

Refuge in Wayanad and a Refuge Away From Varanasi – The Story of a Family Dynasty

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Today, two major political developments have taken place. The first was the huge roadshow of the Prime Minister of India Shri Narendra Modi at Varanasi from where he is contesting the 2019 election. The roadshow culminated in the customary Ganga Aarti. If the size of the support expressed at the roadshow is any indication, the Prime Minister is well on the way repeating or even increasing the 2014 victory margin. Even a casual visitor to Varanasi would tell you the difference which the Prime Minister has made in his constituency in the last five years. The new highways, the arterial roads, the Ghats, the railway station, the airport, the steamer in the Ganga and the modernisation of the electricity systems are only a few examples of the change that has happened in Varanasi. The proposed corridor connecting the Ganga Ghats with the Kashi Vishwanath Temple puts a new life into one of the world's oldest cities.

The second important development is the surreptitious announcement by the Congress Party, fielding a political lightweight, against the Prime Minister. The build-up of the last two weeks had been that Priyanka Gandhi would be fielded against the Prime Minister. She rejoiced in giving daily bytes to the media that she was ready to take on the Prime Minister. Her brother claimed that the Party was building up the suspense for an eventual thriller. Obviously, she quietly chickened out of the contest. I am deeply disappointed with the Congress Party's decision of not fielding Priyanka Gandhi from Varanasi. The last two months that she has been in the public life has driven home the point – "India has changed, dynasties don't matter". The myths of Priyanka Gandhi stand eroded. India's conventional wisdom has been 'बंद मुट्ठी लाख की, खुल गयी तो खाक की'. The myth of 'Priyanka will make a difference' was worth a lakh. Today, the myth has lost its value. The cards are out in the open for public scrutiny. The Gandhis must introspect the plight of Amethi and Rae Bareilly in the last forty years and compare it to what the Prime Minister has done in Varanasi in the past five years.

I had only hoped that Varanasi will give the new India an opportunity to decide the fate of a tried, tested and successful leader as against a new political dynast. Just repeating the same five sentences several times a day and not getting out of the obsession of 'हमारा परिवार' does not impress 'New India' any more. I am sad that new India has been denied the opportunity to establish that it does not accept inexperienced dynasts with no other credentials. India is not a banana republic. It is the world's largest democracy. There is one additional point that this episode established. It is only juvenile politics, where a family lives under an illusion that people will accept it irrespective of credentials, which persuades you to build a climax of Priyanka taking on the Prime Minister and then suffer the wrath of the anti-climax.