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Managing the Mandate: The Emerging Tool in the Indian Political Scenario

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Abstract: The general election for electing the sixteenth Lok Sabha would be remembered for many reasons in the history of Indian politics, with the mandate definitely being the top-most of them. For the first time in three decades, a single-party majority government was formed at the centre. Also, it was for the first time in the history of Indian politics that a non-Congress party formed a government and that too without the help of any other party. It is indeed something which would go down in the history as phenomenal and deserves attention.

This research paper would throw light on the mandate as received by the various political parties of the country, the trends which formed during the election, the vote share as garnered by the major parties, the voting patterns and other information of similar ilk. After reading this research paper, the reader would be in a position to gauge the way people voted in the nine-phase 36-day political spectacle, the largest and longest run election in the history of mankind.

Throughout this research paper, the authors would keep on highlighting the numerous aspects related to the mandate thrown in this election and how to read the same. It would be brought to the fore that getting a requisite share of the vote percentage doesn't necessarily translate into number of seats. Bahujan Samajwadi Party is a prime example of the same. Despite being the third-largest party in the country in terms of vote-share, it ended up with no seats. Such interesting facts and the implications of the same would be discussed.

I. Introduction

The general election of 2014 in the republic of India to elect the 16th Lok Sabha delivered a landmark mandate which was historic in more ways than one. The magnitude of victory, as achieved by BJP, was nothing short of being stupendous, even beyond imagination by their own standards. Even the die-hard supporters of the party could not have imagined such a momentous mandate in the favour of the party. The mandate gave wings to the expectations of the people of the country. They voted for the BJP riding high on the hope of change and promise of development and growth.

A country of around 1.3 billion, out of whom 814 million people were eligible to vote. A record turnout of close to 66.6% meant approximately 55 crore people exercised their franchise to vote in the election, collectively making them the largest voting population anywhere in the planet. These are mind-boggling numbers which merit attention thus making this election unlike any other either in Indian history or for that matter anywhere else in the world.

The result of the election threw many interesting results. For the first time, Bharatiya Janata Party (henceforth BJP) spread its wings beyond the Northern part of the country and came up triumphant in large swathes of land across the nation. It became a national party in true sense and trounced a party whose legacy ran 125 years. Its mission of 'Congress-mukt Bharat' was very much realized in majority of the states.

Such was the pounding received by INC that it drew a blank in 7 of the states of the country not to mention its worst-ever showing of securing only 44 seats. To gauge the extent of drubbing faced by it, a regional party AIADMK which won seats only from the state of Tamilnadu secured 37 seats, just 7 shy of the national tally of INC. likewise, TMC secured 34, BJD 20. These were regional parties having limited appeal which didn't go beyond their home states and they were within such a close distance from Congress, a national party which ruled India for the better part since general election first took place in 1952.

II. The Verdict

Many people draw parallels of this election with that of 1977. The 1977 election was seen as one which resulted in a referendum which was given in favour of political freedom. The referendum given to the Janata Party was seen as a befitting reply by the Indian electorate towards the excesses of Late Indira Gandhi as committed by her during the Emergency. They were exasperated by the high-handedness of her and wanted to teach her party a lesson. It was this factor, more than the charm of Janata Party, which propelled it to power.

However, the mandate of 2014 was given to Bharatiya Janata Party, more so to Mr Narendra Modi, on the plank of development rather than anything else. People might say that being in power for the past one decade anti-incumbency was a major factor for the defeat of INC and political pundits would not disagree with the same to

an extent but it was the charisma of Mr Modi, above all else, which proved to be the decisive element in the lok sabha election of 2014. Many people hailed this mandate as akin to economic freedom as they were fed-up with the coalition compulsions, rampant corruptions, scandals, earth-shattering scams, unimaginative and weak leadership, graft, nepotism, red-tapeism, and other negative attributes as associated with the incumbent government.

Another interesting trend which came to the fore in the lok sabha election of 2014 was related to the median margin of victory. If one looks across the past four elections to elect the lok sabha, the victory margin was in the range of seven to nine percent which highlighted that the difference between winning and losing seats were relatively smaller. However, the result of 2014 indicated a bigger margin between the winners and the losers. It shot up to a record high of thirteen percent. It is quite an achievement for the winners as it goes on to show that the electorate rejected candidates more vehemently this time than it has in the past two decades or so.

III. The BJP Juggernaut

To give an idea about the magnitude of victory of BJP, it won 282 seats, 166 more than it won in the 2009 general election. The question of taking support of allies became redundant though it honoured all pre-poll alliances. The BJP-led NDA won 336 seats, an astronomical rise of more than twice from its 2009 showing of 159 seats. This was the highest tally put up by a party/coalition since the 414 seats garnered by Late Rajiv Gandhi-led Congress. However, the scenarios are as disparate as chalk and cheese. Congress won that historic mandate riding on the wave of sympathy which formed in the aftermath of assassination of Late Indira Gandhi. Whereas the 2014 mandate, which BJP won with a landslide margin, was given on the agenda of growth and development more than anything else, even anti-incumbency. People voted for change, for pro-development policies. They believed in the charisma of the talismanic Mr Modi as they were fed up with the despondency and gloom as prevailing for the past decade, more so during UPA II.

On the contrary, INC won 44, a huge let down from its show of 206 in the 2009 general election. Same was the case of INC-led UPA. It too suffered a major rout. It just managed to eke out a total of 60 seats, a far cry from the 262 seats it got in 2009, a huge loss of 200+ seats. Such was the battering received that even the most loyal followers found it hard to explain the debacle suffered by the party. They made up excuses but were found lacking the conviction for the same. Such was the scale of the defeat, that out of the 80 seats in Uttar Pradesh, the most in any state, only Mrs Sonia Gandhi and Mr Rahul Gandhi won seats for Congress and that too from their strongholds. The margin of victory for Mr Rahul Gandhi was less than one-third of what he got in the 2009 election from Amethi. On the contrary, BJP gained by more than seven times. The party won a paltry 10 seats in 2009 and this time it won 72! BSP scored a blank and SP came triumph only at 5 seats, all to the extended family of Mr Mulayam Singh Yadav.

Congress faced similar fate in another state and that was Maharashtra. From 17 MPs in the state, it went down to 2. It lost all the seven seats in Delhi.

BJP fulfilled its Mission 26 in Gujarat and won all of the seats there. It was equally stupendous success in Chattisgarh where it came triumphant in 10 out of the 11 seats. In Madhya Pradesh, barring two, it won all the 29 seats. A complete dominance in Delhi only sweetened the deal for the party where its candidates scored home in all the seven seats. Equally impressive were the victories in Bihar and Jharkhand where the party collectively won 40 out of the 54 seats. Along with its ally, it won on 41 seats out of 48 in Maharashtra.

These are some impressive numbers indeed. The incumbent government in J&K suffered whitewash and the six seats were shared between BJP and PDP three each. The juggernaut didn't stop there. It rolled home in 7 out of the possible 10 seats in Haryana. In effect, it was a one-party show in almost entire North India. There was no answer to the Modi wave which took along with it all the prospects of its opposition.

Such was the dominance of BJP that it won an astonishingly 147 seats out of 168 the three states having a cumulative strength of almost one-third of the lok sabha seats, almost ninety percent of the available seats. No wonder, majority of the ministers, be it finance, defense, railways, home, HRD, have, in the past, came from these three states. Each one of these states has been crucial for any party to form government at the center in the past and BJP went on to stamp its authority in a big way in all of them.

IV. The Regional Influence

On one hand BJP did phenomenally well in most of the states. Then there were those states where regional parties called the shots. They were unchallenged and despite the charisma of Mr Modi, held on their own to come out triumphant. There was AIADMK under the leadership of yet another talismanic leader, J Jayalalitha, the incumbent chief minister, who won a massive 37 seats out of the possible 39 seats in Tamil Nadu, a feat which has no parallels in the history of the state. It led to the abysmal performance of DMK, another prominent force (or used to be) in the state which failed to win even a single seat. BJP had to satisfy itself with just 1 seat.

Next state which proved the dominance of its regional leader was West Bengal where Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress stole the show big time. The incumbent chief minister's party won 34 seats out of the 42 seats up for grabs in the state.

Likewise, Odisha gave a huge mandate in favour of the incumbent chief minister's party. Biju Janata Dal won 20 seats out of the 21 seats and BJP got just one.

Shiv Sena, an ally of BJP and an important member of NDA, romped home in 18 of the seats in Maharashtra, the state where it had a 25-year old alliance with BJP.

One interesting similarity among majority of the above-mentioned states is the fact that the incumbent government held sway over its competitors, including BJP. This goes on to prove that amidst the hype surrounding the brand appeal of Mr Modi, the regional leaders, specifically the incumbent chief ministers, held on their own.

At the same time, there were states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, J & K where the tide was against the incumbent government and they had to face the ire of the electorate.

V. Death of the King-Maker

The parties in these states have, more often than not, played the king-makers in the past governments. Hence they were rewarded with plum posts out of coalition compulsion. They literally dictated their terms to the incumbent government who had no other option than to oblige them. This particularly held true for both the UPA regimes, more so during UPA II when allegations of rampant corruption, nepotism and graft were made against INC, and many of the members of its allies were implicated in such charges. It brought bad name on the party by heaps. The weak and unimaginative leadership didn't help the cause either.

But this time around, the absolute dominance of BJP, at least in the states mentioned above and otherwise as well, made sure that no coalition compulsions deterred it from forming a stable government and that too without compromising on who will get what ministry. Mr Modi was known as a no-nonsensical leader since he took up the post of the CM in Gujarat in 2001 and stood by the same prior to and after the general election. He never let anyone dictate his/her terms on him, rather it worked the other way around. It was he who called the shots whether it be inside his party or among his allies. The senior members of BJP were relegated to the background under his leadership. One can very well imagine the traction which he would have given to his allies.

The king maker really lost its position of calling the shots in the government formation. Prior to the election, many psephologists predicted that Jayalalitha, Mamata Banerjee, Nitish Kumar, Mulayam Singh Yadav, Sharad Pawar might play the king makers like on previous instances when they were instrumental in the formation of the government. They spoke on the exit poll predictions majority of which forecasted that BJP might fall of the half-way mark in case of which these parties can play the role of king makers like they used to do so and benefit from the same. There were leaders like Mr Pawar who has been known for being on the most opportunistic ones and siding with the party at the center. Why just him? Majority of the regional leaders are like him who want to benefit from the current equation at play.

VI. Vote Share : A Different Ball Game Altogether

'69% of the voting population doesn't want Narendra Modi to become the prime minister of India', was the highlight of one of the leading dailies in the aftermath of the election. BJP got the lowest vote share, 31%, of all the parties which have got past the majority mark of 272 in the history of Indian politics. The detractors of Mr Modi highlighted this aspect on every possible occasion. They told that less than 20 crore people in the country want him to be the next PM. The supporters thought otherwise. They highlighted the point that the vote share of BJP has gone up by almost 12 percent, that too at the expense of parties like INC.

Congress' fortune dipped both seat-wise and vote share-wise. However, the decline in its vote share was not as drastic as that in seats. It secured 19 percent of the popular votes, much on the same lines as BJP in 2009 but seat-wise they were poles apart. While BJP won 116 in 2009 election having the same vote share, INC could muster only 44.

The biggest surprise was the abysmal performance of BSP despite having the third-largest vote share nationwide. Despite having a vote share of 4.1 percent, it didn't get even a single seat. On the contrary, TMC and AIADMK both got more than 30 seats each despite having lesser vote share than BSP. So much for the numbers! Then there is BJD which having won 20 seats was the fifth-highest party in terms of the number of seats won but it stood at a lowly 17th position in terms of votes polled in its favour. It garnered a measly 1.7%. Same was the case with Shiv Sena which polled 1.9% votes and won 18 seats, eerily similar to BJD. But then even DMK polled 1.7% of the votes and still remained seat-less!

What is of interest here is to note that in total, 18 parties managed to secure one percent or more in terms of vote share in this election. That's a huge number of parties given the huge impact which BJP had on this election. It also implies that the verdict was more fractured than shown by the seats won by parties.

VII. Conclusion

One can safely say that this win by BJP was the biggest mandate given by the voters of the country against incumbency. Congress slumped to its worst-ever show and was reduced to two digits for the first time since the first general election was conducted in 1952. The massive verdict was won by BJP on the plank of development

and its pro-growth policies rather than anything else, a far cry from the gain made on the ground of the sympathy wave and subsequent performance as registered by INC in the aftermath of assassination of Late Indira Gandhi in 1984. The first non-Congress majority government took shape for the first time in independent India.

What was indeed commendable on the part of BJP for achieving such a decisive mandate was the fact that geographically it was limited to mostly northern and western parts of the nation. Barring Karnataka, it hardly made any inroads in southern India. Even in Uttar Pradesh, it scored in those areas of the state which are dominated by the backward people, a traditional vote bank for the two parties – SP & BSP. The caste equations failed and the barriers were broken by the party successfully.

However, the vote share of the various parties presented a somewhat different picture. The starkness in terms of difference between BJP and INC was not to the same extent as reflected in the seats. The third-largest party in the country in terms of vote share failed to win even a single seat. Parties having less vote percentages won more seats than those having high percentages. It reflected the fractured nature of voting patterns as exhibited by the electorate of the country.

Overall, it was mandate which was historic in more ways than one and would go down in history for many reasons and remembered for numerous years to come.

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