

## ***Bombay chai: cheerless cuppa for Kashmiris***

**Burzine Waghmar**

It is human to hate: Samuel Huntington's dictum must be borne when confronted by outbursts, whose immediacy impels urban – not always urbane – netizens to bestow, depending on pet peeves or projects, instant adulation or approbation.

Marc Anwar, a Pakistani-born Asian actor on ITV's long-running *Coronation Street* sitcom, enraged at the slaying of [17 Indian soldiers at an Indian base](#) by armed Pakistani militants, was sacked for [tweeting epithets](#) labelling Indians (actually, Hindus) as pee-drinkers – a familiar refrain about cow-revering Hindus among Pakistani ranters on social media. Its antecedent though has drained away through the sluices of contemporary history.

Irate Pakistanis, at home or in the diaspora as Anwar, little realise its attribution to the only Indian awardee of their country's highest token of recognition, *Nishan-e Pakistan*, the late Morarji Desai (1896-1995). Prime Minister Desai, an austere Gujarati, was a votary of urine therapy and known to drink daily a glass of his own water. He died aged 99. But not before becoming the oldest head of government, aged 81 in March 1977, still unsurpassed in the *Guinness Book of World Records*. Desai got on swimmingly with another teetotaller as himself, Zia ul-Haq, who assumed the chief martial law administrator's mantle next-door, some three months later, in July. In his telephone chats with Zia, cordial but candid, Desai allegedly dropped it to the general that he was primed, thanks to Indian intelligence inputs, of Pakistan's [nuclear programme at Kahuta](#). The late [B. N. Raman](#) recalled how a local mole, sometime in 1978, was on the verge of delivering blue prints of the Kahuta complex. Zia, the consummate charmer, however, would ingratiatingly pepper his conversations with earnest

queries if urine must be ingested after arising or any time of the day. [Desai 'was sold'](#). The entire network, carefully cultivated by India's R&AW (popularly albeit incorrectly RAW), was blown.

Morarji Desai, a self-righteous cross between Jeremy Corbyn and Oliver Cromwell, believed transparency, not secrecy, was paramount to building fraternal relations with neighbours. Desai's private secretary, [Hasmukh Shah](#), reminisced that Zia 'knew Morarji was a straight person with whom he could strike a bargain and Morarji would stand by it.' Desai also rebuffed [Moshe Dayan's suggestion](#) to blow up Kahuta provided New Delhi permitted Israeli jets a forward base in Rajasthan. An understanding on Kashmir was in the pipeline but Desai's administration, independent India's first non-Congress router, sank during the monsoon of 1979. An imminent 'break-through', oft recalled in the memoirs of mandarins, chimerically glimmer to the present. Waiting Kashmiris, among others across the 1947 divide, are not close readers of tragicomedies, especially Samuel Beckett.

Zia disappeared into ash and mangoes but his successor, Ghulam Ishaque Khan, despatched High Commissioner Abdul Sattar to Bombay, despite Benazir Bhutto's demurrals, to confer that nonagenarian his *Nishan* on May 19, 1990. Desai, among other Bombayites, was unwary of Pakistanis bearing gifts to their isle. For it was in the middle of another '[escalation](#)' that [very month](#) when Pakistanis feared a joint Indo-Israeli raid, *à la* Osirak, on Kahuta. Its chief of staff, [General Aslam Beg](#), who set sail from Bombay in 1949, conveyed bluntly to New Delhi: 'If Israel hits us, you shall be held responsible and Bombay will cease to exist.' Beg recounted it, exactly a decade later in 2000, to [Owen Bennett-Jones](#) (p. 205).

Morarji Desai never lived to see the night skyline ablaze from his Marine Drive apartment, Oceana, in late November 2008. A ten minutes' walk from where he was lauded by Pakistani

diplomats stands the Oberoi Trident – previously Oberoi Towers where was PIA’s then Bombay office – just by the bay’s tapering end. It took but ten Pakistanis, Sunni males barely out of their teens, ostensibly despatched without Rawalpindi’s approval, to storm it, the Taj Mahal Palace, a Parsi charity hospital, and Victoria Terminus (now CST), the city’s principal railway station, to bring West, South and Southeast Asia’s largest metropolis of almost 20 millions into lockdown for more than 60 hours leaving 600 wounded and 166 plus dead.

Bombay 26/11, as American and British security officials rue, ‘changed everything’ ([Bob Woodward](#), p. 47). Ditto Kashmiris who must loathe Pakistan and its ‘deep state’ tutees tutored in the arts of mayhem and murder. By 2006 a rudimentary ‘in principle’ agreement had been hammered, especially regarding troop demobilization, between Indian and Pakistani diplomats. The *Composite Dialogue Process* – pretty much compost despite being tentatively exhumed in 2011 – was paused so that Islamabad could embark on overdue weed control: the sole surviving perpetrator had been [charge-sheeted](#), not unconvincingly, for ‘conspiracy to wage war against the government of India’. [Khurshid Kasuri](#) has now divulged, in his recently published reminiscences as foreign secretary (p. 434), how he ‘was horrified at the mere suggestion’ by Senators McCain and Graham, in the presence of Af-Pak envoy Richard Holbrooke, that India mulled ‘a [limited air-raid on Muridke](#), the headquarters of the Lashkar-e-Taiba’s and its political wing, Jamaat-ud-Dawah (JUD)’ because New Delhi suspected then, and has been proved now, that ‘Hafiz Saeed was responsible for the Mumbai atrocities.’ Lt.-Gen. Shuja Pasha, ISI chief at the time of the carnage, flew into Langley to tell his CIA counterpart, General Michael Hayden, on Boxing Day 2008, that ([Bob Woodward](#), p. 47): ‘There may have been people associated with my organization who were associated with this [but] That’s different from authority, direction and control.’

Daud Gilani (aka David Coleman Headley), the mastermind of Bombay 26/11, disagreed vehemently at his Chicago trial by insisting that it was possible only because of [‘complete support of the ISI’](#); that every attack initiated by the *Lashkar-e Taiba* is carried out with ‘full knowledge’ of its head, Hafiz Mohammad Said; and every senior figure of the LeT retains an exclusive ISI handler. *Quod erat expectandum ergo demonstratum.*

It was familiar fare: General Vernon Walters, as [Husain Haqqani](#) tellingly tells in his well-wrought tale of Pakistani perfidy, called Zia ul-Haq a ‘most superb and patriotic liar’ who solemnly stated in 1982 (p. 225): ‘Pakistan might not be a large or important country but it was an honorable one’, and Walters, from one soldier to another had his word that, ‘Pakistan would not develop, much less explode, a nuclear weapon or explosive device.’

The *LeT*, according to Bruce Riedel, is the [‘darling of the ISI’](#). Riedel pointed out to those who cared to listen in 2014: [‘Five years ago, on a trip to South Asia, I asked a former Pakistani ambassador where Osama bin Laden was hiding. The ambassador replied that he would be in a safe house built by Pakistan’s intelligence agency, the ISI, near a military headquarters.’](#)

Marc Anwar has tweeted for [India to be declared a terrorist state](#) despite the absence, October 1989 onwards in Jammu or the Vale, of Kashmiri corpses with [faeces stuffed in mouths](#). Cadavers of missing, mutilated Baloch insurgents are, when discovered by distraught relatives, as part of the Frontier Corps’ [‘pick up and dump’](#) routine.

Kashmiris sipping [bambai chai](#) would, in their lingo, point out all this to Anwar. But [Mirpuri Britons](#), as Anwar, cannot comprehend for they neither speak *kashur* nor hail from Kashmir. Britain’s current deputy high commissioner to India

and a specialist on Kashmiri affairs, [Alexander Evans](#), remarked that they ‘would not be recognized as such by Valley Kashmiris whether in Srinagar or London.’ Likewise the anthropologist and director of the Centre for Applied South Asian Studies (CASAS), [Roger Ballard](#), that ‘not only do they have little in common with the Kashmiris of the Srinagar valley’ but also their ‘cultural connections with the Valley proper are few’ since they originate in ‘the eastern and northern limits of the Potohari Punjabi culture which is otherwise characteristic of the upland parts of Rawalpindi and Jhelum districts.’

Marc Anwar’s cluelessness of Kashmir matches that of Islamic observances. Mayor [Sadiq Khan](#) extended his bests to Jewish Londoners for *Rosh Hashanah*, Hebrew New Year 5777, which fell on October 3, 2016. Anwar berated him: ‘[And Muharram @SadiqKhan sahib, or did I miss your tweet?](#)’ It is a thoughtful mayor who knows, as most Muslims would, or should, that the Islamic new-year beginning on *Muharram* 1 is simply the start of a lunar calendar devoid of any festive signification for Sunnis. Or Shia.

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*Views expressed are the author’s own and independent of his institutional affiliations.*