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THE LEADER OR THE PARTY: WHO WON THE MANDATE OF 2014?

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ABSTRACT

The 2014 general election would be remembered as one which gave a single-party majority government for the first time in more than three decades and a non-Congress for the first time ever in the Indian political history. But more than that, it would be remembered as the election which saw the rise and rise of the BJP-wave or was it the Modi-wave! It is the answer to this precise question which would be attempted to in this research paper. Mr Narendra Modi took the Indian politics by storm and changed the game on its head. Prior to the general election, in the build to it, no one, and that includes even his most ardent fans and staunch supporters, would have predicted such a landslide victory for him and BJP. The question arises, is it the party which won the clear mandate from the electorate or is it the charisma of Mr Modi as the maverick who rewrote the rule-book as far as campaigning in a general election is concerned. It is to be seen in the research papers as to whom the people really voted for – the party or the leader? Throughout the research paper the focus would be on the various tactics adopted by BJP and Mr Modi at various stages as were to be found during the campaigning stage as well as during the nine-phase general election of 2014 which begun on April 7 and lasted till May 12, the longest in the history of Indian general elections. Also, the mandate won by the BJP-led coalition was outstanding in more than one ways which made even the most cynical critic of the party; the coalition and most importantly the leader take note. All this and much more would be discussed in detail throughout the research paper with the sole purpose of answering the above question.

KEYWORDS; 2014 ELECTION, BJP, PARTY LEADERS.

INTRODUCTION

First of all, the authors would like to clarify that they very well understand the idea of party and leader being the two sides of the same coin. It is the party which makes the leader and vice-versa. One doesn't have relevance without the other. It is a scenario similar to asking which came first – the chicken or the egg. No one has solid ground to say which is more important of the two, the party or the leader. At least the public thinks so. But once you scratch the surface, as far as the general election gone by is concerned, one has some solid data, figures, facts and circumstances which indicate that at least in this election the scenario was not similar to the argument put in the initial paragraph of this heading, that is, both are equally important for the very existence of notion of democratic politics, goes for a toss.

Everything stood apart for the one leader who mattered the most, not only for his party but in this election in entirety. His philosophy, deeds, way of speaking, oratory skills, ability to leader, conviction, body language, character, style, trademark moves, clothes, online activities, everything was closely scrutinized, followed,

criticized, appreciated, commented upon, liked or disliked, what not!

At the same time, when one talks about his chief opponent (at least his supporters believed so), the ignominy suffered by Congress in the lok sabha election of 2014 was the nadir of its reach in the country, a serious dent on its claim to be a national party, paltry 44 seats, 7 more than a regional party AIADMK which won all its 37 seats from a single state Tamilnadu, put a serious question mark on the leadership skills of Mr Rahul Gandhi. Even the UPA got a measly 59 seats, down from 262 seats it won in 2009. This, in entirely different way, goes on to prove that indeed it is the leader who matters more than the party. His party followers and supporters looked up to him as the leader who would take the party to the next level riding on the youth image (Mr Rahul Gandhi is in his 40s whereas Mr Narendra Modi is in his 60s), however it was the youth which rejected the insipid, unimaginative, supine and uninspiring leadership trait of Mr Gandhi.

They were simply not impressed with the way he spoke, his lack of conviction adding salt to the injury. The negativity was bound to rub off on the overall performance of the party so much so that it suffered the worst ever defeat in its 125-year old illustrious history. The electorate rejected an inexperienced youth over a seasoned veteran. It would be foolhardy to think that the Lotus symbol of the party lost its relevance in the wake of emergence of brand Modi as the most powerful force to reckon with in the recent history of Indian politics. Such was the aura of his persona that even his detractors were in awe of it, though not openly. However, what changed was the way the party projected the leader above all else during the general election 2014. Every contesting candidate of BJP, even the coalition NDA, wanted Mr Modi to address a rally in her/his constituency. He obliged most of them. 430+ rallies and a traveling distance of more than 3 lac kms are testimony to the same. More than 6000 events were organized of which Mr Modi was the raison d'être. They had this feeling that if Mr Modi campaigned in their constituency; the chances of their winning would increase sharply. They were not wrong in most of the cases.

WHAT THE HISTORY BECKONS

Even beyond the general election of 2014, there are numerous examples when the leader has been heads and shoulders above the party. In fact, it is the leader who maketh the political party. The fundamentals and the defining principals of the party are rooted in the personality of the leader so much so that in some cases there is no party without the leader.

The history of Indian politics is replete with such instances where the leader defines the party and not vice-versa. Since the beginning, the Grand Old Party, Congress has been dominated by the Gandhi-Nehru surnames, a trend which still prevails albeit the allure of the same is diminishing with each passing day and even the inside supporters are questioning the relevance of sticking with the surname in the aftermath of the rout suffered by the party in the general election of 2014. Further discussion in this regard is beyond the scope of this paper.

Likewise, Late M G Ramachandran, the famous patriarch of DMK was the lifeline of this Dravidian party which always hogged the limelight riding on the charisma of its maverick leader. Even his protégés, namely Mr M Karunanidhi who later headed the party and Ms J Jayalalitha who split from the parent party and formed

AIADMK are known to be the heart and soul of their respective parties. Mr Lalu Prasad Yadav (RJD), Mr Mulayam Singh Yadav (SP), Ms Mayawati (BSP), Ms Mamata Banerjee (TMC), Mr Sharad Pawar (NCP), Mr Nitish Kumar (JDU), MR H D Dewegowda (JDS), Mr Naveen Patnaik (BJD), Late Bal Thackarey (Shiv Sena), Mr N Chandrababu Naidu (TDP), Mr Farroqh Abbdullah (NC). These are a few names which are synonymous with their parties. In fact, they are so famous in their own way that many a times the electorate (the one residing mostly in the countryside yet forming a substantial base in the election) recognizes the party symbol by the virtue of the leader. They reckon that they have to vote for Mr X or Ms Y. The party comes second. Such is the allure, the aura, the halo effect surrounding the individual leaders of the country.

This is not only true for leaders of this country only. Mr Putin is immensely popular in Russia, Mr Shinzo Abe in Japan, Mr Barack Obama in USA, Mr Tony Blair in UK, Mr Tony Abbot in Australia, Mr Fidel Castro in Cuba, Ms Angela Merkel in Germany. Even a small country like Nepal is best known for its PM Mr Koirala. All these names are world-famous and need no introduction.

Our neighboring countries have had their fair share of famous politicians overshadowing the party and in some cases the government itself (Pakistan being a prime example of the same. Military generals like Mr Parvez Musharraf hogged the limelight for his dictatorial-style leadership more than anything else.).

People are hardly aware of the parties to which all these politicians belong. But they are very much aware of these leaders who have been successful, in their own ways, at international and national levels. World leaders like Mr Bill Clinton and Mr Tony Blair are immensely popular in most of the world and are one of the most highly paid motivating speakers much sought after for their oratory skills and influencing power.

BRAND MODI ALL THE WAY: BJP FOLLOWS

Mr Modi acquired the cult status, somewhat like a superstar whose presence excited the crowd to be at the venue where his oratory skills were on full display. Though his critics were unimpressed by alleging that most of the crowd was 'sourced' riding on the power of the currency but the claims were mostly hollow. In fact, he introduced the novel concept of putting a token amount of Rs 5 for those who turned up to listen to him which the audience even didn't mind. The collection from the same went for various welfare schemes.

This assumes even greater significance in the wake of the sorry figures which his chief opponent Mr Rahul Gandhi commanded while addressing a rally wherever he went for campaigning for INC or for any of its allies. Modi becoming bigger than his party could also be seen in the light of his belief in and push for US presidential-style campaigning where the limelight is on the leader and not on the party. It is Obama who won the election for the post of US President two times in a row and not the democrats; at last that is what his supporters believe. Likewise, Mr Modi firmly believed in putting himself ahead of the party in whatever propaganda he had in his mind during the general election of 2014. This could be attributed to his tenacity, his strong will, his no non-sensical approach towards issues, past experience of being the longest-serving chief minister in the history of Indian politics (he served as the Gujarat CM for four back-to-back terms uninterrupted from the year 2001 to

2014 till he became the PM.

His traits like being confident, immune to criticism to an extent, proactive, development-focused, organised, proactive, and in command of things, made people believe in him, especially in the wake of a weak prime minister who was at best known as a shadow of the UPA supremo Ms Sonia Gandhi even among the party insiders.

The way he engages his audience by talking animatedly with them is a quality which comes naturally to him. He doesn't have to prepare for the same. Most of his speeches were impromptu in nature where he addressed the audience not with readymade cut outs of papers but with his own thoughts and answered to their queries in a way which even his critics found hard to ignore.

The result-oriented approach which he talked about, the model of development which he showcased with much pride, people wanted to believe in them because they were fed up with the lack of the same in the past decade or so. In all this, BJP was left behind Mr Modi but no was seen complaining, albeit for the initial hiccups which Mr Modi faced from the wizened politicians of the party whom he either sidelined or made redundant in the changing scheme of things.

Demographically, India is one of the youngest nations in the world what with more than 65 per cent of people in the below 35 years bracket. Modi's ability to become bigger than the BJP was in his ability to connect with this India, tapping into their hopes, dreams, and the anger against the previous regime.

Modi created a pan-Indian identity that resonated with far more people and deeper than it ever did with BJP as it was seen as a saffron party with its roots mostly in North and Western parts of the country. Like brands make sense at surface and deeper levels, Modi's discourse on economic development and prosperity intersected at the surface level of consciousness. The Gujarat model threw in words like women's safety, peace, industry, roads electricity, governance, and education, supported by statistics. This satisfied the questioning mind that hankers for reason.

CONCLUSION

To conclude based on the above discussion, one can say that many a times it is the leader, rather than the party, which set the momentum for the nation. Nowhere it was more visible and palpable than in the general election of 2014. At the same time, one needs to keep in mind that the thoughtfulness put by Mr Modi behind building his image consciously building on the expectations, mostly of the youth, of change and development and growth and betterment of the nation found resonance across most quarters of the nation. This was evident in a good show put up by BJP-lead NDA in most of the places where the party contested the election. But at the same time, one need not forget that Mr Modi tapped into the feelings, most of them bordering on hopelessness, despair and negativity and channelized them in such a way that they led to his rise in a way which as few parallels in the history of India. The lackluster performance of Congress has much to do with its own non-performance, below-par fulfillment of

the expectations of the electorate during its one-decade old regime rather than the rise of Brand Modi, as alleged by the detractors of Mr Modi. However, there are no qualms about the fact that it was Brand Modi which delivered the most in this election, even more so than the party with which it was associated. It is no coincidence that the same party about which the most optimistic expectations with regard to performance in the lok sabha election for 2014 was at best pegged at 150-175 seats a year back stormed to majority on its own. No one, and that includes even the die-hard believer in the philosophy and working mechanism of the party, could have predicted such a fine performance by the party if not for its charismatic leader who led from the front in every regard. If this doesn't score the point home with regard to who won the mandate of 2014, the party or the leader, the authors are not sure what else will.

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