

**Trying to be a first-time reporter on the average American newspaper is like trying to play Bach's St. Matthew's Passion on a ukulele**  
*Baghdikian's Observation*

## On to semi-final

With the Election Commission announcing the dates of Assembly polls in five States the stage has been set for what politicians and commentators see as the 'semi-final' to the final match – the 2019 general elections. Several changes in the political situation have taken place over the last few months. The latest development is that Mayawati has decided not to enter into any poll alliance with the Congress. Akhilesh Yadav of SP has also dumped the Congress, alleging that Rahul Gandhi's party was taking too long a time to make up its mind for him to wait. After BSP and SP turning away from the Congress, the Left also seems to have developed cold feet to the Grand Old Party. The CPI-M has remained vertically divided for the last couple of years on the question of forging an alliance of opposition parties including the Congress. Now the anti-Congress lobby in the party headed by Prakash Karat has got a shot in the arms.

However, the veering away of the BSP, SP and the Left from the Congress may not harm Rahul Gandhi and his party much. People's perception of the Congress and Rahul has changed, and changing positively, for some time past. From his old 'Pappu' image, Rahul is fast maturing into an experienced politician. Though Prime Minister Modi is still far ahead of him in popularity index, recent opinion polls show that Modi's popularity is slowly dipping while that of Rahul is slowly rising. There is a perceptible change in BJP's attitude to Rahul as well. No longer does the saffron party draft junior spokesmen like Sambit Patra to rebut Rahul in press conferences or TV panel discussions. A battery of senior ministers like Arun Jaitley, Ravi Shankar Prasad, Nirmala Sitharaman, etc. replied to Rahul's criticism.

In public perception, next year's general election is becoming more and more a battle between the BJP and the Congress, or between Modi and Rahul, whichever way one may put it. No other political party or alliance of political parties is seen to be the BJP's main challenger. It is the Congress all the way. If the Congress wins the Assembly elections in MP, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh, as pre-poll surveys indicate, then the political scenario will undergo a sea change in December. It will be the other parties that may seek alliance with the Congress for the Big Fight in 2019. Much will depend on the outcome of the Assembly polls.

# CJI has no fans in 'God's own Country'

## REFLEX ACTION

Sushil Kutty

The Supreme Court is on a roll and women everywhere are on fire with #MeToo turning into a #WeToo chorus. As far as court judgements go, when they ring false on one thing, they ring false on all things. So, if the verdict on Sabarimala rang false for those opposing women's entry to Sabarimala, the ruling on Bhima Koregaon didn't strike true for rights activists.

Both rulings left in their wake also anger. Will feminist Trupti Desai be able to gather courage to head for Sabarimala in this life? Doubt it, for there is a sneaking feeling that mission accomplished, her work's done and she wouldn't be seen anywhere near the shining beacon on the hill at least in her this life: maybe next time when 'she' could be born a 'he'. Is that too strong a statement, bigoted? No, for the likes of Malayali Rahul Easwar, if he was looking for fair justice, he was in the wrong town at the wrong time. At the end of the day, the only person who wore pants on the bench turned out to be the woman judge, Justice Indu Malhotra. The four men on the august top court bench showed pink slips.

It was not scenic beauty that Trupti Desai wanted to turn Sabarimala into but has probably succeeded to do so. What's the difference between a water park and Sabarimala? The people who wanted to overturn a centuries old religious tradition are not from Sabarimala Country. They are from a branch of irreligious contradiction whose only goal is to establish Venus in Mars. Sabarimala country is

Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, it's not Trupti's town in Maharashtra or regions up north. And there is this bunch of #RightToWait women from Sabarimala country who are unhappy with a verdict that has reduced Sabarimala to just another temple. To them, Sabarimala is a school of advaita founded by Lord Ayyappa on the values of Brahmacharya and, for them, the Supreme Court stepped into uncharted territory for women.

Justice Indu Malhotra got it right for lakhs of women in Sabarimala country. She held that it is not for the court to interfere in religious practices of a sect, even if it appeared discriminatory in nature. But her solitary voice was drowned in the openly biased towards gender equality assertions of her male colleagues on the bench.

She probably understands the issue better than the bulldozing Trupti Desai. Justice Malhotra was emphatic that the right to practice religion is a fundamental right, but religious practices are protected. The other justices limited themselves to the view that Article 25 protects equal entitlement of all

persons to freely practice religion. Justice Malhotra believed "Article 25 protects essential practice." She found resonance when she insisted that "equality in matters of religion must be viewed in the context of the worshippers of the same faith" and that only such religious practices should be struck off the statute which were "evil", like Sati. Needless to say Justice Indu Malhotra won the faith of legions in Kerala while CJI Dipak Misra, in "his progressive garb", was not the favourite man of Justice in God's Own Country on Friday.

The marauding floods, which left Sabarimala and Kerala underwater, have receded but it will take a long time before a menstruating woman treks to the hill-shrine. The naysayers are planning to go for a special review. The state government, which sided with Trupti Desai, now has the burden to ensure that she gets to enter Sabarimala. Will the government wash its hands off this delicate task? Intimidating? Just desserts!

The Supreme Court with its 4-1 judgement hit the ball out of the park but now to go out and find the ball in the jungles of Sabarimala is daunting task. It's going to get far worse before it gets better. Progressive journalist Barkha Dutt tweeted that her "minor crush" on the SC was threatening to become a major one! But, as Lord Ayyappa is witness, the Bhima Koregaon ruling that followed did not help the major crush any. Like said, in another context, the Supreme Court like God acts in mysterious ways. (IPA)



A mother washes her son at a camp for people displaced by an earthquake in Palu, Central Sulawesi, Indonesia --REUTERS

### Conventional Crossword

1		2		3		4	5	6
				7				
8	9	10					11	
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				16	17	18	19	
	20	21		22		23		
24				25				
26								
27					28			

- |                           |                       |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>ACROSS</b>             | <b>DOWN</b>           |
| 1 Quickly (mus)           | 1 Couples             |
| 4 Month                   | 2 Stopping place      |
| 7 Nimble                  | 3 Solemn promise      |
| 8 Whole                   | 4 Gentle              |
| 11 Fate                   | 5 Drug-yielding plant |
| 12 Uprising               | 6 Still               |
| 13 Conceal                | 9 Pinch               |
| 15 Small branch           | 10 Copy               |
| 16 King with Golden Touch | 11 Clamour            |
| 20 Bill of fare           | 18 Curve              |
| 23 Wary                   | 19 Cozes              |
| 24 Wicked                 | 20 Neck hair          |
| 25 Mode of standing       | 21 Dutch cheese       |
| 26 Sily                   | 22 Employ             |
| 27 Precious stone         | 24 Large              |
| 28 Hexes                  |                       |

### SUDOKU: 2337

7	8				6			
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3	5	6			9			
							5	
7	5		4				8	3
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	2		8	3		7		
6	5	7						
9					6	2		

### Yesterday's Solution 2336

2	6	8	5	7	4	1	9	3
3	5	9	1	2	6	4	7	8
4	1	7	8	9	3	2	5	6
1	9	5	3	8	2	7	6	4
7	8	4	6	5	1	9	3	2
6	3	2	9	4	7	8	1	5
9	4	1	2	6	5	3	8	7
8	2	6	7	3	9	5	4	1
5	7	3	4	1	8	6	2	9

### Yesterday's Cross Word Solution 345

	R	U	G		D	H	O	W	
P	I	E	R		A			A	
R	A	N	T		S	T	A	G	
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# Shaping the 2019 battle of alliances

The 2019 Lok Sabha elections have been shaping as the battle of alliances. The most important player in battle of alliances is BSP supremo Mayawati. Also, on these alliances depend the future of the BSP leader. Seat sharing arrangement between Mayawati and Janata Congress, Chhattisgarh, floated by the Congress rebel, Ajit Jogi, raises the possibility of a triangular contest, which may be advantageous to the BJP. Ajit Jogi's party, even in alliance, may not make much difference; his imagine is not good, and Mayawati's party is virtually non-existent in the state. While Jogi's exit has brought peace in the Congress, the party is still grappling because of the absence of a leader of Raman Singh stature. The entire leadership of the Congress, which included VC Shukla, was wiped out in a Naxal attack a few years ago. In the neighbouring Madhya Pradesh, Mayawati has announced she will contest all seats state but congress president Chief Kamal Nath has reportedly said negotiations are still going on.

Mayawati has no chance in the state as she has influence in certain pockets only but she has potential to damage the Congress. The real test for Mayawati is in Uttar Pradesh. She has left terms of an alliance vague by saying she will enter into an alliance if BSP is given "a respectable" number of seats. Samajwadi Party President Akhilesh Yadav however, was quick to react: "even if I have to take two steps back in the proposed coalition, I will not let communal forces come forward". He said being a national party, the Congress has a bigger role to play, the party leaders should talk to all non-BJP parties with the idea of bringing them on one platform. Highly placed sources say that Mayawati is under intense pressure from government not to come too close to the Congress or SP. She was threatened that many pending cases against her would be reopened. That is why perhaps, she distanced herself from the Congress in Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh. Observers say if the BSP supremo succumbs to the pressure, it will

be end of her political career. Alliance between Mayawati and Akhilesh in Lok Sabha by-elections in the Gorakhpur, Phulpur and Kairana sent shock waves in BJP circles. The BJP candidates in three constituencies were routed. It is believed if Mayawati, Akhilesh and Congress enter into an alliance in 2019, the BJP may be annihilated in the political sensitive state. BJP had won a massive 71 out of 80 seats in UP in 2014. It was helped by a split in the Dalit and Muslim votes and a consolidation of non-Yadav OBC votes. But an SP-BSP alliance can negate this and consolidate the anti-BJP vote. However, complications remain as SP votes many not be so smoothly transferable to BSP as BSP votes to SP. BSP drew a blank in 2014 poll and fared poorly in 2017 assembly election. Thus the next general

election will be a do-or-die scenario for Mayawati. This is why she has said that she might go it alone unless she gets a respectable number of seats from her likely allies. BJP appears to be moving fast having firmed up a tie up with Nitish Kumar in Bihar. Bihar CM's recently announced that his JD(U) had come to a respectable seat sharing agreement with the BJP. Though Nitish did not reveal the seat sharing formula, that an understanding has been reached well in advance of the 2019 poll indicates BJP is moving with its customary alacrity in political matters. Reports from Patna say Nitish is not as popular as before because she joined hands with the BJP. Currently a strong Lalu wind or call it sympathy wave is blowing even though he is in jail. Congress-Lalu tie up

is certain to do well. Similarly, in Telangana chief minister K. Chandrashekar Rao recently decided to dissolve the state assembly to facilitate elections. And although his TRS party hasn't announced a formal alliance, the very fact that KCR made disparaging remarks about Congress President Rahul Gandhi—calling him a buffoon—shows that he is leaning towards the BJP. Meanwhile on the opposition front Congress, Telugu Desam Party have formed an alliance to take on KCR. With this ties up chances of similar coalition in other Telugu speaking state of Andhra Pradesh have brighten up. Those optimistic about Congress-TDP tie up say, the alliance will gain in Hyderabad- Secunderabad and Khamam. A sizeable number of Andhra Poll, including those from Chandrababu Naidu kamma caste are settled in these area which account for nearly three dozen seats in 119-member assembly. The 2019 Lok Sabha poll is decisive which may decide future of the BJP and Narendra Modi. (IPA)

## FOCUS

Harihar Swarup