

VETO OF THE OPPOSITION

(Manufacturing consent plus Midwifing dissent)

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We had predicted a 10 years rule for BJP government and called Modi the Indira Gandhi of neo-middle classes (see post dated --- on : shashidharkapur@wordpress.com). Subsequently, we reiterated in Nov 2018 saying that first signs of trend reversal will become apparent only in 2024, if at all. While the first prediction has come true , we will have to wait till June 4 to see whether the second passes muster.

2024 is Global Election year with over 50 countries going to polls , including the world's oldest and the biggest democracies. While there is greater than usual buzz in the U.S., in India election season appears to be a damp squib. Some of the reasons why there is apparently not much happening could be the country being in continuous election mode , protracted voting cycle , no great contest expected between national parties , the real pressing issues concerns not adequately represented , Manifestos not delivered , promises not kept , assurances denied and so on. Over time, disinterestedness assumes a dangerous sign for democracy if the biggest stakeholders in a young nation become cynical. This time out a very large portion of first time voters have simply not bothered to register. Their disengagement may be due to lack of university elections , poor public education or both. On the other hand , biggest beneficiaries of government schemes- women- too have become skeptical as is reflected in their voting percentage come down by 5-10 percent. Multiple reasons for low voting –Heat wave , apathy , cynicism , low registration , wedding season et al. Suppression of protest has made the protest internal (silent) .. Later expressed in NOTA , boycott or not voting individually. 2024 is a weird election for both US and India - We could see America being run either from a jail or hospital if trends continue. India on the other hand , could see Citizens living in an open jail or makeshift mental hospital . There could be exigency – undeclared emergency - and oddballs may rule the roost. Either which way , the options are less than exciting. This complementary trend of US and Indian elections began at the outset of Covid when Trump became the first

President in decades to lose after first term while in India despite massive lapses in Covid management , various state governments returned to power with even greater majority. Whether that trend continues would be reflected in Trumps' rise with a proportional decline of Modi and vice versa . One will have to wait till the end of the year to know that. ***

From the citizens' point of view , a rough and ready **report card** of the outgoing government and opposition is the starting point.. About the incumbent government , like all its predecessors there are good as well as not so good things. Last mile delivery of schemes , digitisation , vaccination drive , quantum improvement in infrastructure , public communication are some of its highpoints while demonetisation , GST , poor Covid management , dilution of institutions ,negating federalism , majoritarianism , are some of the key failures .Based on it . the government may have earned 38 percent marks - equivalent to its votes polled. As for the opposition , their highpoint was prickly fight put up by regional parties ; National parties though performed below par both in parliament and among people .Some nationwide yatras and pushing the government on backfoot may have been the only high points. In fact , more than the opposition it is the citizens who fought their own existential battles as in the case of farmers. All said Opposition may have scored at most 36 percent marks - half of their potential 62 percent.

The report card indicates many things about various dimensions of the nation -its four pillars : legislature ,executive ,judiciary and ,media in particular . Legislature during the past decade has become more **like post office** – mostly stamping whatever is presented ; Executive has been disempowered to the extent of becoming like a delivery boy; mostly judgment ,less justice; largely media left very little journalism . Legislation has been reduced to a mere formality with all important bills not shared with the opposition till the last moment whereby leaving little scope for indepth debate ; Ministers have been reduced to darbaris – almost all key ones are from Rajya Sabha and hence politically weak ; at most they seek clarifications but never express contrarian view ; Medipersons at best may provide credible information but hardly ever provide context , analysis , explanation; at best only doubts are

cleared but authorizes never questioned... Co-opted media is being used to manufacture consent. As for the Judiciary, many new laws have made the process as punishment by inverting the dictums “ Innocent till proven guilty “ and “Bail, not jail is the norm “ To “ guilty till proven innocent “ and “ Jail, not bail” shifting the onus on the victim in specified cases...What should’ve been the way in favour of weak esp. women, backward and minorities has been weaponised to target political rivals. There are hints about of the State of federation too – its four columns: Society, advocacy/movements, activism/protests and social media. Political is being pursued in the name of social; Society is becoming more religious in the garb of cultural; sole focus on aspiration sans ambition has legitimised greed; activism had a death knell for a generation after Anna Movement fizzled out to become a political party; movements have been nipped in the bud and social media is a toxic factory being used to midwife dissent.

The above analysis offers **both opportunities and dangers- former being** Demographic dividend, Factory of the World, eliminating poverty, Human resource provider for the globe etc. As for various dangers: Democracy is not in danger, republic is; nation is not in danger, federalism is; Constitution is not in danger, institutions are ... As Modi said “ khud Ambedkar bhi Samvidhaan ko nahin badal sakte ”..More than external threat, surveillance state is a real danger; entire populace becoming aspirational and hardly anyone becoming ambitious is a great danger; Corporate Cooperativism becoming all pervasive while the space-time for Individual personal has shrunk; Perhaps the biggest danger is disproportionate focus on material and proportional reduction on enhancing human resources...Besides, two of the darkest issues –Corruption and communalism – have been normalized. One national party projected Hindutva, the other too followed with soft Hindutva instead of Sarva dharma sambhava; One party was synonymous with individual corruption, the other brought in institutional corruption... converting it to necessary evil instead of going after both individual as well as collective corruption.

Based on the above, various parties came up with their Vision and Mission. **BJP** spoke of a UNSC seat and developed nation status by 2047.; In the short term, going for 5 trillion economy and making it the third biggest in the world **Congress** of the other hand talked of -Poverty elimination (Beyond mere alleviation), building a rights based society and wealth redistribution...Jobs led growth and reigning in inflation being the immediate goal.

Issues and Concerns remain the same in every election- only their priority and weightage changes. This time out Congress is raising the issues of unemployment, inflation and corruption besides social justice in the form of Caste census while BJP after beginning with sole focus on development and Vision for India @ 2047 returned to core emotive issues of Anti Nationals and *Sanatana* haters midway through the voting.

What strategies did these parties adopted about acualising their vision and / or tactics to realizing their mission ? **BJP** focused on *Ghulam Kaise Hue* (Focus on the reasons for being colonized and eliminating them)...Harping on unity divided in castes, regions, languages (Diversity in unity than other way round) ...basically Kamandal plus Mandal.Congress talks of how Independence was achieved and aims to fulfill the dream of founding fathers. It presents an alternative vision of Integrating stuff (Integrity in plurality): highlighting the Constitution, reviving the institutions...As far as electoral strategies are concerned, BJP has gone for the kill against regional parries while Congress has ceded maximum space to them esp. in states where they are in power.

The specific aims and goals of the parties as reflected in their Manifestos includes BJP promising to make India the third biggest economy and building 3 cr homes for the poor besides bidding to host Olympics in 2036 as its move for youth connect .Congress main promises include 1 L per year cash transfer to BPL women, ,apprenticeship scheme for Youth carrying out Caste census and relooking New Education policy be sides revoking *Agniveer* scheme

Overall , state has become stronger vis-a -vis citizen , republic diluted , government tracks us round the year but citizens can barely track the govt –RTI diluted ,protests nipped , media coopted. Single ideology dead ...either dual or coalition ; Vision is mostly hyped and Mission a hyperbole. We have enough material infrastructure for a generation but human resources slipped by as much ... Must focus mostly on qualitative enhancement of demographic dividend for 10 yrs if not till 2047.

Having analysed the parties , an outline now about the state of citizens. Voters are riddled with many doubts , unanswered questions...Parties Divert , deflect , indulge in Whataboutery peddle misleading , confusing information .. In the election season every direct question is brushed aside and fact check trolled... In this maze , we act as DRS-cum –ball tracker in trying to give an accurate judgment sans spin.

Many major issues totally brushed under the carpet .Covid is the biggest example ...Neither party has mentioned it for the fear of being exposed in own zone .Likewise none have mentioned Chinese aggression as they're wary of being labeled anti national. National interest has been compromised on the altar of electoral arithmetic.

One of the definitions of democracy is ruling by explanation. However , in India there is great lack of conceptual clarity. Everyone talks about **Development** and give it their own spin. It is never clarified whether the term means material development or human resource development or both. Another faulty reasoning is about last minute freebies by the governments and promises by opposition backed candidates throwing money . It is claimed to be good for economy as lot o f money comes in to circulation. That is not exactly true since the circulation at the last minutes makes the money distorted - not being spent on the right stuff in the correct ratio. Both material source development and human resource growth has to be in the matching ratio of material indices and human intelligencies.

Then there is the concept of Nationalism...By conflating nation with the state a citizen's love for the nation is converted to subservience to the state. It has to

be citizen nationalism - That the combo of Nation's material indices and citizens' intelligencies makes it unique and special.

In LS 2024, Many Perennial issues & concerns have been Normalised. For instant Corruption- Corruption is not a central issue anymore despite the role of agencies as purely administrative actions too are seen as political in light of elections. Similarly...the fact of the matter is that corruption is not an issue ; loot is .Another issue - Communalism- too has been nullified ...Resulting in switchover from Appeasement of minority to pandering for Majority. These days there is a surfeit of **doublespeak**. While one section speaks vehemently in favour of Caste census , the other viciously opposes it . Yet the former doesn't give tickets in the ratio of castes while the latter too gives many tickets on caste basis. It is left upon the poor voter to second guess the rationale.

Elections are an occasion to announce reforms and discuss them. Strangely, LS 2024 features very little talk of reforms. Only about ONOE (one nation one election).. Nothing about GST reform , police reforms et al. On the other hand , big ticket changes are kept off the radar -Seats delimitation ; Constitutional overhaul for instance .

A lot of **fuzzy concepts** being bandied - Viksit Bharat , Atmanirbhar etc. To us it appears only the next version of previous concepts such as developing India and self reliance. Phoney **binaries** have been created in which precious time and energy is being invested. Bharat versus India and North versus South for example. Our take is that it ought to be Bharat and India than Bharat v/s India , north and south ... In this chaos, real binaries such as “ rich versus poor divide ” “ Urban v/s rural division” is being ignored.

As always parties come up with catchy acronyms - only the trend has gotten more pronounced in the age of WhatsApp. This election season top Acronyms : GYAN : Gareeb (Poor), Youth, Annadata (Farmer), and Nari (Woman). Of BJP ; MY- BAAP (Muslim Yadav - Bahujan :Backwards and Dalits, Agdaa :upper caste , Aadhi Aabadi (women), Pichda and poor); PDA (Pichade-Dalit – Alpasankshyaak/Aadhi Aabadi) of Samajwadi.

Hype and hyperbole is part and parcel of every election. Only that in LS 2024 it is in greater proportion. While the ruling dispensations speaks about making India the *Vishwa Guru* (Mentor of the world) , opposition cries about undeclared emergency...Our take is that *Vishwa Bandhu* (Friend of all) is a better option since *Vishwa Guru* reeks of superiority complex ; As for draconian rules , it may not be Emergency but undeclared emergency could be called Exigency (*Aafatkaal* -not- *Aapaat kaal*)...Moreover , some of the things said have crossed all limits of sanity - Modi claiming to be a divine entity or Rahul guaranteeing to take reservations beyond 50 percent or Tejaswi promising to implement reservations in private sector - took it too far. Political parties in election mode going in overdrive is normal but the worrying part is **media** getting sucked into it ... Even acting as force multiplier in social media...All the standard headlines are put on steroids and you have the scenario of TV channels saying “ War” , “ *Mahabharat*” while some newspapers call it “ Dance of democracy”... Our take is they’re doing a great disservice by focusing on individuals and events rather than policies , programmes , agendas , issues and manifestoes ... In any case why can’t they coin new words ... Why war ? Let it be “ play” ?(Sport / *Khela*) ...Why merely dance ? Why not drama ? Theatre.? *Leela*?...At the end of the day, mainstream media and social media roles were labeled **Godi media v/s Pididi media**.

All said and done various possible scenarios on June 4 ,2024could be.

Perfect scenario : Two coalitions/alliances get equivalent seats and votes –within 6.25 with opposition controlling as many more states ;That’ll position India as a “leading power”.

Ideal within 12.5 %: which makes for a “Balancing power “

Practical : within 25% vi 300 & 225 ;India remains a functional anarchy.

Imperfect : 364 180 ...constitution redesign may be attempted: chaos ,messy : dysfunctional state ensues.

Odd : Winning party gets over 400 : constitutional overhaul on the cards ; old bad traits of the pre-independence polity return.

Impractical : Winning party breaks the previous record of over 414 seats with less than 6.25 pc votes for the main opposition- It'll be single party/ coalition rule/ New constitution for sure : Dysfunctional anarchy.

Our projection is that winning spot will be between “practical” and “imperfect”. As mentioned at the beginning , two things not available elsewhere –about NDA being under 271 and lower than 2019 in south and east ...It'll be updated after the exit polls to give final prediction and before wrapping it up with an explainer on election results. (The final Opinion poll :ABP says 155 to INDIA & 373 to NDA .)The idea of this essay was to complement citizens' information, analysis as also enlighten in some ways ...To make their call...If chosen wisely, India could be an Independent country, Bharat an autonomous society by 2047 , else from residents to *Praja* and the virtual form of 99yrs lease may come true.-Just as it happened a millennium ago.
