motivated, and unreliable.

Don't commentators listen when President Ram Nath Kovind pitches for "compassionate society" or Prime Minister Narendra Modi exhorts citizens against religious intolerance or hatred? Why don't they find a single positive thing to say about India's numberless achievements? Why does international media subject India to such scathing criticism when failed states such as Pakistan or authoritarian regimes such as China are seldom held accountable? Whenever anyone needs an excuse to sledge us, it is such unbalanced India-trashers who are sure to be quoted. No wonder Mishra earned the sobriquet of "general hater-in-chief of anything Indian." But as

he himself once confessed, "My dominant feeling every day is one of great ignorance." We should take him at his word here and discount his rants.

To end on a positive note, a great civilisation, society, or state must not be overly touchy. Such hypersensitivity only reveals our own insecurities. To seek the approbation and sympathy of friends and foes alike is unnecessary. This, indeed, was Jawaharlal Nehru's undoing. An elephant does not slow down, let alone stop at every barking cur. Similarly, India must move forward calmly, purposefully, and confidently to reassert her economic, cultural, political, and military power, not only in the region, but also in the world. But in doing so, we should never deviate from the path of dharma or righteousness. Therein lies our manifest destiny.

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**eurovision**

SUNNY HUNDAL



## Abused wives of NRIs in the UK are fighting back

I feel particularly angry that laws in Britain make it easy for abusive men to put women's lives in jeopardy

**A**njalika Sharma was the director of her own consulting company in Delhi when she gave it up to marry her husband. He was an educated IIT graduate and from a similar family so they seemed like a good fit. But just one month after they came to Great Britain to start their family he started to abuse her.

At first her husband wanted to sell off her property in India to pay for his house in Britain. When she refused it was a present from her parents he started to threaten her. "He told me he would cancel my visa, divorce me and it would bring shame to my family," she told me.

Then the abuse got worse. She says he took videos of him raping her and threatened to post them online if she reported him. British police are now investigating. "We are Indians, we are a bit scared of breaking off our marriages you know," she told me with regret. It took her three years to leave her marriage, despite being independent-minded and financially secure.

The sad truth is that there are thousands

more women like Anjalika. Indian brides who move to Britain are in a vulnerable position and can easily be taken advantage of by abusive husbands. It is not hard for the husband to cancel his wife's visa after a dispute, leaving her stranded and without any support. Anjalika told me: "People who take their wives outside India can manipulate women, because they know they don't have anywhere else to go."

Not all marriages between Indians end up in tears of course. I have plenty of friends who came to Britain and America after marriage in India and live happily. But as a growing number of Indians move abroad, this problem keeps getting worse.

I spoke to another victim who is facing similar problems. Mamta Reddy earned good money in Hyderabad as an IT consultant before she got married and moved to the UK three years ago. Immediately her husband took all her job earnings and controlled what she did. "He physically abused [me] so many times. I took that matter to his parents also, but his parents just ignored it."

Because her visa depended on his name



Why are Indian men able to use tradition to silence women and shame them? AFP

she was stuck. In July this year he persuaded her to come back to Hyderabad to "resolve" their problems. But it was just a ruse. He took her visa and left for Britain without telling her. Then he cancelled it with the authorities, leaving her abandoned in India. She told me: "Right now I don't have single penny with me [from] what I earned [last] three years." Her husband exploited her for three years and then left her without any problems.

Last week, as Indians were celebrating 70 years of Independence, a group of women in London held a protest demanding their own freedom. Poonam Joshi, founder of Indian Ladies in the UK (ILUK), who organised the protest, was abandoned by her husband years ago. She doesn't want anyone else to go through the fear and insecurity she suffered. "The very egregious manner in which some men behave towards their wives is soul

destroying," she told me.

Indian Ladies in the UK campaigns on behalf of victims of domestic abuse and spousal abandonment. They say that hundreds of women find themselves abused and exploited due because the husband can easily cancel his partner's visa, leaving his wife in limbo.

But the problem here is much, much bigger. Indian women are being abandoned by British-born Indian husbands not just in the UK, but in India too.

Amanjot Kaur Ramoowalia, who runs the charity Helping Hapless in Chandigarh, says there are around 15,000 women just in Punjab who have been left abandoned by their husbands from Europe, America or Canada. "He [the groom] comes here and he asks for a massive dowry. They marry. He takes the money and enjoys the honeymoon. Then he never comes back," she says.

The plight of these women should shame us. I feel disgusted that British-Indian men are exploiting women for their money; I feel angry that UK law makes it easy for abusive men to put women's lives in jeopardy and Indian law makes it very difficult for women to divorce these fraudsters.

But most of all I'm ashamed that Indian men are able to use Indian traditions of izzat and shame to silence women and abuse them without repercussions.

Anjalika Sharma told me she was so ashamed of what was happening to her, she did not want to raise the issue. But her mind has changed. "Now I am determined to get him arrested. This is the right decision, to put him in jail."

I hope she and many more women like her get the justice they deserve.

\* Some names have been changed.

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## A small gesture of kindness can give you lots of happiness

**innervoice**



Anukampa Sharma

We, the people running the world, refer to ourselves as humans or human beings. The word 'human' initially meant benevolent and compassionate which was believed to be the core of our character. This belief coined the term humanity.

The true meaning of human can hardly describe us anymore. Can you truly call yourself a human when you fail to show anyone an ounce of kindness? We often blame the cruelty of being unkind, even downright cruel forgetting to realise that

it is us who constitute the society. Just a few kind words can forge a lifelong relationship, full of respect and devotion.

We are on the path of destruction as the cruelty we exhibit is turning us into nefarious beings that are sometimes addressed as monsters. Benevolence is the key to escape such a dreadful predicament which will destroy the world as we know it.

Can you remember the last time you were kind to someone? A little kindness will not just improve your relationship with people but also fill you with happiness and solace. It is such a joyous feeling and a step towards becoming a better person.

(Inner Voice comprises contributions from our readers.)

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