

# The politics of enmity

We must reject the idea that membership in a group comes with an enemy to be fought



RAJEEV BHARGAVA

Indian elections have become less violent over the last three decades. The credit for this must go not only to institutions such as the Election Commission but also to the political class. Yet there is another disturbing tendency, potentially replete with violence, that has been growing during the same period: to view political opponents as enemies to be annihilated. One gets a flavour of this in slogans such as ‘Congress-mukt Bharat’, but more than in statements, it is present in the tone of some speakers, in their body language and in the ferocity in their eyes.

### Friends and enemies

The pro-Nazi, but important legal and political theorist, Carl Schmitt, made the friend-enemy distinction as constitutive of politics itself. To be political was necessarily to work with a distinction between an extreme version of us and them, friends and enemies. Not only was this distinction the decisive criterion of the political but even within this relationship, enmity had priority over friendship: Those not on our side, or disloyal to us, are automatically, irredeemably, enemies. In doing so, Schmitt reduced all politics to war. At least war is an ever-present possibility in politics, he claimed, and therefore a political person must conduct himself as if surrounded by enemies. Schmitt was exploiting a distinction perfected by some strands within Abrahamic religions that invented the idea of an ‘extra-systemic other’, a radical other with whom no conversation is possible, one who is outside one’s semantic universe. Those who do not adhere to the doctrine defining the system are enemies to be fought. Internal dissent too is anathema, akin to betrayal, of joining the camp of the enemy, signifying treachery. Felt as existential threats, both outsiders and deviant insiders must be ‘converted’, brought in line or altogether expunged.

This horrendous resource within these traditions, when deployed under certain conditions, has played havoc in large parts of Europe lead-



“The strain of exclusionary nationalism has permeated South Asian cultures, an example being the expulsion of the Rohingya from Myanmar.” A Rohingya refugee camp in Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh. •GETTY IMAGES

ing to crusades, the inquisition, the expulsions of Jews, and to the final solution of the concentration camps; and outside Europe, in the liquidation, for example, of native Americans. Some detect the same ideological underpinning even in the neoconservative war on Iraq. Perhaps, its most recent expression is in the violence exhibited by Islamist organisations such as the Islamic State. However, this mindset is no longer confined to strands of Abrahamic theology; it has crept into other religions and even been secularised. It is found in the 20th century in both fascism and Stalinism and more pervasively in a host of ultra-nationalisms that have led to ethnic cleansing and genocide in several parts of the world, including Indonesia, Cambodia and Rwanda. This strain of exclusionary nationalism has permeated China where undercurrents of Han nationalism have virtually turned Tibetan Buddhists and Uighur Muslims into extra-systemic others or enemies. It has infected South Asian cultures too, causing the partition of the ‘subcontinent’, ethnic cleaning of Tamils in Sri Lanka and the expulsion of the Rohingya from Myanmar. In India, the frequent use of the term ‘anti-national’ for those critical of the current dispensation smells of the same fatal disease. How to deal ideologically with this seems to be one of the great challenges of our times.

### Enemies and adversaries

Obviously, a mentality inebriated

with the friend-enemy syndrome is fundamentally undemocratic. Knowing the difference between an enemy and an adversary is absolutely critical in a functioning democracy. An adversary is someone one wishes to defeat in a temporary contest such as a legal combat or a game of cricket. To wish to trounce an opponent in an election is entirely legitimate. On the other hand, an enemy is someone to be destroyed permanently. Adversaries can be won over, turned into allies, but enemies cannot. A compromise with an adversary is acceptable, even praiseworthy. On the other hand, with an enemy, a compromise spells defeat, an unacceptable concession, a betrayal. The world of adversaries in a democracy does not involve a zero-sum game; no one loses everything or forever. There are no permanent losers or victors; each competitor wins some and loses some in a fair contest. But all rules of fairness can be abandoned in a fight with an enemy. In this hostile scenario, all politics is nothing but war.

It is often heard that in politics there are no permanent friends or enemies. This may well appear to be opportunistic in some contexts but it is the very stuff of democratic politics where everyone hopes that today’s losers can be tomorrow’s victors and vice versa. Everyone, not only active political agents but also ordinary citizens, is assured that no matter which party wins, the fundamental interests and liberties of all, the majority as well as the minority, are secure,

and despite deep differences on many matters, everyone also shares something in common. This ‘common’ can be our humanity, national ethos, Constitution, or shared civilisational values, nurtured through history. For example, in India, the value of pluralism, acceptance and accommodation, of refusing to view the world in terms of simple binaries has faced challenges from time to time by narrow-minded, rigid, hierarchy-ridden, upper caste practices (often termed Brahminism because it was legitimated by scholarly Brahmins), by close-minded religious orders which accompanied Afghan and Turk invaders and marauders, and by ruthlessly exploitative colonialists. More recently, heartless multinational corporations have also damaged this ethos by mindlessly turning everything into a commodity to be bought and sold in the capitalist market. But exclusionary ultra-nationalists (as distinct from inclusive, moderate nationalists) must not be left out of this nefarious list. They too are hell bent on throttling our civilisational values and democratic ethos.

### Protecting our civilisation

As groups grow in size, they invent rules to regulate behaviour, formulate authoritative norms, install a structure of authority and, above all, evolve some criteria of who is in and who is out, of insiders and outsiders. Let us even agree that there is no ‘self’ without an ‘other’. But rules can be rigid or flexible, a challenge to norms can be tolerated or punished severely, and the ‘other’ can be viewed as a temporary adversary in a healthy contest, someone with who one can also have a fruitful dialogue, or one with who conversation is impossible, a permanent enemy. This idea that membership in a group comes with an enemy to be fought was a powerful resource in the doctrines of some religions has slowly taken root in Asian religions, including modern Hinduism. It has now entered our democratic politics. If it stays there, it will utterly destroy the *atman* of our civilisation and the *astivya* of democracy. Everyone across religious differences must strive to fight it. All democrats, if they wish to save their cherished system, must defang it before it is too late.

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# Chowkidars are those who protect the rich

Why the BJP campaign is on the mark



KANCHA ILAIAH SHEPHERD

Prime Minister Narendra Modi calls himself a chowkidar. What he has done is tell the nation and the world the truth. Chowkidars exist mostly in Asian countries where poor men work as protectors of the rich. In India, only about 0.5% of the population have watchmen, who are called chowkidars. Only poor, lower caste people – Dalits, Other Backward Classes and Adivasis – take up this

job, and that too when no other work for survival is available. That the job is tied to caste was evident in Rajya Sabha MP Subramanian Swamy’s statement. Mr. Swamy recently said that he cannot join the BJP’s ‘Main Bhi Chowkidar (I am also a watchman)’ campaign as he is a Brahmin. Being a chowkidar is a low-paying job with little job satisfaction – after all, a chowkidar has to stand at the gate of a rich man or woman’s house all day and protect it. No chowkidar serves the poor. The poor do not have anything that needs protection.

### Protecting the rich

When I say Mr. Modi is speaking the truth, I refer to the people he has been protecting as Prime Minister – the rich, the top industrialists. Those who are trying to establish a Hindutva state and economy are doing so for the rich. The BJP/RSS Ministers and cadres have no hesitation in joining the ‘Main Bhi Chowkidar’ campaign. The BJP and the RSS have never believed in socio-economic equality. While it is true that BJP-RSS activists have always worked to help people during natural calamities, they have never worked for the upliftment of the poor. They have never organised the agrarian poor or the urban poor in order to increase their daily wages. Whenever there have been strikes by workers, they have sided with the management, never with the workers. Their student wing, the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad, has never organised seminars or conferences on how to improve the living conditions of the marginalised. Nor has it organised meetings for social and economic justice. It has, in fact, opposed progressive meets on campuses.



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When the Indian economy was feudal, these activists mobilised support for the feudal lords. After it became mainly capitalist following the globalisation and liberalisation phase, they stood by the growing crony capitalists. Their only concern was that these crony capitalists should back the Hindutva ideology.

This is not to say that the Congress has not supported monopoly capital. But during the freedom struggle and till the 1970s, the Congress had some serious ideological relationship with the socialist welfare agenda. It wanted to build state capital. From Nehruvian democratic socialism to Indira Gandhi’s abolition of Privy Purses and bank nationalisation, the Congress engaged with the idea of some sort of social and economic equality.

However, after Emergency, its credibility began to erode. When Rajiv Gandhi became Prime Minister, a slow pace of privatisation started. Once the P.V. Narasimha Rao government was ushered in, the privatisation process picked up, without giving up the idea of a mixed economy.

Through all these phases, the RSS and Jan Sangh opposed state capital; they opposed a mixed economy. It was only after Indira Gandhi imposed Emergency that they gained some credibility among the poor, and this was because they joined hands with the socialist leader Jayaprakash Narayan. Otherwise they never moved away from the rich. They never moved away from serving capitalist and feudal interests.

### Disintegration of feudalism

Luckily for them, by the 2014 Lok Sabha election, feudalism got disintegrated. The crony capitalists were impatient with the Congress culture of slow privatisation. They found in the BJP those who could protect them.

Of course, some pro-poor policies are taken by the government too – for poor farmers and labourers. This is only because if this is not done, a revolution could break out. And if a revolution does occur, leave alone the chowkidars, even the police cannot protect their economy.

The 2019 elections will decide what the masters do. If the chowkidars come to power with their full backing, more decisions will be taken to increase the gap between the masses and the rich.

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## SINGLE FILE

# Taking a cue from Japan

How India can bridge the Belt and Road divide with China

ATUL ANEJA



As the countdown begins for the second edition of the Belt and Road Forum (BRF) later this month, Beijing is jubilant. Last month, China demonstrated that President Xi Jinping’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) had steamed into the heart of Europe. Late last month, during President Xi’s Europe visit, Italy became the first G7 country to formally subscribe to the China-led BRI. The Chinese have interpreted Rome’s decision as a historic event that revives ties between the European and Chinese civilisations. During his visit, President Xi also spoke about joint venture prospects in other countries, including in Africa. That apparently tickled a nostalgic nerve in European capitals, where it has been difficult to separate the guilt of colonisation from a whiff of romance. The geopolitical subtext of the visit is also fairly obvious. With its ties with the U.S. souring, China is making a bold move to chip away at the real or contrived fault-lines of the Trans-Atlantic Alliance. As in 2017, when there were plenty of red faces in China when India did not grace the BRF, there is once again a fear in Beijing that New Delhi may repeat the embarrassment. India had stayed out because of sovereignty concerns as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, the flagship of the BRI, passes through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. The question then arises whether there is third way out of the problem that would allow India to hold on to its position against official participation, but yet convey to the Chinese that New Delhi has no ingrained ill-will towards the BRI.

Perhaps, New Delhi can pull a leaf out of Japan’s play book. In 2017, after Tokyo had decided that it needed to rebuild bridges that had collapsed following a maritime dispute over a few East China Sea islands, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe decided to send his trusted party ally, Toshihiro Nikai, to China. Mr. Nikai, the secretary general of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, though an established heavyweight, was technically not a part of government. His presence signalled that Tokyo continued to have reservations about the BRI, but was nevertheless open to an engagement with the enterprise, provided a course correction was carried out in the future. Significantly, Mr. Nikai’s delegation included the head of Keidanren, Japan’s Business Federation lobby – a pointer that its current misgivings apart, Japan could be open to business within the ambit of the BRI.

Taking the cue from Japan, Prime Minister Narendra Modi can also tap an influential party heavyweight to lead an Indian non-official delegation to the BRF, along with business leaders and reputed scholars. A mature and pragmatic Indian response, which keeps the door open for a future partnership with the BRI, may help keep afloat the reset achieved last year following the informal summit between Mr. Modi and Mr. Xi in Wuhan.

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## DATA POINT

# The winning habit

The late CPI leader Indrajit Gupta had the distinction of being a member of 11 Lok Sabhas, beginning in 1957. The CPI(M) has the highest proportion of MPs who have been part of five or more Lok Sabhas. Among States, Meghalaya has the highest proportion. By **Vignesh Radhakrishnan**

### Veteran line-up

The graph shows MPs who were part of 9 Lok Sabhas or more. Labels show the MP’s name, the latest party he was affiliated to and the **number of Lok Sabhas he was part of**

<b>Indrajit Gupta</b> CPI 11	<b>Basudeb Acharia</b> CPI(M) 9	<b>Kamal Nath</b> INC 9	<b>Purno Agitok-Sangma</b> NPP 9
	<b>George Fernandes</b> JD(U) 9		
<b>Somnath Chatterjee</b> CPI(M) 10	<b>Giridhar Gamang</b> INC 9	<b>Ram Vilas Paswan</b> LJP 9	<b>Madhavrao Scindia</b> INC 9
<b>P.M.Sayeed</b> INC 10			
<b>Atal Bihari Vajpayee</b> BJP 10	<b>Manikrao Hodyla Gavit</b> INC 9	<b>Khagapathi Pradhani</b> INC 9	

### Experience counts

The CPI(M) has the highest proportion of veterans among parties which have sent at least 50 MPs and that are no longer defunct.

**Table 1** shows the % of one-time MPs (1), % of two to four-time MPs (2 to 4) and % of MPs who completed five or more terms (>5) among various parties.

**Table 2** shows the same State-wise.

**Note:** In cases where an MP represented multiple parties, the last party that s/he was part of has been considered. An MP might have also contested from various States. In that case, the last State from where s/he contested has been considered

### Table 1

Party	1	2 to 4	>5
CPI(M)	41	50	9
BJP	52	41	7
SP	56	38	6
INC	52	43	5
AITC	61	35	4
DMK	64	33	3
Ind.	80	17	3
TDP	74	25	1
AIADMK	84	15	1
BSP	80	20	0

### Table 2

State	1	2 to 4	>5
Meghalaya	50	33	17
Uttarakhand	35	53	12
Jharkhand	57	32	11
West Bengal	52	39	9
M.P.	60	31	9
Kerala	47	45	8
Karnataka	52	40	8
Goa	58	33	8
Tripura	50	43	7
Gujarat	51	42	7
Himachal	52	42	6
Maharashtra	55	39	6
Assam	59	35	6
Bihar	59	35	6
Odisha	59	35	6
A.P.	52	43	5
Rajasthan	63	32	5
Telangana	63	32	5
Tamil Nadu	64	31	5
Chhattisgarh	52	45	3
U.P.	60	37	3
Haryana	50	49	1
Punjab	60	39	1
Mizoram	50	50	0
Delhi	58	42	0
J&K	59	41	0
Arunachal	64	36	0
Nagaland	64	36	0
Manipur	67	33	0
Sikkim	67	33	0

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FIFTY YEARS AGO APRIL 2, 1969

### Wrong Air-India folder to be withdrawn

The Union Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation, Dr. Karan Singh, expressed regret in the Lok Sabha to-day [April 1, New Delhi] that a folder produced by Air India in collaboration with the BOAC and Thomas Cooks to attract foreign tourists had indicated that India, Kashmir and Nepal were separate countries. The Minister was earlier taken by surprise when Mr. Indrajit Gupta flourished the pamphlet and asked whether there was any kind of check to stop this kind of giving wrong information that India, Kashmir and Nepal were three separate countries whereas Kashmir was an integral part of India. Mr. Gupta demanded to know who authorised this production, whether anybody in Government had seen the text and what action would Government take to see that such a piece was not put out. Dr. Karan Singh said that he was distressed to learn that Air India had produced such a pamphlet. It had not come to his notice so far.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO APRIL 2, 1919.

### A Farewell in Madras

Two gentlemen long connected with the Madras Christian College are leaving Madras for good in the persons of Mr. J.R. Henderson, C.I.E., and the Rev. the Hon’ble Mr. G. Pittendrigh. Whether as Professor in the Christian College for a quarter of a century, or as Superintendent of the Madras Government Museum, Mr. Henderson has done valuable and enduring work. An active member of the University Senate, as Hony. Secretary of the Victoria Technical Institute, both those institutions have profited by his zeal and experience... In Mr. Pittendrigh the student world loses a ripe and able educationalist. He is a warm friend of the Young Men’s Christian Association. Mr. Pittendrigh was given a cordial send-off at a farewell meeting yesterday.

## POLL CALL

# Electronic voting machine (EVM)

EVMs replaced the paper ballot system in the Kerala State elections in 1982 and are now used during Lok Sabha and Assembly elections. EVMs are easy to operate, reliable, eliminate the possibility of invalid votes, make the process of counting faster, and are easier to transport compared to ballot boxes. Only two Indian public sector units manufacture EVMs: Bharat Electronic Limited and the Electronics Corporation of India Ltd. EVMs contain a control unit, which is with the polling officer, and a balloting unit, which the voter enters in order to cast her vote. Names and symbols of parties are shown on the machine and the voter presses the button next to the party of her choice.

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