ATAL BHARI VAJPAYEE
(1924-2018)


c değiştiren o lay hayat
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl No</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01</td>
<td>Ajatashatru: Remembering Atal Bihari Vajpayee Shri M Venkaiah Naidu</td>
<td>04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02</td>
<td>A leader for the ages, he was ahead of the times PM Shri Narendra Modi</td>
<td>07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03</td>
<td>मेरे अटल जी प्रधानमंत्री श्री जातेंड्र गोटी</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04</td>
<td>भारतीय राजनीति के सिद्धांत पुरुष भारत रत्न अटल तिहारी वाजपेयी जी को विजय श्रद्धांजलि</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05</td>
<td>Atalji, the Quintessential Gentleman – How he made a difference? Shri Arun Jaitley</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06</td>
<td>अक्षेष्ठ की रह दिखाने वाला अटल युग श्री अरुण जेटली</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07</td>
<td>His weapon was the word, not the sword MJ Akbar</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08</td>
<td>His charisma, poetry had impact across the border Hardeep Singh Puri</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09</td>
<td>Atalji’s love of the nation took precedence over love of power Ram Madhav</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>अपने ललए तो सि जीते हैं, पर अटल जी के ललए जजये प्रभात झा,सांसद राज्य सभा एवं राष्ट्रीय उपाध्यक्ष भाजपा</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>A gifted orator whose stories always had a sting in the tail Swapan Das Gupta</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Atal-led India asserted itself as responsible nuclear power Shakti Sinha</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>The uncompromising patriot Shakti Sinha</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Atal Bihari Vajpayee, a normal person with infinite patience Shakti Sinha</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>High priest of coalition dharma NK Singh</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Atal Bihari Vajpayee steered India out of difficult economic times Swaminathan S Anklesaria Aiyar</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sl No</td>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Page No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>वाजपेयी ने आर्थिक मुश्किलों से बाहर लिखाली थी हमारी अर्थव्यवस्था ्ी लवाजानाथ एम अकबर अख्त ल</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Atal Bihari Vajpayee, The Man Who Mainstreamed BJP And Bharatiyata</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Atal Bihari Vajpayee: A towering leader, his work set the gold standard for statecraft</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Nuclear India to educated Bharat, how Vajpayee led us to brighter future</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Recalling The Iconic Strategic Leadership Of Atal Bihari Vajpayee</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>The Visionary: Key Decisions Of Vajpayee That Transformed India</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>A Graceful, Stoic and Eloquent Prime Minister: Vajpayee, as I Knew Him</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>सहज स्वभाव वाले तवलक्षण राजनेता ्ी राजरीव शुक्ा</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>The speech that Vajpayee couldn’t finish</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ajatashatru: Remembering Atal Bihari Vajpayee

Shri M Venkaiah Naidu

Atal ji finally gave up and lost this one battle, as he set sail for new unseen horizons. This is a battle none has won so far and Atal ji is no exception. But what makes him vastly different from others of his generation are the several battles that he had fought when he was alive by remaining ‘Atal’ (unmoved) as far as the core values and convictions were concerned. He was both ‘Atal’ and ‘Behari’ (wanderer or a dreamer) all through his life. He stayed rooted to his core beliefs even as he dreamt of a new India. My first brush with Atal ji was in the late 60s when I used to go around Nellore city in a tonga announcing the impending visit of him. Little did I imagine at that time that I would one day be privileged to be the president of the party and sit between Vajpayee ji and Advani ji.

Ever since, I have been fortunate to receive in great abundance the bounty of his love, affection, guidance and patronage. I deem it as a rare honour that such a person of many virtues has guided me through hand-holding as well as promoting me. It is usually said that one’s ‘inner core’ gets reflected in one’s face. Atal ji is a fine example of this. His clarity of thought, strength of convictions, vision for the country and his idea of the inescapable course the nation would take to attain its glory made him so relaxed, and even detached, to the amazement of even his peers. His inerasable smile, in my view, is a clear manifestation of this inner core of Atal ji. Of his 65 years of active public life till 2009, Atal ji spent about 56 years in opposition and only about nine years in power.

He was elected to the Lok Sabha
ten times and twice to the Rajya Sabha. He was the minister of external affairs in the Morarji government and later became prime minister thrice. But, whether he was in opposition or in office, Atal ji made seminal contributions to the growth and evolution of India since its Independence. The great orator that he was, Atal ji excelled as a public speaker and Parliamentarian, winning wide acclaim from across the political spectrum, including from Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. One may say that it is easy to speak eloquently without the responsibility of the office. But Atal ji addressed such doubts squarely as external affairs minister first and later, as prime minister of this vast country. He broke new ground improving frosty relations with our neighbours in quick time, imparting a new perspective to our diplomacy which won him wide acclaim.

As prime minister, he demonstrated a remarkable understanding of the problems plaguing the nation and an ability to address the same. He decisively demonstrated that he was not only a mere orator enjoying the liberty of the flight of imagination while in opposition, but a decisive leader when required to resolve the problems confronting the nation. He had won several battles, both as an opposition politician but even more as the prime minister. As prime minister, Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee pioneered the ‘Mission Connect India’ by radically re-scripting the contours of various core sectors like telecom, infrastructure, including national highways, rural roads, airports and ports, private sector participation, and disinvestment. He proved to be a reformer, par excellence, of which the nation is still reaping rich dividends. Atal ji added ‘Jai Vigyan’ to Shastri ji’s slogan of ‘jai jawan-jai kisan’, underscoring his sense of importance of knowledge in the contemporary times. Vajpayee ji was a fine blend of tenderness and toughness.

While the former trait was on show for long, the latter came out when Pokhran-II was conducted and the way the aggressors were forced to retreat from the Kargil heights. The tenderness of his personality was quite evident in the way he dealt with his peers across the political spectrum and in the manner he nurtured and led coalition governments at the centre at a critical time. Owing to his personal qualities Shri Vajpayee became the first non-Congress prime minister to complete one full term besides being the head of government thrice. He provided an alternate political thought and succeeded in providing a real alternative to the ruling party. He successfully led a coalition of 23 parties proving that he was an able leader providing a stable government.

Shri Vajpayee contributed to Indian polity in multiple ways. He made a major contribution in strengthening democracy in the true spirit of the ideals enshrined in our Constitution. His name will go down in the history as synonymous with and exemplifying the essence of good governance in the country. Both the common man and the political class were won over by his charm, character and conduct. He was both the source and object of confidence of the people that made him one of the few tallest leaders of our country, post Independence. What
made Shri Vajpayee endearing to all the countrymen was the way he conveyed himself to different sections of the society. It was possible for him because he saw no contradiction in his commitment to the core values he believed in and speaking for India as and when required. It was because he was, and remained, a true Indian, appealing to all the Indians.

He never compromised but also never hesitated to speak his heart out when a larger consensus was required to be articulated. It was Atal ji’s remarkable ability. In the process, he mesmerised and motivated millions like me to follow true nationalist ideology. He was a national icon and a true ‘Ajatashatru’, one who had no enemies. In our early days, we used to fondly call Atal ji as ‘taruna hriday samraat’, a leader with a young heart. He remained so till illness struck him and that infectious smile stayed with him all through. ‘Bharat Ratna’ Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee’s qualities of vyaktitva (personality), vakrtrutva (oratory), kartrutva (devotion to duty), mitrutva (friendliness), all combined in netrutva (leadership), will be remembered for a long time to come. He was in the mould of a ‘Philosopher King’. A King who ruled the hearts of all Indians by his words and deeds. Such statesmen and visionaries walk on this earth only once a while. Let’s resolve to carry forward his legacy as a true tribute to him.

Published in Financial Express on August 16, 2018
In times of turbulence and disruption, a nation is blessed to have a leader who rises to become its moral compass and guiding spirit, providing vision, cohesion and direction to his people. And, in such a moment at the turn of the century, India found one in Bihari Vajpayee, who was gifted in spirit, heart and mind.

For those of us who knew him, he was, first, the rarest of human beings, who touched and inspired everyone he met. He was compassionate to the core, generous in spirit, warm beyond measure and kind to a fault. He was deeply respectful of others and gifted with a rare sense of humour that he often turned upon himself.

Orator without parallel, he could switch from disarming humour to a lofty vision with ease, with a rare ability to connect with people naturally, to stir them to self-belief and to a higher cause. Sharply perceptive, he could summarize the most complex issues and discussions in a single sentence or question.

Born into a family of modest means and high ideals, he hailed from a small town in MP. His youth was defined by academic excellence and quest for public service during the gathering momentum of freedom struggle. Starting as an ordinary Karyakarta in the Jana Sangh, he organized the only truly national-level party to be formed in independent India – the BJP – and helmed its organization work after the passing away of Shri Syama Prasad Mookerjee and Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya.

Through the four decades of leadership in Parliament, the struggle against Emergency (who can forget that memorable rally in Delhi’s Ramlila Maidan when his speech became the roar of the nation), the clarity to represent his party with passion but always speak for the nation, he defined the spirit of democracy in India. Firm in his political beliefs, but always accommodating and respectful of other points of view, he set the standards of debate in Parliament. In his simplicity and integrity, in his dignity and empathy, and a sense of personal...
non-attachment to the office, he became an inspiration for a nation of youth.

He rescued the economy from the morass of the mid-1990s, when political instability at home and an uncertain global environment had threatened to derail a still incipient economic reforms process. He sowed the seeds of much of the economic success that we have experienced over the past two decades. For him, growth was a means to empower the weakest and mainstream the marginalized. It’s that vision that continues to drive our government’s policy.

It was Atalji who prepared the foundations of an India that is ready to take on the mantle of global leadership in the 21st century. The futuristic economic policies and reforms of his government ensured prosperity for several Indians. His thrust on next-generation infrastructure particularly roads and telecom contributed to our country’s economic as well as social empowerment.

Atalji irreversibly changed India’s place in the world. He overcame the hesitation of our nation, the resistance of the world and threat of isolation to make India a nuclear weapons power. It was not a decision he took lightly, but one he knew was of paramount importance in the face of mounting challenges to India’s security. No longer would India’s security be vulnerable. At that moment of surge in national pride, his was a voice of restraint and responsibility. And, the world listened to the wisdom of the man of peace. Equally important, he then brought to bear his extraordinary understanding of world affairs and formidable diplomatic skills to gain global acceptance of new realities. Indeed, it is the combination of his legacies of creating strategic capabilities, promoting stronger economic growth, undertaking multi-directional diplomacy and harnessing of diaspora energies that is today the basis for the respect we command across the world.

He transformed five decades of estrangement with USA into an enduring strategic partnership in the course of five years. He also steered India to deep friendship with a new post-Soviet Russia through a strategic partnership in 2000. I had the privilege of accompanying him on a visit to Russia in November 2001 when we concluded a sister province agreement between Gujarat and Astrakhan.

With China, he made the boldest move for peace in an effort to overcome the burdens of a difficult past by establishing the mechanism of Special Representatives for boundary talks. Atal Ji’s conviction that these two ancient civilisations – which are rising powers – can work together to shape the global future continues to guide my thinking.

A person of grassroots, our neighbours were his priority. In many ways, he was the inspiration for, and even pioneer of, our Neighbourhood First policy. He was unwavering in his support as an opposition leader towards Bangladesh’s liberation. He went to Lahore in search of
peace. With persistence and optimism that was his nature, he continued to search for peace and heal the wounds in J&K. But, he was resolute in winning the Kargil War. And, when our Parliament was struck, he made the world recognize the true nature and source of cross-border terrorism against India.

Personally, Atalji was an ideal, a guru, and role model who inspired me deeply. It was he who entrusted me with responsibilities both in Gujarat as well as at the national level. It was he who called me one evening in October 2001, and told me to go to Gujarat as the chief minister. When I told him that I had always worked in the organization, he said he was confident I would fulfill the people’s expectations. The faith he had in me was humbling.

Today, we are a self-assured nation, brimming with the energy of our youth and resolve of our people, eager for change and confident of achieving it, striving for clean and responsive governance, building future of inclusion and opportunity for all Indians. We engage the world as equals and in peace, and we speak for principles and support the aspirations of others. We are on the path that Atalji wanted us to take. He was ahead of the times, because he had a deep sense of history, and he could peer into the soul of India from his grasp of our civilizational ethos.

A life is to be judged not just by the extent of grief that follows when its light goes out. It is also to be measured by the lasting impact on the lives of people and the course of time. For that reason, Atalji was a true Ratna of Bharat. His spirit will continue to guide us as we build the New India of his dreams.
मेरे अटल जी
प्रधानमंत्री श्री नरेन्द्र मोदी

अटल जी अब नहीं रहे। मन नहीं मानता। अटल जी, मेरी आंखों के सामने हैं, स्थिर है। जो हाथी को सबसे पहले जमाते थे, जो स्नेह से, पुकारते हुए मुझे अंदाज में भर लेते थे, वे स्थिर हैं। अटल जी की वे स्थिरता मुझे झकझोर रही है, अस्थिर कर रही है। एक जलन सी है आंखों में, कुछ कहना है, बहुत कुछ कहना लेखक, धारदार पत्रकार और विज्ञानी जननेता के तीन से जानती है। लेकिन मेरे लिए उनका स्थान इससे भी ऊपर था। सिफर इसलिए नहीं कि मुझे उनके साथ बस्तों तक काम करने का अवसर मिला, बल्कि मेरे जीवन, मेरी सोच, मेरे आदर्श-मूल्यों पर जो छाया उन्होंने छोड़ी, जो विभाग उन्होंने मुझ पर किया, उसने है।

वे पंचतत्त्व हैं। वे आकाश, पृथ्वी, जल, अंग, वायु, सबके स्वभाव हैं, वेअटल हैं। जब पहली बार उनसे पहले मेरा नाम लिया गया तो लगा, पाने के सलए जब तक मेरा नाम लेती हुई उनकी वह आवाज मेरे कानों से टकराती रही। मैं कैसे मान सकू ं वह आवाज अब चली गई है।

कभी सोचा नहीं था, कि अटल जी के बारे में ऐसे लिखने के लिए कल्त उठानी पड़ेगी। देश और दुनिया अटल जी को एक स्टंडर्ड पॉप्युलर, धारा प्रवाह वक्ता, सेवदारश्री कवि, विचारक मुझे गढ़ा है, हर स्थिति में अटल रहना सिखाया है।

हमारे देश में अनेक क़ाबिश, मूनि, संत आत्माओं ने जन्म लिया था। देश की आजादी से लेकर आज तक की सवकास यात्रा के लिए भी असंख्य लोगों ने अपना जीवन समर्पित किया है। लेकिन स्वतंत्रता के बाद लोकतन्त्र की रक्षा और 21वीं सदी के सशक्त, सुरक्षित भारत के लिए अटल जी ने जो किया, वह अभूतपूर्व है।

उनके लिए राष्ट्र सशक्त करने था-वाकी सब का कोई महत्व नहीं। इंडिया फर्स्ट –भारत प्रथम, ये मंत्र वाक्य उनका जीवन ध्येय था। ये उपर्युक्त देश के लिए जहरी था तो चिता नहीं की प्रतिवेदन और आलोचनाओं की, क्योंकि देश प्रथम धारापुर कंप्यूटर नहीं मिले, क्रान्तिकारी इंजन नहीं मिले तो परवाह नहीं, हम खुद बनाए, हम खुद अपने दम पर अपनी प्रतिभा और वैज्ञानिक कुशलता के बल पर अत्यधिक धारापुर नया संग्रह कर दिखाए। हम उसे भी उद्यमी को किया। सिफर एक तात्कालिक उनके भीतर काम करती थी- देश प्रथम की जिद।

कात के कपाल पर लिखने और मिटने की ताकत, हिम्मत और चुनौतियों के बादलों में विज्ञ का सूरज उगाने का चमकार
अटल जी कभी लीक पर नहीं चले। उन्होंने सामाजिक और राजनीतिक मामलों में एक रास्ता बनाए और तो कहा । “चाचियों में भी दीये जाने” का अर्थ उन्हें था। पूरी तरह से वे जो कुछ भी कहें थे, उनका मन साधुर का रहा था, और कितना अनहु छोड़ देना है, उसमें उन्हें महारत हासद स्वाभाविक थी।

राष्ट्र की जो उन्होंने सेवा की, समाज में मां भारती के मान समान को उन्हें जो बुलंदी दी, इसके लिए उन्हें अनेक समान भी समले। देशवाससयों ने उन्हें भारत रतन देकर अपना मान भी बढ़ाया। लेकिन उन्हें कभी भी सभी समानों के ऊपर भी नहीं उठाया। देश के गरीब, वंसचत, शोशित के जीवन तर को ऊपर उठाने के लिए वे उन्हें मानते थे। वे अपने समय से बहुत दूर तक देख सकते थे - स्वभाव दृष्टि से लेकिन कर्म की वीर भी थी वहाँ है। भारत मन के तो तो पारसीक मन चाले थे। उन्होंने देशवास की यात्रा की तो जीवन सुरक्षित था, तथापि मित्र बनाने और भारत के रिति की स्थाई आधारिता संहार गए। वे भारत की निज और विकास के लेख थे।

अटल जी का प्रखर राष्ट्रवाद और राष्ट्र के लिए समर्पण करोड़ों देशवासियों को हमेशा से प्रेरित करता रहा है। राष्ट्रवाद उनके लिए सिफर एक नाम नहीं था बल्कि जीवन शैली थी। वे देश को सिफर एक, भरभरा, जमीन का टुकड़ा भर मानते थे, बल्कि एक जीवन, सावधानी इकाई के रूप में देखते थे। “भारत जमीन का टुकड़ा नहीं, जीता जागता राष्ट्रीय है।” वह सिफर भाव नहीं, बल्कि उनका संयम था, जिसके लिए उन्हें अपनी जीवन न्योजन कर दिया। देश का सार्वजनिक जीवन उन्होंने अपनी वस्तु सोच को जीनें में, धारतापर, उन्हें मान लगाया। अतिरिक्त ने हमारे लोकतंत्र पर जो दाग लगाया था उनको मिटाने के लिए अटल जी के प्रयास को देश हमेशा वाद रखा।

राष्ट्रभक्ति की भावना, जनसेवा की प्रेरणा उनके नाम के ही अनुकूल अटल रही। भारत उन्होंने मन में रहा, भारतीयता तन में उठाने देश की जनता को ही अपना आराम माना। भारत के कण-कण, कंकर-कंकर, भारत की बूंद-बूंद को, पवित्र और पूजनीय माना।

अटल जी का प्रखर राष्ट्रवाद और राष्ट्र के लिए समर्पण करोड़ों देशवासियों को हमेशा से प्रेरित करता रहा है। राष्ट्रवाद उनके लिए सिफर एक नाम नहीं था बल्कि जीवन शैली थी। वे देश को सिफर एक, भरभरा, जमीन का टुकड़ा भर मानते थे, बल्कि एक जीवन, सावधानी इकाई के रूप में देखते थे। “भारत जमीन का टुकड़ा नहीं, जीता जागता राष्ट्रीय है।” वह सिफर भाव नहीं, बल्कि उनका संयम था, जिसके लिए उन्हें अपनी जीवन न्योजन कर दिया। देश का सार्वजनिक जीवन उन्होंने अपनी वस्तु सोच को जीनें में, धारतापर, उन्हें मान लगाया। अतिरिक्त ने हमारे लोकतंत्र पर जो दाग लगाया था उनको मिटाने के लिए अटल जी के प्रयास को देश हमेशा वाद रखा।

जितना समाज, जितनी ऊंचाई अटल जी को मिली उतना ही अधिक वह जमीन से जुड़ते गए। अपनी सफलता को कभी भी उन्होंने अपने मस्तिष्क पर प्रभाव नहीं दिया। प्रभू से यह, कीसती की कामना अनेक व्यक्ति करते हैं, लेकिन वे अटल जी ही थे जिन्होंने कहा,

“हे प्रभु! मुझे इतनी ऊंचाई कभी मत देना।
गैरों को गले ना लगा सकूं, इतनी रुखाई कभी मत देना”
अपने देशवासियों से इतनी सहजता और सरलता से जुड़े
रहने की यह कामना ही उनको सामाजिक जीवन के एक अलग पावन पर खड़ा करती है।

वेपीडा सहते थे, बेदना को चुपचाप अपने भीतर समाये रहते थे, पर सबको अभिंत देते रहे- जीवन भर। जब उन्हें कठुआ हुआ तो उन्हें लगा- “देह परवर को दंड है, सब काह को होये, जानी भुगते जान से मुरख भुगते रोए!” उन्होंने जान मारे से अत्यत गहरी बेदनाएं भी सहन कीं और वीतरागी भाव से विवा ले गए।

यदि भारत उनके रोम रोम में था तो विवेक की बेदना उनके भरता थी। इसी वजह से हिरोशिमा जैसी कब्जों का जन्म हुआ। वे विवेक नायक थे। मां भारतीके सच्चे वैश्विक नायक। भारत की सीमाओं के बाहर भारत की कीर्ति और करणा का संदेश स्थापित करने वाले आधुनिक बुद्ध।

कुछ वर्ष पहले लोकसभा में जब उन्हें वर्ष के सर्वश्रेष्ठ सांसद के सम्मान से सम्मानित किया था तब उन्होंने कहा था, “यह देश बड़ा अदूत है, अनूठा है। किसी भी पश्चिम के सिंदूर लगाने अभिवादन किया जा रहा है, अभिवादन किया जा सकता है।”

अपने पुरुषार्थ को, अपनी कर्तव्यविष्ठा को राष्ट्र के लिए विश्वसनीय करने उनके व्यक्तित्व की महानता को प्रतिविरोध कराता है। यही सवा सौ करोड़ देशवासियों के लिए उनका इतना बड़ा और प्रखर संदेश है। देश के साधनों, संसाधनों पर पूरा भरोसा करते हुए, हमें अब अटल जी के सपनों का पूरा करना है, उनके सपनों का भारत बनाना है।

नए भारत का यही संकेत, यही बवालते में अपनी तरफ से और सवा सौ करोड़ देशवासियों की तरफ से अटल जी को श्रद्धांजलि अर्पित करता हूं, उन्हें नमन करता हूं।
श्री अमीत शाह, राष्ट्रीय अध्यक्ष, भाजपा

अटल बिहारी वाजपेयी इस देश की राष्ट्रीयता के प्राणतत्त्व थे। भारत क्या है, अगर इसे एक पक्ष में समझा गया तो अटल बिहारी वाजपेयी का नाम ही काफी है। वे लगभग भारत की उत्तरार्द्ध के तहत संसदीय प्रणाली के सबसे नेता रहे। अपनी चक्रवृत्त क्षमता से वे लोगों के दिलों में बसते थे। उनकी बातों पर सरस्वती उड़ानमान थी। वे उदयन के प्रणेता थे।

अपने जीवन के लंबे संसदीय जीवन में देश की राजनीति को इस तप्ती को सदैव पलकों पर सबसे रखा। एक ऐसा अटल जो आजीवन राग-अनुराग और लोभ-देह से दूर राजनीति का मानव सेवा की प्रायोगिकता सिद्ध करते थे लगातार।

अटल जी का जीवन आदर्शमयी प्रतिमा का ऐसा इंद्रधनुष था जिसके हर रंग में मौसमिकता की छाप थी। पत्रकार का जीवन जिया तो उसके शीर्षस्थ प्रतिमाओं के हर खांचे पर लंबाई की तरह खराब रहे। राजनीति के बीच अर्जुन, पांचवें जैसे पत्रों को उनकी प्रमाणिकता और लोकप्रियता के शिखर तक पहुंचाया। कवि की धूमिका बचाए तो उदयन भेंट की समस्त उपभोक्ता बैठनी कर दी। अंतःकरण से गाया। ध्वानों से निभाया। कभी कुछ मांग भी तो बस इनका-

"मेरे प्रभु!
मुझे इतनी ऊंचाई कभी मत देना
गैरों को गले न लगा सकूँ
इतनी उंचाई कभी मत देना।"

उनके भीतर का राजनीतिक जीवन की बस एक ही दृष्टि रही। उनके राजनीतिक जीवन की बस एक ही दृष्टि रही। एक ऐसे भारत का निर्माण कर सके जो भूख, भय, निर्भरता और अभाव से मुक्त हो। वे इसी आदर्श के लिए जिए।
इसी की खासतर मे। जीवन मे न कुछ जोड़ा, न घटाया। सिफर दिया।
वो भी निम्पह हाथों से। डॉ. श्याम प्रसाद मुखर्जी और पंडित दीन
दयाल उपाध्याय के आदायाम की फलित भूमिप पर उन्होंनें राजनीति
के जो अजेय सोपान गढ़े वो आज ऐसी लेकिन बन चुके हैं जिन्हें
पार करने का सहास स्वयं काल के पास भी नहीं।

देश के सवा सौ करोड से ज्यादा लोगों के ‘अटल जी’
बांध अजेय वाजपेयी हमारी इस राजनीति से कहीं क़ौर
थे। करीव और वजन से वृद्धावर ता तत्वे वाले वे आकरके
राजसत्ता थे। देश ही या विज्ञ करीव पार्टी हो पर इसीदिगे दल
सभी उनकी प्रतिभा के कायल थे। सिफर की सदी के भी नहीं
वृत्तिकी सदी के भी सभी लोकप्रिय वक्ता रहे।

पंडित दीनदयाल उपाध्याय ने अटल विहारी वाजपेयी में
भारत का भविष्य देखा था। पंडित जवाहर लाल नेहरू ने कहा
था कि ‘वे एक दिन भारत का नेतृत्व करेंगे। डॉ. रामरोहिनी लोहिया
उनके हिंदी प्रेम के प्रशंसक थे। पूर्व प्रधानमंत्री चंद्रशेखर उन्हें संसद
में ‘गुरुदेव’ कह कर ही बुलाते थे। पंडित दीनदयाल ने भारत के
प्रधानमंत्री पद तक पहुंचा था। उनकी यह यात्रा बेहद ही रोचक
और असवर्मणीय रही। तीन बार देश के प्रधानमंत्री बनने वाले
अटल विहारी वाजपेयी सही मायनों में पहले गैर कांग्रेसी प्रधानमंत्री
थे। यानी अब तक बने प्रधानमंत्रयों से इतर न तो वे कभी कांग्रेस
में रहे, न नहीं कांग्रेस के समथितन से रहे। वो शुद्ध अथिशों में का
गैर-कांग्रेस सवरोधी राजनीति की धुरी थे। पंसित नेहरू के बाद वे अकर
ऐसे प्रधानमंत्री थे जिन्होंने लगातार तीन जनादेशों के बाद प्रधानमंत्री
का पद पाया।

भारतीय राजनीति के इस सदाबहार नायक ने विज्ञ से
भारतीय राजनीति के बाद पत्रकारिता की और तीन समाचार पत्रों
‘राष्ट्रधर’, ‘राष्ट्रशिक्षान’ और ‘बीसर्ग’ का संपादन भी किया।
वाजपेयी जी देश के एक मात्र सांसद थे, जिन्होंने देश की हास
अलग-अलग सीटों से छुपाव जीता था। जवाहर वाजपेयी
फहर प्रधानमंत्री थे, जो प्रधानमंत्री बनने से पहले लंबे समय तक
नेता विहारी दल रहे। भारतीय राजनीति के विष्टुत वैज्ञानिक को
अटल जी ने संभवतः और यात्रा के साथ भी। वे उसके हर सी
को हास्यरहे थे इसलिए इस यात्रा के उपर से उसे विदेश थे। वे
वसके थे। जिनके पास इस देश के सवा सौ करोड श्रीटों में से
सबके लिए कुछ न कुछ मैथिली था। इसलिए गए साठ बार से
देश उनकी ओर खींचता गया।

अटल जी के शासनकाल में भारत दुसनया के उन ताकतवर
देशों में स्थान हुआ, जिनकी सभी लोहा मानने लगे। पूर्व में
पोलिसूल की श्रृंखला से हम दुसनया के सामने सीना तान
कर प्रधानमंत्री रहते हुए उन्हें ‘भय’ और ‘भूखमुक्’ भारत का
सपना देखा था। वृत्त विदेशमंत्री उन्हें संयुक्त राष्ट्र संपद में पहली

प्रकाशन- http://base.amitshah.co.in, 16 अगस्त 2018
Atalji, the Quintessential Gentleman – How he made a difference?

Shri Arun Jaitley

Atalji’s demise is referred to by many as end of an era. I, however, consider it as a continuation of the era of which he was one who laid the foundation.

The political and ideological journey

His political journey shaped his ideology. His convictions were shaped by his deep commitment to the nation from the student days association with the Quit India Movement to his joining the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and then being associated with Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee as one of the founders of the Bharatiya Jan Sangh. During his early days in the Jan Sangh, he was associated with the ‘Kashmir Satyagraha’ which wanted to lift several restrictions on Indian citizens in relation to the State. He was, alongwith Dr. Mookerjee, a strong opponent of the Liaquat-Nehru Pact. Once in Parliament from 1957 his speeches as a young parliamentarian on the Tibet crisis and the 1962 war debacle left their impact on all. At a young age, he became a principal face of the Jan Sangh. He travelled across the country and was being hailed as a charismatic orator. He once told us that till the mid-1980s most of his travel was either by trains or by roads. At times even by busses. During his tours he mostly stayed at the homes of political workers. This was when a young party was being built up.

Disillusionment with the Congress had started after the 1962 China war debacle. It was at this stage that Dr. Lohia pioneered the idea of ‘Congress Hatao Desh Bachao’ and seat coordination in
critical bye-elections between Dr. Lohia, Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya and Acharya Kripalani had begun. Deen Dayalji, alongwith his political team, mostly young leaders in their 30s, was busy creating an organisational structure of the party. It bore results in 1967 when the Jan Sangh emerged with a large contingent of MPs in Parliament, got the absolute majority in National Capital Territory of Delhi and made a sizeable presence in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Punjab. After Deen Dayalji’s sudden demise, the mantle of Jan Sangh leadership fell on Atalji. Not compromising with Party’s core beliefs, he started coordinating with other political parties and became a nationally respected and acceptable face of the Jan Sangh. He had an ability to rise above partisan interests which he displayed by strongly standing behind the Government during the 1971 war. In 1974, the movement led by Shri Jayaprakash Narayan witnessed the Jan Sangh under Atalji plunge into it and give it a core strength. The battle against the Emergency and for restoration of democracy was fought by Jan Sangh under his leadership. After a brief experience in the Janata Government, the Jan Sangh was back to square one.

The merger of the Jan Sangh and other political parties in the Janata Party had failed. It was a short lived experiment. Thus in 1980 he revived the BJP. The inaugural session of the BJP witnessed an aspirational cadre with a self-belief chanting ‘Pradhan Mantri Ki Agli Bari – Atal Bihari, Atal Bihari’.

When the BJP was formed, it suffered initial isolation. Its parliamentary presence was minimal. It faced its lowest ebb in 1984. Notwithstanding this adversity, the duo of Atalji and Shri L.K. Advaniji held on to their political space and remained determined to expand the BJP. From 89 Lok Sabha seats in 1989 to 121 seats in 1991, to 166 seats in 1996 and finally 183 seats in 1998. The isolated BJP had now become the center-stage party of Indian politics. Atalji led the party to great victories in 1998 and 1999 and had a successful tenure as a Prime Minister. India has now witnessed the demolition of a single party domination in the electoral space. The BJP had expanded its geographical and social base.

Atalji’s political style

The essential aspect of his political
journey, true to his name ‘Atal’ was determination. In the world’s largest democracy only the Congress Party dominated in the first few decades. Atalji created an alternative, which in the last two decades became larger and bigger than the Congress. Alongwith Advaniji, he created a second line leaders both in the Center and the States. He was always open to ideas; always gave priority to national interest; was always at ease in dealing with both friends and opponents and never allowed himself to get into any petty controversy. He had no personal enemies since he spoke mostly on issues rather than individuals. He was a wordsmith. He could use the facility of language to get out of any challenging situation. What he will be remembered for most will be oration both in Parliament and outside. In Parliament, he was heard in pin drop silence. In his public meetings audiences waited for hours before he could arrive. His oration was always blended with humour. His ability for an instant response was unmatched. His choice of words, his turn of phrases, the poetry that he injected in his expression, gave him the ability to even explain the most complicated issue in a simple language.

His Prime Ministerial tenure

Besides the BJP, his coalition at different points of time had the Akali Dal, Shiv Sena, National Conference, Janata Dal (U), Trinamool Congress, BJD, TDP, DMK, AIADMK, besides individuals like Shri K.C. Pant and Shri Ramakrishna Hegde.

The Nuclear Test in 1998 was a defining moment of his Government. He went out of the way to work for peace with Pakistan. But when the need arose, he inflicted a severe blow to it in Kargil. Both Pokhran and Kargil were his high points. On the economic front, he was a liberaliser. National Highway, rural roads, better infrastructure, a new telecom policy which was pragmatic, a new electricity law are evidence of this. In any intra-Governmental debate, his nod inevitably was for the liberal economic view. He corrected the foreign policy imbalance in the changed global environment.

Several personal traits

As a Prime Minister, he was never harsh on either the bureaucrats or his Ministers. In a polite but firm language he could convey more to his subordinates than what he desired. The Cabinet Meetings that he presided lasted for hours. He allowed a discussion on almost every subject and eventually reconciled the conflicting viewpoints depending on their merits. He loved food. Ministers in his Government still occasionally speak about the quality of snacks which was served in his Cabinet Meetings. He even loved to experiment foods when he travelled internationally. In India, he had his own favourite places in various cities and occasionally when he got out of the trains in the morning, he would have breakfast on one of them before reaching home.

The poet in him also created a dreamer. He dreamt of his own vision. Many of those were born out of his idealism. In fact, several lines of different poems that he wrote reflected his own mood.

During the Emergency, he had a serious problem with his back. He was brought to the All India Institute of Medical Sciences while in detention for treatment. His orthopaedic doctor asked him he should have always sat straight, how
can the pain occur? “Kya Aap Jhuk Gaye The?”, to which the man in pain not losing his sense of humour replied in the context of the Emergency:

झुकना तो सीखा नहीं डॉक्टर साहब । यूँ कहिये मुड गए होंगे”

This made him pen down on his hospital bed his famous lines against the Emergency:

“टूट सकते हैं मगर हम झुक नहीं सकते”

This poem became one of the most distributed pamphlets during the Emergency.

Atalji was a democrat. His political style was liberal. He accepted criticism. He was a product of parliamentary democracy and, therefore, valued consensus. He bore no malice. He communicated even with those who disagreed. Whether in opposition or the Government, his attitude never changed. He was an iconic communicator unparalleled in recent history. All this added to his charisma. His greatest asset was his credibility where he was never in any controversy. Yet in an era dominated by the Nehruvian Congress, he created a political party which was an ideological alternative to the Congress which disagreed on various issues with the Congress, which took the Congress head on, struggled for almost five decades and in the last two decades not only became an alternative to Congress but overtook it. Atalji ran a marathon. He was a patient runner. But for him, Advaniji and their other colleagues, Indian democracy would have looked different – dominated by one party, one family with a lot of scattered smaller parties. That did not happen. Atalji and his colleagues made the difference. Atalji has left the world. But the era of which he laid the foundation will prosper even more. That is the Vajpayee legacy.

Published in Facebook on August 17, 2018
भविष्य की राह दिखाने वाले अटल युग

श्री अरुण जेटली

अटल जी के निधन को तमाम लोग एक युग का अंत बता रहे हैं, लेकिन मेरे ख्याल से वह उस युग की निरंतरता ही है जिसके वह प्रवर्तक रहे। उनकी राजनीतिक यात्रा की शुरुआत छात्र जीवन में भारत छोड़ो आंदोलन में भाग लेने से हुई। पिर वह राष्ट्रीय चीन से मिली पराजय के बाद कांग्रेस से मोहभंग हो रहा था तब डॉ. लोहिया ने ‘कांग्रेस हटाओ, देश बचाओ’ के अभियान का निगम बजाया और उपचारों में प. दीनदयाल उपाध्याय और आचार्य कृपलानी के साथ सीटों पर साझे दरों को लेकर बात

स्वयंसेवक संघ जुड़े। उसके बाद डॉ. रामचंद्र प्रसाद मुखर्जी के आह्वान पर भारतीय जनसंघ के संस्थापकों में से एक रहे। जनसंघ के शुरुआती दौर में वह ‘कर्मगार सत्याग्रह’ से जुड़े जिसका मकसद राज्य में भारतीय नागरिकों पर लगे तमाम प्रतिबंधों को हटावा था। चिन्हों के साथ ही वह भी तिरुत्पुर-नेहरू समझौते के पोर विरोधी थे। 1957 में एक युवा सांसद के तौर पर तिब्बत संकट और पिर 1962 में चीन से मिली पराजय से संदर्भ में उनके भागणों ने सभी को प्रभावित किया। युवावस्था में ही वह जनसंघ का प्रमुख चेहरा बन गए। उन्होंने देश भर का दौरा करना प्रमुख चेहरा बन गए। उन्होंने देश भर का दौरा करराक उन्होंने सभी को प्रभावित किया। उन्होंने देश भर का दौरा करना प्रमुख चेहरा बन गए। उन्होंने देश भर का दौरा करना प्रमुख चेहरा बन गए।
नेतृत्व में जनसंघ के सहयोग से 1974 में जयप्रकाश नारायण के आंदोलन को बहुत मजबूत बनाने के लिए उनके नेतृत्व में जनसंघ ने लड़ाई लड़ी। जनता सरकार में कुछ समय के लिए सत्ता में भारी भारी भी मिली, लेकिन वह प्रयाग किए गए प्रयासों के लिए 1980 में जनसंघ का आंदोलन ने पुनर्जीवन हुआ और उदारता राजनीति में ही उसके कार्यकर्ताओं ने नए दिशा दिखाईँ। "प्रामाण्यता की असली अर्थ, अदल, विवाद, अदल विवाद के साथ शासनशील दीर्घ भारतीय राजनीतिक तुलनात्मक की शिकार थी। 1984 के चुनाव में उनके पुनर्जीवन हुआ खासहासी। इसके तत्त्वात्मक बदलाव के बारे में हड़प्पा राजनीतिक वृद्धि का शिकार हो गया। 1989 के चुनाव में भाजपा को महत्वपूर्ण भागीदारी की। भाजपा ने अपने प्रारंभिक दौर में बड़े शौकीन थे। 1984 के चुनाव में उनकी शुरुआत ही खराब रही। इससे हार रहे आंदोलन के नेता अटल जी और आिवाणी जी की जोड़ी भाजपा के लिए दुर्दृष्टिकोण रही।

नतीजे में 1989 के चुनाव में भाजपा को लोकसभा की 89 सीटें समलीं, सहजाता 1991 में बढ़कर 121 हो गया। सरकार यह आंकडा 1996 में आधे, 1998 में बढ़कर 183 तक पहुंच गया। अलग-थिलग पड़ी भाजपा अब भारतीय राजनीति की मुख्यधारा की पाटजी बन गई थी। 1998 और 1999 में अटल जी के नेतृत्व में पाटजी को शानदार जीत समलीं और प्रधानमंत्री के रूप में वह बेहद सरल रहे। उन्होंने भारतीय राजनीति में एक पाटजी के वच्फ्व को खतम करा। भाजपा ने अपने सामाजिक एवं भौगोलिक दायरे में सफलता की। दुनिया के सबसे बड़े लोकतांत्रिक राजनीतिक दीर्घ भारतीय संसदीय लोकतांत्रिक प्रसारों में पगे हुए होने के कारण आमसहमती की कद्र करते थे। सभी से कोई द्वार नहीं रखते थे। सहमत रखने वालों से भी संवाद करते थे। समय-समय पर गठबंधन में उनसे अलग-अलग साथी जुड़ते रहे। पंत और रामकृष्ण हेगडे जैसे सातरों को भी उन्होंने साथी सलया।

1998 में प्रधानमंत्री के रूप में रवैया कभी नहीं बदला। वह ऐसे प्रसतसष्ठत ओज्वी वक्ा थे जो सहमती हासल इस तहास में समसाल समलना मुमसकन नहीं। साख उनकी सबसे बडी थिाती थिी। नेहरूवादी का ंग्ेस के दबदबे वाले दौर में उनकी भाजपा दुसरी पांत के प्रमुख उदाहरण है। सरकार के भीतर सकसी भी चचा्फ में उन्हें उदार आसथि्फक दृसटिकोण के सहमायती रहे। बदलते वैसश्क पररदृशय में उन्होंने सवदेश नीसत को भी सही सदशा में मोडा। प्रधानमंत्री के रूप में वह अपने मातहत मंसत्रयों और नौकरशाहों पर कभी सखत नहीं रहे। सवनम्र, ले सकन दृढ लहजे में अपने मातहतों से वह अपनी बात मनवा लेते थे। उनकी कसवताओं की तमाम शंसों उनके समजाज का ही प्रसतसबंब हैं। आपातकाल के दौरान कमर में तकलीर के उपचार के लिए उन्हें एमस ले जाया गया। डॉक्टर ने पूछा कि क्या आप झुक गए थिे? दर्द में भी उनका हास्यवध कायम था। उन्होंने आपातकाल के सर्वर में जब विवाद रहा, 'झुकना तो सीखा नहीं डॉक्टर साहब, मुड गए होंगे।' इसी सवचार से उन्होंने असत्य के बदल पर ही झुकने ही नहीं सकते, उनके अनुसार वह भले ही इस दुनिया से सवदा हो गए हों, ले सकन उन्होंने सजस दौर की सवदा रखी वह आगे और समृद्ध होता जाएगा।

प्रकाशन- दैमनक जागरण, 18 अगस्त 2018
His weapon was the word, not the sword

MJ Akbar

The distance between Treasury benches and its “loyal” Opposition in Britain’s House of Commons is, famously, the length of two swords plus one inch. The inference is clear. Politicians might be at daggers drawn, but democracy cannot afford drawn swords.

Atal Bihari Vajpayee would have sniffed at such political architecture. His weapon was the word, not the sword. His wordplay had the flexibility of oratory and the principles of a humanist. His language was as mellifluous as his smile; even when the cut and thrust of debate demanded a touch of verbal stiletto, it was tempered by the goodwill of geniality rather than the bitterness of angst.

Some associates disliked his overt or covert generosity to opponents. He wasn’t bothered. He could be hurt when recipients of his generosity reciprocated with malice. But this did not much bother him either. He did what he did because he believed it was the right thing to do.

Anger was part of neither his personality nor his preference. If memory serves, he was angry in public just once, at a rally in Delhi in January 1977, after 19 months of draconian Emergency during which Mrs Indira Gandhi had imprisoned India and exiled India’s democratic values. India was still numb, and depressed. No one believed that Mrs Gandhi could be defeated in the impending general election. No one knew that India was smouldering beneath a fragile surface.

On that cold January evening, Vajpayee’s speech, heavy with sarcasm, sparkling with promise, and infused with faith in the Indian people, lit the fuse that led to a revolution.

He was angry not merely because he had been sent, in a brazen exercise of injustice, to jail; or because the courts had been impaled; or because the political process had been usurped by Congress. He was angry because democracy had been grievously wounded. He was a democrat because his heart was passionate about liberty; and his head said that India, with its ancient philosophy of pluralism, could
only function as a democracy. Dynasties, in contrast, believed in supremacy and exclusion; it was no accident that Mrs Gandhi began to visibly nurture a dynasty only during this obnoxious Emergency. Vajpayee’s main concern was the future of India and Indians. He was a champion of democracy because he was a servant of the people. That is the logic of freedom.

Vajpayee was not weaned on silver spoons; he wrote his own destiny. His father was a school-teacher. He was born into an emerging middle class, the backbone of India. His virtues, inherited from civilisational values, became the foundation on which he could structure his formidable talents. He did not enter politics to become prime minister of India. Even independence seemed psychologically distant when, as a student in 1942, he joined Gandhi’s Quit India movement to, in the words of the Mahatma, “do or die”. When he became a member of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh in 1951, no contemporary believed it would one day lead a national government, albeit in a slightly altered avatar. Power, when it came, was a by-product of commitment.

Any conscientious prime minister wears a crown of thorns during the day and sleeps at night on a bed of nails. But above all, this responsibility tests two qualities: vision, on the strategic balance, and crisis management, on tactical scales. As prime minister, Vajpayee wrote an indelible chapter in India’s history with the detonation of one fusion and two fission bombs on 11 May 1998, and two additional fission devices two days later. Previous PMs had shied away from traversing the last mile of a national vision. Vajpayee’s cool, and silent, steps to this visionary horizon took the world’s breath away. For India, it was a moment of rebirth.

Vajpayee’s leadership was tested by Kargil. Pakistan’s onslaught, thinly veiled by familiar military deceit, had the advantage of surprise. Vajpayee’s resilience, patience and belief gave our armed forces the leadership they needed for victory.

There was much surprise, and even a hint of contradiction, when the leader who went to Lahore for peace, hosted Pervez Musharraf, the architect of Kargil, at the Agra summit. But Vajpayee, who dreamt of resolution, understood a critical fact: peace is possible only when security is achieved. Between a nuclear arsenal and Kargil he had proved to Pakistan the futility of terrorism and war. It was now up to Pakistan to abandon both and build amity between two sovereign nations. Alas, Pakistan never seems to be awake when history beckons.

As is well known, Vajpayee was also a brilliant poet. There have been many writers [and more re-writers] who have done well enough in politics; but the combination of poet and politician is rare. Uniquely, Vajpayee was equally honest to both poetry and politics. That is what lifted him from excellent Prime Minister to a hero of his generation.
His charisma, poetry had impact across the border

Hardeep Singh Puri

I first met Atal Bihari Vajpayee as a young student in Delhi University. My friend, the late Ashok Saikia, who later served in the PMO, was a family friend of Vajpayee. He introduced me to the young, debonair and fast-rising star in Jana Sangh: Vajpayee, a poet and a statesman.

During those days, it was possible to spot Vajpayee and Lal Krishna Advani catching an evening movie at Connaught Place.

It was his leadership qualities that reverberated amongst us college students during the dark days of the Emergency. It was ironic that curtailing and quashing of civil liberties was celebrated in many circles, including at Delhi University. When politics had sunk to a new low, it was Vajpayee and many like him who stood tall, encouraging students to defend our democratic ideals.

My next encounter with Vajpayee was in 1978, when I was a young Foreign Service officer in Tokyo, and he on a visit as minister of external affairs.

A year before, speaking at the UN General Assembly in September 1977, Vajpayee had delivered a memorable speech, parts of which still resonate: “Our success and failure should be measured by one metric alone: whether we are able to achieve justice and prosperity for humankind — for each man, woman and child.”

He was a firm believer in and supporter of the multilateral system anchored in the UN and famously said: “There was an implicit conviction that the UN would be stronger than the sum of its constituent member-states.” Yet he was realistic: “In the euphoria after the Cold War, there was a misplaced notion that the UN could solve every problem anywhere.”
His wit and charm captured the imagination of a young, aspirational India, looking to the new millennium for peace and prosperity. On the domestic front, he chose to anchor BJP’s ethos in Gandhian ideals, stating: “For the Bharatiya Janata Party, Gandhian socialism is what we want to achieve and make society free of exploitation and full of opportunities.”

I had the privilege of serving in the external affairs ministry and as deputy high commissioner in London when he was Prime Minister. He laid the foundation of our nuclear arsenal. A few PMs before Vajpayee had made similar attempts, but it was only under Vajpayee’s leadership that we were able to keep our cards close to our chest, not letting out a whisper. A man known for oratory had earned the trust of a select few scientists and government officers, and the rest, as they say, is history.

Even as he made India go nuclear, his statesmanship ensured India and Pakistan enjoyed perhaps their best relations since the two nations became independent. The sight of an Indian prime minister embarking on a bus yatra from Delhi to Lahore will remain etched in our memories. His charisma and poetry had an instant impact on both sides of the border — families separated during Partition were in tears at his warmth.

On the domestic economy front, Vajpayee’s achievements have stood the test of time. He ushered in India’s telecom revolution; disinvested public sector companies; envisioned the Golden Quadrilateral to connect India’s largest metropolises; and rationalised taxation in the country, which unleashed the animal spirit of India’s entrepreneurs. In a sense, Vajpayee laid the foundation for ‘sabka saath sabka vikas’ of the Modi-led government. It was to recognise this that the current NDA government termed December 25, the birth anniversary of Vajpayee, Good Governance Day.

Political observers have used various terms to describe Vajpayee: ‘statesman’ is perhaps the most commonly used to describe him. But for members of the Bhartiya Janata Party, he was more — a father figure whose ideals we seek to follow. Each of us, in our own way, is attempting to build on his vision of India — a nation with a deep civilizational past, and a young, modern republic, rooted in constitutional democracy. Vajpayee for us will remain the guiding light in these efforts and we in turn will seek to make him proud of our achievements.

Published in The Times of India on 17 August, 2018
Atalji’s love of the nation took precedence over love of power

Atalji practised his brand of politics without any hesitation or rethink. We have successfully done away with untouchability in social life. Yet, we acquired a new type of scourge called political untouchability. An atmosphere of intense hatred pervades the political arena today. Atalji never practised such politics.

Atalji’s demise is an irreparable loss to contemporary India. A statesman, a poet and, above all, a humanist, Atalji practised a version of politics that is rare to find — a politics in which love of the nation took precedence over love of power; in which feelings, sentiments and emotions found a place in the world of cut-throat competitive politicking; in which dignity and respect for everyone big and small, friend and adversary alike were the way, not disrespect and rejection, abuse and trolling.

Atalji lived a transparent life. He was not a split personality, something from outside and something else from within. Like Gandhi, his life, too, both personal and political, had been an open book. Whether it was his fondness for his family or food, or whether it was about strong political convictions as a quintessential democrat, nothing was hidden from the public eye and scrutiny. At the end, everyone loved him, cared for him and admired him for this very quality of the courage of conviction.

But he never held himself above the party organisation. A true Swayamsevak, he religiously obeyed the decisions of the party as a disciplined Karyakarta even when he was not fully in agreement with those. “Politics and discipline don’t go together. The rare exception is Atal Bihari Vajpayee,” commented Walter Andersen, author and researcher.

Atalji practised his brand of politics without any hesitation or rethink. We have successfully done away with untouchability in social life. Yet, we acquired a new type of scourge called political untouchability. An atmosphere of intense hatred pervades the political arena today. Atalji never practised such politics.

The Bharatiya Jana Sangh, of which he was one of the tallest leaders, was the arch rival of the Congress and Nehru throughout. But neither Atalji nor Nehru ever allowed this ideological adversity to come in the way of mutual respect and
goodwill. Nehru would observe that one day the young parliamentarian will rise to occupy his seat. On his part, Atalji, who made ferocious attacks on Nehru’s policies in Parliament, would speak out from his heart in the same Parliament after Nehru’s funeral, saying: “In spite of a difference of opinion, we have nothing but respect for his great ideals, his integrity, his love for the country and his indomitable courage. I pay my humble homage to that great soul.”

This quality he retained till the end. A real tribute to any leader is when his opponents feel his loss. Today when he is not there anymore, the grief, the loss is being felt not only by his partymen and his countrymen, but even by the neighbours. His bus trip to Lahore, the hand of friendship he extended to Pervez Musharraf and his famous address in Srinagar in 2003 as Prime Minister wherein he had talked about ‘Kashmiriyat, Jamhooriyat and Insaniyat’ make him one of the greatest statesmen the country has ever produced.

He respected institutions. As Prime Minister, he trusted and reposed faith in his colleagues in the Cabinet. His colleagues in the Cabinet recall that in several meetings he wouldn’t utter a single word and patiently listen to the views of all colleagues and take decisions after due diligence. Where he needed to give credit to his Cabinet colleague, he wouldn’t hesitate.

Atalji was compassionate with Karyakartas. Even at the height of his popularity, he never displayed any arrogance. He was beloved Atalji for many, including me. As a 28-year old journalist of a Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh magazine, I went to Delhi in 1993 to interview him. Parliament was in session and he was the leader of opposition. Babri masjid had fallen just a few months before. I had some awkward questions for him, betraying my inexperience. He didn’t become angry. Instead, he gently guided me through the interview for 15 minutes, giving the right answers to my wrong questions. Kishen Lal Sharma, an elderly MP, peeped in to remind that it was time to go inside the Parliament. ‘Apne Andhra ke Pracharak ko patrakarita sikha raha hun” (“I am teaching journalism to our Pracharak from Andhra), Atalji said.

On one occasion, after the fall of his 13-day government in 1996, I had another opportunity to meet him briefly. How does it feel like losing power in just 13 days, I asked. He taught me a lesson through his answer. “Rajneeti me jaldbaji nahi, patience chahiye. Pratiksha karne ka dhaireya chahiye” (In politics, one needs patience, not haste. One should have the patience to wait), he replied. He waited for a decade or more without losing nerve when BJP was reduced to two members in Parliament. And his patience paid off.

“Obituary should be an exercise in contemporary history; not a funeral oration,” said British journalist Peter Utley. Let us look at it through that prism. True, with the passing of Atalji, an era has come to an end. It is difficult to find another Atalji amidst us. But this ‘end of an era’ statement has become too much of a cliché. Atalji as a person is no more. But it is time we brought back the era of his politics — politics of positivity, compassion, dignity and goodwill.

Published in Hindustan Times on August 17, 2018
अपने लिए तो सब जीते हैं, पर अटल जी

देश के लिए जिये

प्रभा्त झा, सांसद राजय सभा एवं राष्ट्रीय उपाधयक्ष भाजपा

अपने शलए तो सि जीते हैं, पर अटल जी

िेि के  शलए जजये

ऐ मातृभूसम के  मातृभक्, पाकर तुमको हम धनय हुये।

ले पुनः जनम तू एक बार, सत नमन तुझे है बार बार।।

वर्तमान भारतीय राजनीति में सत्ता वा विपक्ष में रहते हुये
जन श्रद्धा का केन्द्र बने रहना उनना ही दुकार है जितना कि आज
भी चांद पर पहुंचना। अटल विहारी वाजपेयी 12 साल से बिस्तर
पर रहे, पर कोई देख ऐसा नहीं गया होगा जब उनकी चचारी करोड़ो
पर मिन नहीं होती रही होगी। आजादी के पहले के नेताओं द्वारा
समाज की जो क्पना हुआ करती थी उसे बनाये रखने का काम
जो अटल जी ने किया वो आज से पहले देश के किसी भी नेता
ने नहीं किया।

संसद में भारत के प्रथम प्रधानमंत्री पंसित जवाहर लाल
नेहरू के समक् संसद में अपनी वाणी से सदन के सदों के साकार.
सच में नेहरू जी ने उनहे जो कु छ देखा उसे अटल जी ने अपने कम्फ
से उस ऊंचाई तक पहुंच कर जनता के सपनों को साकार सकया।
अटल जी भारत के वो व्यक्तिक रह जो विपक्ष में रहते हुये
भी देस उनके बारे में वह सोचता रहा कि आज नहीं कल यह व्यक्ति
भारत का राज्वत्ता बनेगा। राजनीति में जनता वाद नेता के बारे में
सोचने लगे कि सच में इस व्यक्ति को राजनीतिक होना चाहिये तो
उस व्यक्ति का क्मन व्यं साथि्फक हो जाता है। अटल जी ऐसे ही
ससर हो। अटल जी नेताशैली प्रस्तर से नेता बने। नेता बनने के लिये
उन्होने कभी कोई जोड तोड नहीं की।

हम व्यालियर के लोग अटल जी को बहुत करीब में जानते
रहे हैं। हम उनके पासन भी नहीं, पर व्यालियर के होने के नाते
शतः हमें गव्फ महसूस होता है सक हम उस नेता के हैं, जहां
अटल विहारी वाजपेयी जैसे सखस पैदा हुये।

अटल विहारी वाजपेयी जी ने कभी अपने बारे में नहीं
सोचा, वे सेवा देस के बारे में सोचा रहे। आजादी के बाद के सात
दशकों के वे ऐसे आशिर्वाद नेता रहे जिनके बारे में हर नागररक कहाँ
न कार्ती श्रद्धा भाव रखता रहे। वे भारत के आशिर्वाद ऐसे नेता रहे
जिनकी सुनने के लिये लोग अपने आप आते थे लोगों को लाने
का कोई प्रयतन नहीं करना पडता था। भारत की व्यं की राजनीति
में अपनी वाणी से भारत के ही हो विश्व के लोगों के मन में
अपना पर बनना लेना सामान्य बात नहीं है। उनकी व्यंन का महत्त
इसलिये बना क्योंकि उनकी वाणी और चत्र में दुरी नहीं हआ
करती थी। वो जैसा बोलते वे दैंिी ही हिंदुस्थी जीति थे। 'अटल
जी क्या बोलेंगे?' इस पर देश इंतजार करता था। यदि किसी व्यक्ति
की वाणी के अंतर्गत उसने हुई उसका इंतजार करते, सच में वो
व्यक्तिक अंतर्गत होता है। आग हम उन्हें बद (सर्वत्री) पुत्र कहने
तो अतिशयक नहीं होगी। अपने लिये तो सब जीते हैं, देश के
लिये हर पतल जीने वाले व्यक्ति बहुत कम होते हैं।

‘नेता’ शब्द का जब सृस्ति में निम्नण हआ होगा, उस
समय जो कल्पना की गई होगी उसका यदि भारत की जमीन पर
श्य-प्रश्य उतारने का और अपने जीवन शैली से जिसने जीने
की कोशिश का उस व्यक्ति का नाम अटल विहारी वाजपेयी है।
वो देश के जन गण मन को जीतते रहे। उन्होंने भारत की राजनीति में
एक ऐसी तक्रीर खींची कि यदि आप भारत माता की सेवा करना
चाहते है तो सिर्फ सत्ता में रहकर ही नहीं व्यक्ति विपक्ष में रहकर भी
एक राष्ट्र के प्रहरी के रूप में कर सकते हैं। विपक्ष में रहकर भारतीय
मन मानस में श्रद्धा की फसल उगाई जाती है।

अटल जी नैक्टिका का नाम है। अटल जी प्रामाणिकता
का नाम है। अटल जी राजनीतिक सच का नाम है। अटल जी
निरोधियों के मन को जीतने का नाम है। अटल जी बिचार का नाम
है। अटल जी प्रतिबद्धता का नाम है। अटल जी निरंतरा में आशा
की विषय जगाने वाले व्यक्ति का नाम है। अटल जी देश की
राजनीति में दूसरे दलों को प्रतिकूल मानते थे विरोधी नहीं। अटल
प्रकाशन- प्रभा साक्षी, 18 अगस्त 2018

सन 1975 में जब भारत में इंदिरा जी ने देश में आपातकाल लगाई तब भी उन्होंने जेल की गलती को स्वीकार किया। पर इंदिरा जी के सामने इनके नहीं। जेल में भी उन्होंने साहित्य को जमा दिया। इंदिरा जी का साहित्य लिखित। जनता पार्टी के बाद से उन्होंने नया समय अपने जीवन का आरंभ किया। उन्होंने कहा कि, ‘राष्ट्रीय स्वयं संघ में कोई सत्ता नहीं होता, बल भारतीय मातृत्व संसद है, हमें वहीं देशभक्ति का पाठ पढ़ने है।’

देश के प्रथम प्रधानमंत्री नेहरू जी ने चौं द्वार के बाद संसद में अटल जी के दिवे भारत का नाम है अटल सुबहारी वाजपेयी जी की नाम सलगा जाता है, तो भारतीय सशस्त्र सेना का पाठ से सम्बन्ध है। इसका मूल कारण था अटल जी का राष्ट्रीयता के प्रति कायम रहने के बजाय सत्ता के साथ पूरे देश ने सहमान कर दिया। इसका कारण था अटल जी के नाते जब भारतीय सशस्त्र सेना को लेकर पंहुचे थे। उन्होंने तत्कालीन सत्ता को जीवन सेवा के बजाय सत्ता के साथ भारत पुत्र होने का प्रमाण दिया। इसकी कारण थी सभी के कारण थे। सवधार के यसद दस राजनीतिक पेशेवर नाम सलगा जाता है। इसका मूल कारण था अटल जी का भारत से जब−जब युद्ध हुआ उन्होंने तत्कालीन सत्ता को नीचे विद्रोह के बजाय सत्ता के साथ भारत पुत्र होने का प्रमाण दिया। इसका मूल कारण था अटल जी का भारत से जब−जब युद्ध हुआ उन्होंने तत्कालीन सत्ता को नीचे विद्रोह के बजाय सत्ता के साथ भारत पुत्र होने का प्रमाण दिया। इसका मूल कारण था अटल जी का भारत से जब−जब युद्ध हुआ उन्होंने तत्कालीन सत्ता को नीचे विद्रोह के बजाय सत्ता के साथ भारत पुत्र होने का प्रमाण दिया। इसका मूल कारण था अटल जी का भारत से जब−जब युद्ध हुआ उन्होंने तत्कालीन सत्ता को नीचे विद्रोह के बजाय सत्ता के साथ भारत पुत्र होने का प्रमाण दिया।
A gifted orator whose stories always had a sting in the tail

Swapan Das Gupta

When everyone was talking of a Ram ‘toofan’ in 1991, Vajpayee said, “The problem with a toofan is that we have to be careful not to get blown over ourselves”

There are some impressions that persist. My abiding impression of Atal Bihari Vajpayee was that he was never in a hurry. I can picture him walking unhurriedly through the corridors of Parliament, lazily greeting admirers who rushed to him; ambling slowly to the microphone to address an election meeting in some distant small town in northern India.

That was the Vajpayee I grew up admiring. The Vajpayee in a dhoti, slightly plump and ever smiling, walking leisurely and talking in an equally unhurried pace — and always with a sense of humour.

Vajpayee’s speeches were legendary. I remember making a visit to Shahid Minar in Kolkata as a 15-year-old to hear him address a Jana Sangh meeting. Vajpayee was late and I had to return, bitterly disappointed. I got my chance the next year when he spoke to a gathering of well-heeled Marwaris in the Hindustan Club. He was seeking volunteers for a national jail-bharo programme organised by the Jana Sangh demanding the government recognise Bangladesh. “Come to jail for a day”, he advised the Marwaris, “I promise to provide you cups of steaming coffee.” I don’t know if they responded but it set out Vajpayee from other over-earnest netas.

Some have imagined Vajpayee made a controversially provocative speech to a BJP meeting held on December 5, 1992, the day before the historic kar seva in Ayodhya, an event that redefined politics and brought the BJP to power. I was at that Lucknow meeting with my friend Chandan Mitra. The question uppermost in people’s minds that tense evening was whether BJP would scale
up its mobilisation in Ayodhya or signal a lowering of the political temperature.

Vajpayee addressed the issue with characteristic ambiguity. He had been to Ayodhya that morning, he told his audience. There were lots of people in the town. There was a lot of jostling and people were getting pushed around. He wondered what would happen if more people went there.

I can’t remember if any part of the speech was provocative. All I remember was that both Chandan and I found Vajpayee’s speech hilarious, especially the way—laced with eloquent pauses and the spin bowler turn of the hand—he described the crowds.

Vajpayee’s oratory was legendary. He had the ability to craft a compelling story out of nothing and hold his audiences spellbound. What people looked out for was not what he spoke on but whether there was the usual small sting in the tail. I recall a national council meeting in Jaipur just prior to the 1991 election when the talk was of an impending Ram toofan. “The problem with a toofan”, he rued, “is that we have to be careful not to get blown over ourselves.” Then, with the cryptic tone the party had come to associate with him, added: “The BJP is not a dharma sabha. It is a political party.” The remarks said it all.

Vajpayee climbed the political ladder on the strength of his oratory, his reputation as a parliamentarian and his reputation for being above doctrinaire politics. In political circles he was projected as flexible, an attribute he may have acquired in the days Jana Sangh/BJP had no understandings with other non-Congress parties. It was this plus the ability to attract incremental votes that saw him being recalled to a leadership role in 1996, after a 12-year spell on the sidelines.

Was this reputation justified? I will leave the answer open. Vajpayee was a shrewd judge of mood and quickly adapted. He invariably responded to feelings on the ground. There was nothing doctrinaire about either his alleged liberalism or his supposed hardline Hindu nationalism. Vajpayee responded to situations.

One thing is certain: he was steeped in the values and traditions of the movement he was nurtured in.
Atal-led India asserted itself as responsible nuclear power

Shakti Sinha

It was early evening on April 17, 1999, when the counting of votes in the confidence motion moved by Atal Bihari Vajpayee ended. We had been holed up inside his room for over two days, watching heated exchanges between the treasury benches and the opposition. After the hour-long voting process, Speaker G M C Balayogi announced that the Vajpayee government had fallen by one vote. I remember Vajpayee emerge from the House looking shocked and stricken. It was a verdict he did not expect.

He had known there would be difficulties. Leaders had been talking to each other and there was an understanding this was still “open-ended” and the verdict could be in our favour. I was in his room when he had telephoned BSP chief Kanshiram and sought his support. Kanshiram had refused to back Vajpayee, but he had also conveyed to him that BSP’s five MPs would abstain from voting.

On D-day, however, the BSP MPs not only showed up but they voted against the government. Saifuddin Soz of National Congress, which had pledged its support, turned rogue and voted against the government. Congress’s Odisha CM Giridhar Gamang, who had still not resigned his membership of Lok Sabha, also showed up to vote. The net result was for all to see.

Vajpayee recovered quickly. A few hours after the vote, the now ‘former’ PM had recovered his composure. The week that followed saw much political drama. Sonia Gandhi claimed to have the numbers but Kanshiram, once again, did not concur.

A few days later, word about Pakistan infiltrating into Kargil came in. This was another shock. The first official briefing to the PM could not indicate the seriousness of the situation. It was reported simply as “some movement of Pakistan inside the Line of Control”. It was only after General V P Malik, away in Poland on an official tour, returned and assessed the situation that...
India began its preparations to retaliate in right earnest. Under Vajpayee’s watch, Gen Malik ordered full mobilisation of troops. India was clear it had no option but to safeguard its territory. Vajpayee sought at least one briefing on the ground situation every day. When Indian fighter planes began operations, he also sought video footage. But the line was clearly drawn. India would defend its territory on the LoC and push back aggressors but would not enter Pakistani airspace.

In Vajpayee’s mind, withdrawing from the field or letting Pakistan hold on to Indian territory was out of the question. Eventually, the Americans understood. Pakistani PM Nawaz Sharif was summoned to Washington on July 4 after the Indians gained the upper hand. Sharif was told in no uncertain terms that Pakistan must return to their side of the LoC. Vajpayee established that India and Pakistan should not be clubbed.

If there was an article of faith for Vajpayee, it was to see India assert itself as a responsible nuclear power. When he assumed office in 1998, he ordered the Pokhran tests. There was great secrecy around the preparations, and camouflage nets were thrown over the drilling site. India’s preparations were not detected.

When the Pokhran mission was accomplished, it was with great satisfaction and pride that India wrote to world leaders explaining the need for the tests. Contrary to what the west projected — India and Pakistan as reckless nuclear powers — India asserted that it was the growing influence and aggression of China that had led to the tests. China, at that time, made aggressive inroads into Indian territory in the east.
It must have been November or early December 1970 at Ranchi that I first saw and heard Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

It was an election meeting in the early evening and the mid-sized Kutchery ground was quite full. Indira Gandhi, who ran a minority government with the support of the Communist Party of India and Communist Party of India (Marxist) had called for early elections. The leading opposition parties, Congress (O), Jan Sangh, Swatantra Party and the Samyukta Socialist Party, had formed a Mahagatbandhan (Grand Alliance). It seemed to pose a very formidable challenge to the ruling Congress (R) of Mrs Gandhi.

Just as Vajpayee began to speak, it started drizzling. Naturally, he interpreted it as the blessing of Lord Indra. The crowd loved it, the speech was mesmerising and we all felt elated. Though not for very long -- the other Indira swept the elections, including in Ranchi, where the Jan Sangh candidate Rudra Pratap Sarangi lost. The Mahagatbandhan was created with the sole motivation of “Indira hatao” (remove Indira). It had developed no coherent vision, no alternative point of view; it was hobbled together only to get rid of her. It had learnt no lessons from past defeats and assumed that if the parties got together, then mechanically, their polling numbers would stack up enough to defeat her. Indira Gandhi was relatively alone and all she said was “Garibi hatao” (remove poverty). The people gave her a crushing mandate, 330 MPs out of 536 in the Lok Sabha.

Getting to know Vajpayee at a personal level after I got married in 1980 and often visited 6 Raisina Road to meet my wife’s aunt and cousins (my wife is related to Vajpayee’s foster family), was a very slow process. Baap ji, as he was
called, was a notoriously shy person, and generally kept to himself; when present, he was a man of very few words. It was clear that while he could speak to tens of thousands very intimately, he could be quite retiring in close groups.

I realised this in full measure when I started working for him on 13 May 1996 when he became the Prime Minister, the head of a government whose days were numbered even as he was being sworn in. I continued working with him when he became, once more, the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha. As the office of the LoP, as it universally called in Parliament, was very small, the work was quite taxing. I had to read all the letters he used to receive, and after talking to him, prepare replies to important letters myself. As a result, I worked closely with him.

Comrades of the right: How Vajpayee, Advani reshaped India’s politics

A mesmerising public speaker, Vajpayee could hold audiences, and not just supporters in thrall, but not just through eloquence. What impressed me the most was his ability to make a logical argument that was very well structured. This came, I realised, from a very disciplined brain of someone who never found work boring and was always willing to devour more information and analysis. This may surprise many as the general impression created of him was of a person removed from the nitty-gritty of party work or administration.

The best way to illustrate this is to describe his preparation for important political speeches, in Parliament or outside. The library at parliament was usually very quick in delivering a pack of material containing all relevant written material on any subject. He would read that and other articles and debate proceedings very carefully, and start writing long notes, but not in any particular order. In the process, he would presumably process the material and structure the speech. Though he used to carry the notes, he would not look at them except to check specific quotations. The famous pauses, to hazard a guess, gave him the space to choose the right word and phrase necessary for effective delivery of the message.

The same meticulous attention went into reading the detailed briefs that the Ministry of External Affairs prepared for meetings with foreign dignitaries, often running into hundreds of pages.

I still remember the meeting held at 7 Race Course Road after the famous July 4 statements of Bill Clinton and Nawaz Sharif, where the latter agreed that the Pakistani army would withdraw from the Kargil heights. Some of us felt that the statement was not unequivocal enough, but after listening to others, the Prime Minister felt that the statement was enough to ensure the withdrawal. He was
That Vajpayee was able to develop a very close personal equation with Nawaz Sharif is well known. Though they first met at the SAARC summit in Colombo (August 1998), it was a few months later at New York when both were in New York for the UN General Assembly and Vajpayee hosted a lunch for Sharif that they hit it of very well. Both wanted to end the state of hostility and move on towards peace as good neighbours. Vajpayee always used to say: “You can choose your friends but not your neighbours”. He, and Nawaz Sharif staked their personal reputation and political equity on moving ahead but Pakistan’s Deep State quickly realised that if the two succeeded, its bluff that India wanted to dismember Pakistan would be called. It had to strike back and ensure that till it controlled the narrative and power in Pakistan, there would be no movement ahead on the road to peace. The price Sharif paid in 1999, and continues to pay even today should remind all those who feel that things would be different if India had done something, that they inhabit another planet.

I would like to narrate two personal anecdotes that reflect his approach to policy and his caring nature. I was very upset when my wife’s parents had to vacate their rent-controlled house in Allahabad because the new owner was able to manoeuvre the system. Vajpayee’s response was that, personal considerations apart, owners of assets should have control over them and not be constrained by obsolete laws that distort the economy. That was evidence of an understanding of the economy from long years of being in public life. Not surprisingly, Vajpayee was able to move from disinvestment to privatisation; scrap the terrible system of telecom licences and move to a revenue-sharing mode that unleashed the actual revolution in mobile phones post-1999; and give his finance ministers after 2000 latitude to restructure the economy. The grounds of the subsequent economic boom (2003-08) were laid then.

When it seemed that his government would not come back after it fell in April 1999, he was very worried that my career in the civil services would be affected and approved a foreign posting for me. Despite having never asked me, or any other civil servant, to perform a ‘political’ duty and ensuring that civil service neutrality was not compromised, he was worried that someone could act vindictively. His concern was very touching.

Vajpayee was an uncompromising patriot, with a strong sense of his Hinduness, which was cultural and civilisational. That meant that the primary loyalty of citizens was to the country. Lacking a word, or even concept, for ‘religion’ in any Indian language, he used to publicly say that the State had no role to in any individual’s choice of upasana padhati (forms of worship). There could be no discrimination, or force, in the choice of belief systems. This was real secularism. However, conversions really bothered him, and visiting Gujarat’s tribal-
dominated district of Dangs in the wake of alleged attacks on Christians by non-Christian tribals, he suggested a national debate on conversion. The media had grossly exaggerated the scale of violence and damage which were absolutely minor, and had ignored the tensions that arose when tribal customs were denigrated and mocked. Soon after, the heinous murder of the missionary Graham Staines and his sons happened in Odisha. To be fair, the Odisha government acted quickly, apprehended the murderers and successfully prosecuted them in court, but the killing really shook him and he never went back to the idea of the debate.

Naturally, the debate never took off, and an opportunity to strengthen inter-community relations through dialogue and the clearing of misunderstanding fell by the wayside. In fact, Vajpayee was pilloried for even making the suggestion. Despite no evidence that the RSS, BJP or any related organisation was involved in such acts, many opposition leaders and self-styled public intellectuals saw Vajpayee and his government as a threat to the secular fabric of India. He was charged with subverting the Constitution, of discriminating against the minorities, and of allowing an atmosphere of fear to grow. He would have found it ironic that the same people now cite him as the paragon of tolerance, which he was with or without these dubious certificates.

Mr Vajpayee, you will be missed. But the India of your dreams - economically prosperous with no poverty, with social harmony (Samajik Samrasta), and global political prestige will not only live on but also be achieved. That will be the best tribute to the man.
Atal Bihari Vajpayee was a normal person who had infinite patience and a firm conviction that India was destined to be a superpower. He was a leader who gave a lot of attention to contrarian views, but was firm in his conviction to go ahead with the nuclear tests in Pokhran.

He felt that besides growing socially and economically it was important for the country to be respected by the world community for its ability to be able to defend itself. So the first thing he wanted to do in 1996 when he got power was to try and set up the nuclear tests.

In fact it was Vajpayee’s predecessor, PV Narasimha Rao, who had asked him to bring in APJ Abdul Kalam to organise the tests. He had gone to meet Rao once and had talked about his dream and Rao had advised him to get hold of Kalam as soon as possible. Rao himself wanted to do the tests in 1995 but couldn’t.

Atalji told me in the afternoon one day that Kalam had to be located fast, but in those days cell phone connections used to be very patchy. It was already night when I finally managed to get hold of Kalam, who was in the DRDO (Defence Research and Development Organisation) guesthouse in Kolkata. He came to meet Vajpayee the very next morning.

But obviously, as the government fell, there was not much time to take things forward. Vajpayee, however, got a second chance in 1998, when he returned as prime minister. This time, he resumed the unfinished task. When the tests finally happened, I remember there were Advani, George Fernandes and Brajesh Mishra with us. The joy on Atalji’s face then was something I had never seen before. For him, it was a vision of 40 years coming true.

I have very fond memories of working under Vajpayee. He never had to show that he was the boss.

He was willing to listen to all points of views. He made it obvious that he was the boss without saying it even once because he was warm and open. He had the conviction that India will get its place in the sun.

That belief in him was tremendous. He wanted India to grow socially and economically and it was this firm faith in what he thought was absolutely possible that drove him to dedicate his life to achieving that.
High priest of coalition dharma

NK Singh

Vajpayee mainstreamed BJP using economic policies and reforms, FDI and highways projects for this massive image makeover

One was always in awe of his oratory and parliamentary skills.

In private chats and official conversations, Vajpayee had a sense of humour, sometimes at himself. A wisecrack would ease a tense atmosphere. He recognised early that parliamentary management and governance were not as much about winning arguments as about winning friends. That’s why he could manage a coalition of disparate parties while never losing focus on economic policies or politics.

P V Narasimha Rao walked away from nuclear tests, fearing international criticism. He was paranoid about what had happened in 1991 when international organisations pressured India. We, in the department of economic affairs, were asked to prepare a note on economic consequences of the tests during Rao’s time and Vajpayee’s term. But Vajpayee was fearless and initially there were hiccups but later, the Jaswant Singh-Strobe Talbott dialogue helped normalise relations with the US.

It was a shrewd calculation that the US would bark but not bite. Vajpayee felt the lure of a growing Indian market was attractive and forces of industry would prevent big powers from imposing sanctions. He backed this with progressive liberalisation with opening up of financial markets, FDI and the telecom sector.

He created the telecom revolution. He inherited a huge mess. His minister Jagmohan suggested invoking bank guarantees. He asked me what would happen and I told him companies would go bust, banks would take a hit but telecom would be set back by decades.

He had the vision to see telecom would be a launchpad. He took the risk, the telecom minister was changed and
the SC agreed to revenue sharing. That’s how telecom companies were saved. There was a moral hazard but as long as the intent was clear — public good — he was willing to take the risk.

He is credited with the national highways programme, which he announced at an industry event. Three months later, he told me, “Arey maharaj, ghoshna to ho gayi hai ab thoda road bana bhi dijiye.” Money from cess was inadequate and a non-lapsable fund was created, which allowed for greater debt. He introduced Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana, the beginning of the rural roads programme. Again, he went against conventional wisdom. He faced constant criticism of going too fast on liberalisation and FDI. A classic example was the view he took on FDI. I had prepared a report for the Planning Commission and when I took the draft to him, he told me to keep retail out. “Usme kathinai hogi, usko rehne dijiye,” he said, realising this could jeopardise larger goals. He did not see the Economic Advisory Council on trade and industry as a collegial drawing room club. He sent me to I G Patel because he was apprehensive that he (Patel) may not agree to head it, having turned down an offer to become a minister. IG happily accepted.

Once he invited diaspora in telecom and technology such as Kanwal Rekhi, Vinod Khosla and Sabeer Bhatia and asked for inputs. One of them suggested a ministry and Vajpayee had a laugh and said, “Let’s keep the ministry away.” But he ensured all ideas were reflected in the policy.

More often than not, carrying your own people is more difficult than dealing with outsiders. He tried to balance contradictions but never gave up on the objective, which was greater competition, greater productivity, greater opening up of the economy. He mainstreamed BJP. Economic policies had a big role to play in this image makeover.

Published in The Times of India on 17 August, 2018
Atal Bihari Vajpayee steered India out of difficult economic times

Swaminathan S Anklesaria Aiyar

Everybody loved Atal Bihari Vajpayee, even his opponents. A Congress MP once said, marvelling, “Vajpayee is India’s best Congressman.” Amid the rascals and hate-raisers of Indian politics, he stood out for humanity, integrity and inclusiveness. Alone among BJP leaders, he was genuinely dismayed by the Babri Masjid’s destruction. That act made the BJP a political pariah, unable to get others to join it in a coalition government in 1996.

But Vajpayee had the grace and persuasiveness to win over bitter critics like George Fernandes and form a BJP-led coalition government in 1998. He proved that India under BJP could have less rather than more communal friction, the 2002 riots in Gujarat being the one major blot on his record. By defying the US and conducting nuclear tests, he established India as a nuclear power.

He then won the Kargil war with Pakistan in 1999, gaining the political capital needed to liberalise the economy in the teeth of opposition from the Swadeshi Jagran Manch and other such elements in his party. He came to power when India was down on its knees, hit by the Asian financial crisis. When he demitted office, India had become a miracle economy, averaging 8% growth. This killed the theory that only authoritarian regimes could become miracle economies: democracies can do so too.

Vajpayee ended the mess in telecom he inherited, and made it India’s fastest growing sector, which eventually provided cheap cellphones even to those below the poverty line. He started the great
The infrastructure thrust that provided the Golden Quadrilateral to boost trade and industry. At the same time, his Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana provided pukka roads to every village. He presided over India’s rise as an IT exporter, encouraging it with a tax holiday for ten years.

He had the guts to privatise public sector white elephants. In his six years, he steadily cut import duties and barriers to foreign investment, globalising India as never before. His party was historically inward-looking and wary of MNCs. Vajpayee persuaded BJP to have faith in the ability of Indian business to stand up to western competition, and to eventually become MNCs through foreign acquisitions.

He ruled in difficult economic times. India was hit by the Asian Financial Crisis in 1998-99, by the dot-com bubble bursting in 2000, a global recession in 2001, and two major droughts in 2000 and 2002. GDP growth often stuttered in these years, and reached 8% only in his final year. He mistakenly thought this sufficed to get re-elected on an ‘India Shining’ platform. A worse error was his decision to ditch the DMK as his coalition partner in Tamil Nadu and tie up with Jayalalithaa.

Had he stuck with the DMK, he might have won an additional 40 seats, and returned to power. That was not to be. He bowed out gracefully from politics, and even Congressmen could scarce forbear to cheer. No other politician today can lay claim to that same universal love and respect.

Published in The Economic Times on August 17, 2018
वाजपेयी ने आर्थिक मुश्किलों से बाहर निकाली थी हमारी अर्थव्यवस्था

पूर्व प्रधानमंत्री अटल बिहारी वाजपेयी को सब यात्रा करते थे, यहां तक कि उन्हें अपने निर्बाधों का भी संघ मिलता था। एक बार करारेज के एक समस्त ने कहा था, “वाजपेयी देश के सबसे बेहतर अंकलेश्वर हैं।” धूतों और नफरत फैलाने वाले समय सारे राजनीतिज्ञों के बीच वे मानवता, ईमानदारी और सबको साथ लेकर चलने वाले जागरण के प्रतीक थे, वे बाबूर मसिद विचार से दुखी थे। इस पत्र में ने भाजपा को राजनीतिक अख़बार बना दिया था। इस वर्ष से 1996 के गठबंधन सरकार में भाजपा दूसरे दलों का साथ हाससल नहीं कर सकी।

लेकिन, वाजपेयी के पास जोकी फॉनाइज जैसे क्षुद्र आलोचकों का दिल जीतने और 1998 में गठबंधन सरकार बनने की कला थी। उन्होंने यह साबित किया था कि भाजपा की सरकार में सांप्रदायिक अलगाव बढ़ने के बजाय घटते हैं। एक बार के बंगार एक सांसद ने कहा था, “वाजपेयी देश के सबसे बेहतर के बंगार हैं।” धूतों और नररत रैली लाने वाले हमारे राजनीतिज्ञों के बीच वे मानवता, ईमानदारी और सबको साथ लेकर चलने वाले जागरण के प्रतीक थे। वे बाबरी मस्जिद सवधंस से दुखी थे। इस घटना ने भाजपा को राजनीतिक अछूत जैसा बना सदया था। इस वजह से 1996 के गठबंधन सरकार में भाजपा दूसरे दलों का साथ हाससल नहीं कर सकी।

उनका कार्यकाल आर्थिक चुनौतियों से बाहर था। 1998-99 में एंडमर्क वित्तीय संकट, 2000 में टॉटकॉम का बुलबुला, 2001 में वैस्थक मंदी और 2002 में शुष्क घटाव और विदेशी निवेश के हार्मस की बाधाएं दूर की। इसमें सह भारतीय अर्थव्यवस्था का ऐसा वैश्विक वर्तमान देखने को नहीं मिला था। उनकी पाटजी बहुराष्ट्रीय कंपनियों को लेकर साधारण थी। लेकिन, उन्होंने पाटजी को भरोसा दिलाया कि भारतीय कंपनियों को पष्टि से मिलने वाली सुगन्धि को स्वीकार करने और विदेशी कंपनियों का अस्वीकार कर खुद बहुराष्ट्रीय कंपनी बना चाहिए।

उनका कार्यकाल आर्थिक चुनौतियों से बाहर था। 1998-99 में एंडमर्क वित्तीय लुक, 2000 में टॉटकॉम का बुलबुला, 2001 में वैश्विक मंदी और 2000 तथा 2002 में शुष्क घटाव देश की बड़ी चोट पहुंचने वाली थी। इन सालों में आर्थिक बुखार देश की बड़ी चोट पहुंचने वाली थी। यह उनके कार्यकाल के अंतिम साल में ही 8 फीसदी पर पहुंच सकी। उन्होंने 'इंडिया रेडिंग' प्रोग्राम के बुखार देश की बुखार के हूँ में बड़ी चोट पहुंचने वाली थी। उन्होंने इंडिया रेडिंग प्रोग्राम के बुखार देश की बुखार के हूँ में बड़ी चोट पहुंचने वाली थी। उनकी पाटजी बहुराष्ट्रीय कंपनियों को लेकर साधारण थी। लेकिन, उन्होंने पाटजी को भरोसा दिलाया कि भारतीय कंपनियों को पष्टि से मिलने वाली सुगन्धि को स्वीकार करने और विदेशी कंपनियों का अस्वीकार कर खुद बहुराष्ट्रीय कंपनी बना चाहिए।

अपने वाजपेयी ने दीएक्स से रिसाला बनाए रखा होता तो हत्या और 40 सीटें मिलती और वे दोबारा सरकार में आते। लेकिन, ऐसा नहीं हो सका। उन्होंने शोकन के तरीके से राजनीति के लिए विवाद के लिए नहीं कर सकता है।
Some will say it was his great oratory, poetry that tugged at the heart-strings, that set him apart. Others will talk of his easy manners, avuncular personality and ability to appeal to politicians and people across the ideological divide. Strategic affairs experts and nationalists will mention his bold decision to cross the nuclear threshold in 1998, court international condemnation, and yet take India-US relations to new heights as his biggest achievement.

Yet others will highlight his stellar record in terms of economic reforms, with privatisation, the Fiscal Responsibility & Budget Management Act, and the opening up of the coal and electricity sectors as key milestones to applaud. That he left government in 2004 on a high note, with growth spiking significantly and inflation falling, speaks much for the quality of economic management under his leadership. One can contrast this with the mess left behind by United Progressive Alliance (UPA) in 2014 even after 10 years of managing a coalition.

Each one of these elements played its part in building the Vajpayee mystique and claims to Nehru-esque status, but the one area where one cannot ever diminish his contribution is this simple one: he ended the Bharatiya Janata Party’s (BJP’s) political untouchability, and, in the process, set up the scaffolding for creating the country’s only real alternate node to the Congress in national politics. Had
Vajpayee not broken the untouchability of the BJP in 1998-1999, it is unlikely that the BJP could have produced a Narendra Modi as the most towering political personality today. L K Advani built the BJP to become the biggest national party after the Congress with his 1980s Rath Yatra and Hindu mobilisation which ended up with the demolition of the Babri Masjid 1992, but it needed a Vajpayee to end the untouchability of the party after this development. Nobody but Vajpayee – with his hands-off attitude to the Ram Janmabhoomi movement – could have pulled this off. It is not without reason that even today, when his supremacy is established, Modi prefers to paint himself in the colours of Vajpayee.

Another thing that separated Vajpayee from some of his contemporaries was his true centre-right position on economics, when almost every other prime minister, barring possibly P V Narasimha Rao, has been to the Left or Centre-Left. Even Narendra Modi, despite his solid record as a reformer, prefers to bill himself as a messiah of the poor, and not as an economic liberaliser. In its earlier avatar, the Jana Sangh was certainly Right-wing or Centre-Right, but after 1980, when the BJP re-emerged from the womb of the Janata Party, it adopted a vague term, Gandhian Socialism, as its defining ideology. It was left to Vajpayee’s 1998-2004 government to espouse economic reforms and privatisation as a core priority for the party. In this, Vajpayee was at odds with his Sanghi ideology.

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) parivar’s economic ideology is a fuzzy mix of anti-consumerist socialism combined with Swadeshi ideas. As the promoter of the country’s largest trade union, the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh, the Sangh can hardly be accused of favouring free markets and laissez faire. While Vajpayee did not formulate any clear set of economic ideas for the party, post-
1999 and the Pokhran nuclear blasts of 1998, Vajpayee used the global economic sanctions as a goad to embrace economic reforms, including privatisation.

In a sense, he was the man of the hour in 1998 just as Narasimha Rao was in 1991, when the country was close to external bankruptcy. Rao used that crisis as an opportunity to reform the economy, just as Vajpayee did in 1998, and in this both were cut from the same cloth. Neither was noted for being pro-market, but both accepted that as a reality when the situation so demanded. Vajpayee was a pragmatic man.

It was often said that Vajpayee was the right man in the wrong party, but this would only be a half-truth. Many ideologues in his own party might have seen him as the wrong man in the right party, with some of his internal critics calling him the party’s mask (mukhauta), not the real thing. While he was certainly a moderate, and some segments of the Sangh doubted his commitment to the Hindutva cause, Vajpayee was a nationalist to the core, as proved repeatedly from the Pokhran blasts to his leadership of the Kargil War, when India scored a clear diplomatic victory over Pakistan.

As a moderate man in a party with strong ideological instincts, he could compromise more with his rivals than anyone else in his party. This was why Advani saw him as the man to lead the party to power as head of a coalition despite his own larger contributions to building the BJP’s power in the 1980s.

In part, Vajpayee’s moderate image was an extension of the easy way he carried himself. Unlike the stern personalities of Advani and even Modi today, Vajpayee always came across as intensely human, with his endearing faults and weaknesses (a little tipple here, a nibble at forbidden fried stuff there), and an even more endearing sense of self-deprecation. His political adversaries were never his enemies, just people with different viewpoints. He was incapable of vendetta politics. He was not the kind to drive even his opponents to the wall. He could thus allow a Sonia Gandhi and the Congress party to escape the clutches of the Bofors scandal, for he could let bygones be bygones.

In 1999, he took the bus to Lahore in the hope of bringing peace between India and Pakistan, but this was followed by the Kargil War and the Indian Airlines aircraft hijack. Even so, he agreed to hold a summit with Pervez Musharraf in Agra in 2001, and almost agreed to many giveaways in order to buy peace. Luckily, Advani put his foot down, and the summit did not end with one-sided benevolence.
In fact, by the end of the year, the Indian Parliament itself was attacked, forcing Vajpayee to abandon his soft approach to Pakistan. Modi has followed the Vajpayee line by holding out an olive branch, and then getting it slapped away, courtesy the Pakistani Army.

In the Kargil War, even though India had the moral right to take the war into Pakistani territory, Vajpayee ordered his armed forces not to cross the line of control. In the Kandahar airline hijack, he allowed the release of dreaded terrorists in order to obtain the safe return of Indian citizens from Afghanistan. One must admit that the Indian crisis management group botched the hijack by allowing the plane to fly out of India to hostile Afghanistan, then ruled by the Taliban, but that is another story.

In many ways, one should say, Vajpayee let his emotions rule hard logic. But one can’t hold him alone guilty of this weakness. It has been part and parcel of India’s DNA from Nehru down to Modi.

If one were to step back and look at Vajpayee over his more than seven-decades-long political career, first as the boldest voice against Nehruvian sentimentalism in strategic affairs in the initial years after Independence, and then as the new Nehru in the BJP camp, one can come to this conclusion: he was a nationalist, but not an extreme one. His stance was about a rooted Bharatiyata, a middle ground between deracinated and empty secularism and aggressive Hindutva. He was a formidable politician, but not one with a killer instinct. He could stoop to conquer.

However, one has to pay a tribute to his lifelong political companion too. Without the grassroots work of Advani to build the party, it would be difficult to imagine a Vajpayee soaring above the rest. The contrast between a hard ideologue and a soft moderate made it easier for Vajpayee to be more acceptable across the political aisles. It was the existence of an Advani by his side that made Vajpayee the man to choose.

We should not forget this when lauding Vajpayee as the man at the heart of India’s civilisational and economic resurgence in the 21st century.
Atal Bihari Vajpayee: A towering leader, his work set the gold standard for statecraft

Saubhadra Chatterji

It was one of those Rajya Sabha debates in which Opposition parties united to denounce the Prime Minister’s newest foreign policy venture.

Finally, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the Prime Minister, stood up to reply. And after half-an-hour, even as their arguments lay demolished, Opposition leaders had no choice but to laugh heartily; Vajpayee was at his wittiest best.

He reminded Congress’ Natwar Singh, the most critical voice in the debate, that once he wrote a letter praising Vajpayee’s parliamentary speeches.

Kuldeep Nayyar had asked Vajpayee what happened to his promise to move forward. Vajpayee retorted, “Nayyar ji, we met at the stairs. You asked me, where do I want to go? I replied, main aage jaana chahta hoon.”

His best was reserved for Ram Jethmalani who launched a bitter attack on Vajpayee’s close friend and then national security advisor, Brajesh Mishra.

“Ram Jethmalani ji is a senior advocate. He loves to stand up for any case. He fights a case which he understands. He also fights cases he doesn’t understand,” quipped Vajpayee amid roars of laughter.

Vajpayee, arguably the greatest statesman in India’s recent history, showed us that you don’t necessarily need aggression and shrillness of voice to counter Opposition forces. In Parliamentary politics, he conquered his opponents but left no bitter aftertaste. His world was not confined to his own party, he kept the doors open for everyone.

During the second Iraq war, a senior cabinet minister had floated news that India may back US forces against Saddam Hussain. A few days later, Vajpayee invited then Communist Party of India (Marxist) general secretary Harkishan Singh Surjeet and his Communist Party
of India counterpart AB Bardhan for tea.

They chatted about the old days until the Left leaders sensed that Vajpayee might have some serious reasons to sit with them. Surjeet thought of the Iraq situation and asked if the government would indeed send Indian troops there. Vajpayee sounded stoic, “I haven’t said it. But what to do? I don’t see any protests against this plan!”

The ace Leftists got the signal. The very next day, the Left launched country-wide protests against sending troop to Iraq and at the next cabinet meeting, Vajpayee announced that in view of the protests, India could not send its troops to Iraq.

Hours after terrorists attacked the Parliament building in 2001, then Congress president Sonia Gandhi called Vajpayee to enquire about his wellbeing. Next day, Vajpayee told the Lok Sabha, “When the Leader of the Opposition calls the Prime Minister to enquire about the latter’s health, then we know that India’s democracy is in good health.” For many years, Vajpayee’s dear friend, Congress veteran Pranab Mukherjee, used to narrate this anecdote in his speeches to Congress workers to underline the value of Indian politics.

He epitomised the ideals of tolerance. The liberal ideal amid many hawks, Vajpayee occupied the high moral ground throughout his life.

One of his finest speeches was the one during the floor test his 13-day government faced in 1996. The first leader to deliver a Hindi speech at the United Nations, Vajpayee’s Hindi became the gold standard of political oratory. In Parliament, he found friends and admirers, not adversaries.
Shivansh Jauhri

These words of former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, spoken in the Lok Sabha in 1996 have been etched in public memory. One of independent India’s tallest leaders, Vajpayee passed away on August 16, aged 93, at New Delhi’s All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS). In a political career spanning more than 47 years, Vajpayee was at the centre of several key moments in modern Indian history. From arriving at Parliament on a bullock cart to protest fuel price hike to representing the nation’s interest at the United Nations as an opposition leader, Vajpayee has left behind a political legacy that few can rival.

Satta ka khel toh chalega,
Sarkarein aayengi... jaayengi...
Paritiyaan banengi... bigadengi...
Magar ye desh rahna chahiye,
Is desh ka loktantra amar rahna chahiye...!

["The game of politics will be played endlessly, Governments will come, and perish...parties will be created and destroyed... But this nation must survive, and this nation’s democracy must live on...!"]
Vajpayee served as the country’s prime minister thrice – first for 13 days, then 13 months, and finally four-and-a-half years. As PM, he took India ahead into the future with some crucial reforms. Here are some of the most important developments during his tenure:

**Pokhran II: Making India a nuclear power**

Pokhran II was the most anxiously anticipated moment in the scientific history of India. It was during his tenure that India not only tested nuclear bombs successfully but also went unnoticed by US spy agencies while doing so. Scientists tested the nuclear fission and fusion bombs at Pokhran range and helped India realise its nuclear dream. Though the US imposed several sanctions on the country after the tests, India sailed through the difficult times without much difficulty.

**Relations with Pak: Lahore Bus service**

A bus service between New Delhi and Lahore was started by Atal Bihari Vajpayee, hoping to achieve peace with Pakistan. The bus service started in February 1999, but was stopped in the wake of the Kargil war. Despite the hurdles, the commitment to have better relations with neighbours was much appreciated by everyone.

**Kargil War: Operation Vijay**

In 1999, Pakistani army and militants crossed the line of control from the side of Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir, an event that snowballed into armed confrontation. The furore across the nation was huge, but Vajpayee stood like a rock and led with strength. He famously said: “Pakistan has fired the first bullet, India will fire the last.” In a war fought in the world’s highest battlefield, Vajpayee’s firm determination boosted the morale and India regained every inch of land Pakistan had captured. Today, July 26 in India is celebrated as Kargil Vijay Diwas every year.

**One regrettable incident: IC 814 hijack**

In yet another unprecedented turn of events inside the first year of Vajpayee’s tenure, Air India flight IC 814 carrying 176 passengers was hijacked by the terrorist group Harkat-ul Mujahideen.

They demanded the release of several
militants, including Maulana Masood Azhar. After days of negotiations, India released Masood Azhar and two other terrorists to secure the safe release of the passengers. The drama unfolded across countries like Nepal, Pakistan, UAE and Afghanistan, and lasted eight days.

Literate India: Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan

Amid turbulences created by the IC 814 hijacking incident and the Kargil war, Vajpayee did not lose his focus from his other responsibilities. His government launched the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan. The idea was to eradicate illiteracy from the country. ‘Each one, teach one’ was the motto of this educational drive. Vajpayee himself wrote the famous poem ‘School chale hum’, which was used as the promotional song for the campaign.

Road connectivity: Golden quadrilateral and National Highways Development Project

Vajpayee’s vision for development was very realistic. He initiated the Golden Quadrilateral, connecting major cities of India. Also, he pushed the speedy development of national highways under the National Highways Development Project. To fund these multi-billion-rupee projects, he introduced a Re 1 cess on petrol and all the fund thus raised went to NHDP.

Withstanding terror: The Parliament attack

On December 13, 2001, the Indian Parliament was attacked by five heavily armed Lashkar-e-Toiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed terrorists. Vajpayee had just left the Parliament House when the terrorists launched the attack. The operation saw 11 security personnel losing their lives, but all terrorists were also neutralised. The attack was telecast live on news channels and the incident put the brakes on Indo-Pak peace talks.

Prevention of Terrorism Act, 2002 (POTA)

Following the Parliament attack, IC 814 hijack, and other terror activities, the Government of India under Vajpayee’s leadership brought the Prevention of Terrorism Act, 2002 (POTA). The Act defined terrorism and terror activities and gave special powers to investigating authorities.

Communication boom: Boost to the telecom industry

Vajpayee introduced a revolutionary policy to replace the fixed licence fees for telecom firms with a revenue-sharing arrangement. The Telecom Dispute Settlement Appellate Tribunal (TDSAT) was set up and the monopoly of Videsh Sanchar Nigam Limited (VSNL) on international calls was ended.

Economics: Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act, 2003

The objective of the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act was to reduce the revenue deficit. It aimed at introducing transparent fiscal management systems in the country and bring a more equitable and manageable distribution of the country’s debts over the years.
Recalling The Iconic Strategic Leadership Of Atal Bihari Vajpayee

Syed Ata Hasnain

While deeply regretting the passing away of the iconic former prime minister, Bharat Ratna, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, I perceive no better way of condoling the loss to the nation than by recalling from memory his iconic contribution towards India’s strategic construct. In writing this I ensure that I refer to no book, document, or any other reference because to do that would be sacrilege. The memory of Vajpayee is embedded where it should be, deep in the psyche because I followed his progress as a leader from the time I became aware of what strategic leadership is all about.

The only personal interaction with him goes back to 1982 when I had the privileged chance to share with him a four bunk compartment of the Mussoorie Express during a journey from Dehradun to Delhi. We were alone during the journey. The few waking hours that one spent during that memorable time were spent in just listening to him.

From early years, even before television really became a means of information and news, Vajpayee’s mark in Indian politics had already been made due to the sheer brilliance of his eloquence. Rarely would a politician around the world have made a mark with his style of communication the way he did. In the days when India’s political scene was dominated by the giants of the Indian National Congress, Vajpayee had already carved his own niche space in Parliament. Little did one realise then of what lay in his destiny. It was the All India Radio announcement in March 1977 which I tuned into, that gave the news that in the new first ever non-Congress government being then formed under Morarji Desai, the Foreign Minister (not External Affairs then as far as I can recall) would be Mr Atal Bihari Vajpayee; and those were the very words.

His appointment drew cheer all around and gave him greater insight into international affairs. Those were turbulent days. General Zia ul Haq overthrew Zulfiqar Bhutto in Pakistan to assume power in July 1977 a few months after the Janata government came into being. It was from this juncture that Pakistan’s process of seeking retribution against India for the loss of its eastern wing, really commenced. It was during the ongoing Vajpayee visit to Beijing in 1979 that China decided to invade Vietnam and punish it for having entered Cambodia against the Khmer Rouge. Vajpayee cut short the visit
in protest, an act which has been long remembered in Indian diplomacy. The stint as Foreign Minister was short as the Janata Government fell apart leading to the return of Congress rule. Yet, the brief period in government tempered his mind and his understanding of the world which helped him tremendously in later years in and out of power.

It is the out of power recall which is most important here and that needs mention before getting to the Vajpayee years when he headed different governments of the Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP)/National Democratic Alliance (NDA). Vajpayee was credited for taking the BJP's political fortunes out of the woods after the disastrous defeat of 1984 when it could muster only two seats in the Lower House. He rebuilt the party to make it stand on its feet creditably and bounced it back to an 85 seats presence in 1989.

It is the period from 1991 to 1996 when Vajpayee's known friendship with then Prime Minister Narasimha Rao helped the national strategic cause in no small way. India was under huge pressure from the international community over Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) and the first Clinton Administration (1993-96) showed no signs of support to the Indian cause. In fact, the then Assistant Secretary of State, Robin Raphael, wife of the late and former US Ambassador to Pakistan who was killed along with Zia ul Haq in the infamous air crash near Bahawalpur, targeted India's J&K policy and attempted to paint it red in the international community. It was with the statesman like attitude of Vajpayee supporting the incumbent Prime Minister, without concern for party interests, that the Parliament could get together and pass a Joint All Party Resolution of both Houses on 22 February 1994. The Resolution went on to express India's unstinted claim over the entire territory of J&K at a time when it was under pressure from the international community. It was a landmark in Indian Parliamentary history.

Four months later, India was again under intense pressure from Pakistan and Robin Raphael over alleged human rights (HR) violations in J&K and was being hauled over the coals at the first United National Human Rights Commission (now Council) meeting at Geneva. To take the wind out of the sails of the Pakistani campaign, the Indian delegation was led by none other than Vajpayee and giving him company were Salman Khurshid and Farooq Abdullah. The political support Vajpayee extended to Rao during the crisis period of 1994 was one of the greatest displays of political maturity in India's post-Independence history; it was all for India's national strategic interest.

In 1996, the writing was on the wall for the Rao government as the Vajpayee leadership put BJP firmly ahead. Unconfirmed but yet significant is the fact that Rao had been under intense US pressure and his intent of breaking free through the overt testing of India's nuclear capability could not be realised. It was Vajpayee who finally went and did the unfinished business; this was in his
second tenure as Prime Minister after the first stint of 13 days when he gracefully abdicated rather than face a vote.

Between 11 and 13 April 1998, under Vajpayee’s overall leadership, the Indian nuclear scientist community hoodwinked US surveillance and tested five nuclear devices in underground facilities at Pokharan putting India firmly on the nuclear weapons map of the world as only the sixth nation to overtly possess such capability. It was the beginning of the Vajpayee era which would see many major strategic decisions over the next six years commencing with his decision to extend the olive branch to Pakistan and undertake the Lahore Bus Yatra in February 1999. Behind it was his firm belief that dialogue with Pakistan would ensure necessary confidence building to resolve issues politically and force Pakistan to pull back from the disastrous choice it had made of fighting a proxy war in J&K. It was the same belief with which in 2014 Prime Minister Narendra Modi commenced his tenure and saw initiatives such as Ufa and the dash to Lahore before Pakistan chose to upset the process. In 1999, Vajpayee was similarly hit by Pakistan’s strategy of pursuing a peace process with the signing of the Lahore Declaration of February 1999 even as it was simultaneously preparing for the Kargil incursion which occurred three months later.

Kargil 1999 surprised India as it occurred just too soon after the commencement of Vajpayee’s initiative of the Lahore Yatra. Even as the Indian Army fought at the Kargil heights restoring its hold over the intrusions, Vajpayee was under intense pressure to broaden the scope of the war. It was obvious that the international community would not blame India for the escalation but it was Vajpayee’s strategic mind and statesmanship, expressed between deep bouts of thinking so characteristic
of him, that considered escalation as unnecessary. The Indian Air Force was unhappy over its restrictions of not crossing the LoC as much was the Army. Yet, it was a time when both India and Pakistan had just gone overtly nuclear; doctrines and response guidelines were yet not in place and the Indian Army lacked a typical cold start capability. Discretion was the better among options as a war at that stage may have gone out of control. There are many who are critical of this decision but with degree of certainty of a military victory and the international community restless over the nuclear status of both nations, it would obviously energetically venture to end hostilities. The LoC was restored by a masterful combination of military and diplomatic efforts, although the cost in terms of lives lost was heavy (527 killed). If the diplomatic pressures on the US and thus on Pakistan had failed, the cost of restoration through military means may have meant many more lives of our soldiers and equally of the adversary.

Kargil was followed by the Agra Summit in 2001 where Vajpayee refused to relent to pressure from Pakistan's President Musharraf, with the summit ending in an utter failure. His period as Prime Minister also witnessed the largest turbulence in J&K in terms of terrorists killed; in 2001. It led to a couple of important decisions. Among these were the expansion of the Rashtriya Rifles, the extension of Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA-90) to the Jammu division to assist the Army in controlling the spiraling militancy and terror there. It was also at this time that the Kargil Review Committee submitted its report to the government. A Group of Ministers was immediately set up to study it and recommend the measures to be executed to improve national security. Again, the decision, to set up the Headquarters (HQ) Integrated Defense Staff (IDS), the Strategic Forces Command (SFC) and the first Tri Services Command - HQ Andaman & Nicobar Command (ANC), were all taken in early 2001 within less than two years of the Kargil operations. The delegation of additional powers to the three Services was also executed with effect 15 August 2001. A decision
was taken to reduce the age of frontline officer functionaries of the Services. The AV Singh Committee was set up and a full cadre review with release of additional select rank vacancies recommended; it was finally executed with effect end of 2004 by when the NDA-1 government had ceased to be in power. It was the speed of transformative reforms which was mind boggling.

There were two more areas where the Vajpayee imprint was firmly felt. On 13 December 2001, Pakistan’s Deep State chose to target India’s Parliament House with a terror attack, in the wake of the twin tower attacks in the US on 9/11. With India’s national pride and psyche hit adversely, there was no option but to mobilise the forces for war. That war was never to be and Vajpayee faced severe criticism over this. Again, he chose discretion over anything drastic and reasoned with his advisers on the terminal benefits of war for India. Operation Parakram lasted over a year and the Army suffered a large number of casualties.

In my opinion one of the greatest achievements of the Vajpayee strategy was a temporary change of heart of Pakistan’s President Musharraf. The latter perhaps perceived how he would go down in history as a rogue and a repeated villain of peace, while Vajpayee would gain much as the statesman with all his repeated gestures of it. Perhaps the final straw came in 2003, Vajpayee’s penultimate year in power. On 18 April of that year during a visit to Kashmir, Vajpayee outlined his famous philosophy of resolving J&K through dialogue with Pakistan and the people. The words – “Insaniyat ke daiyere mein” rang loud and clear, lifting him to a status of full and final endearment among the people of J&K; perhaps a level to which no Indian Prime Minister had ever risen. From that emerged the soft slogan – ‘Insaniyat, Jamhooriyat, Kashmiriyat’; the three principles by which peace would be sought by the Indian state in J&K. Prime Minister Narendra Modi even repeated these in his speech from the ramparts of the Red Fort on Independence Day 2018.

The ceasefire of 26 November 2003, always considered unilateral, would never have been offered by Musharraf if there had not been enough positive overtures
from Vajpayee. It was his larger than life presence in the subcontinent which gave Musharraf the confidence that India would be sincere in its efforts towards peace; he had experienced enough of the mature leadership of his counterpart who simply refused to be provoked. The poet and the philosopher in the personality of Vajpayee could not allow himself to be provoked and therein lay his greatness. As his expression and articulation lapsed into greater periods of silence through the years, it was his stability of decision-making which continued to enhance; that indeed is the hallmark of a great leader. The final bit – the initiation of a dialogue process with Pakistan seeking peace without changing borders could last some time with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh at the helm. It was perhaps too utopian an idea and much before its time. It died its death after four years of backroom diplomacy once the Mumbai terror attacks took place.

It was never my intent to chronologically lay out Bharat Ratna Atal Bihari Vajpayee’s milestones as a strategic leader. Yet, once this commenced it could not stop because these came racing to the mind. The iconic former prime minister has breathed his last but leaves behind many memories of what strategic leadership really means. Enough justice has not yet been done to the achievements he had to his credit. Perhaps, as it always happens with most humans, it is the aftermath which will reveal much more of what a poet, a philosopher, a politician, and above all a humanist, all rolled in one, can achieve if his nation chooses to elevate him to the status of its Prime Minister.

Rest in peace, Bharat Ratna Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Be assured your memories will remain ‘amar’ for your grateful nation.

Published in Swarajya on August 17, 2018
Atal Bihari Vajpayee was the first non-Congress Prime Minister to complete a full term in office. He led a coalition bound by nothing much expect anti-Congress politics, scaling India’s nuclear capability and winning a war against Pakistan. Just those two things would have been sufficient to call Vajpayee a great leader.

But there was a lot more he achieved on the economic and legislative front. He started the process of structural reforms and capacity building, in a true departure from the policies of the previous governments.

Here is a recap of various transformational policies Vajpayee helmed.

**Civil Aviation**
The Vajpayee government envisaged private participation in airport development. Today the Bangalore, Delhi, Hyderabad, and Mumbai airports rank amongst the best in the world. Although the actual implementation only happened in 2006, the idea was mooted in the Vajpayee government times.

The process of linking the Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF) to market rates also started during the Vajpayee tenure.

**Divestment**
The process of selling some of the government-owned businesses to the private sector started in Vajpayee regime. He formed a Department of Divestment specifically to oversee this process. His tenure saw the Government of India moving out of 32 companies.
Electricity

The Vajpayee government introduced the historical Electricity Act of 2003, which allowed separation of the various functions in the power supply chain. States were allowed to separate power generation, transmission and distribution. This process led to further involvement of the private sector in private generation and distribution.

Although power reforms are ongoing, they trace their origin to this legislation. Vajpayee government also tabled the possibility of creating economies of scale in power generation through creation of ultra mega power plants (4 gigawatts and above capacity).

Energy Push

For the first time, India invested in overseas oil fields. The first major investment was in Russia in the Sakhalin oil and gas field at a massive investment of $1.7 billion. India also invested in Sudanese oil fields later. This capacity building process has since continued.

The Vajpayee government also started the process to decontrol the prices of petroleum products. In fact, his key minister Yashwant Sinha notes in his autobiography Confessions of a Swadeshi Reformer, how increase in kerosene prices cost the government politically. The Manmohan Singh government stopped this process, until late in its second term, when a gradual price escalation process was restarted.

The Vajpayee government also started the mandatory requirement of blending petrol with ethanol extracted from sugarcane. This policy again did not sustain in the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) regime. The Narendra Modi government has restarted this afresh in the recent years.

Housing

India’s housing boom started due to the low interest rate regime made possible by the Vajpayee government. This housing boom attracted new private investment and helped ramp up country’s steel, cement, and construction material capacity.

Insurance

The Vajpayee government established the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) in 2000. The IRDAI started giving licences to private life and non-life insurance players. Setting up of the IRDAI also started the process of professionalisation of the insurance sector. The Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) monopoly was broken due to these measures.

Interest Rates

The Vajpayee government changed the why how India’s administered interest rate mechanism used to work. In 2002, the administered rates were linked to annual yields on government securities of comparable maturities. The government decided to cut administered rates (small savings scheme, provident fund) by half a
percentage point in one go.

Due to better control of government spending, the inflation rates were brought down, which further kept interest rates in check. Vajpayee left the last year legacy of high growth and low inflation for the UPA government to benefit from.

**Public Finance Management**

The Vajpayee government introduced the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act in 2003. It aimed at improving fiscal deficit and making central and state government more prudent in their expenditure. Although the states never stuck to their target of 3 per cent deficit, FRBM started a debate on managing public finances more efficiently. The public sector savings rate also improved over the Vajpayee government term, which stood UPA-1 in good stead.

**Road Network**

The Vajpayee government launched two ambitious road building efforts - National Highways Development Programme and the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana. The former, modelled on the American highways programme, led to the construction of the Golden Quadrilateral. The latter started a rural economic revolution of sorts, where the villages could finally leverage connectivity for economic gains.

**Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan**

Although the UPA government generated a lot of debate on school education due to the Right To Education (RTE) legislation, the true primary education revolution started with the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan in 2000. This programme aimed at universal elementary education, making education free and mandatory for all children between six and 14 years of age. Plans were drawn to educate almost 200 million children in that age bracket. The government managed to reduce drop-out rates by 60 per cent in just four years.

**Tax Reforms**

The Task Force on Direct and Indirect Taxes set up under the chairmanship of Vijay Kelkar, which gave its report in 2002, forms the basis of most of the tax reforms we have seen since. This task force recommended several administrative as well as policy changes.

The Permanent Account Number (PAN) grew in scope and use after this report. The Income Tax department started outsourcing more of its data processing services and became more citizen experience aware. Setting up of electronic tax network was also an outcome of this report.

The task force also spoke about improvements like Direct Tax Code, indirect taxes (Goods and Services Tax implemented in 2017), and abolition of wealth tax (achieved by the Modi government).

**National Pension System**

The Vajpayee government launched a National Pension Scheme (NPS) in 2004. This scheme allowed central government employees who joined services after 2004 to not take the old defined benefits
but rather opt for this annuity based programme. This was opened up to the private sector in 2009. The real benefit of the NPS will show up in 2040s when the first batch of central government employees opting for NPS start retiring, and government pension burden will be reduced.

**Telecom Revolution**

India has leapfrogged mobile connectivity in just two decades. We didn’t have mobile phones until late 1990s and today we set global benchmarks in daily data consumption. The New Telecom Policy created by the Vajpayee government in 1999 was the harbinger of this telecom revolution.

All this and a lot more was achieved in a timeframe where India went to war with Pakistan, saw its Parliament attacked by terrorists, faced an international hostage crisis, dealt with natural calamities like droughts and earthquakes, dealt with manmade problems like communal riots, faced international sanctions due to nuclear tests, and the Bharatiya Janata Party had only 182 Lok Sabha seats. To top it, the international economy went through a bad time as well with the internet bust and the 9/11 attack in New York.

Despite the various rollbacks in the UPA regime, the Vajpayee legacy in governance lives on. Unfortunately, his work is not talked about in the same breath as the 1991 economic decontrol. But structurally, he achieved as much if not more.

The dhoti-kurta wearing, Hindi speaking wizard Atal Bihari Vajpayee played a big part in modernising India in real sense. What if he had got another term? What if!
A Graceful, Stoic and Eloquent Prime Minister: Vajpayee, as I Knew Him

In spite of my reservations about the ideological tendency of which he was a veteran leader, I developed a profound admiration for Atal Bihari Vajpayee. For eight years, from May 1996 to May 2004, as a member of the 11th, 12th and 13th Lok Sabhas, I closely observed and frequently interacted with Atal Bihari Vajpayee. In spite of my reservations about the ideological tendency of which he was a veteran leader, I developed a profound admiration for him.

My first experience on my arrival in parliament was of Atalji’s 13-day government in 1996, his first stint as prime minister. At that time, we were on different sides politically. I joined the Trinamool Congress immediately on its birth in December 1997 and we became part of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) in 1998. I still vividly remember the grace and stoicism he showed in parliament when that first NDA government lost the confidence motion by a single vote in April 1999. India is fortunate that he was still at the helm in a caretaker capacity during the Kargil War that followed.

When I ran for the Lok Sabha for the third time from Jadavpur in the autumn of 1999, Vajpayee came to campaign for me. I recall a big rally the Trinamool Congress organised in September 1999, at a spot in Kolkata’s southern suburbs on the ‘border’ between the Kolkata South and Jadavpur constituencies. It was a joint rally for me and Mamata, who was contesting for the fourth consecutive time from Kolkata South. Atalji was his usual self, dignified eloquence personified and the rally was a roaring success.

During the term of the second NDA government (1999-2004), I sometimes sharply criticised the Bharatiya Janata
Party on the floor of the parliament on specific issues – such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh’s efforts to ‘saffronise’ education, the intermittent calls to build a Ram temple in Ayodhya and the Gujarat pogrom of 2002. Ever the keen parliamentarian, Vajpayee always listened intently to my speeches and other interventions. When I finished, he, the prime minister, would come up to me, smile warmly and shake my hand. Although he never said anything explicitly, I got the distinct impression that he rather liked these critical interventions of mine!

In June 1999, when Vajpayee was the caretaker prime minister and the Kargil War was raging, my husband, Sisir Kumar Bose, suddenly fell critically ill during a visit to Mumbai. He was admitted to the Breach Candy Hospital, where he was in intensive care for a couple of weeks. Vajpayee called me almost every morning from Delhi to enquire about his health and to ask if he could do anything to assist. On the rare days he did not call personally, Sudheendra Kulkarni did on his behalf from the Prime Minister’s Office.

Two years later, in mid-2001, Vajpayee and I were admitted simultaneously to the Breach Candy Hospital in Mumbai. We had a common problem – with our knees! We were to have knee-replacement surgery on the same day, to be done by Dr Chitranjan Ranawat, who had specially flown in from the US. Of course, the prime minister’s turn came first. He was wheeled out of the operation theatre as I was being taken in. He smiled gently at me and said: “Don’t be afraid”.

During the days of recuperation, he was on the floor just above mine. He would sometimes call me to his room. When I arrived in my wheelchair, he would, propped up in bed, initiate discussions on various matters. At the time, the Agra summit with President Pervez Musharraf of Pakistan was imminent and we discussed that most of all, because of my role as chairperson of the parliamentary standing committee on external affairs throughout the term of the 13th Lok Sabha (1999-2004). Vajpayeeji had chaired the committee a few years earlier, as had Inder Kumar Gujral, a good friend of Sisir’s and mine. I realised from our conversations that he badly wanted to do something about the bleeding sore of Kashmir and had therefore reached out to the Musharraf regime – at considerable political risk to himself, just two years after his bus diplomacy to Lahore had been answered with the Kargil incursion.

Vajpayee’s legendary indulgence of food was continuing during our stay in the hospital. I mostly restricted myself to the hospital diet but Vajpayee’s daughter Namita, who was with him, always shared the food that came for the prime minister with Sugata, my elder son, who was accompanying me.

When Musharraf arrived for the Agra summit, Vajpayee still had some mobility issues as a consequence of the operation, as did I. So, arrangements were made at the official banquet in Delhi’s Taj Palace Hotel to ensure that the two of us didn’t
have to climb stairs or walk more than a short distance. Vajpayee, Musharraf and the senior members of our cabinet sat a table, named ‘Ganga’, placed closest to the entrance. I sat with Sonia Gandhi and a few others at the next table, ‘Jamuna’.

One Delhi winter, a year or two after Vajpayee had ceased to be prime minister, I called on him at his residence in Delhi with my sons, Sugata and Sumantra. Namita was there, as was Brajesh Mishra. Vajpayeeji was visibly happy to see us. As usual, he did not speak much, but his face said it all. The Delhi cold dissipated in the warmth of the evening. When we rose to leave, Vajpayee insisted on walking out with us to the portico – a not inconsiderable distance – to see us off. He disregarded my protests and briskly walked along with us, using his stick for support. Just before I got into our car, I turned to him and said: “Vajpayeeji, please keep well. The country needs you”. His eyes lit up. Looking back from the car window, I saw him smiling radiantly and waving goodbye to us, leaning on his stick with the other hand.

Farewell, Atalji.
राजरीव शुकला
सहज स्वभाव वाले तवलक्षण राजनेता
अटलजी पर बहुत लोग बहुत कह रहे हैं, लेकिन किसी के लिए भी उनके जीवन से जुड़ी सभी पहलुओं पर प्रकाश डालना संभव नहीं। वह एक ऐसे व्यक्ति थे जिनके बारे में जितना कहा जाए जल्द ही है। मेरी उनसे प्रगाढ़ता उस समय बढ़ी जब मेरे ससुर गए में अकसर उनसे मिलने लगा। उन्होंने मुझ समन्वय समिति में भी नामित किया। कलाम सहाब की राष्ट्रपति बनाने का फैसला इसी समिति ने उन्हीं के प्रसारों से किया। कठम से कठम समय से आने पर भी वह घवराते नहीं थे। एक बार समिति के बैठक में पूर्व मंत्री ठाकुर प्रसाद के निधन पर उनके पर लटक उठे। ठाकुर प्रसाद जी से उनके संबंध थे। वह हमेशा उनके के पर रखते थे और कार के बजाय रखी रहे उन्हें साथ अकसर में जाकर कीया समझा और समगर्ला खाते थे। इधरा बढ़ा कद होने के बावजूद उनकी कोशिश एक आम आदमी की तरह नहीं होती थी। वह कम बोलते थे, सुनते ज्यादा थे, लेकिन भाषण देते वह कभी बढ़ते थे। उनके विरोधी दल के लोग भी उनका भाषण सुनने उनकी समझ में जाते थे। भाषण में हास्य-व्यंग्य के साथ वह गंभीर वात भी कह जाते थे। उन्हें यह यह था कि मुरारी के साथ अगर वारा विफल होने के बाद राजसभा में जारी होना है और वह वह अपने व्यक्ति रख कह रहे थे। कभी उन्हें यह यह था कि मुरारी के साथ अगर वारा विफल होने के बाद राजसभा में जारी होना है और वह वह अपने व्यक्ति रख कह रहे थे। कभी उन्हें यह यह था कि मुरारी के साथ अगर वारा विफल होने के बाद राजसभा में जारी होना है और वह वह अपने व्यक्ति रख कह रहे थे। कभी उन्हें यह यह था कि मुरारी के साथ अगर वारा विफल होने के बाद राजसभा में जारी होना है और वह वह अपने व्यक्ति रख कह रहे थे। कभी उन्हें यह यह था कि मुरारी के साथ अगर वारा विफल होने के बाद राजसभा में जारी होना है और वह वह अपने व्यक्ति रख कह रहे थे। कभी उन्हें यह यह था कि मुरारी के साथ अगर वारा विफल होने के बाद राजसभा में जारी होना है और वह वह अपने व्यक्ति रख कह रहे थे।
नयूयाक ्फ जाना पसंद करते थिे। वह वहां काफी समय तक रहते थिे।

इंसदरा जी, राजीव जी, नरससमहा राव सहित हर प्रधानमंत्री ने उन्हें
इस प्रतिनिधिपिंडल में भेजा। जब वह प्रधानमंत्री बने तो नयूयाक के
साथ वाशिंगटन भी जाने लगे। राष्ट्रपति किल्लटन उन्हें बहुत समान
देते थे। उन्होंने वाशिंगटन हाई दील लेने में तब लगवाकर सर्क की ओर
ली। उन्हें शात सर्कसँड़ दिया। उन्हें एक चौथी राष्ट्रपति की ओर दूसरा
अटल जी को। उन दिनों अटल जी के पूर्णाव में दर्शता थी। उन्हें
खुद देखा कि किल्लटन अटल जी का हाथ पकड़कर पुरू समय उन्हें
सहारा देते रहे। अटलजी को फिल्म देखने का भी शौक थिा। उनके
प्रधानमंत्री रहते समय कई बार विशेष शो होते थे जिनमें अकसम में
भी जाता था। वह शाहरुख, सत्तमान को पसंद करते थे। शाहरुख
ते साथ कई बार बीमार अटल जी को देखने गए। एक बार उन्होंने
मेरे जररये अपने पसंदीदा स्वरक्ष मैने तर इरान पठान को भी पीएम
हाउस बुलाया। जब 2003 में गुह मंत्रालय ने भारत पाक-स्वरक्ष
सीरीज का बिरोध किया तो मैने अटल जी से मिलकर टीम को
पाकिस्तान भेजने का आग्रह किया। उन्होंने अनुमति दिला दी।
इसके बाद सबको पता है कि उस दीर्घ ने भारत-पाक संबंधों को
बेहद मजबूत किया। अटल-आिवाणी के संबंधों को लेकर तमाम
तरह की बातें होती हैं, लेकिन उनकी दोस्ती अनोखी थी। यदि
कोई एक किसी बात पर अड जाता था तो दूसरा जद जाता था।
शायद इसलिए उन दोस्ती 65 साल तक रही। दिवालित होठे
के किक्स के दौरे दिन अटल जी बहुत दख्ती थी। संसद के अटलजी
क्ल में अपनी प्रतिक्रिया में उन्होंने कहा, आज हमारा निर्वास से
झुका हुआ है। जब 2004 के चुनाव चल रहे थे तो मैने उससे कहा
कि ज्यादातर सब से मिलकर जिता रहे हैं। इस पर वह पाक से बोले,
कोई सब से खुद भी कहे, मेरी सरकार नहीं आ रही है। समय से पहले
चुनाव काटकर बहुत गलती हो गई। मैं उनकी बात सुनकर अवाक
रह गया। बाद में वही सच साबित हुए। (लेखक पूब्जंजीर मंजी एवं
क्रिकेट प्रशासक हैं)

प्रकाशन- दैमनक जागरण, 18 अगस्त 2018
The speech that Vajpayee couldn’t finish

Former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee was known for his speeches that could move millions or fire them up with josh (enthusiasm), but very few people know that he was tongue-tied when he stood before his schoolmates during a debate in Barnagar town of Ujjain district in 1934.

Vajpayee spoke of this ‘life-changing moment’ at a public rally while campaigning for the 1996 Lok Sabha election. He could not finish the first speech of his life. He was booed. “But I learned a lesson that changed my life. I took a pledge that I’d never rote-learn a speech. It was my first speech at AVM (Anglo Vernacular Middle) School,” Vajpayee had said.

Vajpayee, who was admitted to AVM School on August 4, 1934, after his father Krishna Bihari Vajpayee joined there as headmaster from Gwalior, never forgot the moment he stood up to address the audience during a debate on ‘Development of railway line laid down in India by the British’.

The man known for his flawless speeches had said: “I was afraid. I stood up without any preparation. I was stammering while speaking. It was the school’s annual fest and the speech was discontinued midway. I was booed by my schoolmates, who accused me of learning the speech by rote.”

It was the first of his many failures that he later turned into springboards for success. Vajpayee spent nearly a year at the school before being transferred back to Gwalior. According to a biography on Vajpayee, his father, a post-graduate scholar, had once told his friend Gangadhar Rao Valuskar: “I will make sure that my son Atal shines like a star one day.”

Vajpayee, who was lovingly called ‘Atalla’ by his mother Krishna, often spoke of the year he spent in Barnagar. “I have a deep connection with Malwa region. I studied in Barnagar,” he had said, adding with his quiet sense of humour, “My studies are of some use now, this you will have to accept.” The haveli that once housed AVM School is now in ruins.
The End