

Indian Elections and Narendra Modi: India needs a thinker, not a despot on its peacock throne

Wednesday 23 April 2014, by [GANDHI Gopalkrishna](#) (Date first published: 18 April 2014).

There is a strange stillness in the air. Marine geographers have a word for it – the Doldrums. The word signifies a stupor, in which everyone and everything is listless, stagnant and immobilised. Coleridge describes the state of the Pacific Doldrums in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*:

*All in a hot and copper sky,
The bloody Sun, at noon,
Right up above the mast did stand,
No bigger than the Moon.
Day after day, day after day,
We stuck, nor breath nor motion;
As idle as a painted ship
Upon a painted ocean.*

The ship of our nationhood, during these election days, is meant to be moving. But is it moving at all? No one quite knows, no one wants to speculate on where, towards what port, we are headed if we are headed anywhere at all.

One asks in Shailendra's words and Mukesh's voice animated by the one and only Raj Kapoor:

*Manzil kahaan?
Kahaan ruknaa hai?
To find the answer with the humour and sadness of resignation:
Uparvaalaa jaanay-ay-ay-ay
Uparvaalaa jaanay.*

But that is certainly not how the BJP looks at the scene today. For that party, this is already the hour before the coronation, before the golden moment it has been waiting for ever since the country voted its government out of office 10 years ago.

Can a people who showed the door even to a person as esteemed and as utterly un-dislikable as AB Vajpayee, vote into office a government headed by one who has split the country into those who worship him and those fear him, those who adulate him and those who despise him, those who imagine he will steer the ship to a golden harbour and those who know he will do nothing of the kind?

Perhaps they can, perhaps they will.

Perhaps a bloody sun at noon will shine over that phenomenon. Dictators have been wafted up by people voting democratically. The ballot box can receive the faith of innocence and emit a genie. It can receive trust unseeingly, disgorge its betrayal unblinkingly. That receptacle, now a machine, is

neutral to the ethics of its arithmetic. It is concerned only with numbers.

And so, for aught we know, the painted ship will bestir itself and move into, what I would call Port au Pain.

Let us realise that the Doldrums feeling is true but is true only as a feeling. In actual fact, beneath the surface stillness, there is a great frenzy astir, a frenzy to bring to India's helm, the reign of an ethnic majority, of a sectarian bigotry, of a denominational autocracy. And all in the name, the very specious name, of 'strength'.

Aurangzeb the unmusical, merciless, illiberal and ravenously ambitious Narcissus is slouching towards that helm, in the garb of his opposite number. And we, we Indians, who do not believe in the rule of the sharpened scimitar or of the pointed trisul, are the adherents of Dara Shukoh, waiting for the denouement.

The Doldrums lie motionless in our minds. The Great Cyclone is taking furious shape in the new Alamgir's.

And, in this great contradiction, it is the spirit of Majma-ul-Bahrayn, or The Mingling of the Two Oceans, Dara's great work on India's two faith traditions, that calls for our attention. When, in 1659, Dara was captured and put to death in Delhi, on the orders of his brother, the new Emperor, Dara's adherents and admirers were shocked, stunned and, of course, were persecuted, but even as it became clear that Aurangzeb was gaining ground and would become Emperor, another great number of Dara Shukoh's supporters and 'neutrals' shifted their allegiance to the new power-centre. That is Delhi for us. The way men and women of standing and stature, as intellectuals, activists and writers, have slid, like sandbags on a see-saw, to the heavier side, is reminiscent of the nobility and the ignobility of Delhi and Agra that slid to the new order in Imperial Delhi, 355 years ago. That blood was on Aurangzeb's hands seemed not to matter to them. That deceit, purchase, intimidation were used by that self-proclaimed Servant of God, seemed not to matter to them.

'Hindustan is weak ; we need a strong sovereign', was the selling line. The Alamgir's path to the Peacock Throne was laid by the murderer, plastered by the rowdy, smoothed by the toady, washed by the traitor, petalled by the flatterer and finally perfumed by the simply-scared-out-of-his-wits courtier. And a man who swore by the Holy Word but swore at his rivals, peers, alternatives, came to lead India.

Lead India he did, but to what, to where, we know.

Claims of vision are not made by visionaries, but by myopics. Claims of strength are not made by the strong; they do not need to.

Gandhi, Ambedkar and Nehru did not say "I am a visionary" ; others saw they were that. Patel did not say he was made of iron. Metal does not self-designate. Subhas Bose said 'Dilli Chalo!', not 'Mujhe Dilli le chalo!' Dilli may well be 'paas ast' (near), for the chief minister of Gujarat, but there moves in the debris of its earlier empires a spirit that is not about that city's forts, gardens and ridges but about Hindustan. Hindustan in 2014 needs no despot on its Peacock Throne, but a thinker who is also a doer, one who will heal its wounds, not turn the knife in them, rub salt on them, make them bleed again. Is there such a one around ? We do not see one.

But we know where Aurangzeb's reign led Hindustan to.

Gopalkrishna Gandhi

P.S.

* Hindustan Times. April 18, 2014. First Published: 22:37 IST(18/4/2014). Last Updated: 15:31 IST(20/4/2014):

<http://www.hindustantimes.com/comment/gopalkrishnagandhi/india-needs-a-thinker-not-a-despot-on-it-peacock-throne/article1-1209715.aspx#.U>

* Gopalkrishna Gandhi is a former administrator, diplomat and governor. The views expressed by the author are personal