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### POST-2014 GENERAL ELECTIONS: AN ANALYSIS OF THE CHANGES IN POLITICAL DISCOURSE



Ceguri Pradeep Kumar

Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, Osmania  
University, Hyderabad, Telangana.

#### ABSTRACT

*The historic 16<sup>th</sup> general elections of India, 2014, have mirrored the paradigm shift in the aspirations and outlook of the people. By relegating the Grand Old Party of India i.e. the Indian National Congress, to a dismal low, these elections have marked a new epoch in the political history of India. Having won 280 plus seats in the Lok Sabha Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) secured a clear cut majority and dispelled the indispensability of coalitions at the Centre for the past three decades. However, because of the pre-poll understanding the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) formed the new government with a robust mandate in its favor. The change in the government necessitates a reinvigorated reconsideration of the hitherto priorities, policies and performance of the government.*



#### POLITICS IN INDIA

The Congress system, as envisaged by Rajni Kothari, has become a thing of past. The proclamation that 'India is Indira and Indira is India' has also been an extinct perception. Over the years no other party or an individual has influenced the Indian polity in such a proportionate manner. As a result, coalition politics dominated the electoral politics. The dispelled congress system exhibited centralizing tendencies and the latter day coalitions reversed it towards decentralization. In spite of having standalone majority for the party, Narendra Modi's initial steps towards fostering cordial relations with the state governments reinforces the significance attached to decentralized federal polity. Moreover, being a coalition, NDA government at the Centre cannot unilaterally impose its whims upon states. Therefore, the existing environment assures green pastures for flourishing federal polity.

Second, Poverty is associated with India as a basic feature since independence. And so, it has been greatly politicized by all the political players. A single slogan like 'Garibi Hatao' fetched windfall of votes and seats for Indira Gandhi. Gradually, the emphasis started shifting towards growth and development. Undoubtedly, vikas/development was the buzzword in this general election. This shift in the objectives of the polity underscores the transitory phase of our country.

Third, during the tenure of Indira Gandhi, the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) reached its zenith of glory. Later, its significance started diminishing due to the succession of weak PMs and coalitions politics. In

the recent times, it has been overshadowed by extra-constitutional bodies like National Advisory Council (NAC) ruling party core committees. The cabinet system of government was sharply eroded due to these extra constitutional power centers. But the early actions of the new government indicate the emergence of the glory of PMO under the dynamic and strong leadership of Modi who wield enormous powers by virtue of his personality. Hence, it is no exaggeration in terming the new government as a Prime Ministerial form of Government.

Fourth, just like the elections of Abraham Lincoln and Barack Obama as presidents of USA, the making of Narendra Modi as the Prime Minister of India is inspirational for the marginal classes and aspirational for the proponents of democracy. An ordinary chai-wallah has risen to the position of Prime Minister of India. This certainly reiterates the successful functioning of democracy and popular sovereignty in India. At a time when politics has become a family business and got limited to elites in the society, the rise of Modi has injected new hope and spirit for a common man.

However, the politicization of constitutional posts such as governors, Supreme Court judges is being continued without any aberrations. The recent uproar against the pressure tactics employed by the new government on gubernatorial offices revived the debate on the need for non-politician as governor. One other disturbing trend is the low representation of women (11.3% of the total MPs) and minorities in the Lok Sabha. BJP, the largest party with 282 members, does not have a single representative from the Muslim community. Although the election was a landmark and its mandate a decisive one, the under-representation of certain sections threatens the national integrity and can foster secessionist tendencies.

### CENTRALITY OF MIDDLE CLASS

The middle classes constitute nearly 267 million of the total population of India and the numbers are consolidating since the liberalization of the economy. The expansion of urban habitats, educational facilities and basic services accompanies the onward march of middle classes. As a result, the literacy levels and the standard of living rises proportionately. Today, the urban educated voters are highly indifferent towards the religious beliefs of the contestants and their physical attires such as Gandhian cap, saffron clad and skull cap. Therefore, the 16<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha is more colorful and has a relatively better education profile of the members.

The middle classes are ambitious about opportunities to develop. They prefer progress in livelihood and economic status to ideological turfs. This was evident from the dismal performance of the left parties which were nearly uprooted. Aply, the BJP has succeeded in recognizing and targeting these sections. Therefore, their aspirations have to be duly fulfilled. Accordingly, the budget 2014-15 doled out sops for the middle class such as expanding tax slab, enhancing the IT exemption limits, cutting down of excise and import duties on consumer articles such as electronic goods.

### SOME PERENNIAL CHALLENGES

The contentious issues such as the Uniform Civil Code, Article- 370 and construction of Ram temple at Ayodhya have been revived during the election campaign. It also instigated a larger debate on issues revolving around Kashmir. First, the NDA talked about abolishment of special status to Jammu and Kashmir under Article- 370 of the Indian constitution. It was aimed at integrating Kashmir completely with the mainland India and to curb the separatist identity of the locals. However, the issue needs to be rationally debated before arriving at a conclusion. Second, a fund was constituted to assist the fled Kashmiri pundits to return to Kashmir and for rehabilitating their livelihoods at their native places.

The constitution of India provides for a Uniform Civil Code to integrate and foster the notion of nationhood and to eradicate social evils and practices amongst various sects by prescribing a code of living. But due to the multiplicity of the social fabric in India, consensus couldn't be achieved on this issue. Subsequently, it had been shelved for the past six decades. The present government's efforts to enact a uniform civil code have triggered restlessness among the minorities. Keeping in mind the BJP's soft pedaling of the hindutva forces before and after elections substantiates the apprehensions among the Muslims.

Given the rightist orientation of the ruling party, it has a greater responsibility to shed its sectarian attitude. As an opposition it can polarize voters for deriving electoral dividends, but in power, it has to accommodate all sections. Government is for all and should be constitute of all. Every citizen need to own it for upholding the legitimacy of the rule. BJP was criticized for its communal politics and the BJP countered

the rivals as being pseudo- secular parties and vehemently opposed the 'politics of appeasement of minorities'. Alternatively, it assured of equal treatment of all Indians and annulment of vote bank politics. These commitments have to be reverberated in the actions for preserving the social fabric of India.

### ISSUE OF GOVERNANCE

Political indecisiveness, policy paralysis and corruption have accentuated the downfall of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA). Recognizing these shortcomings NDA promised a dynamic, decisive and determinate government. The slogan 'minimum government and maximum governance' has attracted both the capitalist entrepreneurs and the burgeoning middle classes. In tune with it, the government shifted its focus towards reforming governance. It started revamping administration and restructuring institutions and their mechanisms in order to curb over- administration and delays in service delivery. The following major actions undertaken by the new government speaks for themselves in this regard.

- The scrapping of Group of Ministers (GOMs), Empowered Group of Ministers (EGOMs) was aimed at speeding up decision making process.
- Revamping of departmental offices and removing at least ten unnecessary or outdated laws in each department encourages dynamism in administration.
- The role specified to the secretaries to the government of India by the PM and the proposed autonomy for the bureaucrats highlights leeway provided to the bureaucrats for their efficient performance.
- The government's decision to repeal all the archaic laws, rules and regulations helps in plugging the loopholes.
- The emphasis on technology driven governance reduces the citizen interface with officials and helps in reducing corruption. It also facilitates appropriate feedback for evaluating the performance.
- New accounting procedures, external auditing mechanism, in built feedback provisions proposed in the 2014-15 budgets are paradigm shifts in the policy process.

On contrary, the executive actions such as rejecting the name of Gopala Subramanian from the panel of judges proposed for Supreme Court and the ordinance issued for inducting Nripendra Mishra as the principal secretary are eclipsing the bold measures of reform in governance. Any government should act with restraint while constituting commissions, and at times of appointments and omissions.

### DEVELOPMENT AND GROWTH

Partly because of the global economic slowdown and largely because of the alleged inefficiency of the previous government, India remained trapped in the vicious circle of sluggishness in economy. The new government has to revive the economic growth without jeopardizing equity and equality. Along with agriculture, manufacturing and service sectors need to be revitalized for which infrastructure is the lifeline. Resources have to be augmented and properly channeled for bringing growth and enhancing development.

The issues of displacement, resettlement and rehabilitation have snowballed and are obstructing the successful completion of infrastructure projects. Hence, the time is ripe enough to alter the existing practices. The in-principle approvals accorded for Polavaram project and the rising of height of Narmada dam are noteworthy. But the opposition views need to be considered and all the stakeholders should be engaged in the decision making process.

Economic growth coupled with environmental sustainability results in human development. Growth at the cost of environment leads to disasters and calamities. Hence, mad rush after the economic growth need to be hindered addressing the environmental concerns. Similarly, technology has to be complementary to environment rather than being a substitute. Decisions on allowing GM crops and usage of chemical pesticides and CFCs, etc., have to be thoroughly debated and judicially analyzed. Emphasis has to be shifted from GDP to Gross Domestic Happiness (GDH).

### FOREIGN POLICY

In order to reinvent India as a global player, first, it has to emerge as a dominant regional player. A robust relation with the neighbors is a prerequisite for extending our outreach. The swearing in ceremony of Narendra Modi has highlighted his preference for an effective and assertive neighborhood policy. The presence of the premiers of the neighboring countries in the swearing-in ceremony was a path-breaking gesture of direct diplomacy in foreign relations.

By undertaking the first foreign visit to Bhutan, the government had sent a strong signal of reassurance and commitment towards friendly nations. All these actions indicate the autonomy enjoyed by the south block in foreign policy formulation, restrained from the hitherto meddling by the regional parties. However, this tempo should be maintained even while dealing the sensitive and significant issues.

Relations with China and Pakistan deserve a special mention. Modi's outreach to Chinese leadership while being determined on national sovereignty and integrity and the Chinese response has breathed a new life in the stability of the region. Likewise, the healthy relations with Pakistan in terms of trade, the 'sari and shawl' diplomacy and the confidence building measures constitute a good start. However, by reinforcing the principles of 'Panchsheel' the existing trust deficit among countries can be alleviated.

Our dependence and crush on a single country like US should cease to promote India as a friend of all and an enemy of none. In the interconnected world, one cannot confine oneself to a cocoon. Hence, our doors need to be opened for all for having a prosperous and complementary relationship. Rather than being aggressive and adamantly nationalistic, one needs to be practical and accommodative to promote national interests in the international arena. Deliberations and reconciliation should be the guiding principles in creating a peaceful and stable global order.

## THE WAY AHEAD

A decade rule of UPA-I and II had nurtured certain practices and principles in governance. The new government is bound to revamp and reconstruct them in tune with the mood of the electorate. Energizing growth rate is certainly the top priority followed by employment and skill development. Decentralized participatory administration with provisions for active civil society participation is the need of the hour. Similarly, India's rich demographic dividend has to be trained and utilized productively. As promised in the election manifesto, the 5Ts (Trade, Tourism, Technology, Talent and Tradition) should be the driving forces for an all-round development. In this phase of electoral politics, every step matters a lot in shaping India's future and so our actions should imbibe the spirit of transition.

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