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Parliamentary Elections 2014

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Parliamentary Elections 2014—The Issues Before Us

JOHN MOHAN RAZU¹

The 16th Parliamentary General Elections scheduled to take place this summer is expected to open up new challenges and new configurations in the post-Independent political history of our nation. The two national political parties namely the BJP and the Congress are vying to capture power and desirous to form the Government at the Centre as the single largest party along with its alliance partners. Towards this end the regional parties are making careful moves whether to continue with the same alliance or shift to the other in order to maximise their bargaining power once the government is formed. As of now the scenario is hazy.

However, some political analysts predict that the formation of government is increasingly dependent on the regional parties that have a major say and stakes while devising and executing policies on crucial matters. While others contend that there is a possibility of new political formation taking place as an alternative to the existing alliances, namely NDA and UPA. Notably Indian politics revolves around identity viz. caste, religion, region, language, and other considerations and ideology.

Identity and ideology did play a major role thus far, but in this election the role of ideology seem to be receding and identities are reconfiguring and inter-facing. Barring the left and a few regional parties most of the political parties keep shifting their alliances by abdicating their ideological stance and manifestos. As of now clear demarcation of the parties based on ideological position such as the right or extreme right of the centre or left of the left and left of the centre is not apparent.

India's political culture of our country is rapidly changing in tune to the changes that take place on the ground. We are in the midst of a very critical time, and so, we cannot afford to make mistakes. The status quoits political parties want to further their interests. So, when we say non-political formation or anti-political parties all these permutations are within the ambit of the political establishment. The emergent scenario warrants governance premised on accountability and transparency. Apparently, we are in the midst of trajectories of novel formation. How and when are the questions?

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Political landscape is bound to change. It is subjected to many factors. General elections have given rise to new social and political situations, which in turn have advanced directed nuances. Failing to respond to the current impasse and thus remaining passive could lead to portents of dramatic political upheaval plunging the national polity into chaos. It might eventually give rise to fascist tendencies. The classic case is Modi factor. He is being promoted as the Prime Ministerial candidate. He seem have been elevated to the level of acceptability among sections of the socially and economically advanced segments that are active in social media networks such as Twitter and Face book. This segment have benefitted enormously from the policies and programs of LPG. This constituency comprising of entrepreneurial castes and business classes are becoming more vocal to protect their own class-caste interests. On the contrary, the current arrangement has alienated millions of the poor and marginalised negating their basic survival needs and rights.

Electoral campaigns and social media have projected Modi as the force to reckon with. The visual and print media are flooded with Modi factor. Opinion polls swings towards Modi. His rhetoric of development has captured the imagination and aspirations of the neo-middle class and castes in Gujarat. They have been hugely benefitted by the market forces and private sector services. Modi talks about development, growth, progress, prosperity, and in the process pushed himself from Gujarat to pan-Indian. With all these gimmicks, his political agenda should not be forgotten. It is impregnated with enormous social dangers which include the possibility of the rise of fascism through electoral means. History reminds us that Hitler came to power through ballet.

If BJP via Modi forms the government at Centre, communal upheaval and social polarisation shall certainly unleash and is inevitable. There seems to be a tremendous wave sweeping in favour of him across the country amongst the ultra-rightist ruled Hinduised Hindi-speaking belts and also some pockets in the Southern India. Modi is known for his aggressive communal and sectarian politics. He is undoubtedly against Muslims and minorities. His governance in the last two tenures as the Chief Minister of Gujarat triggered communal polarisation across the country. My caricature of Modi has two dimensions: prior to becoming the PM candidate "Modi was a wolf in wolf's clothes" and after his appointment as PM candidate "Modi is a wolf in lamb's clothes". The basic characteristics of Modi are the same and shall not change. Let us apply clear

criteria/yard sticks on which Modi be measured for the top political leadership of the country.

Electorates judiciously exercise their franchise when it comes to Lok Sabha and Vidana Sabha elections. Performance at the state elections need not be construed as an automatic assurance for the Lok Sabha. We have been witnessing a combination of results in the elections in 2012 and 2013. For the Vidana Sabha elections in 2012 regional parties won with local agenda. The results of these elections showed the emergence of youth leaderships. But in the 2013 elections to other states the results were just the opposite wherein the BJP won in most of the states. Does it mean BJP has an advantage over congress or is the only alternative to Congress?

Both the parties namely the Congress and the BJP are corrupt, known for poor governance and administrative lapses. These parties have equally proved that corruption is part and parcel of its culture. Prior to the elections the political parties with their rhetoric hoodwink the masses with their manifestos promising many things. After winning the elections what they said in the manifesto and what they did do not match. Therefore, people want change. But, there is an absence of political formation to counter the mainstream parties. If the vacuum is not filled with alternative counter-political option, there is every possibility of potentially dangerous social formation taking place across the country. The need of the hour is emergence of an alternative political force with new political culture and ethos.

The political climate we are in should never be considered as crisis, but coupled with challenges and opportunities. The masses across the country are disillusioned with the mainstream political parties, its policies and programs, especially the young in mid-segment, the poor and the labouring masses. In addition to these, there have been unprecedented rise in unemployment, escalation of prices in essential commodities, increase in the inter and intra migration patterns, spiralling violence against women, slave labour, ethnic conflicts, atrocities against Dalits/Tribals, millions who live in poverty and hunger across the country and host of others. The task is insurmountable, but be addressed. For this to happen there should be a broader alliance of political parties that have people's agenda. Since the BJP and the Congress have fallen short of voters expectations, the electorates want good governance and prosperous environment. This could happen only through electoral process by electing a government known for good governance centre.

Out of a maze of issues that the country faces the most crucial one is the security in all facets that the state/government provides for each citizen. It is mandatory that the state via the government shall translate the guarantees enshrined in the Constitution to its citizens. But the BJP PM candidate is the hard core ideologue of Hindutva and a staunch promoter of Hindu Raj who is opposed to secular values. His party's programs show anti-Dalit-Tribal and anti-minorities sentiments insulated with fascist tendencies. For instance, Maharashtra has witnessed amongst the largest number of communal attacks on Christians in 2013, second only to Karnataka, says a recently released by a Catholic-Secular Forum (CSF).²

Across the country the report points at 4,000-odd aimed at Christians, with 400 clergy and 100 churches attacked in a year. The report suggests Maharashtra is the next Hindutva laboratory. Christians in Karnataka had faced a spate of violent attacks by the Hindutva brigade during BJP regime till 2013. In Maharashtra, the police and the lower levels of state administration are highly saffronized," claims the report. Instances of persecution against Christians were highest in Karnataka, followed by both Maharashtra and Andhra at No.2. It is followed by Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Rajasthan and Delhi where persecution occurred.³

In recent weeks we have been witnessing widespread outcry as against the Kerala bishops who expressed their willingness to meet Modi during his visit to Kerala. For those who have known the History of the Church in Kerala would agree with the idiom that "Birds of the same feather flock together". There are a number of commonalities and linkages between Hindutva and Kerala Syrian Christianity. To cite an incidence many years ago when NCCI and RSS bigwigs in their dialogue-conversation along with Sudershan who at that time was the RSS Chief had categorically said that the Church in Kerala was the only indigenous church and the others were alien. It simply means that the Reformed Churches which primarily consist of the Dalits and the Tribals shall never be considered as Indian. For the ultra-right Hindutva fundamentalists, the Dalits and the Tribals embraced Christianity by denouncing caste-centric Hinduism. And so, they are not Indians, and naturally the churches they belong to need not be Indian too.

² See the title "Christians attacked most in K'taka, Maha: Report" in the Times of India, January 23, 2014, p. 14.

³ Ibid.

Purity and pollution are very much engrained in Hindutva ideology. Obviously, its programs are geared against those churches where the Dalits, the Tribals, the vulnerable and the downtrodden Christian communities worship. So, the meeting of the Kerala Bishops with Modi should not be taken as something unusual and shocking. Rather it is natural and thus obvious. Over and above, the Indian Church by and large has always been and known for soft-peddling and non-committed when it comes to parliamentary elections. There could be a number of factors and reasons. Nonetheless, the Indian Church has always extended its support to any party that forms the government at the Centre irrespective of its ideological stance, policy positions, and past governance ratings. Hardly have we seen clear position statements issued by the Indian Church for the forthcoming Lok Sabha Elections. Paradoxically the Indian Christians are polarised on the basis of caste, creed, language, economic status, region, and other subsidiary identities and consideration.

The ruling political class and its establishments should not take the people for granted as their objects of benevolence. New permutations and configurations keep emerging in the Indian polity and one such expression is AAP. AAP in recent times has created ripples and shaken the status quoits parties. The national parties (congress and BJP) in the modern political history of India have assumed that except them none has the political tenacity, maturity and experience to rule a complex Indian society. Sudden emergence of AAP and its formation of Government in Delhi have totally shaken the calculations of the national parties in power as well as in opposition. Masses keep surging and thronging demanding corruption-free government and institutions of governance.

AAP is thus one such expression of people's power that wilted the traditional political idiom and thus rattled the mainstream politics. AAP is undoubtedly a phenomenon. Irked by AAP's actions both Congress and BJP use negative terms. One such term is 'anarchy'. For decades the people of India tolerated all kinds of anarchy in economy, polity and socio-cultural and religious realms. When AAP purged corrupt and lethargic officials employed in the institutions of governance, the actions are attributed as anarchy. New political idioms will continue. So, the 16th Lok Sabha Elections are important for the preservation and furtherance of the democratic and secular character of our country. Let us exercise our franchise judiciously as citizens of India. As B.R. Ambedkar, the architect of India's bible of governance used a maxim which is valid at this historical juncture: "One Person, One Vote, and One Value".

