

Goa, Lisbon, Zurich

by

Rajan Parrikar

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Modi's rise

The euphoria following Narendra Modi's emphatic victory has subsided but not before revealing once again a couple of key national traits of Indians: mistaking words for action and a paper plan for actual results, and the hungering for a Messiah.

Am I glad that Modi is Prime Minister? Yes, says my heart. He represents the best chance yet for India. For the sake of the generation of my little nephew and niece, I wish him success. My mind, however, is not on board. I am persuaded that very little will change, and that we will be presented with more elaborate scandals. Exhibit A for this assertion is Manohar Parrikar, a point I shall return to later.

I should note, however, that I am no Modi hater. Far from it. Two consequences flowing from Modi's success warmed the cockles of my heart. The first is the decimation of the criminal enterprise known as the Congress Party, responsible for consigning generations of Indians to a life of grinding poverty. The second is the body blow it dealt to a cabal of Indians, a mix of white-ass-kissers, Hindu haters, Leftists, whitewashers of history, third-rate sciolists, useful idiots, and faux journalists, all masquerading as intellectuals and interpreters on matters India and Indian. Huddled inside this stinking tent are names like Amartya Sen, Pankaj Mishra, N. Ram, Amitava Ghosh, Teesta Setalvad, Romila Thapar, Prannoy Roy, Sagarika Ghose, Burkha Dutt, Harsh Mander, and Arundhati Roy. When I turned to the online TV coverage of the poll results on May 16, a few from this syndicate had faces that looked like they had been marinated in excrement. I didn't think I would live to savour the day when the vile pretenders would come so undone now that India finally chose a leader who doesn't apologize for being Hindu.

Modi and Goa

I'm afraid the news on this front is bleak. I go by Bertrand Russell's precept that one must form opinions on the basis of available evidence. The past two years have brought us the debacle of Manohar Parrikar. As one of his ardent and vocal supporters during his years out of power, it gives me no pleasure to write this. Goa has worsened on every key count under Manohar-bab's watch and joined the

Indian sewer. When I hear "Oh, but he is much better than Digu," I realize that we have now become accustomed to a bar that low.

Parrikar was elected to clean house, to rehabilitate Goa, to usher in a fresh political climate, to change the way things were done before. Nobody expected overnight miracles but everyone expected a new beginning. His administration has made matters worse and, evidently, it is in bed with the mafia of builders, casinos, and mine owners.

Let me illustrate. When I brought to Manohar-bab's attention the megaproject of his casino pal, his response was that the project had been approved by the earlier government. Never mind that he was elected on the "zero tolerance for corruption" pledge. Never mind that flagrant violations of the building codes are blindingly obvious. Never mind that none of the monstrous housing projects is to the benefit of Goans who are priced out of the market. Parrikar is fond of the law only when it suits him but when the interests of his builder and casino allies are in peril he is remarkably quick to furnish clauses of exemption.

A Goan who wrote an anti-Modi screed on the net was recently hauled before the court on a complaint filed by individuals swearing allegiance to Parrikar. Instead of condemning outright these tactics that foster a climate of fear, Manohar-bab hid behind the veil of judicial process. Selective appreciation and enforcement of the law has become a hallmark of the Parrikar government.

Yet another example of recent vintage: Manohar-bab has called for a revision of the Gadgil environmental report implying that it is not "scientific." This would be laughable had the implications not been so serious. This is the same man whose scientific nous deserts him on the subject of Mopa. He has resisted calls for a study of the proposed airport's rationale, its feasibility, the trade-off between costs and benefits, its environmental impact. When inconvenienced, science is dispatched on a vacation by our IIT leader. Gadgil's report could impede the cash flow for builders and the mining honchos, therefore it must be declared "unscientific."

Rampant concretization, migrant influx, deterioration of law and order, unsafe Goan roads - all these have worsened since 2012. The answer to the question, What does Modi's win mean for Goa? should be obvious. It is bad news. Manohar Parrikar has been dealt carte blanche to pursue his wrong-headed policies and enrich his cronies. Some may argue the obverse - that Modi's advent strengthens Parrikar's hand to correct course. While they are free to construct fantasy alternate universes, I prefer to live in the world of reality.

Still, there are a couple of steps Manohar-bab can initiate to restore a measure of confidence.

One, retrieve Raj Bhavan (Cabo in Dona Paula) for Goans. This spectacular gem was usurped by India to serve as a vacation resort for political appointees sent from Delhi while requiring Goans to pay for its upkeep. Its true owners - we Goans - have to beg to be let in once a year to enjoy its beautiful grounds. Let the Governor live in a bungalow in Altinho. Inaugurate the Cabo as a public space for culture and arts. It could serve as a museum, a concert hall, an art gallery - in short, give Cabo back to its rightful owners, the Goans.

Two, request the Navy to reduce its footprint in Goa and shift its major operations to Karwar. Let it maintain a modest presence in Goa. The Navy brass will not hear of it for their charmed life in Goa is not one they are willing to surrender. And any such suggestion invites charges of “anti-Indian” and “unpatriotic.” It is the magic trigger for the ‘freedom fighter’ and ‘desh-premee’ brigade to wrap itself in the tricolour and issue fatwas.

It is highly unlikely that Manohar-bab will pay heed to either of my appeals above.

Lisbon and Zurich

Changing tracks, on my recent visit to these two great cities, Goa was on my mind.

My association with Lisbon and Zurich goes back well over two decades. I also have family in Lisbon, a city much older than both London and Paris. It is a beautiful town with a vibrant, visually-striking, pedestrian-friendly core. Did I mention the superb pastelarias? Lisbon has undergone a recent transformation leading to suburban sprawl and ugly high-rises. But make no mistake: despite its woes, this is a very pleasant city of First World grade, with outstanding physical infrastructure and an integrated public transport system. There is no city in India that comes even close to providing the aesthetic appeal, comfort and quality of life that Lisbon affords its residents.

While strolling in the Alfama quarter with my little nephew and niece a couple of weeks ago, I was reminded not only of Fontainhas but also the venom a few Goans pour on Portugal. Perplexingly, these lounge warriors have no such hard feelings about the UK. If you compare the monumental damage, murder and loot Britain wrought upon India, and the lasting consequences of that assault, with a corresponding assessment of colonial Portugal and Goa, well, there is no comparison. One of the two almost looks like a rounding error. Yet these Goans remain gaga over Britain and cricket while unloading heat and fire at Portugal.

Let me be clear: I am no fan of the misdeeds of the colonial Portuguese. The Goa Inquisition remains one of the most brutal chapters in our history. My intent here is not to exonerate the Portuguese but to illuminate what I find to be a curious asymmetry in the repertoire of those engaged in the business of settling colonial scores.

And what of the predatory behavior of India towards Goa since 1961? How come India is exempt? Is brown-on-brown, bhai-on-baab colonialism excusable? India has urinated on Goa (with Goan help), turning an idyll into a hovel in less than a generation. Yet the accusatory fingers only point to Portugal even as bags of Goan cash are periodically ferried from under their noses to fatten the colonial masters in Delhi.

In stark contrast to Lisbon, Zurich cuts a clinical, if imposing, picture. Here, Teutonic efficiency rules. Although the Swiss are affluent, crass displays of wealth are frowned upon. The guy sitting next to you in a Zurich tram could well be the Chief of Credit Suisse but you wouldn't know it by his demeanour or appearance.

The supremely efficient trams of Zurich have for long stirred me to think of a framework for a public transport system in Panjim. We ought to adapt - not copy - ideas from Zurich. Turning the central core of Panjim into a pedestrian-only zone and designing mechanized transport, perhaps buggy-like coaches for short hops to points within the city, are ideas worth pursuing. It is a civic as well as a technical problem and requires cross-disciplinary expertise. A scattershot approach has no place in this process. The Swiss are great engineers and have experience in this area, and perhaps can be consulted.

In any event, the one thing I would not recommend is recruitment of any IITian to the project. Think about it - from the moment you rise in the morning until the time you retire at the end of the day, is there a single invention or key idea that you can attribute to any IITian, something that has made a difference to your life. ?The constant diet of non-existent IIT exploits fed to Indians day in and day out is mystifying. I would like to develop this topic of Indian and IITian insignificance some other time. For now I will note that it is in places like Zurich that you can critically see - if you know where to look - what a well-engineered public arena looks like. The British and the Germans are exceptional engineers, too. As are the Americans. Don't take my word for it. Look around you.