

Agenda 2019 – Part – 7 : Mahamilawat or Gathbandhan – A Race to the Bottom

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India is today at the cusp of making history. Industrial revolutions bypassed us in the past. We had to fight the menace of poverty and lack of growth. A regulated economy for over four and a half decades had added to our woes. When we broke away from ideological shackles of the past, India has witnessed a much higher rate of growth. Today we have reached a situation where we grow faster than others in the world. We are expanding the size of our economy. Our revenues are growing and we are finally being able to transfer more resources to the poor to offer them a better quality of life. Our infrastructure in terms of better highways, more airports, better railway systems, better urban infrastructure, surplus power, more port capacity, are growing every year. If this trend continues for the next two decades, India would evolve into a new league.

The essential pre-requisite for accelerating our movement in this direction is that India must have political stability, a clear policy direction, a strong and decisive leadership. If we falter on any one of these, we will be letting down our own people and future generations. India cannot afford lost opportunities at this stage.

India's federalism

Federalism in India is inherent both geographically and constitutionally. Our Constitution defines 'India' i.e. 'Bharat – a Union of States'. Our States must be fiscally strong. This is the essence of Indian federalism. Equally, if not more important, is the fact that for India to be a Union of States, there must be a strong Union. If there is no strong Union, both India and India's federalism will stand to suffer. Let there be absolute clarity. India is a Union of States. It is not a Confederation of States. That is the fundamental difference between NDA and the UPA. This is also the fundamental flaw in this idea of the federal front. The framers of the Constitution had a vision. They were men of wisdom. When prominent areas like defence, sovereignty, security of India, foreign policy and eventually the war against terror were maintained as primary responsibility of the Union Government, can India be ever defended without a strong Union? There can be no 'federal front' without a strong Central party.

An analysis of the two NDA Governments

The first NDA Government led by Shri Atal Bihar Vajpayee had some significant features. It represented the core of India's federalism because regions were represented. But there was absolute clarity in terms of the primacy of the BJP, its size too acted an effective nucleus of the coalition. There was clarity that Atalji was the unquestioned leader of the Government. The same was true of the second NDA Government led by Shri Narendra Modi. The BJP had an absolute majority of 282 seats in the 2014 General Elections. Yet respecting federalism, it formed a Government with its allies. The nucleus of the coalition was a large party. There was no completion for leadership. The last word belonged to the Prime Minister. That is how the two Governments functioned. There was clarity in terms of policy and the Government had capacity to take difficult decisions and deliver.

The Mahamilawat Gathbandhan

The Mahamilawat gathbandhan being envisaged is a road to disaster. It is a race to the bottom. There is a tug of war on the issue of leader. Four people have clearly indicated their desire to be Prime Ministers – Shri Rahul Gandhi, Behan Mayawati, Mamata Didi and Shri Sharad Pawar. Each desires to expand his or her own base and reduce that of the competitor. The BSP is trying to maximise its base in Uttar Pradesh and weaken the Congress in several States. The Trinamool Congress is trying to maximise its seats in West Bengal and it won't go with Congress in that State. It does not want Congress to win any seats in West Bengal. The Congress wants to go alone where it has some strength and is desperate to be in alliances, even with its own opponents, elsewhere. Pawar Saheb wants his ultimate dream to come true and is hoping for a hung Parliament where he has an opportunity to play his cards. Where a proxy leadership battle is visible before the elections, it will be full-fledged war post the elections.

The opportunism in this coalition is writ large. Sections of the Congress and the AAP are talking of an alliance. The AAP was formed as a reaction against the Congress corruption. Today it is pleading with the Congress for an alliance. Shri N.T. Ramarao formed the TDP as an alternative to Congress. Today, the TDP leader Shri Chandrababu Naidu is willing to be the Sarthi of Rahul Gandhi. The Congress and the Left are entering into an alliance in West Bengal. Rahul Gandhi made a fake pretence of an anti-CPM speech in Kerala where they are opponents. Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia was the original creator of the slogan 'Congress Hatao Desh Bachao' while Shri Sharad Yadav sits in the Congress lap. Shri Akhilesh Yadav of Samajwadi Party appears to be more Congress than the Congress. They have buried the legacy of Dr. Lohia.

Political stability and policy

The Mahamilawat gathbandhan unquestionably promises only political instability. Such non-ideological alliances have only lasted for a few months. That is the unambiguous lesson of history. The Governments by Chaudhary Charan Singh, Shri V.P. Singh, Shri Chandrasekhar, Shri H.D. Deve Gowda and Shri I.K. Gujral had a life of only few months. Who would want to invest in India in an environment of political instability? Would even Indian investors prefer to go outside and look for more stable countries for investment? Where there is instability, there is corruption. People with brief political opportunities make the best of them. This is the experience of the past.

What would be the policy of a Gathbandhan of this kind? Would every regional party demand a 'Special Status' for its State? What would then happen to Central funds which are meant for poverty eradication, the defence and security of India? In order to pamper certain exaggerated regional demands? Would expenditure on Armed Forces have to be cut? What will be their policy on expediting infrastructure creation and the poverty alleviation schemes that Prime Minister Modi has launched? Will a war on terror be the priority of such a

coalition or will it lead the battle against terror to a possible depletion of a vote bank politics. Will India be run with a national perspective or by a Government which believes that India is a confederation of States?

What is common between the potential members of the Mahamilawat gathbandhan?

There are a few commonalities between the members' of the Mahamilawat gathbandhan. Firstly, they have no positive programme. They ride on negativism. They just want to remove one man from office. Secondly, most political groups comprise of dynastic parties and dynastic groups. In some cases, first generation dynast is still in control, in many others the next generation has taken over. These are parties with no inner party structures, no inner party democracy and hence no accountability. Many survive either on cost of regional feelings alone. That is their ideology. Thirdly, most of them have serious allegations of corruption either against the top leaders or against the important members who constitute the Mahamilawat gathbandhan. They are rightly referred to as the 'Kleptocrats Club.' Fourthly, they have no ideology or philosophy in common. Pawar Saheb believes in market economy. There are many others, including the Communist, who want a more regulated economy. The Congress President proudly proclaims that he is more Left than the Left. Fifthly, their track record of governance is disastrous. Temperamentally they are too many mavericks in the Gathbandhan.

At the cusp of history, India and Indians have a choice to make. Are they electing a six month Government or a five year Government? Are they choosing between a tried, tested and a performing leader or a chaotic crowd of non-leaders? Is India looking at a Government which accelerates growth, development and poverty alleviation or is it looking for a Government made by persons who excel only at self-enrichment? I am confident that aspirational people of an evolving society will make the right choice.