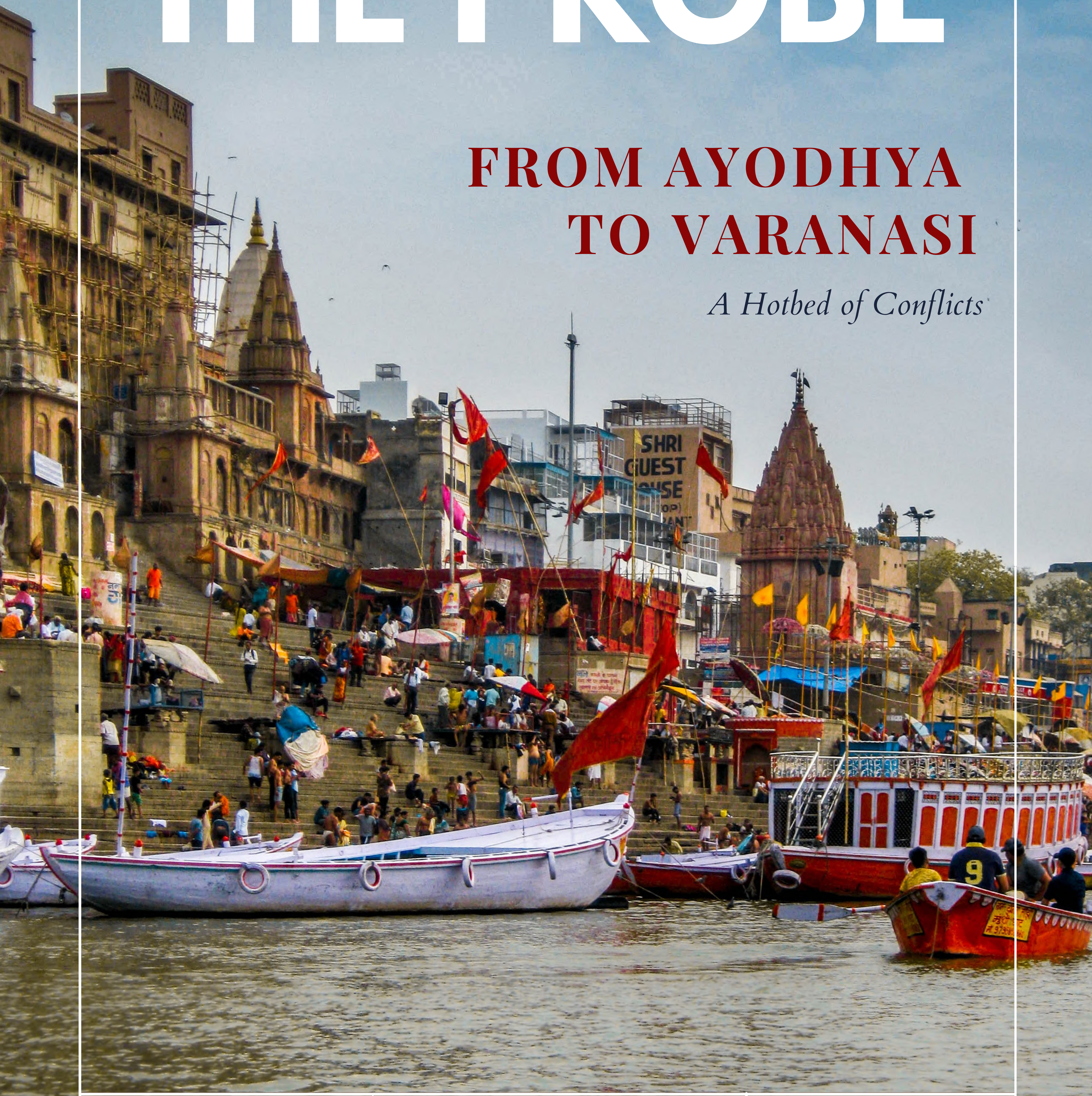


OCTOBER ISSUE 2022 | ISSUE 15

# THE PROBE

## FROM AYODHYA TO VARANASI

*A Hotbed of Conflicts*



Soaring High with Finished Fuel

Cover Story:  
From Ayodhya to Varanasi: A Hotbed of  
Conflicts

December 2022 Assembly  
Polls: 2 States, 3 Parties &  
Beyond



## FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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Dear readers,

The issue takes you from Ayodhya to Varanasi in a few hundred words that unweave the melange of communal colours across different time periods in history, the ghosts of which continue to linger in the contemporary political parley in the Gyanvapi row on the cover. It offers an analysis of issues, strategies and stakes in the upcoming elections in Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh. It also probes into the recent incursions by the People's Liberation Army in Taiwan's air space, the new age use and misuse of attention as currency and the recent string of failures in ISRO's endeavours.

The Probe welcomes the batch of '25/26 and encourages them to work with us. We welcome contributors- writers, photographers and designers from diverse backgrounds. Please send in your resume for consideration.

We greatly value your feedback. Please share your views with us on our social media or mail us at [theprobe20@gmail.com](mailto:theprobe20@gmail.com).

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A magazine's brilliance is a fine combination of quality content and aesthetic appeal, made possible by a dedicated team of designers. With a trajectory of constant improvement in design with every coming issue, this time we have augmented our designing team by inducting volunteers.

With this, we aim to lay the foundation of a sophisticated design team which will help in creating an identity for The Probe in the longer run. In case you are someone who is currently pursuing or interested in learning designing, we welcome you to volunteer for the design team of The Probe. We hope to make this an enriching learning experience and a fruitful collaboration for both!

Kindly mail us at [theprobe20@gmail.com](mailto:theprobe20@gmail.com).

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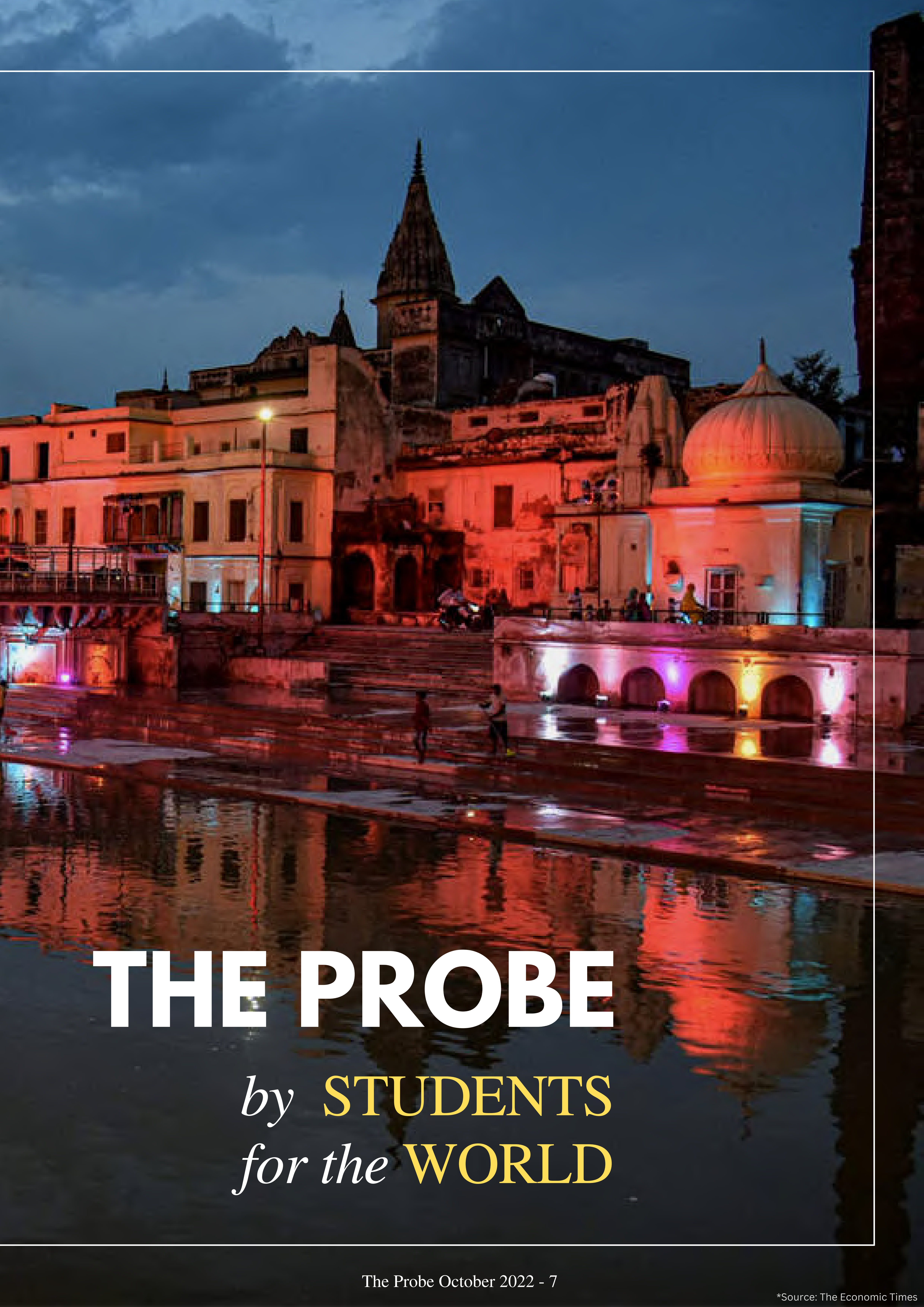
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# THE PROBE

*by* STUDENTS  
*for the* WORLD





# FROM AYODHYA TO VARANASI : A HOTBED OF CONFLICTS

*By Siddhant Sinha, Gaurvi Saluja, Arpit Rituraj, Raksha Jha*



*"In India, Gods flex their muscles over scarce land". What does the recent developments in the Gyanvapi quandary indicate? Here's a story of History, Politics, Culture and Beliefs boiled into one.*

**I**t wasn't long ago when a historic verdict was proclaimed which resolved a centuries-old dispute over the land of importance to both Hindus and Muslims, at Ayodhya. The judgement was a

moment of rejoice for some while resentment for others but, more importantly, called an end to what seemed like an indefinite row. The peace restored, however, was ephemeral. It has rather triggered a chain reaction with a string of claims by different communities over the disputed religious sites all over the country. One such claim is in Varanasi- The Gyanvapi Conundrum, which has gained a lot of eyeballs lately due to the highly publicised litigation involved.

One might wonder, why is there so much unrest over a piece of land? Why are there different claims over these religious sites? The answer, as is often the case, lies in a complex web of history, politics and beliefs.

In India, religious sites are intertwined with the political, economic, social and not just cultural and religious life. Temples are

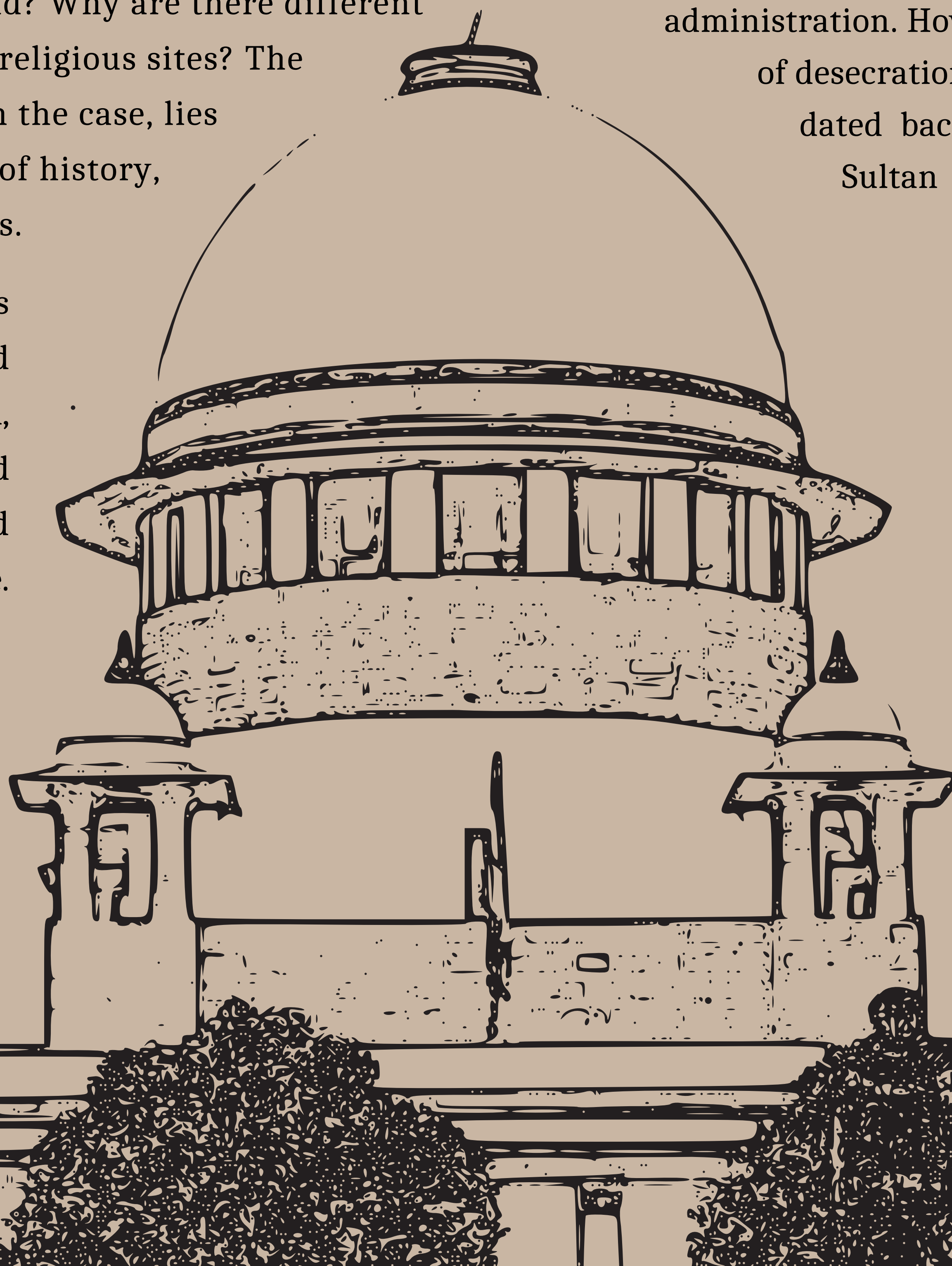
considered sacred property owned by the God whose image is enshrined within the land and cannot be bought or sold. If one goes back into history, one might notice many Indian temples have contested histories revolving around Indo-Muslim rulers and states.

### *Desecration of temples: A strategy for Mediaeval warfare*

During Mediaeval warfare, desecration of temples and the taking away of deity's image was seen as a war trophy to the victorious sultan. Temples were also storehouses of bounties of wealth, and looting of temples served as a source of revenue for their

administration. However, the first instance of desecration of temples can be dated back to 997, the Ghaznavid Sultan Sabuktigin's attack and

conquest of the Hindu Shahi raja, who ruled the territory between Kabul and northwest Punjab. Sabuktigin "marched out towards Lamghan, a city located to the east of Kabul known for its immense power and abundant wealth.





He took control of it and established Islam while burning the infidel-inhabited areas and demolishing the idol temples, this was repeated by many Indo-Islamic rulers in subsequent years.

These histories can be traced from the translated Persian chronicles together with epigraphic data. Contemporary historians like Richard M. Eaton and Sita Ram Goyal have selectively used these sources to portray the narrative that proved their claim. While Richard Eaton has tried to delegitimise the Indo-Muslim rulers and portray how destruction was used as a tool by medieval rulers as part of their politics, Hindu nationalist, Sita Ram Goyal has claimed that blanket orders were given for wholesale temple destruction by Muslim rulers.



Thus, in an attempt to mend fences between the two communities involved in Babri Masjid dispute, the judgement has laid open a hotbed of multiple minor conflicts all over the country and one such case is that of Gyanvapi masjid, in Varanasi.

Varanasi, the holy land, is the acclaimed pilgrimage destination for Indians of various faiths. Known for its peaceful coexistence from time immemorial, it's now boiling up in dispute over the Gyanvapi mosque, which is claimed to be built on the remains of the Vishweshwara temple by the Mughal emperor, Aurangzeb in the 17th century.

As the famous slogan goes - Ayodhya toh jhanki hai, kaashi-mathura abhi baaki hai (Ayodhya is just a preview, Kashi-Mathura are next in line), the contestation around Gyanvapi goes back into history. It forms one of the three major reclamations vouched by Hindu groups like the VHP and the RSS over the years. With the fortress of Ayodhya having already been conquered, it's time to shift the horizon.



In August 2021, therefore, 5 women filed a petition in the Varanasi civil court to gain year-long access to worship at Maa Shringar Gauri Sthal in the Gyanvapi complex (which is currently open for prayers once a year).

While such petitions were being filed since 1991, the Allahabad High Court had applied a stay on the issue. This paradigm was changed when the Varanasi civil court ordered a survey of the mosque premises after the petition was filed in 2021. The issue has, thus, been cracked wide open in the face of legal suits.







### *Places of Worship Act*

At the epicentre of the Gyanvapi quandary is the Places of Worship Act, 1991, a 3 decade-old law that has been the object of debate in the Gyanvapi suit.

Section 4 of the Act says that "the religious character of a place of worship existing on the 15th of August, 1947 shall continue to be the same as it existed on that day". Accordingly, the Anjuman Intezamia Masjid Committee had challenged the maintainability of the suit of the Hindu women on the grounds of the Places of Worship Act. The Varanasi court, however, has recently given a verdict against the plea. It would, thus, be imperative to understand the role and context of the Places of Worship Act in Indian polity in order to understand the case in general.

The law was brought in at the peak of the Ram Janmabhoomi movement in 1991. The Narasimha Rao-led government had brought the law to calm down the communal nerves and tensions at the time that were brewing due to the intense polarisation caused by the Ayodhya movement.

The law set the cut off date for its consideration as the day India got Independence in an attempt to send the message that with her independence, India moved ahead and beyond the issues of communal conflict and lived by liberal democratic values.

Even though the law was enacted at the time of the Ayodhya movement, it did not apply to it as its litigation preceded India's independence. In 2019, the Supreme Court gave the final verdict on the issue in favour of the construction of the temple. However, and perhaps more importantly, it also noted that the Places of Worship Act was a part of the **Basic Structure of the Constitution of India**, and it reflects Indian values on secularism and inclusivity. It doesn't mean, however, that everyone accepts the legitimacy of the law as the Hindu Right, led by the ruling BJP, has always felt that it perpetuates historical wrongs which goes against the principles of justice. The law is, thus, undoubtedly, a severe bone of contention not only with regard to the Gyanvapi case but to the larger movement of temple revival in India.



## Recent Judicial Development

The Supreme Court in 2019 made it a legal and constitutional duty of the government to protect places of worship in India. But courts in Mathura and Varanasi have taken a different path. Courts have since managed to tilt the scales away from the Supreme Court judgement. The district court in Varanasi held that the 1991 law is not applicable to the Gyanvapi suit, because the plaintiffs just wanted the right to worship inside the mosque premises, and weren't staking claim to its ownership. This has opened fissures in the 1991 law that could allow more such claimants to knock on the court's doors.



The order also seems to be providing credence to the BJP's push for a relook at the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act 1991. Earlier, BJP MP Harnath Singh Yadav, party's Madhya Pradesh in-charge P. Muralidhar Rao, Chhattisgarh's former home minister Brijmohan Agrawal and former UP minister Sidharth Nath Singh — all had pushed for a relook at the 1991 Act, the main bone of contention in the Gyanvapi controversy, and a campaign to "reclaim" the temples in Kashi (Varanasi) and Mathura.

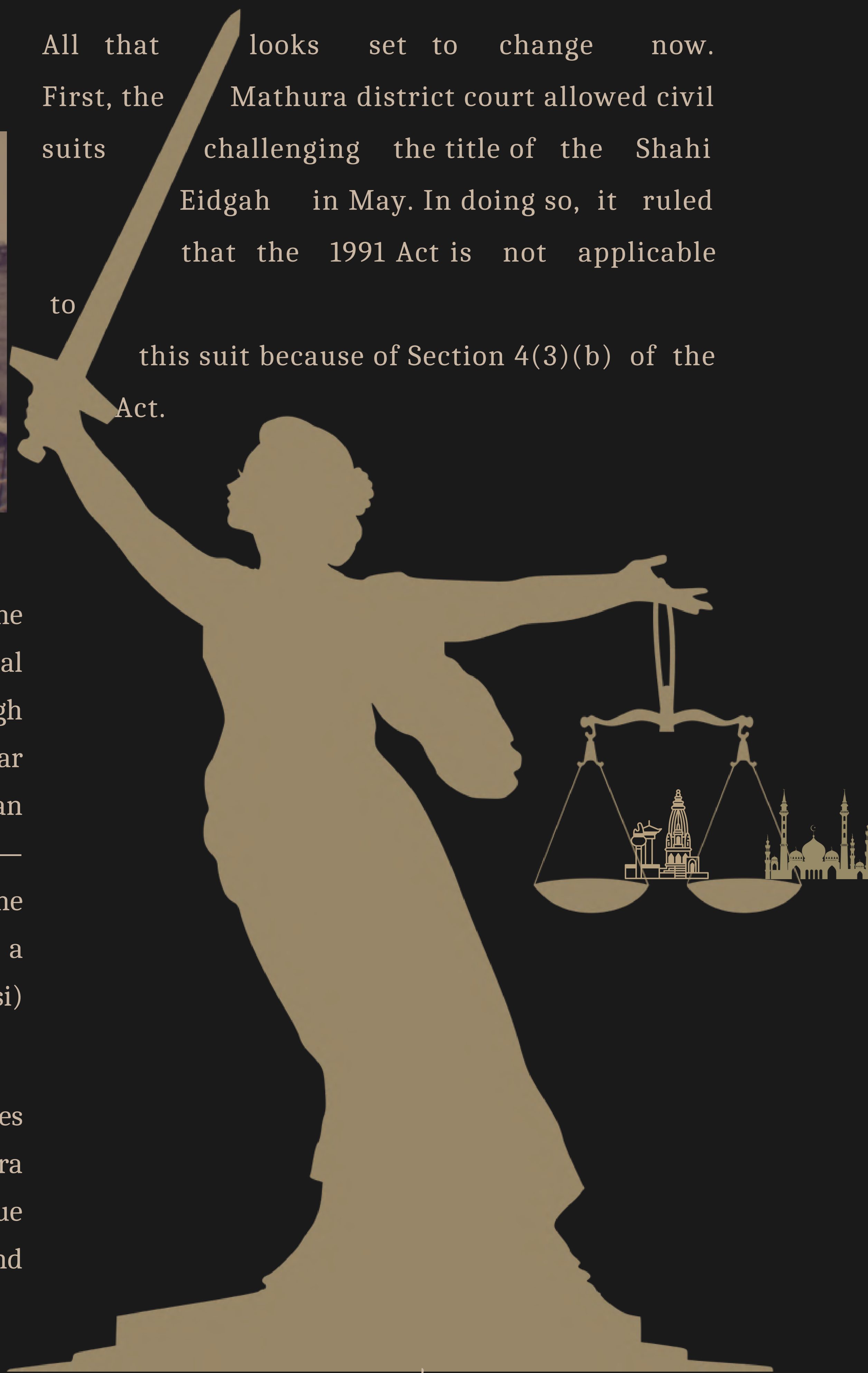
The Supreme Court's decision to hear the plea on Places of Worship Act, followed by the Varanasi and Mathura courts' decisions are likely to keep the temple-mosque debate alive in political and electoral discourses beyond the 2024 Lok Sabha election.

The silence of opposition parties over the Varanasi court's ruling captures their dilemma even as jubilation in the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) camp says it all. While the BJP hasn't taken an official stand on it, individual leaders didn't hide their glee.


## Way Forward

The court made it both a legal and a constitutional duty of the current and future governments to protect other places of worship in India, so that an Ayodhya-like dispute does not arise again. The verdict tried to make the law watertight, and seal shut similar disputes that have been festering like old wounds

All that looks set to change now. First, the Mathura district court allowed civil suits challenging the title of the Shahi Eidgah in May. In doing so, it ruled that the 1991 Act is not applicable to this suit because of Section 4(3)(b) of the Act.



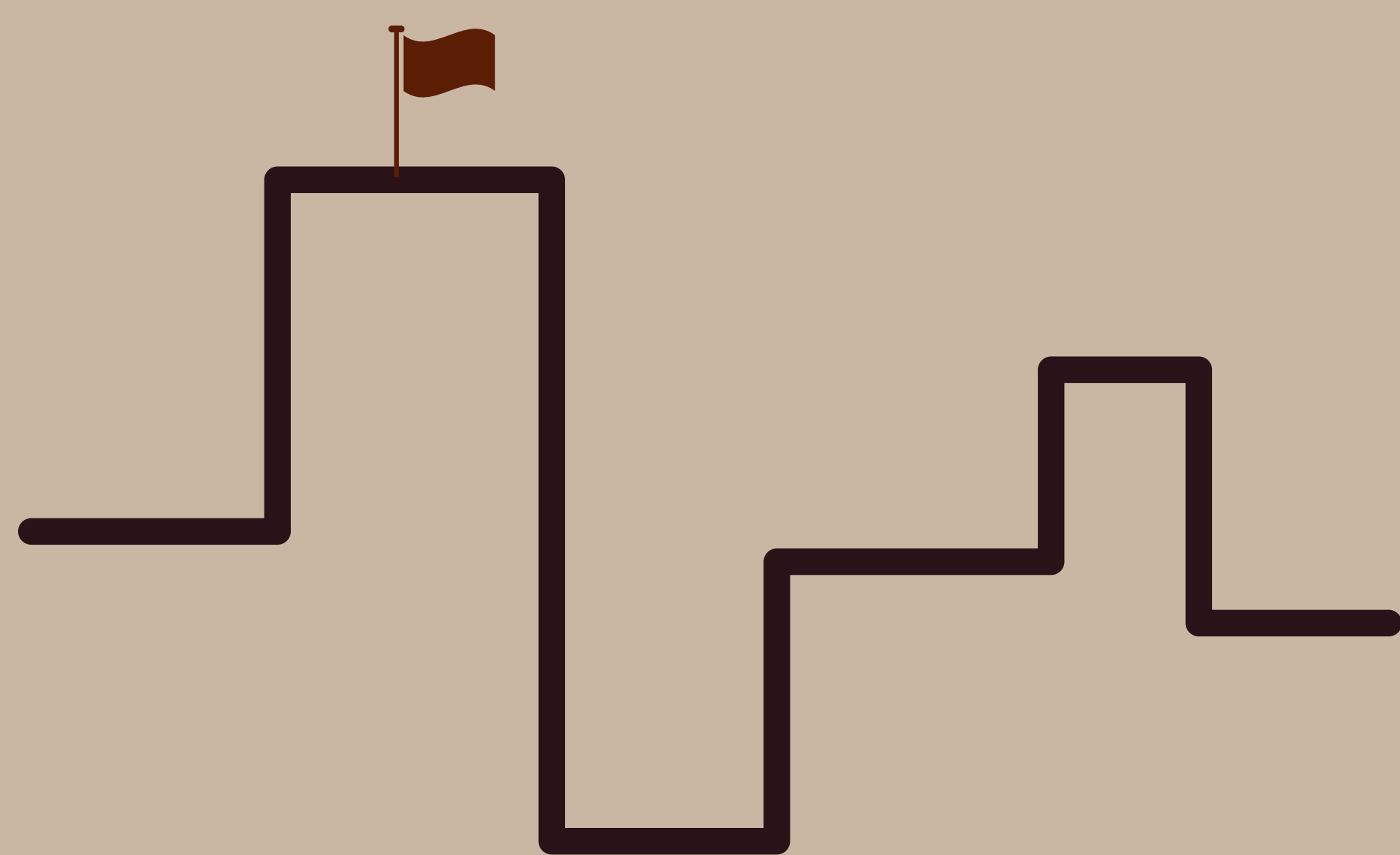




This provision carves out an exception saying that the prohibition under the law won't apply to any case with respect to any matter on religious character of a place that was decided or settled before the law came into force. In this case, the validity of a 1968 compromise agreement between the Shahi Eidgah and the Srikrishna Janmabhoomi temple and another order passed by a civil suit in 1974 have been questioned.



Then, the Varanasi district court on Monday ruled that the plea seeking the right to worship inside the Gyanvapi Masjid is maintainable. The court rejected the Anjuman Intezamia Masjid Committee's challenge to the suit.



“The first hurdle has been crossed and now the court will hear the matter on its own merits,” VHP’s international working president Alok Kumar told reporters. VHP’s Alok Kumar had earlier told ThePrint that provisions of the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act 1991 are “not cast in stone” and Parliament shouldn’t be prevented from reviewing it. Many in the BJP also say that the Gyanvapi case has the potential to emerge as a “strong issue” ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha election, just the way the Ayodhya case did.

### *Unanswered Questions*

The demolition of Babri Masjid in December 1992 triggered a catastrophic series of riots claiming around 2000 lives all over the subcontinent. It's not a secret that communal conflicts can turn very ugly very rapidly in India. 1984 and 2002 are just a couple more examples from a long list. The 1991 law was enacted with the same concern in mind and the apex court gave its weight to it in 2019 by considering it a part of the Basic Structure of the Constitution.

The law was enacted with the understanding that with India's independence she had ushered in an era free from communal strife, breaking free from the horrors of something as recent as the partition riots.





The question is not whether temples were destroyed in medieval India or not. It is obvious that they were. History bears testimony to it. The question to ask is what should we do about that now. Will justice be served if we try to change the nature of those structures again? Will two wrongs make a right? Also, where do we plan to stop if we go on with this approach? The Places of Worship Act was indeed enacted to provide answers to these questions.

With the recent developments, it is evident that we're far from actually ushering in an epoch of harmony. The ball, thus, lies in the court of the judiciary at the moment to navigate the country through the troubled waters. Will it lead to a peaceful resolution in the Gyanvapi case? More importantly, what will it mean for the greater temple revival moment? It'd be too early to comment. What is certain, though, is that the dispute is not just legal in nature. It questions and challenges the very core idea (read Secularism) of our polity as well as the society we live in.

The answer would, thus, be needed to be found as much among ourselves as in the verdicts of the judiciary. ■





# ECCO





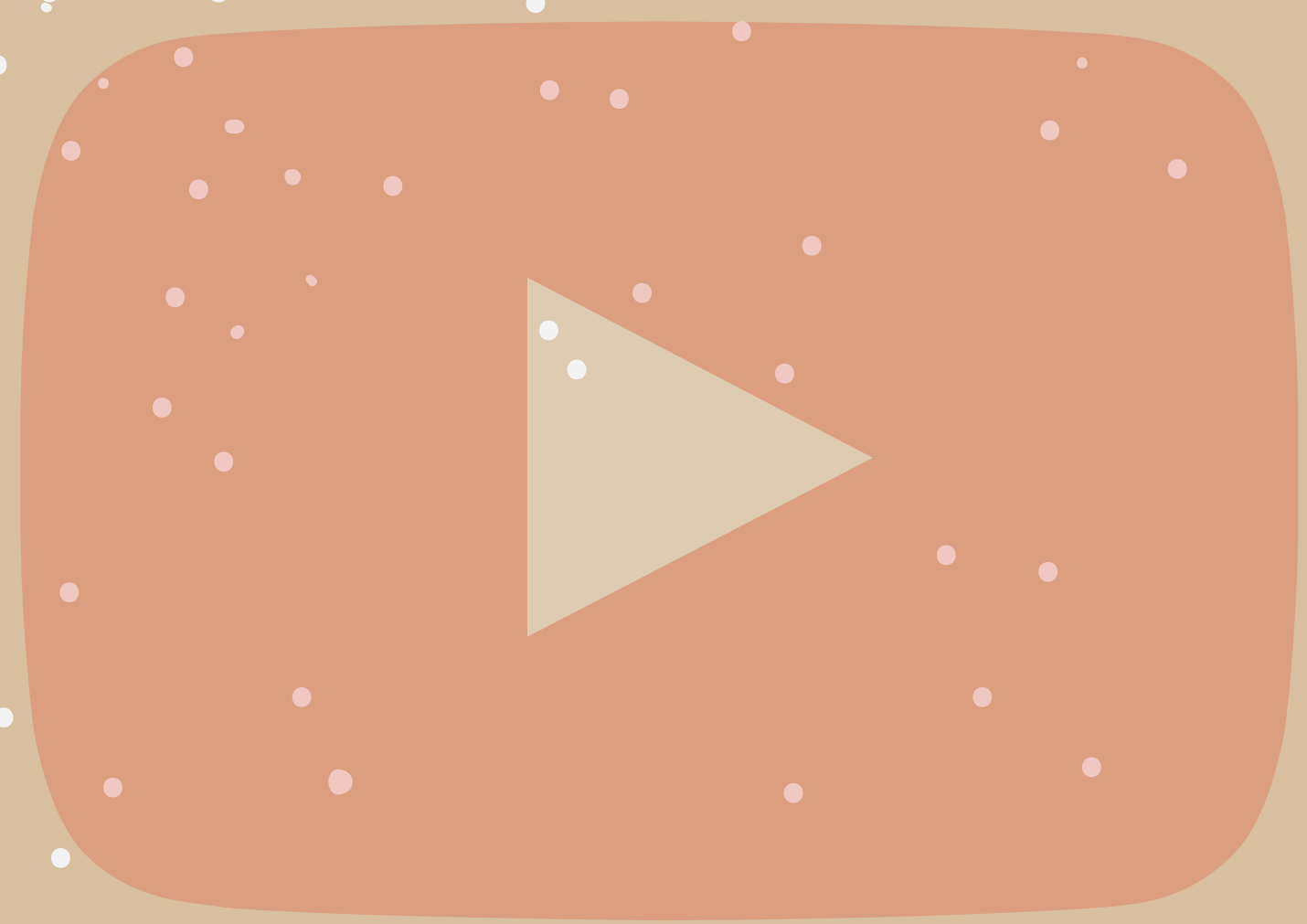


# NOMMY



# 5 MIN CHILL – BOOM – 5 MILLION DOLLAR

*By Shagun Katiyar and Medhavi Raina*



**O**pen the laptop, go to LinkedIn, scroll, read, scroll, read. Oh! a ping on WhatsApp!

Let me see what's that about?

It looks so small and insignificant that it doesn't sound like a big deal. Welcome to the age of information. Before the Digital Age, information was a luxury, available to a select few who could afford paper and keep themselves updated with the changing times. Even though the information age changed this, attention remains a scarce resource. This brings us to the following question: In this sea of information, how do you keep yourself from drowning?

In context, 400 hours of content is uploaded on YouTube every single minute, every single day. Sounds surreal right? However

it might come off as free, in reality, it's not. You pay with your attention and time without even realising it. Making a decision requires one's total focus. This focus, when divided, makes us prone to making mistakes. You want to control your attention, but every marketer out there wants to control the same much more than you do. Remember that ad you weren't able to skip, about a product you randomly mentioned to your friend over the call? Yes, that ad was directed towards you. Social media apps are created to get you hooked to the screen and it's your attention they sell to their customers-advertisers. When those ads pop up saying "other things that might interest you", it is a

market war led by major companies in Silicon Valley. A simple pop-up can derail your focus and it takes approximately 20 minutes to get back in the flow of work—a huge tradeoff for a small dopamine rush.





Lifestyle changed rapidly with the onset of COVID-19, and technology befriended us as we kept spending gigantic amounts of time on different apps. Mothers who avoided letting their kids on the screen started using youtube to make them stop crying. On one hand, many businesses were getting shut down at the time of lockdown on the other hand we saw hybrid model businesses getting set up all around us, which are now earning millions and billions extorting our attention. The pandemic has served as a platform to reach new audiences for this purpose. Way back in 1997, Michael H. Goldhaber wrote that the "global economy is shifting from a material-based economy to one based on the capacity of human attention".



Something scarce always attracts more demand, and something fragile has the maximum chance of breaking, hence, the business giants are feeding on our most valuable resource, making the maximum out of it, it fills their treasury filling us but with filth. In the future, companies might innovate technology to attract our attention to earning such as unskippable advertisements, augmented-reality advertisements, etc.



Thereby attention economy is a giant that will keep on growing in the years to come as the growth rate seems to be flourishing. Thereby, it is the responsibility of the people to make sure that they spend their attention—the new age money, on something worthy of it. ■





# SCIENCE

# ANN







ND

TECH



# SOARING HIGH WITH FINISHED FUEL

*By Manan Bawa*

**F**rom bringing the components of a rocket on a bicycle and launching it from

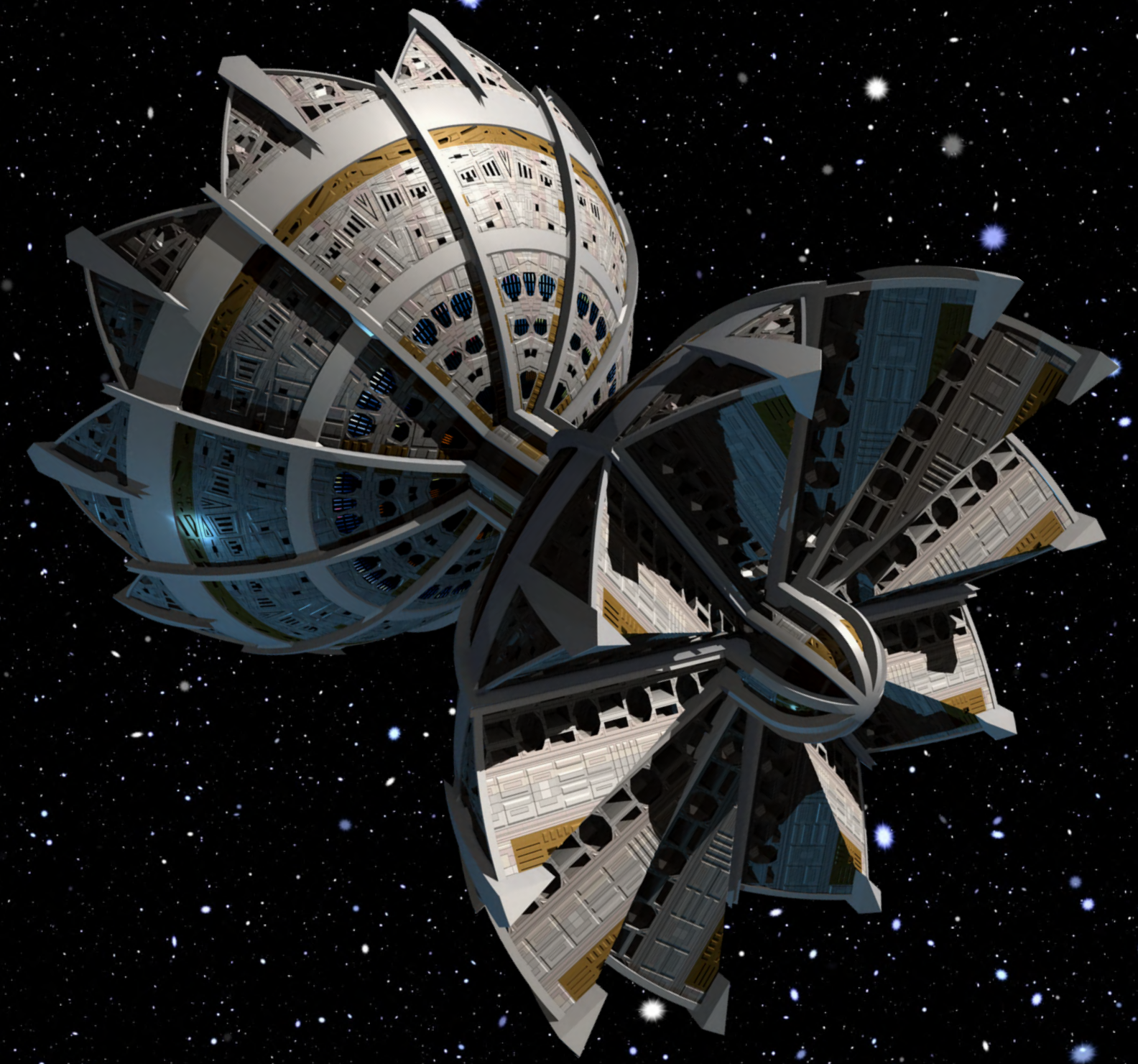
a church in Thumba, Kerala to creating the then world record of launching 104 satellites in a single mission, ISRO (The Indian Space Research Organisation) has come a long way in establishing itself globally with the reputation as a cost-effective space agency with high mission success rates over the years and has put India on the global map with other top space agencies.



But in recent times ISRO has encountered a number of failed missions.

3 years ago on 6th of September's night, people across the globe were sitting intact to witness yet another history we were on the verge of creating by landing the Pragyan rover on the Moon surface but it along with its lander Vikram crash landed on the Lunar Surface. In 2021, earth observatory satellite GISAT-1 (Geo Imaging Satellite) could not be placed in its orbit due to technical malfunction in the 3rd stage where cryogenic upper stage ignition didn't happen. In August 2022, SSLV-D1 (Small Satellite Launch Vehicle) placed the student-made satellite AadiSAT and EOS-02 (an earth observatory satellite) in wrong orbits which left them "unusable".

*Motto of ISRO  
"Space technology in the  
Service of humankind"*



*Vision of ISRO  
"Harness space technology for national  
development while pursuing space  
science research and planetary  
exploration."*





These strings of failures have shaken ISRO's reputation quite a bit but is it really a cause to worry? To answer this question let's walk through some of the facts. Of the global space sector, India's share hold over it is only 2% which is very much behind US and China. Where countries like China, US, Russia, which are more experienced as well as are highly funded, launch more than 15 to 25 satellites in a year plus a number of interplanetary missions in these decades as well as have conducted human spaceflight, India as by its reputation of being cost effective with low budgets and capacity launches 7 to 8 satellites and has successfully launched only one interplanetary mission in the similar timeframe. Which shows our space programme is already several years behind the space programmes of these countries in terms of technology and capacity.

But still our national space agency has taken prudent leaps indeed to remain in this space race. From creating the most significant indigenous cryogenic engine in 2003 after the Russians pulled back in 1993 from transferring the technology to finding the presence of water molecules on the Lunar surface by Chandrayaan-1 in 2008, creating history to place Orbiter around

Mars in its very first attempt and that too at record \$74million making it one of the cheapest interplanetary mission. In addition, the world has faith in ISRO's success rate in launching satellites which is shown by the fact

that ISRO has earned \$279 million dollars by launching 345 foreign satellites from 34 countries. Thus time and again ISRO has showcased its capabilities on the world stage.

Hence such failures shouldn't overshadow its capabilities and also ISRO is now on the track to expand its capacity and range in addition to successfully conducting its future ambitious missions. Which includes Chandrayaan-3 mission, Aditya L-1 mission to study sun's atmosphere, DISHA twin satellites to study Earth's upper atmosphere, Shukrayaan mission to study atmosphere and surface of Venus and indeed the most anticipated Gaganyaan mission, sending humans (which will be known as Vyomnauts) to Low Earth Orbit (LEO) in short run which will open doors for Indian human space exploration programme in long run. Not only these missions, on technologies associated with these and future missions too ISRO is working like new age Reusable Launch Vehicle technology which is quite different from SpaceX which has built reusable rocket launcher boosters, IAD (Inflatable Aerodynamic Decelerator) which is a technology for atmospheric entry of payload which ensures it is not crashed on entry into a planetary atmosphere due to the impact and self eating rockets to curb space debris.

With major reforms in space policy in 2020, the government has opened our space sector for private sector participation in every domain of

space activities. An Indian Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre (IN-SPACe) was set up by the government to promote and enhance the role of the private sector in our

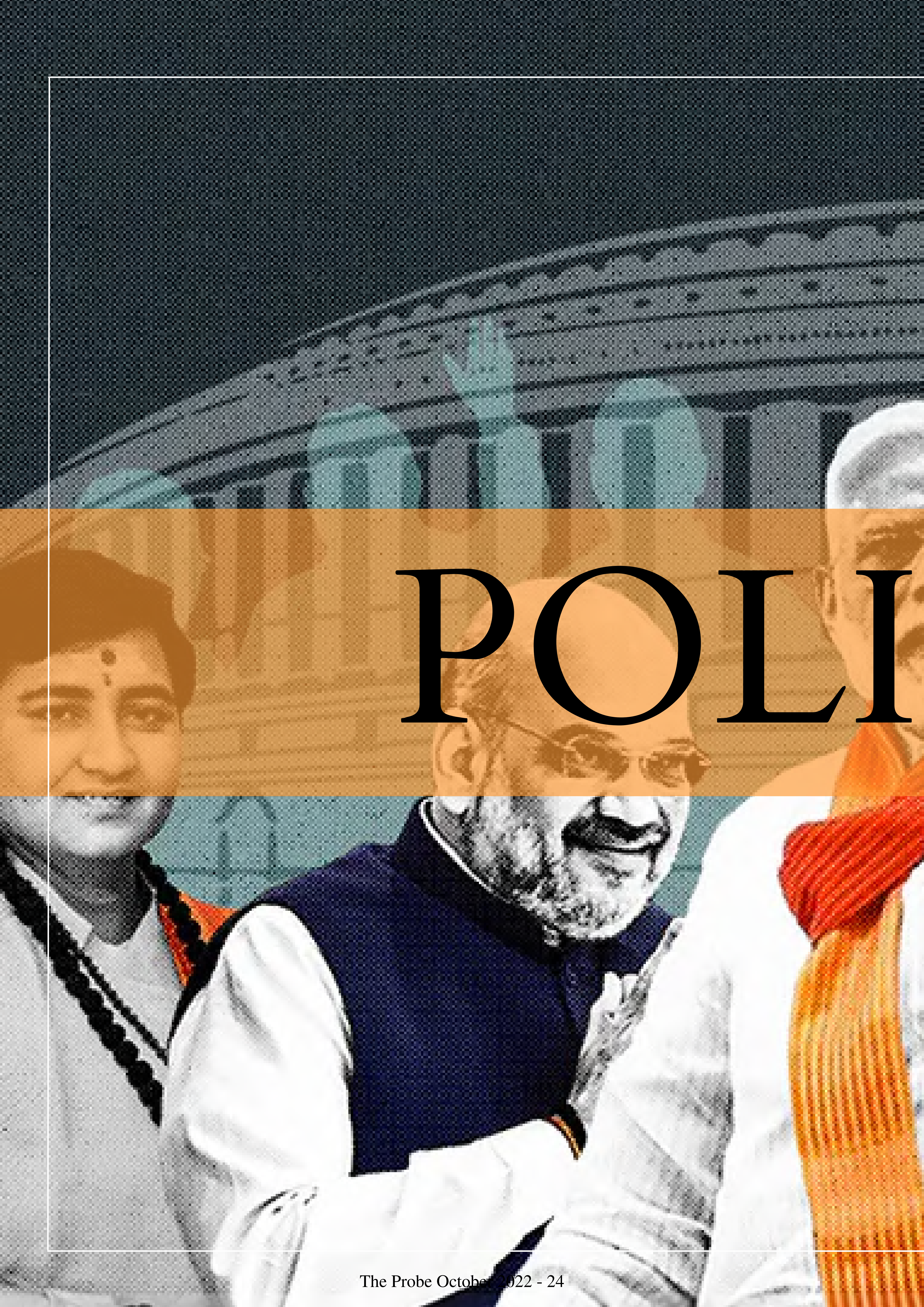
space sector which is also tasked to authorise the use of ISRO's infrastructure and facilities by private entities, manufacture of Indian satellite systems i.e. basically IN-SPACe is a channel between private sector and ISRO.

Therefore, our national space agency with accelerated growth is on the course to make India a global leader in space science and technology by establishing a space ecosystem with private entities. ■

*“...failure is not about not succeeding. Rather it is about not putting in your best effort and not contributing, however modestly, to the common good  
-VIKRAM SARABHAI, founder of ISRO*







# POLI





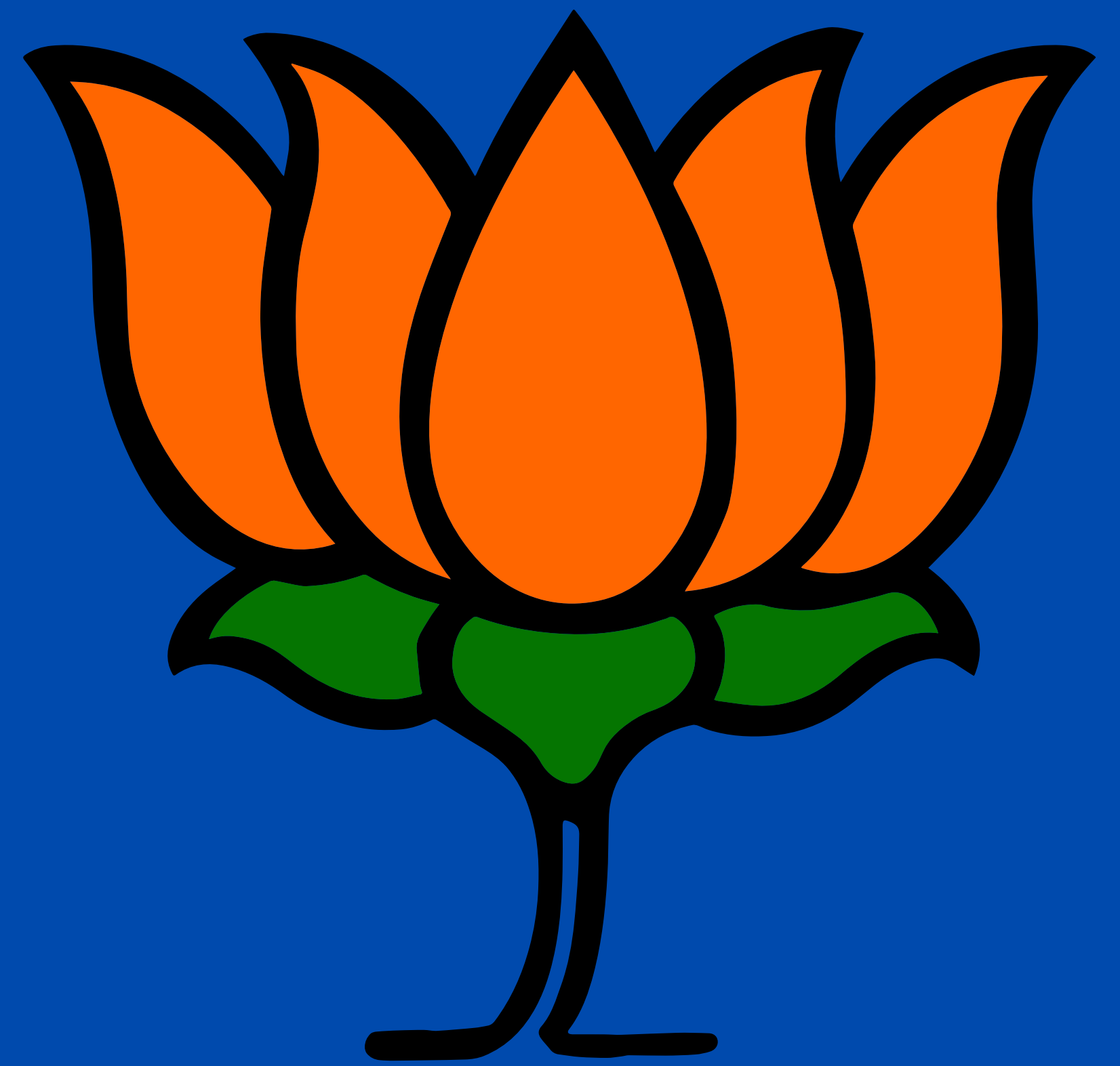
# TICS



# DECEMBER 2022 ASSEMBLY POLLS : 2

## STATES, 3 PARTIES & BEYOND

*By Soumyadeep Chowdhury*



**A**s the country braces for winter turning up the electoral heat in the poll-bound states of Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh, India is all set to witness yet another stimulating round of the festival of democracy this December before the 2024 climax. Gujarat, 'the laboratory of Hindutva', ruled continuously by the BJP without a break since 1995 also happens to be the home state of the Modi - Shah duo, Himachal Pradesh, conversely has witnessed alternating governments led by the BJP and the Congress respectively since the advent of the nineties. Currently, both are being governed by BJP dispensations post the 2017 Assembly Elections. What are the issues, strategies and stakes at play coming December for the two major parties? What will the elections

### *Issues, Strategies and Stakes*

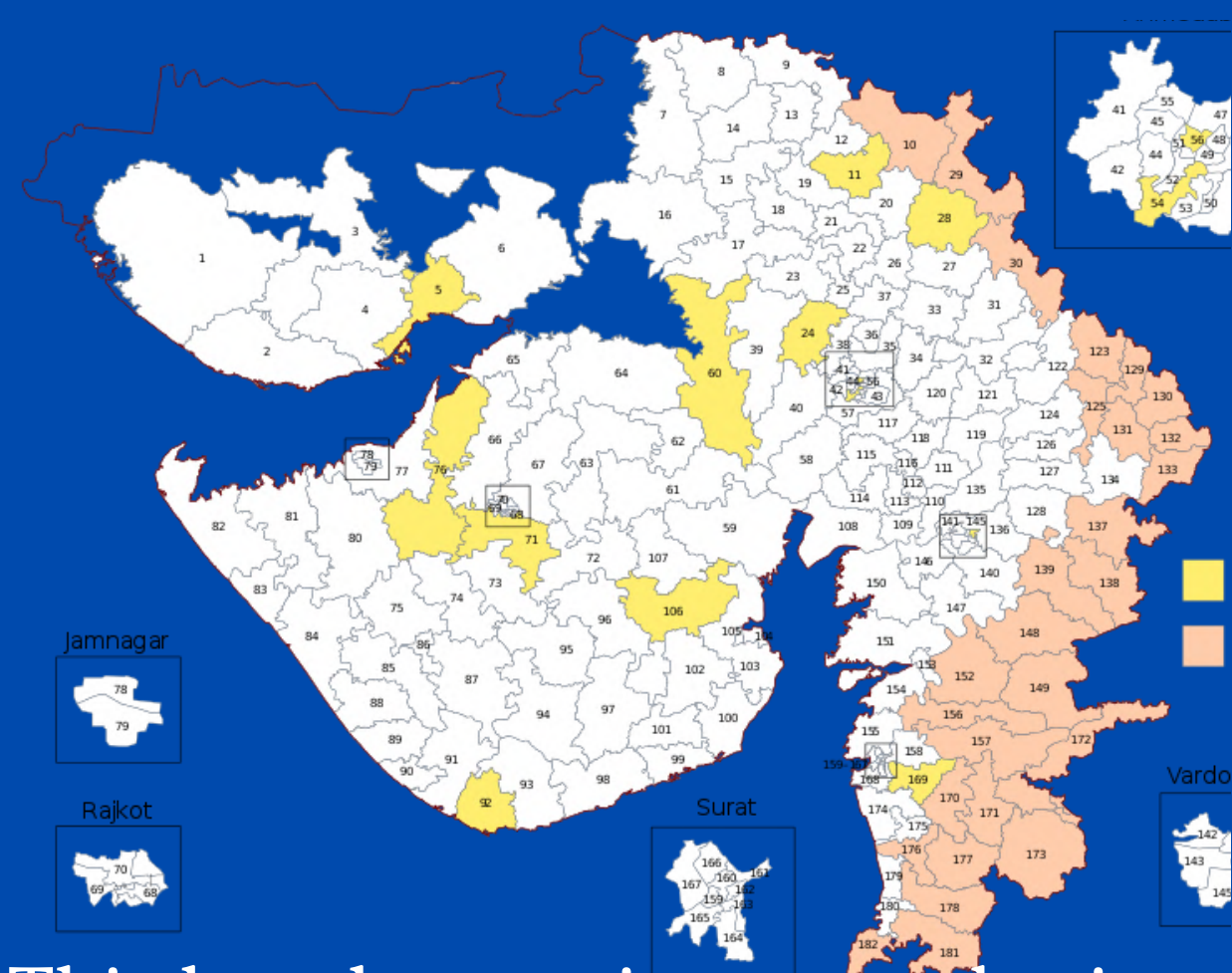
A triple P framework of analysis - Party, Performance and Personality vital for assessing any election when applied to the poll - bound states reflects that :

First, the BJP's well oiled organisational structure with a 24\*7 electoral machinery backed by active support of the RSS cadre in both these states may prove to be a major add-on not to discount the fact that these remain the states where the party had tasted electoral success right since its inception as compared to a beleaguered Congress plagued by factionalism and infighting - significant defections in its Gujarat unit including that of Alpesh Thakor and Hardik Patel, part of the youth brigade

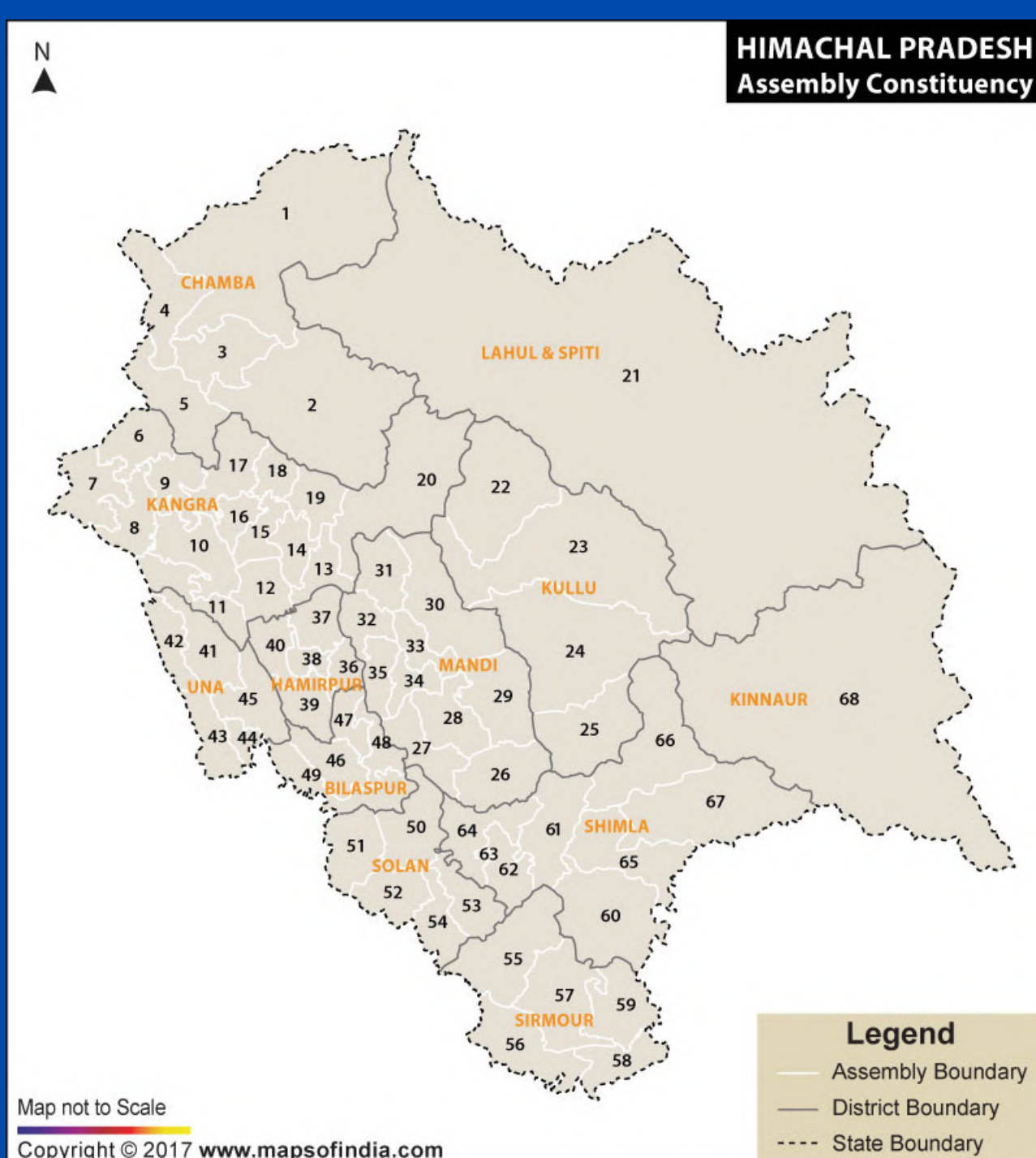
(Thakor - Patel - Jignesh Mevani) which had helped steer the Congress to its best ever performance in decades winning 77 out of 182 seats in the 2017 state polls. Moreover, recent jolts suffered in Himachal, including the exit of its working president Harsh Mahajan and several sitting legislators further deepened the void left by the death of veteran politician Virbhadra Singh last year coupled with the timings of the election of a new Congress President is only likely to add to the grand old party's woes, and a fledgling AAP seems no better placed. Busy 'putting their own house in order', establishing a robust organisational mechanism shall prove quite a task for the anti - BJP camp.



Second, in the performative arena however the odds seem stacked against the incumbent. The economic pains of high inflation and unemployment combined with lacklustre administration by Ministers and MLAs, some of who face serious criminal charges is likely to hurt the ruling party's chances as evidenced by poor state results in the past despite mammoth Lok Sabha victories proving a silver lining for an Opposition banking on anti - incumbency to wrest power in these states.



Third and most importantly, in an era wherein the vitality of the cult of personality only seems ascendant in India. Leadership makes or breaks electoral fortunes, history vindicates, charismatic leaders have pioneered their parties to the pinnacle, their absence has eclipsed them into virtual non - existence. A leadership void in the Opposition camp remains too stark to ignore as the 'politics of models and memory' predominate the electoral landscape.



With top guns of the Congress like the Gandhi's raking up the legacy of Former Chief Minister's Madhavsinh Solanki and Virbhadra Singh to regain lost ground, AAP National Convener Arvind Kejriwal has hit the campaign trail promising to extend his 'Delhi Model' mired in controversy over the freebie culture only to be counteracted by a more indigenous 'Gujarat Model', the insider vs outsider debate working to the BJP's advantage in the western state of Gujarat. The BJP's CM in Gujarat, Bhupendra Patel doesn't just hail from the influential Patel community but his low profile and clean image as a leader rooted to the ground (winning his constituency by a record margin in 2017) along with Jairam Thakur, an experienced RSS hand who enjoys considerable clout in Himachal Pradesh politics supported by dynamic state leaderships gives the BJP a clear edge over its rivals this December. The biggest asset for the saffron party though will continue to remain Prime Minister Narendra Modi and welfare schemes of the Centre combined with a Hindu nationalist rhetoric as the driving force of electoral mobilisation for post 2017 barring setback in certain bypolls, the ruling party not only seems to have held onto its vote share in these two states but with an erosion in the Congress's support base gradually drifting towards the AAP, a divided Opposition and the TINA factor (There is No Alternative) may further bolster its chances, the recent ABP - C Voter Survey only confirms this trend which if validated would imply a comfortable comeback for Mr. Modi's party adding yet another feather in its cap.

### *Fitting it into the larger picture : Road to 2024*

As the saffron juggernaut aims to hold onto power in Gujarat for a straight 6th term and retain Himachal by pulling off another Uttarakhand styled victory bucking anti - incumbency, looking forward to sustain the momentum in states where it has achieved a 100% strike rate in back to back Lok Sabha polls winning all of the available 30 MP seats in 2014 and 2019, the Opposition definitely needs to make a dent here whether it should aim for a comeback at the national level though at the moment, it seems grossly underprepared to face the lion in its own den. For the Congress, reduced to Chief Ministers in 2 states (Rajasthan & Chattisgarh), same as an upstart AAP (Delhi and Punjab), another straight defeat post the washout in UP, Uttarakhand, Manipur and Goa and a humiliating loss in Punjab to AAP earlier this year will only dampen the morale of the Congress cadre in wake of a bigger test. Therefore, if for the BJP, Gujarat and HP seek to testify its dominance, for the Congress it shall remain a struggle for survival, while for the AAP it is likely to prove a trial of emergence as a potent alternative to the national giant. But in doing so, whether AAP helps or hinders the project of Opposition unity, is a story only 2024 will tell. Even a week seems like a long time in politics, and we will have to wait and watch for months, perhaps years for clear answers to evolve ! ■



# MEDIA – A FLAWED FOURTH PILLAR ?

*By Shalwin Yoosuf*



**T**he four pillars of democracy are the judiciary, legislature, executive, and media. Thomas Carlyle coined the phrase "Fourth Estate of the Realm" to describe the media. According to Reporters Without Borders, India is ranked 140th out of 180 countries in terms of press freedom with the situation getting worse by the day. Why does India, a country with a free press and an

independent judiciary, rank so low on global media freedom indices? Is journalism in the world's largest democracy in jeopardy ? And if that's the case, what's the problem with Indian journalism?

**The monopoly of media ownership in few hands.** Mukesh Ambani and Subhash Chandra are two major investors in the Indian news industry. They are the CEOs of the Reliance Group and the Essel

Group, which operate in a variety of businesses. In 2011, Ambani forayed into the world of broadcasting. In 2014 the Reliance group acquired Network 18, one of India's leading news and entertainment television networks. Chandra, a member of the Bharatiya Janata Party, owns the Essel Group, which operates Zee Media, India's oldest and largest television network, with 14 news stations in eight languages.







# THE AMBITIOUS DRAGON

## CAN INDIA AND THE WORLD AFFORD LOSING TAIWAN TO CHINA?

*By Ainesh Dey*

**I**ncreased Chinese intervention in Taiwan has not only disturbed the balance of international order, but also changed the diplomatic course of regional titans like India. Given the world's largest democracy's rich history of long standing commitment to the principle of dialogues and negotiations, that forms the very foundation of its calibrated foreign policy, constraints like these could arguably raise potential eyebrows over its geo-strategic position in the subcontinent.

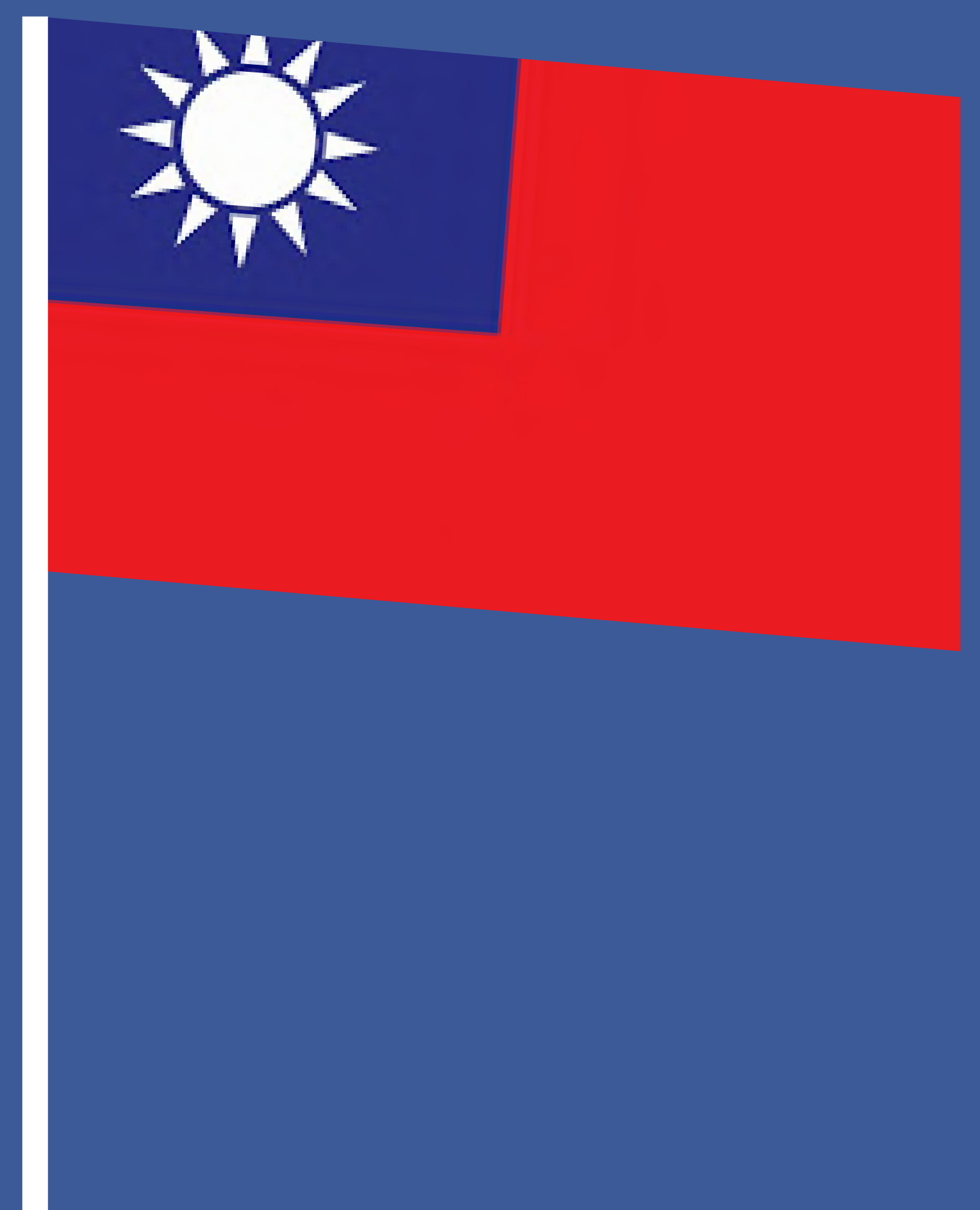
With its gradual shift from the "One China Policy", India envisions greater ties with Taiwan through shared understanding across different spheres of international cooperation. However, social and

economic implications of Chinese brainchild, "Belt and Road Initiative", is likely to bring about a profound bearing on India's policy towards Taiwan. The article examines the aforementioned aspects with an insightful touch, and puts forth propositions in the larger Indian context.

Chinese motives, have always raised numerous eyebrows across the world. Interpreted in light of the present scenario of a pandemic stricken atmosphere, such perspectives have further amplified. In what is explicitly referred to as "The Wuhan Virus", though a lot is still under speculation, there is no doubt that the monumental presence of China has diminished, arousing constrained diplomatic relationships, especially with the West.



It has been two years, since the pandemic first wooed us into an array of uncertainties, however nothing seems to have changed for the dragons. On 23rd January, 2022, Chinese Air force breached Taiwan





air space by sending over 39 missiles into its air identification zone. Notwithstanding the warnings of Taiwan's Defence Ministry, People's Liberation Army's incursions ramped up even further to denigrate the sovereignty of the nation. Out of the 39 war planes that flanked into the zone, 34 were fighter jets, one being a bomber and the other four comprised war planes

were fighter jets, one being a bomber and the other four comprised war planes and intelligence gathering planes.

To a lay individual

this may seem strange and unique on a cursory glance, but it isn't. Moreover, this is not the first time that China has unleashed its perilous prospects in Taiwan. In October 2021, over 150 planes were dispatched making incisive inroads into Taiwan's national security, coinciding with the "Chinese National Day", a key national holiday.

Such actions are said to have been executed across Taiwan Strait. However during the course of visit of Keith Krach, a senior US official, the claims were cast aside by the officials of CCP, who in turn reversed the claims accusing Taiwan's engagement in similar activities on a much wider scale.

### *Chinese stand on Taiwan:*

Over the years, China has hailed Taiwan, as an integral element of its territory, thereby stifling all sorts of international endeavors to interfere. Chinese Foreign Minister puts forth that "There should be no expectation from China, to compromise on issues of its sovereignty and territorial integrity". These blistering remarks seemed to have etched a trail of destruction, in which Taiwan has had to play the victim.

Despite whole hearted promises, made by the Biden administration to stake all for the welfare of Taiwan, no substantive actions could be channelized in order to combat the growing upheaval, triggered by ghastly ambitions of China in the subcontinent.

On the political front, China has never failed to impress the world by its prowess of meddling in the internal issues of any nation. Similar is the case of Taiwan where it tried to flare up armed rebellions among the citizens, as well as prodding opposition leaders into electoral malpractices, in order to establish a government which would cater to its whimsical policies.

Unsurprisingly, this was exactly manifested in the 2018 elections. The present government of CCP under Xi Jinping, has never spared any effort to historically clamp down on the ambitions of self determination, as amplified

by local activists of the region, arguing in favour of the stretch of Chinese hegemony. Premising such dastardly attacks on historical sources, it has virtually ensnared the innocent citizens into submission.

Impending implications on India:

Indian stand on this so called "One China Policy", has rather been on the passive side. In order to restrain the successful takeover of a thriving democracy by an authoritarian state, she along with the international community, should take gigantic strides towards the restoration of normalcy in the region.

Despite inactive diplomatic ties since 1995, both India and Taiwan have endeavoured to maintain constructive electoral practices, with representative offices held between the two, as de facto embassies.

If China were to successfully capture Taiwan, a grave threat would loom over the balance of power in the South East Asian politics. It would fuel China's monopolistic ambitions across the subcontinent, thereby thwarting India's image as a potential global contender at large.

Building on this, its imperative that India streamlines its geopolitical stature in the South East Asian region to effectively deal with the Chinese threat. Moreover, it should also develop conducive relations, not only with Taiwan, but also other neighbouring states to gather support for the cause of Taiwan, by exploring prudent diplomatic options. ■







# HIST







# ORY





# THE MUNSHIGANJ MASSACRE: AN UNTOLD TALE OF VALOUR

*By Aditya*



Colonial India was an epoch that became a synonym for terms like brutal repressions, curbing dissents, racial discrimination, high taxes, lagaan, and much more. Britishers quite tactfully used the cleavages of Indian society towards strengthening the colonial hegemony.

Their methods like divide and rule or caste-based regiments within the army were widely used to spread hatred among diverse cultural groups flourishing in India.

Even during colonial rule, we have witnessed thousands of people laying down their lives for the sake

of this nation against the imperialist forces or the Company Raj and a majority of these belonged to the downtrodden working-class of this society but regardless, they had in them, the revolutionary spirit to aspire and struggle for independence and self-rule.

## Social economic conditions of Awadh

The Indian subcontinent which was divided into various kingdoms ruled by different kings was unified and given an initial shape of a nation-state after the arrival of the British, which embarked primarily after defeating the collective forces of Nawab of Bengal, Nawab of Awadh and the Mughal emperor.

This war also sowed the seeds of British interference in the region of Awadh. During the Mughal period, the land revenue administration was systematized and the central authority dealt directly with the cultivators through the officials of the state.

The position of Taluqdars who were used to function as middlemen between the peasantry and the government emerged as the lords of the land.

After the introduction of the Oudh Rent Act, 1868 these overpowered taluqdars strengthened their existing positions. The taluqdars now had what they never found in the Lucknow court, a powerful patron and protector.



These landlords also used to lend money to peasants at interest rates imposed by them, unable to repay the loan the peasant was forced to do *begaar* (unpaid labour) on the land of the taluqdar.

Holding all the land, property and leisure into their hand, a clear violent antagonism between the taluqdars and the peasantry was brewing in the burning fields of Awadh.

The first British land-revenue settlement in Awadh known as the Summary Settlement of 1856 undermined the power and position of the taluqdars.

The settlement proceeded on the assumption that the taluqdars were interlopers with no permanent claims on the land and that they had established their hold through force and fraud.



The Summary Settlement removed the taluqdars wherever possible. Figures show that under the Nawabs the taluqdars had held 67 per cent of the total number of villages; by the 1856 settlement this number had come down to 38 per cent.

The taluqdars of southern Awadh were the hardest hit and in certain cases lost more than half the number of villages they had previously held. Throughout 1857, the government remained convinced that the revenue and administrative settlement of 1856 was quite just and therefore, the taluqdars should be stripped of the ill-gotten possessions they had acquired mostly by fraud and violence.

This turned out to be a huge blunder for the Britishers as they undermined the influence of the taluqdars within their respective taluqas and they observed its aftermath in the event of 1857. The Britishers realized that, “the people regard the taluqdars as their natural leader. Why then, should we go out of our way to thrust on them a more democratic system for which their own conduct shows them to be unfit? Let us draw an agreement with taluqdars and the whole country will be pacified.”

#### *Formation of the Kisan Sabha:*

These socio-economic conditions were inevitably leading Awadh into a class war.

As Marx put it most succinctly in his 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, “Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-

selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.”

In 1917 the formation of the Awadh Kisan Sabha in Pratapgarh and the introduction of Baba Ram Chandra, an indentured labourer returned from Fiji and later became the leader of this movement marked a milestone in the peasant movement history of Awadh the Sabha started organising the peasants of nearby villages.

Baba started organising the peasants in Awadh and within a few months he became a prominent personality for the peasants and whom they believed to be a saviour sent by God to give them relief from all their oppressions and grievances.

The Awadh Kisan Movement started assuming a more radical character from being ethical-economic in nature as several thousand incidents of destroying crops of their taluqdars across the region were reported.

Kisan Sabha was functioning at its maximum intensity and different committees of it were formed in various districts of Awadh. Evaluating the growing strength of Kisan Sabha, Britishers feared the chance of another mutiny and violent state repressions were persecuted to demolish the movement.

As George Orwell once wrote, imperialism consists of the policeman and soldier holding the ‘native’ down while the businessman goes through his



pockets. But the violence of the empire has been met by the struggle for freedom, from slaves in Africa to peasants in India.

The movement led by Kisan Sabha later developed into a 14-point 'Kisan Pledge' which iterated oaths like refusal to pay excessive rent, receipt of rent paid, refusal to arbitrary taxes like nazrana and others.

This movement was happening at the same time as the Non-cooperation movement henceforth it garnered limited support of the Indian National Congress.

The reason behind this limited support can be found in what Bipan Chandra asserts that the 'Congress, and in particular Gandhi, practised the strategy of class adjustment' and the INC had 'no class essence'.

The taluqdars had developed an inherited expertise in collecting rent from the subjugated farmers and this made the Britishers change their policy towards taluqdars in Awadh and gave them the responsibility of extracting revenue from villages of their respective taluqas and delivering it to the Raj. Based on this change the Taluqdari Settlement of 1858 was introduced.

This settlement restored the status of the taluqdars as that of a king and the peasantry became nothing but slaves of these landlords having barely anything to survive on.

Most of the taluqdars belonged to the upper caste and they sometimes favoured the peasants belonging to their caste and their treatment towards peasants belonging to the lower castes became much crueler.

These taluqdars used to lend land to peasants based on pattas (legal written contracts) after which a peasant is bound to pay a fixed amount of tax or lagaan to the landlord, coming along with it all the uncertainties of poor yield or bad crop to be borne by the peasant.

As landlords seldom issued receipts, the tenants were often charged twice or thrice the annual chargeable rent shown in government records. These extra taxes were in the form of 'nazrana'. These excessive amounts were sometimes paid by the tenants by selling their daughters (kanya vikraya), several instances of which were given in the report of VN Mehta, then Deputy Commissioner of Pratapgarh.

### *The Massacre:*

Munshiganj, a small town in the Raebareli district of the United Provinces (now Uttar Pradesh) is situated on the bank of the Sai River. On 5th January 1921, three Kisan Sabha leaders including its Raebareli coordinator Amol Sharma, were arrested after thousands of peasants picketed the fort of Tribhuwan Singh, taluqdar of Chandaniya estate in Raebareli.

This news of the arrest of peasant leaders spread all over Raebareli like a prairie fire and thousands of peasants embarked on a march towards Raebareli Jail. On 7th January, peasants organised at the bank of Sai River being unaware of the turpitude of British officials and as soon as they crossed the Munshiganj Bridge, British police blocked the bridge on the other side and taluqdar Sardar Birpal Singh, who was among the most loyal pawn of the Raj in the region started firing and eventually, the whole police force started to fire.

Government death records of the incident were heavily hoaxed, with 4 deaths and 14 wounded whereas the number goes several hundred. A martyrs' memorial erected at the same place on the bank of Sai river states that around 700 people died and nearly 1500 people were injured in the massacre.

This incident was also recorded by Jawaharlal Nehru in his autobiography and he too wrote about the telegram which was sent to him on 6th January informing him about the situation in Raebareli. Nehru arrived at Raebareli the very next day but he was unable to reach the incident place on time. But Sarvapalli Gopal wrote in Jawaharlal Nehru, the biographical work on Nehru, revealing the inefficacy of the first PM, "He then held a meeting of a few thousand peasants and tried to pacify them.





His dispatches, signed and unsigned, to the Independent were sharply critical of the Government and of the local taluqdar; but his conduct at Raebareli itself was far from being that of a 'firebrand', as the deputy commissioner had expected before his arrival.

This implied that Jawaharlal would stir the kisans to further violence and give them a wider cause. But he had at this time no economic ideology to offer, and he had certainly no intent of securing any weapons for these kisans to sustain their revolt."

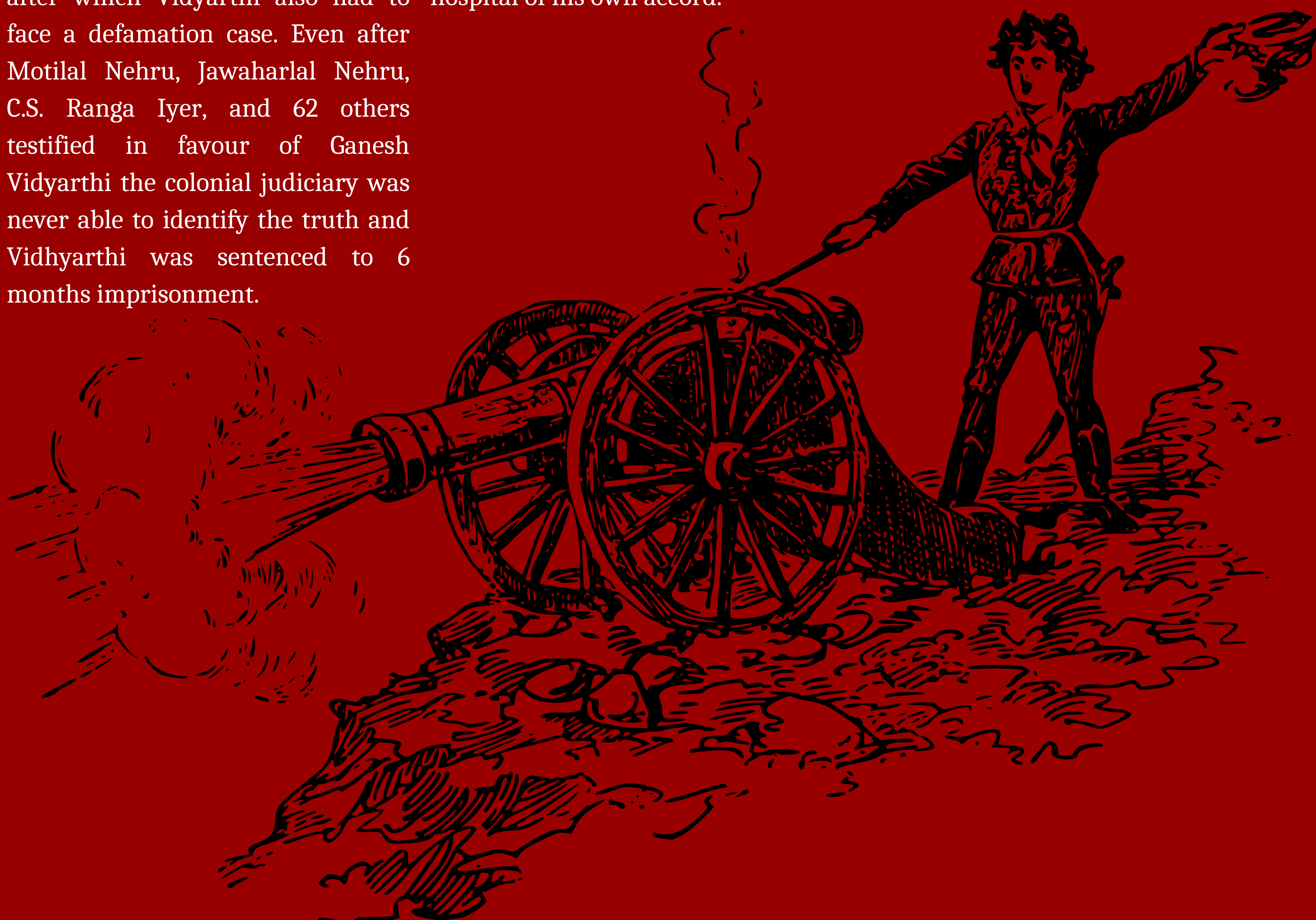
The national press criticised this kind of British brutality on Munshiganj peasants in one voice. Pratap newspaper of journalist Ganesh Shanker Vidyarthi reported extensively on this incident bringing out the role of Sardar Birpal Singh after which Vidyarthi also had to face a defamation case. Even after Motilal Nehru, Jawaharlal Nehru, C.S. Ranga Iyer, and 62 others testified in favour of Ganesh Vidyarthi the colonial judiciary was never able to identify the truth and Vidhyarthi was sentenced to 6 months imprisonment.

The Independent reported in its 11th January issue that the urban politicians saw 6 dead bodies heaped unceremoniously at the back of a tonga near the bridge when they toured the area. A large number of dead bodies were thrown into the Sai River at that very moment. People from nearby villages reported that the process of taking away the dead bodies to Dalmau (the nearest ghat for cremation) continued that whole night.

A few years later Amar Bahadur 'Amresh', a local Congress leader, after intensively researching this issue wrote in an article that the British government counterfeits the number of martyrs by not registering their address in medical or hospital records and most of the people were not found in hospitals a few days later and medical officers wrote in front of their names: leave hospital of his own accord.

The event of Munshiganj was not a spontaneous one provided that the British and taluqdar brutality didn't emerge from any alien reason. It was the result of a series of violent reactions from the peasantry against its exploitation. On 2nd January crops belonging to Sardar Nihal Singh were destroyed by a large crowd at Aundu, a village under Jagatpur Police Station.

On 3rd January, crops belonging to taluqdar Ram Pratap Singh of Chichandi were destroyed. Similar incidents happen at Tikragachipur, Gaura and Guta. On the same day and again on 4th January, more than 3000 peasants assembled in the Tehsil courtyard of Salon. This assembly of tenants demanded an exemption from ejection.





Since the Awadh Kisan Sabha was formed, lower caste peasants were also leading the movement on various fronts, and communal differences were also fought to a great extent.

Fear-backed respect for peasants belonging to the lower caste grew within the upper strata of the society.

As historian Gyan Pandey has pointed out, in the Kisan Sabha phase, the peasant movement imagined a traditional moral economy where inequality embedded in the traditional

structure of agrarian society was accepted and the landlord was seen as a legitimate authority i.e. as a benevolent tyrant and the protest was solely against the excesses. However, these events clearly show us the rage within the peasantry and these were also the consequences of the unanimous support of taluqdari by the British.

Taluqdars were not the single enemy of peasants, upper-caste businessmen also had a major hand in the persecution of these landless labour, as essential commodities which arrived in the market were sold at arbitrary rates decided by

these businessmen.

A newly elected member of the Provincial Council, Sardar Birpal Singh, who belonged to a family of Sikh taluqdars held three estates in Raebareli district and was also quite infamous for being the most loyal taluqdar Britishers can get.

It was testified by a peasant named Basanta in Leader newspaper of 10th July 1921 that the first bullet of this massacre was shot by Birpal Singh at a man named Pancham Pasi of village Nandan ka Purwa after which one bullet was also fired on Basanta.





## Munshiganj massacre in national media:

This Munshiganj Massacre was criticised by the national press in one voice (Leader, Amrit Bazar Patrika, Independent, etc.).

But Pratap newspaper and its well-known founder-editor Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi led the truth of this massacre and decided not to surrender in front of colonial and feudal forces. He reported the whole incident honestly and wrote different articles in Pratap in an uncompromising manner. In one of his articles, he wrote:

“What less District Magistrate of Raebareli did than that of Dyer? He shot at innocent and unarmed people and so was done in Raebareli.

The only difference is there they had machine guns and here they had rifles: there it was a surrounded bagh and here a bank of river”

Independent newspaper also similarly criticised the incident:

“We don't know if Dyer shot at Jallianwala with his hands or no, but a brother of Dyer was present here. Not similar in colour or shape neither in religion or caste but in

cruelty of heart, he was same as Dyer. Because of the misfortune of the nation he was an Indian and his name is- Birpal Singh.”

Massacres and firings in the daylight were common in those days; some massacres came into the mainstream discourse while others were lost in pages of archives.

One such massacre happened at Munshiganj in Raebareli district on 7th January, 1921.

Brutality at the hands of British officers crossed all thresholds that day.

Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi called it the ‘second Jallianwala Bagh’. A massacre that was just one among the thousand expressions of British oppression and that of the taluqdars.

General Dyer and his force fired at innocent people surrounded by walls in every direction, while in Munshiganj on one side there was Sai River, and on the other side forces of Deputy Commissioner Sheriff were ready with their loaded guns.

The Munshiganj Massacre will remain a shameful scar on British Indian history and will always make us remember to the boast that “the sun never sets on the British Empire”, the Chartist Ernest Jones replied, “And the blood never dried”. ■







# INDO-PACIFIC: A CONVERSATION WITH AMB. SHYAM SARAN

*By Hardik N. Shukla*



**T**he Indo-Pacific is a strategic and contested space. With China's economy growing at great pace and its expansionist endeavours creating instability in the region, it becomes increasingly important for us to understand the tensions and significance of this geopolitical landmass and be updated about the recent trends in the Indo-Pacific.

With this objective in mind, a delegation from Caucus - The Discussion Forum of Hindu College visited the India International Centre on November 7, 2022 to meet its current President Amb. Shyam Saran and have a discussion with him on the topic - 'Dynamics of the Indo-Pacific'.

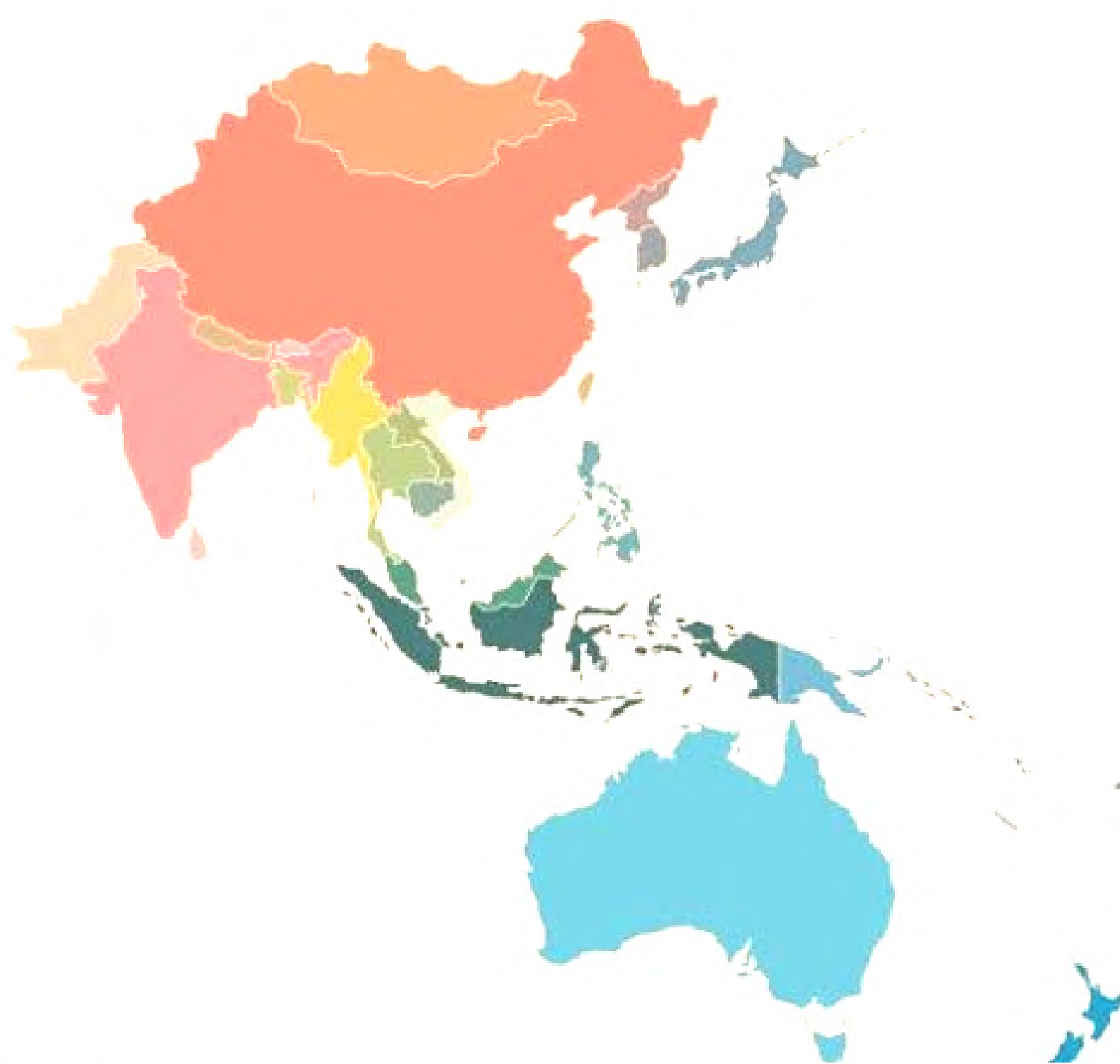


**Amb. Shyam Saran**

Having served as India's Foreign Secretary and as India's Ambassador to Myanmar, Nepal and Indonesia, Amb. Saran has also observed Beijing very closely. Hence, he is one of the best scholars having expertise in the Indo-Pacific. Thus, receiving an invite from him was an honour for the group.

The event unfolded in Seminar Room 1 of the India International Centre. To begin with, Amb. Saran gave an enlightening overview of the topic at length for about 45 minutes followed by some well-thought questions by the participants. In his inaugural address, Amb. Saran mentioned how the term 'Asia-Pacific', with south-east Asian region as its core, evolved over the years to become 'Indo-Pacific', with India and the Indian ocean as the heart of the geopolitical discourse. He further highlighted how some countries like Russia and China detest this term and still prefer to use 'Asia-Pacific'. He further went on to illustrate the power relations and tensions in the region, particularly the response and consequences of the increasing influence of China.





In his address, Amb. Saran gave special emphasis on an important aspect of the Indo-Pacific discourse: the significant role of India and the Quad (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue) in bringing stability to the region. He highlighted how the 1990s was a tumultuous period for India with both internal and external challenges. While the country's domestic economy received a major jolt by the new economic reforms, the fall of the Soviet Union weakened its most trusted and robust ally - Russia. However, he congratulated the country for its foreign policy which

allowed a smooth transition in the disturbing period.

Amb. Saran categorically mentioned that Quad is a central pivot in the Indo-Pacific strategy. Starting off in the wake of the 2004-05 Tsunami which saw a great deal of cooperation between the Quad countries, the organisation declined after the withdrawal of Australia. With the revival of Quad in 2017, China is taking serious cognisance of

its activities. Amb. Saran emphasised that the lack of a unified Indo-Pacific strategy is a major challenge for Quad countries. While the USA wants Quad to explicitly stand against China, India takes a moderate stance and wants Quad to focus more on dialogues than military.

A major limitation pointed out by him is that although the organisation is investing highly in building military capabilities, its economic pillar is very weak. He clearly stated that unless the economic cooperation and

framework is not taken care of, no significant achievement could be made.

India's withdrawal from the RCEP (Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership), was a major setback for the country in terms of its economic partnership according to Amb. Saran. As the case with Quad, India also needs to increase its economic capabilities to effectively counter China. He stated that the "asymmetry of military and economic power between the two countries" should be addressed and the economic front should be prioritised.

In a nutshell, the round table discussion was enriching, insightful and successful. All the participants were very happy to get a clear picture of the dynamics unfolding in the Indo-Pacific and were content with getting their queries answered by one of the greatest experts on the subject. ■

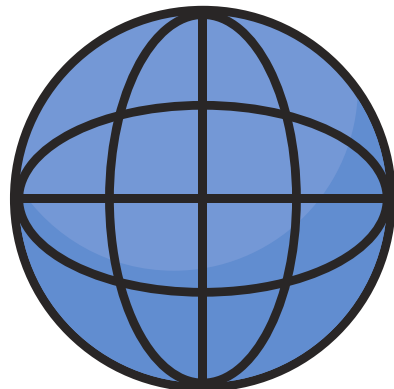


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