

Is the Congress Party Now Paying the Cost for its Dynastic Character?

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I have consistently held the view that dynasties owning political parties is an unfortunate phenomenon which has accelerated in the last three decades. The Congress was original creator of this concept. Dynasties demolish organisational structures. They are unable to attract leaders of talent or mass following. Since the democratic structure of a dynastic party gets diminished, they become a crowd around a family. Chaudhary Charan Singh had very appropriately said that world over parties elect leaders. In India, leaders create parties. Wherever the leader goes, the party travels with him.

Dynastic parties have one major drawback. If the current generation of the party is competent, charismatic and enjoys popular confidence, the dynast can pull-off major victories. There is an incentive in the party to rally behind him. However, if the current generation dynast is lacking in charisma, understanding and popular confidence, the crowd around the family gets increasingly frustrated. Is the Congress Party witnessing that?

The state of the Congress

The Congress Party has been out of power for five years. Its leaders and workers are accustomed to existing with the frills of office. They stare at another possible defeat. They have to live with their leader not relying on political advisors but on some from 'non-conventional' ones who are out of sync with the Congress leaders. Since the last word on any issue belongs to the leader, there is an element of unpredictability.

For those familiar with the Congress leaders, some generic statements are frequently heard. A few illustrative ones are mentioned here:

“What can I do? He just doesn't listen.”

“Wait for the 24th of May, our politics will begin thereafter.”

“I feel like quitting”

“Our campaign planning is lagging behind. I am told Uncle Sam has come to take care of it.”

“Let's prepare 2024”

The above reflects what one generation of dynasty can do to a dynastic party. There are three prominent non-dynastic parties in India. The BJP has elected, over the last few decades, leaders of the calibre of Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Shri L.K. Advani, and Shri Narendra Modi as its front rank leaders. When the new generation of the Left took over, their dominant faces were men like Shri Prakash Karat and Shri Sitaram Yechury. Despite the limited impact of the Left, they had decades of experience and ideological clarity. After a series of splits and mergers, the Janata Dal (United), another non-dynastic party, elected Shri Nitish Kumar, who will shortly

be completing his third term in his office as Chief Minister. It goes to his credit that he changed the governance culture of Bihar.

When leaders wrongly assess their own capacity

Dynasties impose leaders. These leaders don't become great – greatness is thrust on them. Some suffer from what psychologists now regard as the 'Dunning-Kruger effect.' Social psychologists Dr. David Dunning and Justin Kruger have given an apt description. They believe that those who suffer from this effect have a bias of illusory superiority which comes from the inability of low-ability people to recognise their lack of ability. Without the self-awareness of their limitations, such low ability people cannot objectively evaluate their own competence or incompetence. This leads to their miscalculation in their assessment of the calibre of highly incompetent ones. They suggest that poor performers are not in a position to recognise their shortcomings and consequently are insecure and biased against the more competent ones. There is little place for men of high calibre in dynastic parties. An insecure leader is scared of the shadow of more talented people.

Is this the reason for the current mood within the Congress Party? Or is it also the reason which persuades the Congress President to cross the line of decency and dignity when he refers to the Prime Minister.

This should suffice as a lesson for the dynastic parties. They succeed on the strength of some generations of the dynasty. They sink with the others.