

NEPAL'S VOTE TESTS THE OLD POLITICAL ORDER

It has been 20 years since Nepal overthrew its monarchy and charted its course in parliamentary democracy. However, the end of monarchy was not the end of Nepal's woes. These twenty years have been tumultuous, to say the least. The political establishment that took over has not lived upto the expectations of the people. The governments were mostly keen to secure their place and survive rather than to deliver on the development of the country. Corruption, coalitions and internal feuds have defined the parliamentary democracy for all these years. Power alternated mainly among the Nepali Congress and various communist factions, including the CPN-UML and the Maoist Centre, often through fragile coalition governments, but not much changed for the people.

Unemployment and corruption grew, as did the frustration amongst the youth, who finally came on the streets in September last year to protest and changed Nepal politics forever. The elections underway in Nepal are no ordinary elections, it is going to be a litmus test for the old political establishment and also people's view of the Gen Z uprising. With nearly 19 million voters deciding the 275-member House of Representatives, the election has become a referendum on whether Nepal's long-dominant political class can regain legitimacy or whether a new generation will reshape the country's political trajectory. Political instability has marked the democracy and allegations of corruption have eroded public trust.

This election, therefore, marks a turning point. The most visible sign of change is the emergence of younger candidates and unconventional political figures who have captured the imagination of Nepal's urban youth. Among them is Balendra Shah, the rapper-turned-politician and former mayor of Kathmandu, who has positioned himself as a symbol of generational change. His challenge to veteran Marxist leader and former prime minister KP Sharma Oli in Jhapa district has become one of the most closely watched contests of the election. At the same time, established parties have attempted to adapt to the new political mood.

The Nepali Congress, one of the country's oldest parties, has chosen the relatively younger Gagan Thapa as its leader, signalling a cautious attempt at renewal. Traditional leaders are emphasising experience and stability, arguing that governance requires institutional knowledge rather than political experimentation. Structural realities of Nepal's electoral system make a dramatic political overhaul unlikely. The mixed system of first-past-the-post and proportional representation often produces fragmented results and may lead to yet another coalition government. Nevertheless, the politics of Nepal have changed for sure. The Gen Z uprising has set the agenda—one centred on accountability, transparency, and economic opportunity. Whether led by veterans such as Oli or younger leaders like Thapa — or influenced by new voices such as Shah — Nepal's next government will face a restless and politically awakened generation.

A marriage veto violates constitutional rights

Arvind P Bhanu / Mayukh Roy

The recently proposed amendment to the Gujarat Registration of Marriages Act, 2006 has sparked debate over adult personal liberty, conflicting with existing laws and society's/state commitment to women's empowerment. Announced in early 2026, the proposed law seeks to "protect family values," curb alleged "love jihad" activities, and prevent coercion and fraudulent identities. While the state may extend legal protections to adults entering marriage, it must safeguard their constitutional freedom and liberty. The position pre and post proposed amendment is (1) Provisions (pre-amendment) - Gujarat Registration of Marriages Act, 2006 - No requirement of parental consent; registration is for civil procedure ensuring legal recognition of marriage. (2) Provision (post-amendment, 2026) - Amendment 2026 - For marriages/inter-caste or inter-faith marriages, couples must submit a notarised parental consent form alongside the marriage certificate. The parent/s has to submit their ID like Aadhar card along with approval for issuing the marriage registration certificate. The proposed law makes marriage registration mandatory. (3) Key Features - the amendment applies to marriages crossing caste or religious boundaries; same-caste/faith unions remain unaffected. Enforcement is delegated to registrar of marriages, who may request additional verification of consent. The amendment is justified by the state as a measure to "prevent forced conversion and preserve social harmony". But what will happen to the status of marriage when parents does not give approval. The parents may use their veto where they may not be comfortable due to social, religious and cultural etc obstructions. This veto introduces a statutory barrier that directly interferes with adult individual's autonomy over marital choices.

Sections 4 to 8 of the Special Marriage Act, 1954, provide a structured civil framework for marriage, independent of religious customs. Conditions (Section 4): Establishes mandatory criteria: monogamy, sound mental health, minimum age (21 for



males, 18 for females), and avoiding prohibited relationships. Notice and Publication (Sections 5-6): Parties must file a notice in a district where one has resided for 30 days. This notice is publicly displayed to ensure transparency. Objections and Inquiry (Sections 7-8): A 30-day window allows for public objections based on Section 4 criteria. The Marriage Officer must investigate objections within 30 days; if upheld, parties can appeal to a district court. This process ensures that civil marriages are transparent, consensual, and legally vetted before solemnization. The proposed law does not go with hand in hand with this central legislation.

Along with these provisions the Supreme Court has consistently interpreted Article 21 of the constitution as encompassing the right to marry a partner of one's own choosing. In *Laxmibai Chandaragi B vs. State of Karnataka* (2021), the court held that the freedom to marry without parental interference is a facet of personal liberty and privacy. The judgement emphasized that any state-imposed condition that curtails this liberty must be narrowly tailored and justified by a compelling public interest. *Shafi Jahan vs K.M. Ashokan* (2018) reinforced that discrimination on the basis of caste or religion in matrimonial matters violates the equality clause. The court observed that the state cannot impose "socially regressive" restrictions that perpetuate historical hierarchies. The Court intervened by

setting aside the High Court's ruling, stating that the marriage was valid as Hadiya was a consenting adult, and that parental approval is not a legal requirement. Reliance was made in article 21 of the Constitution. In *Lata Singh vs State of Uttar Pradesh*

(2006), the court protected an inter-caste couple from familial coercion directing law enforcement agencies to safeguard their right to marry and to prevent intimidation. The judgement highlighted the parental consent requirements can become instruments of violence, particularly against women. Collectively, these decisions articulate a clear constitutional trajectory: adult individuals possess an entrenched right to marry and not to marry without parental approval, and any legislative intrusion must survive strict scrutiny.

Why the Gujarat Amendment falters? The state argues that the amendment prevents "love-jihad" and protects cultural integrity. However, the Supreme Court has repeatedly rejected communal anxieties as a basis for restricting fundamental rights. In *Shayara Bano vs. Union of India* (2017), the court held that the moral panic cannot outweigh individual liberty. No empirical data have been presented to demonstrate that parental consent reduces forced conversions; rather, the provision appears to codify communal suspicion. Empirical studies on inter-community marriages reveal that women bear the brunt of familial opposition and violence. By legally obligating parental consent, the amendment amplifies the leverage of male family members, contravening the protective rationale articulated in *Lata Singh* case (2006). Judicial precedent demands that any restriction on personal liberty be the least intru-

sive means available. The Gujarat amendment imposes a blanket consent requirement, irrespective of whether coercion is present. A more narrowly tailored approach such as a judicial review mechanism for alleged duress would satisfy the state's interest without infringing on constitutional rights.

Plus we must also think of the logical problems it creates for two distinct set of people, first are those who somehow after coming of this amendment have gotten married now are liable to be penalised plus if the family now uses their so-called "veto power", as above stated, what happens do we break the family unit by declaring such marriage void ab initio? Secondly, if someone has married under the Special Marriages Act, 1954 in the past few years and that too without their parent's consent then can now the parents of such couple voice their dissent to such marriage and what will be the outcome of such dissent on the marriage? The newly proposed amendment leaves with far too many questions and uncertainties and with far few answers. This lack of sheer lack of clarity and predictability is never good for any legal system as it creates confusion, disorganization in a well-oiled machinery and anxiety for the common people of the society.

The proposed amendment represents a regressive approach that subverts constitutionally guaranteed freedoms. Supreme Court pronouncements, clearly affirm adults' rights to marry and not to marry without parental interference (right to choice is also fundamental right). By imposing a blanket consent requirement, the state not only disregards these precedents but also jeopardizes the safety and autonomy of inter-caste and inter-faith couples, particularly women. A truly progressive society must respect individual choice, uphold constitutional guarantees, and resist legislating based on unfounded communal anxieties. Instead of introducing a parental veto that imperils fundamental rights, the state can address coercion, fraudulent identities, and alleged "love-jihad" through targeted special laws and judicial oversight.

WOMEN, KNOW THAT YOU ARE EMPOWERED!

GURUDEV SRI SRI RAVI SHANKAR

Women should know that they are empowered. They should never feel victimized. When you feel victimized, you lose energy, enthusiasm, and power. The spiritual path is where you get rid of both victim consciousness and culprit consciousness. As a victim, you remain in a small mind and keep blaming others. You can never reach the Self. The culprit mindset does the same. When you have doership, "Oh! I did these bad things", even then you can't reach the Self. So, stop blaming yourself and start praising yourself without shame or guilt.

You have all the power to stand up and assert your rights. Of course, we need to bring a lot of change in society. But you can do that without feeling like a victim. India has progressively shown how women can be empowered. For example, we always take the name of a woman before a man in this part of the world - it is Sita-Ram, Lakshmi-Narayan, and Gauri-Shiva. And even in our tradition, it is 'Matru Devo Bhava', mother first, and then the father.

Women can connect minds and build bridges between the communities. Women

have the capacity to be excellent peacemakers. Because it is quite natural for them to relate on the level of the heart. The biggest strength that women have is their emotions, feelings, motivation and inspiration. Men can inspire to fight, but women inspire to unite. There are more wars in the world today because there is a lack of feminine leadership to unite people, overcome differences and bring home to us the purpose we are all born for!

In today's war-torn world, we need women to come to the forefront and take more responsibility, without getting stressed. Women in many parts of the world are going through big trauma, but at the same time, I really commend their courage and the way they are coming together and standing up. I tell them, keep going. There is no going back, and success will be yours. Truth will always triumph.

I strongly suggest that they take a few minutes for themselves. It is essential for their own minds. Today, mental health is a big issue around the world. Every 40 seconds, a person is taking his or her life. In this situation, we all have to work towards better mental health, better education, better facilities and a better world in all. When women are determined, they can do

wonders.

Women have greater roles to play. Women can influence many men around them - father, brother, children, and spouse. They should take the lead in society. Then there will be less conflict, greed, and corruption in the world. Corruption can only happen outside the boundary of belongingness. The heart can never be corrupt. It is the mind that goes corrupt. The heart always longs for the old, and the mind for the new. Your mind wants to hoard more, but the heart says, 'I am happy.' Heart wants to give, and mind wants to take. Women function more with their hearts. They should keep that quality alive while taking on more political and social responsibilities.

Women are born leaders. Women have both gentleness and strength. Indian scriptures place a tremendous amount of power in women. In fact, the primordial energy known as 'Shakti', which is the life force behind the whole creation, is feminine. That is why our scriptures honour women as the highest aspect of divinity - the 'Aadhya Shakti'.

Women bring together the finest aspects of society. The ability to create and the transformational ability to make a differ-

ence in society. Women bring us to the planet and teach us how to live. A mother is our first Guru, our first teacher. Women teach us our first behaviour, our first step in life. And then women also have a great role to play in society. She can be a strong peacemaker; at home, in the community, in society and in the world. Women can glue differences and bring people of diverse nature together - she does it in her home all the time.

In this fast-paced life, we need to balance our inner peace, beauty and ethical values with the external challenges we face, and women have it in them to do it. These qualities are inherent in a woman.

Usually, people think women are emotional, but the fact is, women are also great intellectual geniuses and excel in planning and execution. You see any department headed by a woman; chances are that department is much ahead of others.

Women are the backbone of any society. The role of women in the development of a society is of utmost importance. In fact, it is the only criterion that determines whether a society is strong and harmonious or not. Also, a corruption-free society can only emerge where women are given due regard, respect and importance.<

Ugadi: Six Tastes, One Civilisational Memory

By Anil Rajput

The advent of Chaitra, the first month of the Hindu lunar calendar, marks the beginning of the new year in several parts of India. Coinciding with the full bloom of Vasanta Ritu, when the air grows warmer and the neem flowers bloom, the occasion carries deep seasonal, cultural and spiritual significance. In parts of southern India, especially in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana, the first day of the season, Chaitra Shukla Pratipada, is observed as Ugadi, the commencement of a new year heralding both a seasonal renewal and a reaffirmation of an ancient cultural ethos.

Some Puranic traditions associate this day with the beginning of creation by Lord Brahma. It also marks the first day of Chaitra and the opening of the new year in the Shalivahana Saka calendar, the an-

cient calendar used in regional almanacs and public records. In time, this day assumed both metaphysical and social significance. Temples and royal courts marked it with religious congregations, prayers, and the recitation of the Panchanga, sometimes referred to as Panchangam, the annual almanac through which planetary alignments, seasonal predictions, and agricultural forecasts were interpreted. Even today, this practice remains central to the occasion. Families and communities gather to heed forecasts of weather and rainfall, productivity and prosperity that act as reminders of the cosmic influence on human life.

The days preceding Ugadi are filled with excitement and expectation. Homes are cleaned, doorways adorned with fresh mango leaf toranas to welcome good fortune, and courtyards are decorated with

colourful rangoli. New clothes are worn after oil baths signifying purity and prayers offered before household deities. Yet it is in the kitchen that the philosophy of the festival finds its most intimate expression. If the almanac offers a vision of the year to come, the festive meal prepares you to celebrate it.

The defining dish on this occasion is the Ugadi Pachadi, an eloquent seasonal representation of the underlying philosophy of the day. Prepared with neem blossoms, jaggery, tamarind pulp, raw mango, green chilli, and salt, it unites the six primary tastes recognised in Indian culinary traditions, bitter, sweet, sour, pungent, bright, and saline, representing the various moods of life, into a single delectable offering. Neem is cleaned to soften its bitterness, tamarind pressed for depth, jaggery dissolved and strained,

and mango grated finely. The final balance of these ingredients rests on individual preferences and not on rigid recipes. In Karnataka, the creative pairing of Bevu Bella, neem and jaggery, expresses the same insight and maintains the harmony of different flavours. In this elaborate calibration lies the essence of Ugadi and the recognition that the events of the year ahead, should be approached with similar equilibrium and harmony.

From this symbolic beginning, the festive meal unfolds in a wider spread shaped by the agricultural patterns of the Deccan plateau. Rice preparations form the backbone of the Ugadi thali, expressing regional identity. In Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, Pulihora is indispensable. Tamarind pulp is simmered slowly with turmeric and salt until it thickens, then mixed

with cooled rice, ensuring that each grain remains separate. A tempering of mustard seeds, chana dal, urad dal, dried red chillies, peanuts, and curry leaves is poured over while still hot, releasing fragrance and adding crunch to the dish. Pulihora is equally suited for temple offerings and domestic servings and it nourishes without being heavy with its sourness suiting the changing season.

Alongside it appears Mamidikaya Pulihora, or mango rice, made with fresh raw mangoes which capture the early fragrance of spring. Raw mango is grated and gently sauteed with green chillies, curry leaves, turmeric, and tempered seeds before being cooked with rice. Peanuts or cashews lend texture, turning the preparation into a complete festive meal rather than a mere accompaniment. Besides being a seasonal prepa-

ration, Mamidikaya Pulihora is easy to prepare in large quantities and also serves as prasadam. Its balance of sourness and spice awakens the senses after the austerity of late winter, aligning with the New Year's call to alertness and renewal.

Karnataka's festive table is distinguished above all by Obbattu, also known as Holige, a delicacy whose preparation depends as much on technique as on its ingredients. Chana dal is cooked until tender and drained thoroughly before being blended with jaggery and cardamom into a smooth filling. The dough made of wheat, kneaded with oil or ghee, is rested until pliant, then rolled with the filling. This is done with great care so that the sweet centre is enclosed without rupture. Roasted patiently on a griddle and finished with ghee, the bread emerges soft, fragrant, and lightly bronzed.

In Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, similar versions known as Bobbattu are made with subtle variations of thickness, filling, and finish, showing how one culinary idea acquires regional personality without losing its common identity.

Sweetness is further expressed through Payasam, though here too the festive palate favours composure over extravagance. Whether prepared from vermicelli, rice, or lentils, the dish begins with milk or, in some households, coconut milk, simmered gradually until it thickens. Jaggery or sugar is added according to taste and traditions, while cashews and raisins fried in ghee are folded in towards the end. Cardamom adds fragrance and warmth. What matters most is the pace of preparation which is deliberately relaxed and meticulous to bring out the well recognized flavour.