



MEDIA & ELECTIONS

ELECTIONS AND NEW MEDIA

There was a much greater use of social media this time out. While sites came up with detailed information about candidates and constituencies as also analysis, the parties and candidates made ample use of the social media. In a sense it marked the onset of interactive polity besides offering a space for middle classes. Election commission too kept an eye on the sites besides counting them towards the expenses.

Then there is the practical aspect of social media- which uses the new media for propaganda. The perverse

part was disinformation, misinformation, gossip, slander and pure hatred - particularly on social media. (as was confirmed by the cobra-post.com's sting). Then there is the ever persistent issue of sites being active even after the official campaigning stops.

This trend is likely to grow during the Lok Sabha elections. Since every innovation has a dual nature - regulatory mechanisms as well as public education have to go hand in hand to ensure that its positive use outweighs misuse.

Media's inability to gauge the pulse of voter this time also has to do that the media too didn't go to the grassroots voter and do the right kind of discussions. Instead of having apolitical people- intellectuals and creatives- advocate the agenda, it was mostly the candidates and sanitized audience which carried out mock discussions. The other reason was to get opinion polls done by external agencies - sort of shutting out ground reporting. Opinion polls are easier to manage. Various extra curricular activities are the order of the day on the eve of each elections. New channels -regional news channels in particular -spring up out of nowhere - perhaps to dodge paid news, DPR in the name of Journalism or it could be an investment of jittery politicians in the future. The officers smell the wind and start aligning accordingly, new political parties spring up - as a safe passage for black money and also as self aggrandisement; most of these vanish after the elections.

Ever increasing role of regional media in misinformation, disinformation - planting stories, preventing reports, impact features and all of that. Media houses being allotted mines just prior to elections, Political parties investing in media houses - steps like these have failed the unsuspecting voter.

Various extra curricular activities are the order of the day on the eve of each elections. New channels -regional news channels in particular - spring up out of nowhere - perhaps to dodge paid news, DPR in the name of Journalism or it could be an investment of jittery politicians in the future. This time out, the maximum fraud is in Digital / Social media - with DPR accrediting over 100 shady sites belonging to marketing, advertising, sales personnel and wives of working Journalists.

A few ways in which 2018 coverage is different

- * For the first time media got a little bold (perhaps after model code)- and put up the total of announcements made by Shivraj in the last One month totaling to 12 thousand crores.-or is it due to the wind blowing.-News 18
- * Dainik Bhaskar published "Vote Bank Se Aage" views of intellectuals
- * TOI had a broad review of promises to delivery of Shivraj govt.-50-50
- * Bhaskar Began an election quiz.
- * News 18 had a detailed discussion about the candidates on the declaration of tickets (hopefully it may cause a rethink in few)
- * Bhaskar began a sort of selection process for citizens by asking people to Nominate their choice.(without disclosing the neutrality measures)
- * Coverage in websites has registered the maximum increase.

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VIRTUAL ELECTIONS IN....

Elections have been dulled by aping the tokenisms of the west without addressing the substantive issues. For instance limiting the expenses of candidates without limiting the expenses of the parties. It has become more of a Public party than people's festival - which it used to be. Minor changes are introduced in the process-like introduction of VVPAT-but no discussion on the systemic issues viz. limiting the terms of a CM/MLA.

The elections seem to be fought only for the politicians, their workers and direct beneficiaries. The vast remaining middle classes, non-vote banks have almost been disenfranchised. It is in continuation with the treatment meted out to the minorities. Accountability and responsibility is only to parties/money banks and vote contractors/voters -the remaining can have welfare at most and forget about progress. They're reduced merely to voters from citizens. Workers have become mercenaries - in the absence of political acculturation-shifting parties at the drop of a hat. There is much greater corporatisation - workers operate like robots, members are controlled by whips and views aired exclusively thru spokespersons.

People know more about the CM than their neighbourhood legislator. Alliances get scuttled due to the fear of brokering post results- ideology, commitment, dedication is nowhere in the mix. Data controlling and info management is the key rather than building movements, carrying out struggles, agitations. The voter is made fickle minded and scatter brained by constant bombardment of messages and continuous in-your-face campaigning. Some parties/leaders remain in electoral mode thought their term precluding anti-incumbency; but what about pro-incumbency? In other words, the voter is not allowed to think or realize - he is made a robot and moron. We are living in a world where robots/ algorithms/ social media tries to convert us into morons and morons/ Babas/Politicians try to convert us into robots. A case in point being the fact that bitterest battles are fought over fake social media posts; likewise, Kamalnath importing Sadhus from Ayodhya (in previous elections) and Shivraj giving ministerial berth to Babas is not exactly a compliment to the intelligence/ common sense of voters.

Campaign too has undergone change- it is much more theatrical than realistic. It is designed in Post truth world with alternate facts; hype and hyperbole are the norm rather than exception. Same strategists work for different parties in different elections- it is a virtual strategy. Crowds are imported from other-rating and calibrating the debates it makes them shriller and polarized. There is a whole lot fake news, planted stories, phoney debates and discussions.

Branding is by name-calling; Political campaigning through sloganeering, ditties, verse, song, rating and calibrating the debates it makes them shriller and polarized. There is a whole lot fake news, planted stories, phoney debates and discussions. Branding is by name-calling; Political campaigning through sloganeering, ditties, verse, song, rating and calibrating the debates it makes them shriller and polarized. There is a whole lot fake news, planted stories, phoney debates and discussions. Branding is by name-calling; Political campaigning through sloganeering, ditties, verse, song, retain status quo. The establishment will only do the same things albeit for a different set of people and/or in a different way. Even after the elections only a handful of people / bodies will decide major policies, a select bunch of retain status quo. The establishment will only do the same things albeit for a different set of people and/or in a different way. Even after the elections only a handful of people / bodies will decide major policies, a select bunch of bureaucrats and many non-state actors will control it bypassing the elected representatives. Ad-hocism would be the rule rather than exception. It'll be a government of minority, for the minority and of the minority - albeit a powerful minority. We will only select a Pradhan Sewak instead of a Chief minister-cum- Pradhan sewak (Of the rich /powerful and poor/ weak respectively); we will elect only our Pratinidhi and not Leader-cum-Pratinidhi. As it is, national governments got weakened due to globalisation who in turn weaken the state governments -they emasculate Panchayats in turn. In a sense Madhya Pradesh is becoming an internal colony -bigger states and power leaders/ organisations corner the major chunk of the pie. Cyclical change in governments-without change in system- will be a poor substitute for real change. There would be non-participatory/pseudo-participatory (Participation in minor concerns alone) governance with jobless growth.

How did this situation come about ?

An entire generation of leadership at local level was stunted with CM hogging all the limelight throughout. Anti incumbency was cleverly directed to local leaders/ MLAs - who became a disposable commodity in every term. Money rather than time has become the currency of politicking / electioneering. If you have the moolah everything - from strategists to crowds - is available at a price. On the one hand there is corporatisation of the structure and on the other hand increasing role of dynasties. Opposition is easily co-opted in the post - ideology politics.

Role of capital and technology have totally over-

shadowed the role of Humans and ideas. This has meant that almost the entire focus is on material / physical development and human resource languishes. To add to the woes almost all the govt. contracts go to a select few and there is an oligopoly. Since most governments are running huge debts they have become land / resource grabbers - by acquiring prime land / resources and passing them on to private people. The conventional wisdom of a democratic governance is that it is for the maximum good of the maximum number and maximum risk of the strongest; in the current scenario, it is about the maximum good of a minimum number and while gains are for a select few, risks are borne by the masses. For instance, a handful of individuals/ corporations grab the expensive projects in Smart cities while masses have to foot the bills for decades. The point is, did the people ask for it? Or did the leaders promise it as a priority? The trend however is to enumerate the works of the government without clarifying whether it was one of the promises or did people seek it? Instead that work is delivered which wasn't promised and succor provided to others than the ones who sought it. Thus we have a case of majoritarian / totalitarian governments and authoritarian/ autocratic leaders.

It defies logic - the paradox is that with increasing income and education the system should've improved. Instead it has become almost a farce. From Government of the people, by the people and for the people it has become government of the rich/powerful, by the rich/ powerful and for the rich/powerful. For the others, it is lollypop and jhunjhuna democracy. Vote Tantra instead of Lok Tantra; Selection instead of election. Come what may, in any scenario

Kamal will not lose -Whether Kamalnath or Kamal

Shiv will not lose -Whether Shivraj or Shivbakt

Scindia will not lose -Whether Jyotiraditya or Yashodhara

Mayawati will not lose -she will be in the winning camp.

BJP will lose -even if the party wins, it'll be with a reduced majority.

Congress will lose -even if the party wins, it would've made too many compromises.

Madhya Pradesh will lose -In the current scenario, headroom for any govt. will further shrink.

Citizens would lose- They will not get what they asked for or what was promised; instead what the parties / leaders want will be thrust upon them.

With virtual candidates and virtual agenda we are moving from virtual elections to a virtual democracy.

ADDENDUM

It is not as if this is happening in Madhya Pradesh alone. This is part of a global change in the election process. It has both positive and dark trends-while the enlightened voter gets empowered the governments become even more powerful vis-à-vis the not so enlightened ones..The most worrying point is that the darkest aspects of global trends are the first ones to gain currency at the hyperlocal level- particularly in underdeveloped areas. In that sense the elections in M.P. are being heavily meddled in- from benign looking "friends of MP" kind of groups in the virtual space to the money pumped by global corporations.

How does one go about addressing this? The onslaught of Capital and technology can only be countered with the strength of civil society and ideas. To begin with, citizens have to be educated about the real issues, hidden agenda - in particular the first time voters. Senior citizens can play a great role in this. Apolitical citizens and organisations must pool in resources - both human and material to both do public accounting and social audit of the establishment. One you enlighten Youth, women and marginalised the political narrative would have to change. Seek a space for independent politics - free from corporate and dynasties. In fact, there ought to be a movement for reserving seats for Independent/apolitical candidates.

The paradox of rising income and decreasing democracy will not be solved by mere tinkering- it calls for a systemic overhaul. Having merely "Indianised system" will not do; we need 'An Indian system of elections'.

While systemic changes like holding simultaneous elections could be a long drawn process some minor reforms could be considered:

Limiting the expenses of parties (not merely candidates)

Do not allow change of parties after the declaration of model code of conduct -it diverts attention.

Only manifesto to be discussed after model code of conduct -so as to have positive politics- whatever charge sheets/ report cards have to be debated must be done before the model code of conduct.

Declare candidates at least three months(ideally one year) before the elections- on the same day.

Publish manifestos at least three months (ideally one year) before the elections- on the same day.