

Agenda for 2019 – Modi Vs. Chaos

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Every General Election has its own script. The script is dictated by the prevailing political environment in the country. The nature of the political battle for 2019 is unfolding itself. India's opposition has a two-fold strategy, firstly, negative anti-Modi agenda and secondly, to combine as many political groups together so as to take the best advantage of the electoral arithmetic.

Anti-Modi campaign

A negative campaign works when there is a strong anti-incumbency either against the Government or against the leader. Anti-incumbency is a process by which the Government of the day loses an election and the opposition wins by default. Unhappy people vote a Government out. When there is a comfort level with the Government and its leader, a set of more satisfied people vote a Government back.

It is obvious that the level of satisfaction with Pradhan Mantri Narendra Modi is very high. If that weren't so, where was the need for multiple disparate forces to come together against him? It is only the fear of his popularity and comeback that is bringing them together. The Prime Minister remains by far the most popular, decisive and dynamic leader of the present set of politicians. His integrity, emphasis on ethics, decisiveness, growth-oriented politics, has made aspirational India to accept him. He has singularly decimated all caste-based parties and dynastic political groups in 2014. The opposition is making Prime Minister Modi's continuation in office as a key political issue. We in BJP welcome this agenda being set by the opposition.

The Sham Unity Arithmetic

The Kolkata rally organized by Trinamool Congress leader Mamata Banerjee was significant. On the surface, it was an anti-Modi rally. It indeed was. More significantly it was also a non-Rahul Gandhi rally. The opposition politics has thrown up four desirous Prime Ministers wishing to challenge Prime Minister Modi. Besides Mamata Banerjee, the other three – Rahul Gandhi, Mayawati and KCR were significantly absent in Kolkata. 2/3rd of those on stage were those who in the past have worked with the BJP. Some octogenarians reached Kolkata to satisfy their late-life ambitions. There was not a single speech reflecting the positive idea which the leaders proposed for the future. Negativism was writ large in their approach. The strategy of each of the four contenders is clear.

The Didi of West Bengal wants a combination of the political adventurers to back her. From the ultra-adventurist Chief Minister of Delhi to the discards of the BJP, there are not too many takers for her. The presence of the National Conference, RJD and DMK leaders was a ritual. Their State alliance interests necessitate them to be more with the Congress. The Behanji of Uttar Pradesh has a clear strategy – play it hard to get. She believes that in India, only caste matters. She is clear that this is her only opportunity. KCR is presently the

exponent of a non-Congress, non-BJP front. Is there a space for any such front today? It remains a doubtful proposition. The individual strategy of each one of the above appears to be the same. Replace Modi and get on to the Driver's seat. The Congress, if it chooses, can at best be the pillion rider.

In the Kolkata rally, negativism was the flavor. The former US Vice-President Spiro Agnew had said in 1970 in the context of the United States –

“We have more than our share of the nattering nabobs of Negativism. They have formed their own 4H club the hopeless, hysterical hypochondriacs of history.”

Every word of this was true in Kolkata.

Except in Uttar Pradesh and to a lesser extent Karnataka, the arithmetical combination does not appear to be any significantly different from 2014. The whole emphasis in these two States is on caste coalitions. Vote transferability in such caste coalitions is not so simple. Local chemistries react differently. Many of these combinations end up as theoretical propositions.

The BJP and NDA have to be prepared for a battle for a 50% vote in the direct fight contest. Many States will still witness triangular contests. If a second term for Prime Minister Modi is the issue, it is advantage BJP. The election will be more presidential. If negativism is the political campaign in an aspirational nation, it won't work. If arithmetic is the only hope, the Modi chemistry can prevail over it. People are more intelligent than what many politicians think about them. They never choose chaos as an option. What has been presented by the opposition is a post-election leadership battle, no common programme, no policy and a disastrous memory of their administrative disabilities. Experimented, tried and failed ideas only scare voters. They convey no appeal. People want a Five Year Government, not a six month one.

Epilogue

Amongst the early elections that I participated in as a student, was the 1971 General Elections. We in the Opposition had formed a 'Grand Alliance' the English Translation of "Mahagathbandhan". We had powerful leaders and a head-start in the media. Additionally, the Congress had split into two. One of the tallest journalists of that generation, Frank Moraes wrote a daily political column against the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Curiously, it was also titled 'Myth and Reality'. The results were announced, India rejected negativism. The India of 2019 has moved way ahead of India of 1971. Aspirational society never commit a collective suicide. They do not suffer from a Lemming Syndrome.

Will 2019 be a replica of 1971? It is Modi vs. an unviable and an unworkable short-lived combination. OR is it Modi vs. Chaos.