

# Three Charts: What the Modi Government Wants us to Forget Before the 2024 Lok Sabha Polls

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Representational image. BJP supporters at a rally in Uttar Pradesh. Photo: narendramodi.in

analysis

Economy

The most important issues affecting the nation's electorate are rising inequality and no jobs. Both go missing in the noise around BJP's 'Pran Pratishtha' in Ayodhya and Congress's Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra



Deepanshu Mohan





Economy

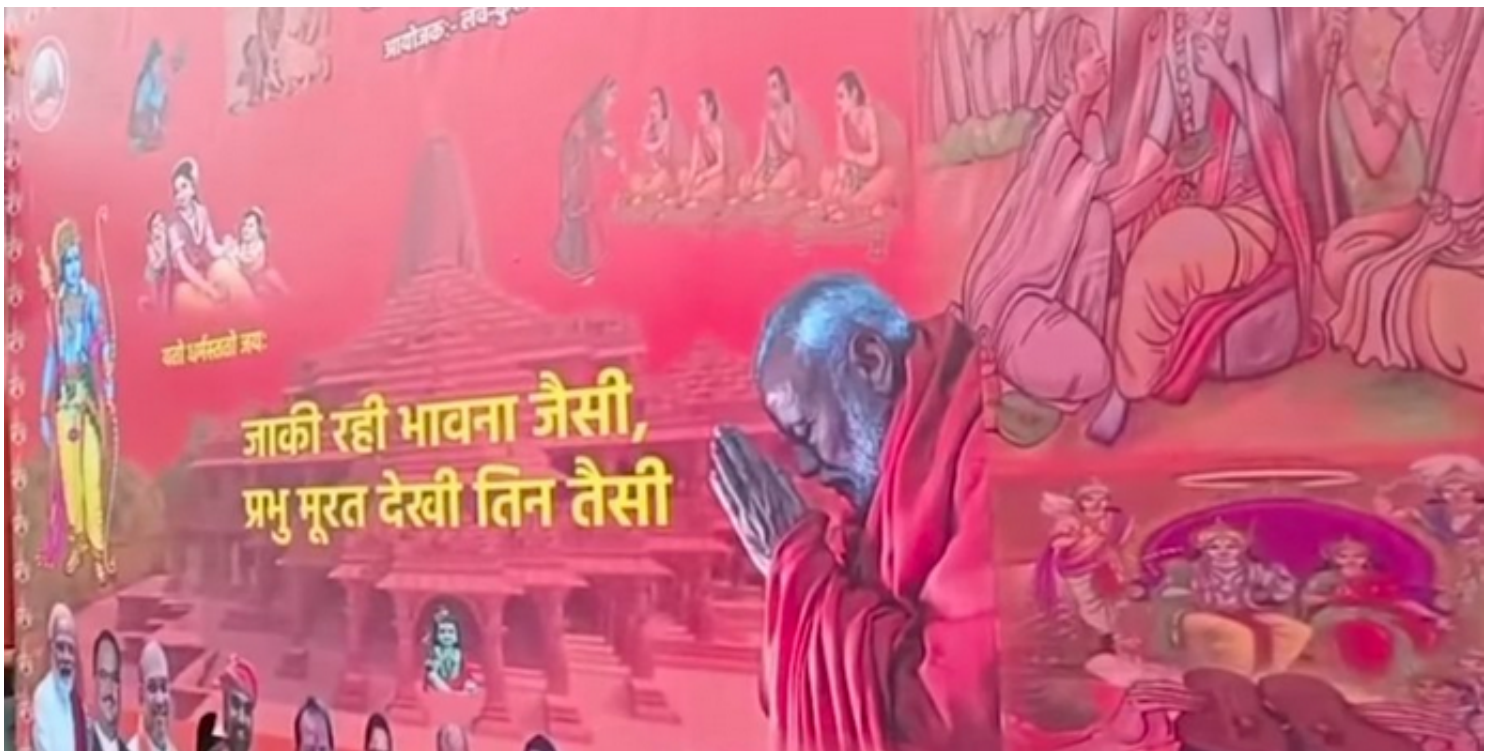
Government

Politics

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Whether it is the *Pran Pratishtha* ceremonial event anchored by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), on January 22, or the beginning of the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra 2.0 spearheaded by Rahul Gandhi and his Congress party, walking from the east to the west part of India, the electoral and political importance of each of these political events, albeit, strikingly different in their respective optics and propriety, has a strong electoral pitch for each of the national parties' prospects in upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

The BJP's brutish power projection in Ayodhya, led by its hegemonic and narcissistic leader Modi, whose image as a devotee (see below) remains asymmetrically larger than the image of Ram, is perceived as an opportunity to secure as many votes as possible from the rath of its Hindutva bandwagon. The party has deployed the use of Ram temple politics, which has shaped its party's politics in Uttar Pradesh and other Hindi-speaking states for over three decades now (and where the BJP remains the undisputed political party as of now).



Credit: YouTube/RavishKumarOfficial

Narcissism is often embedded in the visual image. See the sheer contrast between the stature of man and God! The devotee seems to be the medium as well as the message.

[pic.twitter.com/aSulZMpzmt](https://pic.twitter.com/aSulZMpzmt)

— M K Venu (@mkvenu1) January 11, 2024

For any practising Hindu, the January 22 'religious' event's political messaging by the Modi government has little to do with one's *Aastha*, *Dharma* or even *Pratishtha*, given how the event's political happening is being pitched by the BJP 's high command while being combined with a Hindutva model of infra-growth and poor-centered welfarism (evident from the image below), safeguarding the 'development of UP and Ayodhya' through a consecrated creation of Ram Temple. Some might argue that this was part of the BJP's electoral blueprint for UP in their 2024 Lok Sabha election strategy ever since the Supreme Court order on the Ram Temple dispute.



**RAM MANDIR IS  
BEING BUILT  
AFTER DELIVERING**

**500 km of Metro  
51 crore Bank A/c  
4 crore free homes  
315 Medical colleges  
45 crore MUDRA loans  
220 crore Free Vaccines  
11 cr families piped water  
10,000 Jan Aushadhi Kendra  
10 cr ppl with LPG connection  
70,000 km of National highways**

Credit: X@SitaramYechury

A potent mix of chest thumping religious majoritarianism with poor-centered welfarism has worked well for Modi-BJP in states like UP (that have a larger electoral importance in national elections) even if it comes at the cost of constitutional morality (for those holding public office) and for 'respecting' spiritual sanctity and boundaries of socio-religious propriety (explained by why saints, Shankaracharyas have refused to attend or participate in the January 22 ceremony).

In its own competitive pitch, Congress's Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra 2.0 plan has a 'walking route' planned for Rahul Gandhi and his party members in 15 of the Indian states, spread across 110 districts and 100 Lok Sabha seats for over two months, spending most of their time in UP itself (where Congress remains electorally invisible).

Back in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, the Congress party had first spoken of bringing Nyay as a cash-transfer welfare scheme for the poor, which unfortunately failed to find any resonance amongst the Lok Sabha voters then. The *hope* this time of reviving it is to position the realisation of Nyay in a broader form, focusing on another key aspect of the constitutional Preamble — "*arthik nyay, samajik nyay, rajnitik nyay* (economic, social and political justice)".

This author had earlier argued how the electoral significance of the first Bharat Jodo Yatra already had a mixed (and quite limited) electoral significance – contrary to what Congress party members might say or argue – making any 'electoral' significance for the second leg of the yatra equally doubtful at this point of time.

It has also been previously argued how the Gandhi family's own presence in the recent elections have more often hurt the party's electoral prospects than helping it grow at the ground level (evidence from the recent state elections where Congress did well also reflect this).

### **Signalled importance of event-based politics**

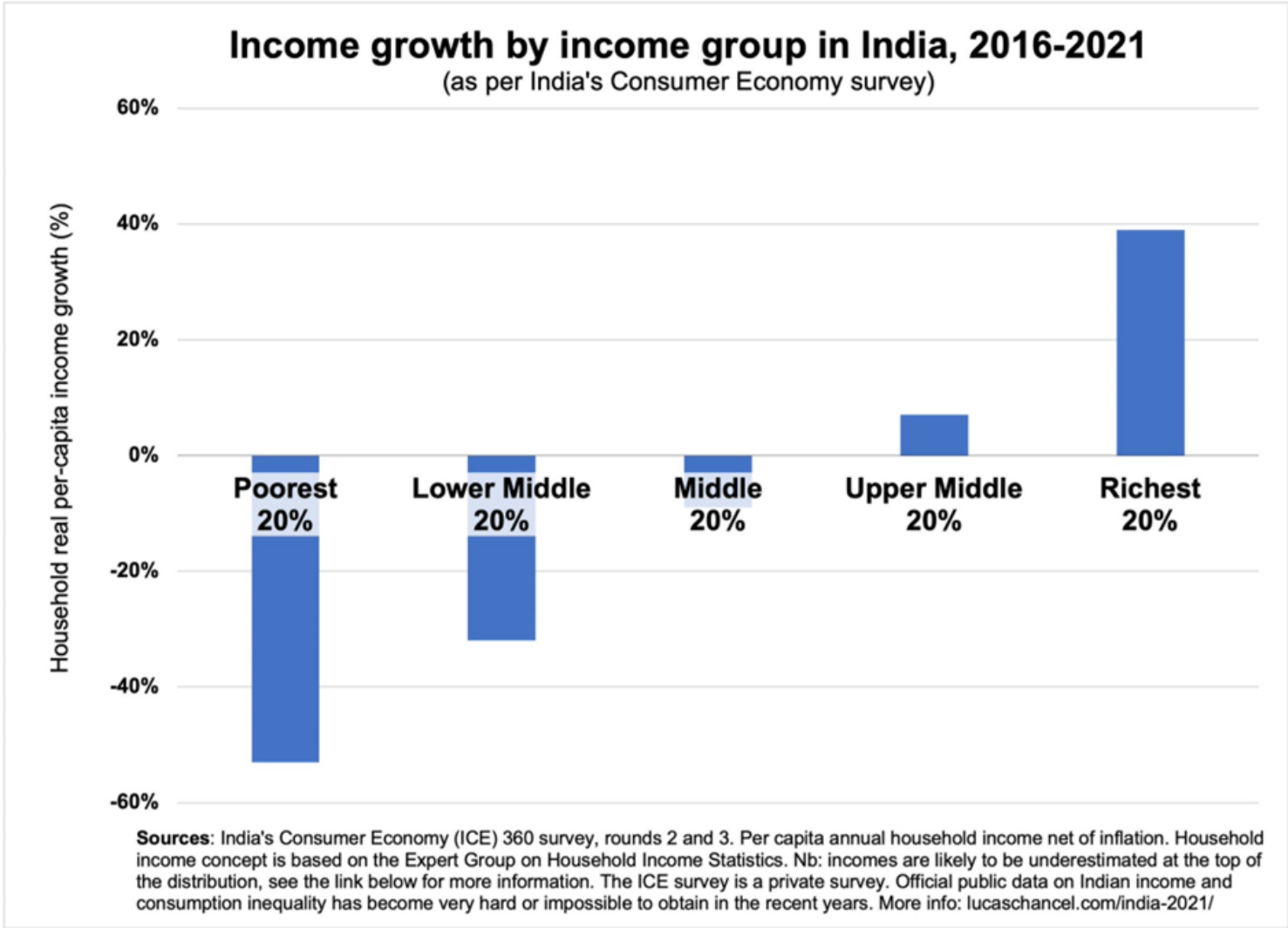
Though the electoral significance of any one event is difficult to attribute, or ascertain, in the complex layering of stratified voter preferences in India's national (or even state) elections, the political *hawa* created by what surrounds the 'event' – backed by mainstream media politics – provides an emotive pitch that's amplified to 'work well' with the electorate for garnering votes. Caste, community, and a host of things are used by all political parties.

But it is puzzling though, how we have limited knowledge on what precisely guides electoral preferences. As Arjun Appadurai argued on the political theory and importance of caste-based politics in India, "No serious anthropologist or historian of India can claim to have decisively answered the following basic question: why has caste – as an ideology, a social formation and a cosmology – spread and survived over two millennia or more without any sort of central political authority, bureaucracy or continental religious organisation of priests, monks or clerical staff? The spread and persistence of this unique form of racial, ethnic and economic stratification has been studied in all its avatars, variations and disguises but its remarkable region-wide tenacity has not yet been accounted for adequately."

The subject of what motivates an electorate to emotively vote for one party against another, despite facing strong economic adversities and socio-economic challenges, remains still understudied and undervalued (being restricted to a few disciplines and its practitioners). And, a lack of knowledge cost attached to it imposes the most serious adverse consequences for any developing nation in its (future) development vision.

### What really matters

In India, at this point, two pressing issues strike out: rising income & access inequality, and the rising gap between output-employment creation for millions of (aspiring) workers across the country.



If we look at the income growth by income group from 2016 to 2021 in India, the top 20% rich have seen almost a 40% rise in their income growth while the middle 20%, lower middle 20% and poorest 20% have all seen a negative income growth. This explains how rising income inequality has exploded in the last six to seven years under the Modi government era of economic policies.

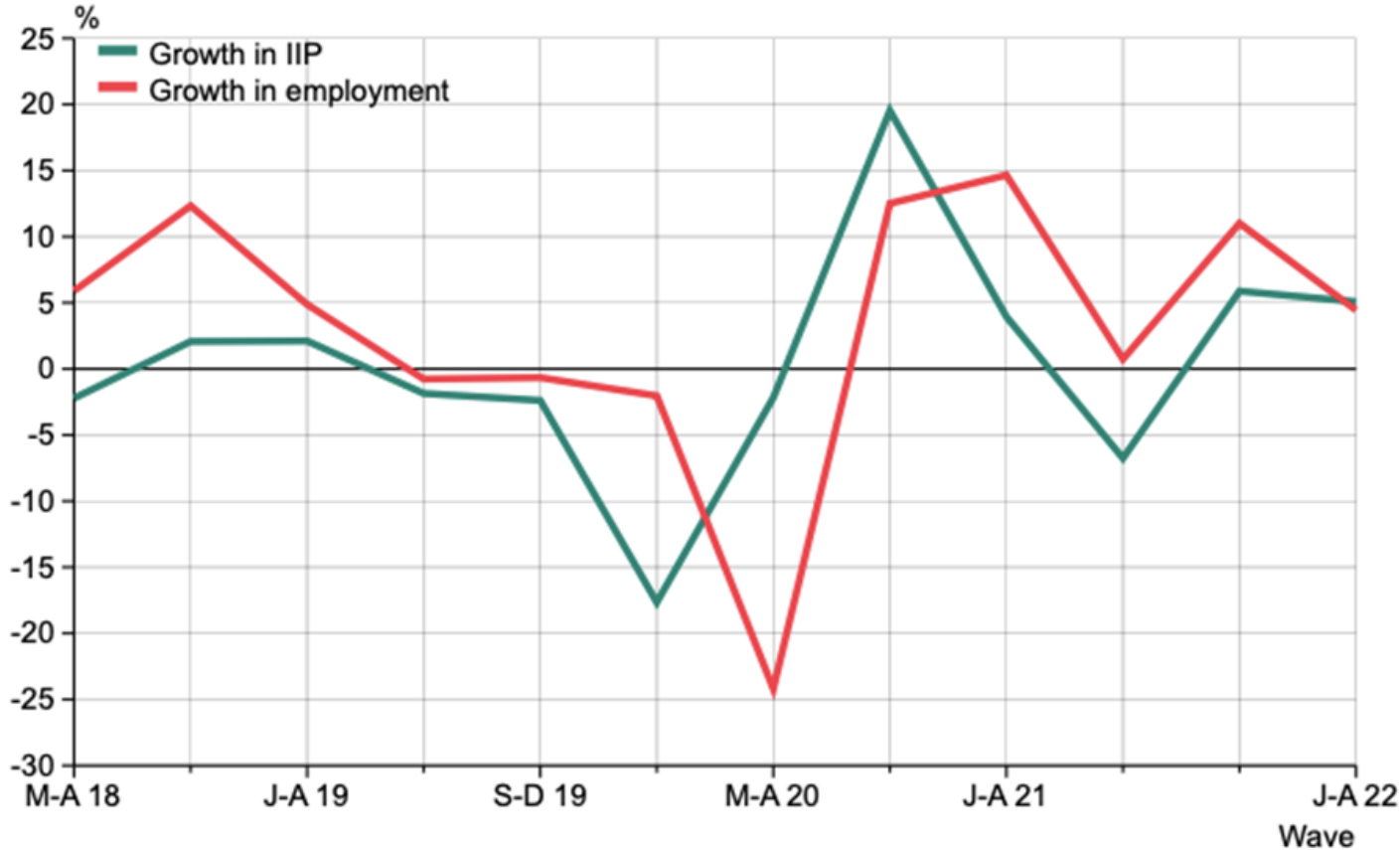
From even an access equality standpoint, as studied and explained by the Centre for New Economics Studies (CNES), assessing how Indian states can be measured in terms of ensuring 'access' to basic social, economic public goods (education, healthcare, social security, legal recourse, finance) the actual

situation for most Indians couldn't be worse, which, when combined with a rising inflationary tax guided by colluding corporate greed and instances of price gouging (backed by government support) is eroding the way of life and standard of living for the 'poor' and 'low-income' class as a whole.

If we look at output-employment growth over the last six to seven years, particularly from the post-demonetisation (2016) period, there has been a sharp fall in the overall output (if we only look at industrial production levels) and in the aggregate employment rate of the eligible job-seeking population.

The gendered effects of these trends are even more striking, where the female employment rate has dropped from 11.88% (2016-17) to 7.96% (2021-22). In urban areas, for women, the employment rate has dropped from 10.77% to 5.57% in the same period.

### Output and employment growth in sync



Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy Pvt. Ltd., 23 May 2022

Employment Rate : By Region and Gender									
Per cent : 2016-17 to 2021-22									
Year ↑↓	All India			Urban			Rural		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
2016-17	42.79	70.52	11.88	40.72	68.46	10.77	43.83	71.53	12.45
2017-18	41.66	69.74	10.47	39.82	67.71	9.57	42.59	70.74	10.94
2018-19	40.17	68.03	9.35	38.35	65.80	8.37	41.09	69.14	9.85
2019-20	39.50	66.78	8.98	37.07	63.99	7.12	40.73	68.19	9.93
2020-21	36.53	61.84	7.80	33.81	58.82	5.73	37.91	63.37	8.87
2021-22	37.02	62.34	7.96	34.44	59.84	5.57	38.34	63.61	9.19

Source: CMIE Employment Data

When anyone looks at these three charts with other cumulative set of data points, it is difficult to acknowledge, or ascertain, how a party, such as the BJP, under Modi, which has actually done very little for the middle class (in terms of creating new jobs and income mobility opportunities), further added to the growing inequality amidst rising prices, making the 'poor' more vulnerable, at the hands of a growing narrow class of elites (usurping greater financial, corporate and money control), has continued to remain electorally 'popular', while garnering more electoral votes from the very states (like UP, MP, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, etc.) where these economic data trends signal their worst position (as compared to 2014).

The Congress, as the face of the political opposition at the same time, being aware of this, has done very little to either capture the imagination of the electorate on the issues of jobs, inequality, price rise, etc, while suffering acutely from a crisis of a visionary leadership, and organisational incompetence (when compared to the BJP) that can present a powerful counter narrative to the BJP.

No Bharat Yatra, unless secured and guided by a people's movement, and anchored by a leader whose voice and presence closely resonates with the anguish of those on the ground, will be able to shift voter preference in 2024, in favour of one party (BJP) as against the other (Congress).

What's perhaps needed by a political opposition is a cohesive vision, backed by an even more inspiring leadership that brings forth a powerful counter-punch to the BJP trying to build itself on a long term theory of driving socio-economic change. It's about time how that 'vision' is realised by a political opposition which has so far failed to capture the nation's attention (particularly in key north Indian and western states), against a party (and its leader) drunk on a brutish exhibition of power, religious majoritarianism, abdicating all basic features of constitutional and civic morality.

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