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Monday, Jul 24, 2023

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His Princely Detachment

Madhavrao Scindia, like his father, held a liberal, tolerant, catholic view of cultures and people.



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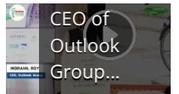
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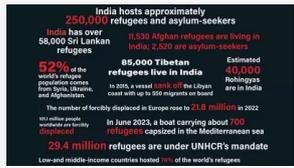
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Madhavrao Scindia is no more, hurled from the sky by a cruel destiny. A young and energetic life with many possibilities in the future has been snuffed out suddenly, literally out of the blue. After about a year, we see almost a repeat of the



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Introduction

City Of Refugees



There is an old city where a

Rajesh Pilot tragedy.

My family has a strange past link with the Scindias. My father went to West Asia during World War II. He and other young officers were greatly impressed by the Jewish cooperative agricultural endeavours in Palestine. On return, they too thought of making such an effort in the UP terai. The Partition had put us on the border in Amritsar and the desire to move to greater security was further strengthened. In 1948, the Indian army undertook 'Operation Polo' against the Nizam of Hyderabad. My father was a participant and met Madhavrao's father, Jiwajirao Scindia, during that operation. The elder Scindia somehow persuaded my father to come to the Shivpuri district of the old Gwalior state, rather than go to the terai. Scindia had already, in the 1930s, encouraged Punjab farmers to come to the Bhind district on the Chambal. People from my own village had done so and prospered under his benign eye.

And so fate brought us to Shivpuri in 1948. I remember coming to Gwalior as a schoolboy and going by the toy train to Shivpuri. One of my enduring memories is of going to the Gwalior City Park and being shown a temple, a mosque and a gurudwara—small, elegantly-built shrines. The Maharaja had done this, we were told, for this was his view of life and message to his people. Sarva-dharma sambhava. Madhavrao, in my view, passionately subscribed to this catholic view of his father, and the true culture of his country. A warm, liberal, all-encompassing view of all beings. I know very well the wide-ranging relationships and friendships he held, cutting across regional and religious distances. In fact, I have to admit, in spite of the current fashion, against feudals and maharajas, that like Ranjit Singh, they certainly looked at their people with a single fair-eye. The histories of Jaipur, Mysore, Patiala, Gwalior and others, all testify to an Indian vision.

With his background and unique education, at the Scindia School, Gwalior, Winchester and New College, Oxford, Madhavrao was an altogether different fish in the sea of politics. He was very much in it, but like the lotus, a little bit out and above it also. He could take it as a sport, not losing his warmth and humanity. Indians generally could do with a little sense of humour, with some self-deprecation. Politicians more than the rest of us are perhaps far too solemn, carrying all the time the unique conviction of an only Atlas, carrying the burden of India on the shoulders. I think Scindia was not like that. He could see the humour of the situation even, the absurdity of his calling. He could hover above himself and look down on his own political life with impish amusement. He laughed at himself. What I will miss is the man's mischievous looks, invariably twinkling eyes, some little joke on himself and



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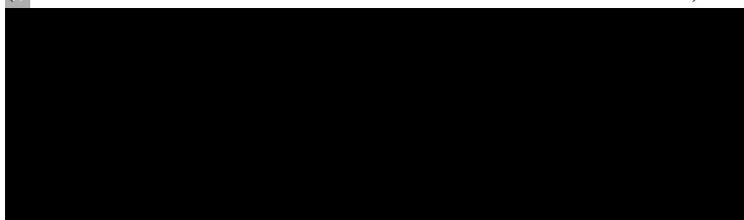
politics and an immense desire to always share a laugh.

I was recently in Cambridge and wrote a light-hearted piece for Outlook, what he in a letter to me, called 'a stroll through time in Cambridge'. I was amusing myself in that little attempt at writing. I referred to a 19th century book which I happened to be reading, which mentioned that the Mahadji Scindias, Marathas, had while holding Agra, used the Taj Mahal as a rest house. I suggested wickedly that Madhavrao could claim a room there when next he visited Agra. Prompt came a letter from him saying that certainly he would look on the Taj with an acquisitive eye, but tongue-in-cheek, he also expressed his worry that spending a night in proximity to Mumtaz Mahal might be a chilling experience, what with husband Shahjahan lurking in the vicinity! Typical Madhavrao, always an interest beyond politics; always a desire to find and share a laugh.

His interest was so wide. I know how often one could talk cricket with him. How good a cricket board president he had been. I have, like many other Indians, watched the recent cricket board elections with concern and dismay. I wish Madhavrao were available to lead the board for the best interest of India. Unfortunately, I think he stepped away, unable to accept the unpleasant politicking and narrow vision. Sportsmen across the country will miss him very badly. There are so few people in high positions who really have the interest of young people at heart and want to do something for them. Madhavrao was one. He could only give, there was nothing he needed to take.

The said thing is that somehow over the recent past, a number of the most promising people of the new generation have been lost. Kumaramangalam first, then Pilot and now Madhavrao. It is a clear and deep national loss in a difficult moment of our history. Milan Kundera has somewhere talked of the unbearable lightness of being. I think the description fits Madhavrao. He was very much in the world of politics and yet floated over and above it, always able to view things with a quizzical, amused, questioning eye. Even his own role in things. He could stand back and see it all as a game which humans play, and therefore did not lose perspective. Sadly all that is gone. In today's India, it is difficult to find men of such tolerance and balance. We will miss him.

(The author is former chief election commissioner of India.)



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