

## Important Vocab For the Editorial

2019:

1. **all is not lost** (phrase) – there is still some chance/opportunity to recover.
2. **between a rock and a hard place** (phrase) – a difficult situation in which someone is left with two equally unpleasant/undesirable alternatives.
3. **bulldoze** (verb) – muscle, force one's way, push; destroy/demolish.
4. **ill-intentioned** (noun) – having bad intentions.
5. **mount** (verb) – display, exhibit, present, put in place.
6. **concerted** (adjective) – strenuous, vigorous, forceful/intense.
7. **critique** (noun) – analysis, evaluation, assessment.
8. **sluggishness** (noun) – dullness, slowness, stagnation.
9. **puzzlement** (noun) – confusion, bafflement, bewilderment.
10. **electorate** (noun) – all the people who entitled to vote in an election.
11. **astounding** (adjective) – shocking, surprising, bewildering.
12. **relegate** (verb) – downgrade, lower, put down.
13. **(fall by the) wayside** (noun) – fail to finish an activity.
14. **proportional representation** (noun) – an electoral system in which parties gain seats in Parliament in proportion to the number of votes it received in an election.
15. **derail** (verb) – obstruct, interrupt, impede/thwart.
16. **relentless** (adjective) – persistent, continuing, constant.
17. **by any means** (phrase) – in any way, at all.
18. **bearish** (adjective) – stupid, foolish, idiotic.
19. **slow down** (phrasal verb) – reduce, lessen growth (in an economy).
20. **reluctant** (adjective) – unwilling, disinclined, unenthusiastic.
21. **seldom** (adverb) – hardly, rarely, almost never.
22. **impending** (adjective) – at hand, near/close; approaching/forthcoming.
23. **bring someone to heel** (phrase) – conquer, vanquish/defeat, crush.
24. **symptomatic** (adjective) – indicative, signalling, warning.
25. **well-being** (noun) – healthy state, comfort/happiness, prosperity.
26. **indifferently** (adverb) – fairly bad, unconcernedly, disinterestedly.
27. **ideology** (noun) – beliefs, ideas/opinions, principles.
28. **stereotype** (verb) – standardize, categorize, conventionalize.

29. **discourse** (noun) – discussion, talk, debate.
30. **rehash** (noun) – rewording, restatement, rewrite.
31. **chauvinistic** (adjective) – jingoistic, strong nationalist, super patriotic.
32. **preclude** (verb) – prevent, prohibit, block/exclude.
33. **reflection** (noun) – thought, thinking, consideration.
34. self-critique (noun) – self-analysis, self-assessment, self-evaluation.
35. **bypass** (verb) – circumvent, avoid, dodge.
36. **legacy** (noun) – footprint, effect/outcome (something received from a predecessor or from the past).
37. **forge** (verb) – build up, establish, form/create.
38. **pluralism** (noun) – (of people) the practice exist in harmony irrespective of various differences.
39. **secularism** (noun) – the belief that religion should not have a strong influence in education or other public parts of society.
40. **tolerance** (noun) – forbearance, liberality, open-mindedness.
41. **imperialism** (noun) – an action that involves a country (usually an empire or a kingdom) extending its power by the acquisition of territories.
42. **plank** (noun) – a fundamental & important point/principle on which something (political program, policy, etc) is based on.
43. **colonialism** (noun) – the act of controlling & exploiting a country/territory (& its people) by another country/territory.
44. **flounder** (verb) – struggle, be in difficulties, face financial ruin.
45. **rudderless** (adjective) – lacking a sense of principles.
46. **synonymous** with (noun) – closely associated with.
47. **enlightened** (adjective) – educated/learned, wise, literate, intellectual.
48. **mediocre** c ordinary, common, uninspired.
49. **hagiography** (noun) – a biography of a saint or a spiritual leader.
50. **coercion** (noun) – force, pressure, persuasion/enforcement.
51. **draw upon** (phrasal verb) – have recourse to, look to, rely on, make use of.
52. **indifferent** (adjective) – mediocre, ordinary, average.
53. **exemplar** (noun) – model, example, type.
54. **persuade** (verb) – motivate, convince, prompt.
55. **desist from** (verb) – abstain, refrain, hold back.
56. **lynch** (verb) – punish/kill by hanging someone for claimed offence without legal trail by the group of people.

57. **robust** (adjective) – strong, powerful, tough.
58. **decentralise** (verb) – transfer of the power/control (of a department/organisation/government) from a single place to other locations.
59. **the peasantry** (noun) – agricultural labourers, agricultural workers.
60. **call off** (phrasal verb) – cancel, abandon, shelve/drop.
61. **rely upon** (phrasal verb) – depend on, bank on, count on.
62. **rung** (noun) – level, rank, position/grade.
63. **linguistic** (adjective) – relating to language; lingual.
64. **accommodate** (verb) – help/assist, serve; adjust/attune.
65. **desirous** (adjective) – desiring, eager for, longing for.
66. **accommodative** (adjective) – accommodating, cooperative, helpful.
67. **shadow** (noun) – hint, faint sign, trace/glimmer.
68. **atrophy** (noun) – deterioration, degeneration, weakening.
69. **slide** into (verb) – fall, drop, descend.
70. **proximity** (noun) – closeness, nearness, adjacency (in relationship).
71. **faceless** (adjective) – anonymous, impersonal.
72. **anonymous** (adjective) – nameless, incognito, unknown/unspecified.
73. **hold hostage** (phrase) – keep someone as a hostage.
74. **legitimacy** (noun) – reasonableness/soundness, justification, validity.
75. **legitimate** (adjective) – permissible, allowable, admissible.
76. **thrall** (noun) – power, control, domination.
77. **simmering** (adjective) – fuming, seething, intensified/severe.
78. **discontent** (noun) – disappointment, dissatisfaction, resentment.
79. **pervade** (verb) – spread through, pass through; be present, be noticeable throughout.
80. **mislay** (verb) – lose, misplace, miss.
81. **imminent** (adjective) – about to happen approaching, in the offing, forthcoming.
82. **catastrophe** (noun) – destruction, damage, disaster.
83. **(be) wedded to** (verb) – dedicated to, devoted to, attached to.
84. **right-wing** (adjective) – conservative, rightist, alt-right.
85. **authoritarianism** (noun) – autocracy, fascism, totalitarianism/draconianism.
86. **dictatorship** (noun) – despotism, autocracy, absolute rule.
87. **call upon** (phrasal verb) – demand, require, ask formally.
88. **owe** (verb) – be obligated to, be in debt, be beholden to.

89. **utterance** (noun) – statement, expression, pronouncement/remark.

## A political reinvention in a moment of crisis

**India needs a national party to provide substantive opposition to the government —  
all is not lost for the Congress**

Today, we, the people of India, are trapped between a rock and a hard place. On one side is the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) which continues to bulldoze legislation, controversial at best and ill-intentioned at worst, through Parliament. On the other is the Opposition, unable to mount a concerted and effective critique of government policies. The sluggishness of the non-NDA parties is cause for some puzzlement. After all, 55% of the electorate has voted for them. Unfortunately, this vote is hardly reflected in Parliament.

Political scientists have been, for long, concerned with the often astounding gap between vote shares and the number of seats a party obtains in Parliament. This leaves a majority of the voters unrepresented. Democrats have strongly argued that the “winner takes all” principle needs to be relegated to the wayside and replaced with the system of proportional representation. This is, however, another story. The BJP is hardly likely to initiate an electoral project that might derail its relentless search for power by any means.

### **Bearish on the economy**

What the ruling party is doing with the power it has acquired is equally puzzling. India is heading toward an economic crisis. Economic growth has slowed down, domestic and global capital is reluctant to invest in the economy, and unemployment reaches a new high every day. Seldom have prominent industrialists expressed such public concern about impending economic disaster as they have now. But the BJP hardly shows interest in tackling the situation. It is more interested in demolishing democratic rights and bringing the minorities to heel.

The determined refusal to confront the crisis is symptomatic of a wider problem. The ruling party is not known for either innovative **politics** or imagination. Its concept of well-being is limited to a free gas connection and an indifferently built flat. Its ideology is stuck in colonial stereotypes of ‘Hindu’ and ‘Muslim’. There is nothing new in its political discourse; merely a rehash of what V.D. Savarkar wrote in 1923. The problem is that the

chauvinistic ideology of religious nationalism precludes reflection and self-critique. The great debates of contemporary politics have simply bypassed the party-multiculturalism, minority rights, redistributive justice, citizenship or cosmopolitanism.

### **Forgotten legacy**

The Indian National Congress has, in the past, been more inventive because its ideology was forged in the heat of the freedom struggle. Pluralism, secularism, tolerance, citizenship, fundamental and minority rights, cosmopolitanism, non-violence and anti-imperialism were thrown up in the course of the movement. On these planks the Congress was able to mobilise vast masses of people against colonialism. Sadly, the party has forgotten its legacy. We need a national party to provide substantive opposition to the government. The Congress flounders, it is rudderless.

All is not lost. Moments of crisis can lead to reinvention. The party must reinvent itself, simply because it is synonymous with the history of our freedom struggle, and with enlightened leaders such as Jawaharlal Nehru. Remember that Nehru's vision inspired great literature, poetry, films, art, theatre, and architecture. What do we have today except mediocre hagiography? A ruling class which cannot inspire cultural creativity can only rule by coercion. In modern politics, this is counted as a failure.

### **Leading from the front**

To reinvent itself the Congress must draw upon five lessons of its own past, some good, some bad, some indifferent. One, its leaders were moral exemplars. They were visionaries and they were courageous. In the middle of Partition violence Nehru was there, in the killing fields of Punjab and Delhi. He persuaded people to desist from violence and he assured Muslims of their safety. Today when Indians are lynched and left to die on the streets, politicians stay safely indoors. Our own people die avoidable deaths and leaders are silent. We need leaders who motivate us by example.

Two, the Congress could lead the mainstream freedom struggle because it had a robust organisation, both decentralised and democratic. The party formed a coalition of what has been called 'big men': heads of caste groups, peasantry, industry, religious formations, and workers organisations. When the party initiated or called off a movement, it relied upon

second rung leaders. The central leadership left State politics, for example the conflict over linguistic States, to regional bosses.

Three, diversity of opinions and interests in the party encouraged members to engage in dialogue and persuasion. They negotiated and accommodated class, caste, and group interests within the organisation. The Congress found place for most demands, from interest groups, from individuals desirous of social reform, and from individuals stirred by the desire for power and prestige. The Congress was accommodative and a dialogical party. It practised **democracy**.

### **Long shadow of centralism**

Four, the decline of the party in the late 1960s and the early 1970s was caused by organisational atrophy. At one point of time, the Congress possessed the ability to address, negotiate, and resolve competing demands. As the party became the captive of the leader, it lost this skill. Even as Ms Indira Gandhi began to forge a national constituency over the heads of State leaders, the party slid into centralism and the politics of the durbar. The power of individual members depended on their proximity to the leader. The BJP should learn from this history. Recollect that even ministers of the party are faceless and anonymous, their fates are held hostage by the leader.

Five, the decline of the Congress took place at a time when politics demanded new forms of legitimacy. In the two decades following Independence, the Congress was legitimate because the party and its leadership were identified with the freedom struggle. Twenty years later, a new generation had no direct memory of the liberation movement. The Congress was however in thrall to its leader; it failed to read the message of the time. By the late 1960s, simmering discontent came to pervade large parts of the country, and groups under the leadership of J.P. Narayan mobilised to target an unresponsive state and an equally unresponsive party system. The Congress had, however, mislaid the ability to contain discontent; it opted for coercion. Mrs Gandhi declared an Emergency.

Today, India faces imminent economic catastrophe. We confront serious threats to our democracy and to the Constitution. The ruling party is not particularly wedded to democracy. Right-wing authoritarianism has no love for any fundamental right that constrains the exercise of absolute power. Civil society will continue to struggle against

violations of democracy. Scholars will write of the threat posed by wielders of absolute power to our constitutional democracy. But civil society has to function along with a democratic political party. Regional parties have degenerated into one-person dictatorships, or become family concerns. We have to call upon a party that had fought the first freedom struggle. The Congress has to step in after it reinvents itself. For only a democratic party can understand what the people of India want, desire and aspire for.

It is our duty to remind the Congress that it owes the people of India. What else can we say? We can only repeat Mark Anthony's words in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*: 'For I have neither wit, nor words, nor worth/Action, nor utterance, nor the power of speech/To stir men's blood/ I only speak right on/ I tell you that which you yourselves do know.' If the party does not respond, our future is an uncertain one.