

## **Agenda 2019 – Part – 5 : Prime Minister Modi and Aspirational India Will Prevent India From Becoming a Dynastic Democracy.**

**Posted on March 15, 2019**

India is the world's most populous and largest democracy. It is a highly aspirational nation which is also the world's fastest growing economy. Very soon we will be fifth largest economy in the world. After a decade, it is likely that we will be amongst the top three economies in terms of size alongwith United States and China. We have witnessed an exponential growth of the middle class. The 'neo middle class' has emerged at a fast pace.

How does the world's largest democracy elect its Governments? Should it be on the basis of leadership quality, policy, ideology, performance or should it be on the basis of dynasties and family charismas?

### **The Congress and the making of a dynastic democracy**

Post-Independence, the Congress party was a political group with a galaxy of tall national leaders. Yet Pt. Nehru started grooming his daughter Smt. Indira Gandhi as a successor. He made her the Congress President ahead of many other seniors. This sowed the seeds of an effort by many others to convert India to a dynastic democracy. Smt. Indira Gandhi first encouraged her younger son Sanjay Gandhi to be groomed as a successor but his sudden and unfortunate death prevented that. Thereafter, she groomed her elder son Rajiv Gandhi to be her successor. The Congress tried to remove itself from the shackles of dynasty for a brief period after the unfortunate assassination of Rajiv Gandhi but could not get out of its clutches for long. Smt. Sonia Gandhi then took over as the longest serving President of the Indian National Congress and thereafter passed on the leadership baton of the Party to her son Rahul Gandhi. Thus, generation after generation, the Congress Party's leadership berth is reserved for a member of the preferred family. When the Party is now in doldrums, another member of the family has entered the scene.

### **The 1991 change**

Conventionally it was only the Congress which was a party controlled by a family. Post-1991, a significant change took place in Indian politics. Most political parties which were created post-1991 converted themselves into dynastic parties. They had no organised structures, no parliamentary board and no decision making bodies. The leader of the party was the head dynast of the family. The succession of the party was within the family. The cadres owed loyalty only to the leader. The leaders were usually charismatic. In most cases the leader amassed wealth. The party was functioned like a personal property of the family. The family took all the decisions. The party became a crowd around a family.

The demonstrative effect of family controlling political parties was that even non-dynastic parties converted their structure into a family owned party. Thus, from Jammu and Kashmir

to Tamil Nadu, there are very few political parties which have a structure left. In most cases, an individual controls it. When there is no immediate family, it is either the brother or nephew being groomed. The only parties which functioned outside the family and dynastic principle are the BJP, the Left parties and may be a few smaller ones.

The dynasts believe that oligarchy helps in holding the party together, defines the line of authority and enforces discipline within the party. The ideas of the leader are their ideologies. Even his aberrations and eccentricities are accepted as the ideology. The leader's dictatorial tendencies are accepted in the larger interest of the party. Many of the leaders of such parties are highly corrupt. Charges of corruption, misdemeanour and even prosecution do not weaken their stranglehold on the party. Survival of the leader in such situations becomes the main political agenda of the party. Even when the leaders are in prison after conviction, their stranglehold on the minds of the cadres remains. When dynasts defect from one coalition to another, the cadres don't question. They call it an opportunity.

### **Impact on politics, policy and governance**

The impact of this on politics, policy and governance is indeed adverse. Many of these parties are ill-equipped at governance. They win a reasonable number of seats and then claim their partnership share either in a State or the Central Government. They possess the capacity to make a difference in the arithmetic in relation to coalition politics. Since ethics in public life is a major casualty of these leaders/ family owned parties, ethical standards in governance fall. These parties are indifferent to the concept of governance. They have very little interest in policy. Their political stand depends on an opportunity to better their own prospects. They prefer voicing either State issues or populist issues over sound policy. Their policy is to protect their constituency.

Inner party democracy and policy become a big casualty – Horizontal induction of talent into politics also suffers. Many well-meaning citizens get disillusioned with the politics altogether. Some compete for keeping the leader and, at times, his family members, humoured. When parties thrust on themselves or on the polity and even governance, men of inadequate stature, vision and mind, the country suffers. While many found the system of family owned parties to be convenient, others dissented against this practice and wanted a change. They were looking for men of competence, clarity and those who would make a difference. Politics, like nature, abhor vacuum. The acceptance of Shri Narendra Modi at national level, after his tenure as a Chief Minister of Gujarat, was also on account of this popular desire to get rid of dynasties. Much before the BJP's Parliamentary Board in 2013 announced Shri Narendra Modi as Prime Ministerial candidate, the people of India had accepted him.

### **The Modi factor**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi grew from an extremely humble background. He worked in the party organisation till he was inducted into the leadership. He had to work and struggle for the positions that he got. He earned them. India was changing while the dynasts thought

otherwise. If the results of 2014 elections are closely analysed, most caste based parties suffered a blow. Most family owned parties lost. This was not because of Prime Minister Modi's popularity alone, it was also because India had changed. An aspirational India with multiple modes of communication and knowledge gathering, realised that it is only men of merit, competence and integrity who can arouse public confidence. Mere membership of a family is no criteria. I am confident that this trend will continue in the 2019 elections. Prime Minister Modi and aspirational India will together demolish the concept of families.

### **Are two dynasts better than one or is it otherwise?**

The key question is – will the dynastic parties learn from their 2014 drubbing and a possible defeat in 2019? Possibly not. It is here that the people of India will have to bring about a change. India is not a monarchy. Neither is it a kingdom or dynastic democracy. Dynasts disapprove persons of talent and merit. The real strength of democracy will be realised when myth of dynasties is finally buried and these parties are taken over by men of competence and merit. That will provide Indians with a better choice.

There is another curious feature. Most families where a single dynast created the party, have moved into the next generation. In the next generation, there may be more than one heir. Both the heirs become aspirational and, therefore, the parent dynast distributes the largesse. But recent history has proved otherwise. Confucius had rightly said that just as there can be only one sun in the sky, there can be only one emperor on Earth. Where power sharing between successor dynasts takes place, who is the ultimate emperor? Haryana, Bihar and Tamil Nadu have witnessed the battle of brothers. In Uttar Pradesh, it was father vs. son. Andhra Pradesh earlier witnessed the battle of the sons-in-law. In Karnataka there is an experiment of sons sharing the State and the grandsons sharing the Centre. In Maharashtra, the initial ripples have started. The Congress has undertaken the same experiment. It believes that two owners are better than one. Will Confucius be proved right and history record that one eventually prevailed over the other or will it be otherwise. One failed. The other won't take-off.