

Donald, Hillary, & I

To rein a monster!

1994. *I came back to India. And never looked back. My seven-year US stint was passé, except for a nostalgic trigger each Olympic year. No, nothing to do with sports. Rather, the game of thrones that is revisited each Olympic year, in the land of the free. I still vaguely recall the 1992 presidential debate. Mr. Clinton vs. Mr. Bush. It was a treat to watch the naked vulnerabilities of these two powerful men. Our Indian democracy is devoid of such crackling displays. For over two decades, I have envied the great American style of making choices.*

2016. *Times have changed. It's Mrs. Clinton vs. Mr. Trump now. My envy has evaporated. Of course, my story here has nothing to do with my envy. And no, there is no sarcasm intended towards our American friends. Instead, this story is about my own demons.*

Six months ago. I started watching the US election primaries with keen amusement. The circus was spectacular in both parties. This election had unusual battle lines, Insiders vs. Outsiders. The Insiders (such as [Hillary Clinton](#) and [Ted Cruz](#)) represented political institutions—steady but too conventional. The Outsiders (such as [Bernie Sanders](#) and [Donald Trump](#)) represented the rising rebellion—unconventional and rather risky. Which approach is more sensible, I debated internally. The subject warranted deeper domain expertise. So the music & movie channels in my home gym went on hibernation mode. The alternate days—cardio-day movies and muscle-day music—were replaced by [CNN](#). My personal trainer whined, but it is easy to bulldoze old timers. I started micro analyzing the political commentaries.

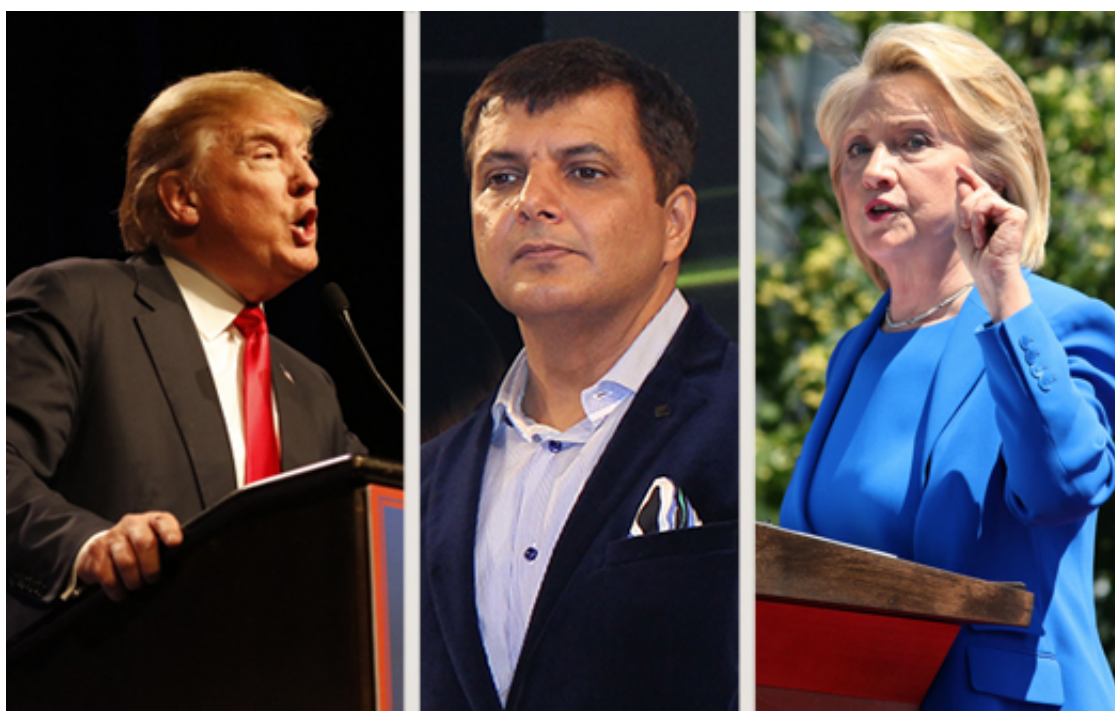
What sentiments are fueling America's choice this year? Establishment or Anti-establishment? Opportunities or Threats? Hopes or Fears? Future or Past? Bravado or Safety? Aspiration or Contentment? Love or Vengeance? Religion or Humanity? Localization or Globalization?...

Four months ago. I was in the USA on an extended business trip, east to west, and everything in between. By now, the election primaries were practically over. Trump was leading the nomination for the [Republicans](#), Clinton for the [Democrats](#). The topic of politics would inevitably pop up during my meetings. My takes were restrained. You never know the affiliation of the other person. Treading cautiously allows you to hedge. I mutely absorbed the unbridled passions on the dining tables, often when the wine glasses were one too many. My intellect was ignited. My smart phone buzzed with continuous streams of political updates as I hopped from one city to the next. Every night, the TV channels in my hotel room would flip-flop from one news channel to another. The broadcasters' right or left leanings would bring out the 'contrasting' flavors of the day's 'identical' news stories.

Does truth have multiple versions? Who is more right: a fearless talker or a guarded diplomat? Is 'political incorrectness' another name for 'racism'? Should the vote of the younger generation count for more? What should be our priority: family or society; country or planet?

Two months ago. Back in India, I kept sinking in a political abyss with each passing day. Now

the primaries were behind us. The losers had sheepishly retreated to the sidelines. According to the opinion polls, the undecided voters were hurriedly making their choices, only to change them back the very next day! The pace was rapid. The morning CNN was not enough. My dawn workouts were only a warm up. Through the day, I would track CNN, [FOX](#), [NBC](#), [ABC](#), and [CBS](#) for their diverse takes. [The New York Times](#), [Washington Post](#), [Boston Herald](#), [The Guardian](#), and [Reuters](#) for their breakaway stories. [The Huffington Post](#) and [RealClearPolitics](#) for their opinion poll of polls. My brain furiously navigated through a maze of conflicting signals.



Is it possible to compartmentalize our human race? Right vs. Left? Celebrity vs. Commoner? Young vs. Old? Muslim vs. Non-Muslim? Caucasian vs. The Rest? Educated vs. Uneducated? Men vs. Women? Rich vs. Poor? Politician vs. Non-Politician? Liberal vs. Conservative?

One month ago. Then it happened. One hectic afternoon, I cancelled an important meeting. Why? Because I was busy googling a breakaway political story. The realization sank in. I had been consumed. Hooked. Out of control. Who wins the US election was no longer relevant. I had a bigger problem, [Obsessive Compulsive Disorder \(OCD\)](#). I was trapped in a whirlpool. I had to snap out of it.

I understood the problem. And I knew the solution. Nip it in the bud. I had to switch off CNN during my morning workouts. By inheritance, the rest of the day would fall into place. Logical. But it didn't work. CNN just won't switch off. My remote control didn't give a hoot for my logic. So I went ahead and got rid of my remote control! How? I switched my tri-weekly treadmill cardio to a personal [Zumba](#) teacher. The alternate weight training days, I enlisted the skills of a new trainer—someone whose routine I was unfamiliar with, thus forcing me to stay focused. The morning CNN went off air. The rest of the day gradually started behaving itself.

Over the last few weeks, I have regained my balance, and have switched back to my old

routine, with my original trainer and treadmill. And, of course, my music and movie channels are back with gusto. My monster has been reined. Whether Hillary or Donald wins, the world will go on. And even if it doesn't, there is nothing I can do about it.

Most humans suffer from multiple forms of OCD without even realizing it. For instance, WhatsApp and Facebook are two such addictions that play havoc in our personal and professional lives. Sufferers often believe they can tame their obsessions by logic, whenever they so decide to. They are mistaken. That's not how OCD works. It can't be conquered by logic. Understanding the problem doesn't solve it. A patient can't be a doctor here. The treatment needs to be outsourced; only an outsourced intervention can break the rhythm of our obsession. In my case, the change of fitness instructors accomplished the objective. It is for each one of us to discover our own 'therapist'. And we better hurry, for at the end of each road of obsession lies grave destruction...