

**Rethinking the Indian exuberant cycle
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Introduction

The just concluded General Elections in India whose results have generated severe shockwaves across the country's political landscape have been unique for a number of reasons that would be analyzed further by political scientists as time goes by.¹ But let us first try to understand what are the implications of these results in terms of their political fallout and the future roadmap of India as the largest democracy of the world in the context of South Asian geo-strategic dynamics.

GOOD GOVERNANCE

It is clear that the Indian people have voted overwhelmingly in favor of a stable government and have reversed the trends of regional politics in the country that was provoked by the so-called deinstitutionalization of the Congress since 1967.² The formidable Congress (presently known as the Indian National Congress) monolith started disintegrating as local parties with focused aspirations emerged powerful enough to challenge the hegemonistic model of one party rule in India.

This was interesting enough as the Congress had always claimed to champion the cause(s) of nearly all the cross-sections of society and had ideological fractures deep enough to be identified

with the multicultural polity of India. It was generally accepted that the tensions of the Indian political system incited by divisions of caste, ethnicity, language and religion (among other critical factors) were suitably reflected in the pluralistic mosaic of the Congress leadership during 1947-67.

But the emergence of strong local and regional political parties triggered decentralizing tendencies and led to the era of coalition politics in India since 1977 when Jayaprakash Narayan launched his famous movement to purge the country along social democratic lines. A series of coalition (and non-Congress) governments followed in New Delhi with interludes of Congress rule.

Even the last Indian Government since 2004 was being led by the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) with the centrist Congress as the single largest party (supported by the leftist and a host of other regional parties) pitted against the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) led by the rightist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). But the 2009 elections have finally delivered a clear mandate in favor of the Congress to rule unhindered (without the botherations of running a government with ideologically incompatible pre or even post-electoral allies).

The recurrent message that is rather obvious during this stage of post-poll analysis indicates that the Indian people have voted for a strong and stable government that can act both decisively and visibly on fundamental issues of good governance (3). This government would have such a majority of pre-electoral allies in the House of the People (Lower House) of the Union Parliament that would ensure its vision and mission for the next five years that may well prove to be crucial in the political history of the country.

STYLE OF LEADERSHIP

Now it has become clear that the BJP had erred in a serious manner when they had condemned Dr Manmohan Singh as a weak and vacillating Prime Minister who cannot take any firm decisions and who is being steered at all times from the shadows by the UPA Chairperson Sonia Gandhi. Rahul Gandhi had replied to this charge that at least the Congress did not hand over terrorists to free the hijacked hostages at Kandahar in Afghanistan in 1999 (as the BJP did much to the consternation of a majority of the Indian civil society).

Dr Manmohan Singh has formidable credentials as an academic, a bureaucrat and as the Finance Minister of India. He also comes across to the popular perception as a man who believes in work and not words. Dr Singh has never been verbose in the past but had guided his government through terribly troubled times by his quiet manner and political vision. He is also responsible for combining pro-people policies with his model of radical economic reforms. He is dynamic without being disturbing and strategic without being verbose.

POLITICAL RHETORIC

The results of these general elections are also expected to determine to some extent the manner in which the discourse of political rhetoric is negotiated in India. The BJP and the Left parties and others had begun an aggressive political tirade against the Prime Minister during the countdown to the polls and their slander campaign had even verged on being too personal at times. But the Congress had exercised commendable restraint at nearly all times and had also ensured political decency (4).

This would perhaps indicate a new language of politics in the country for the foreseeable future. The BJP, the Left parties

(championing the idea of the elusive Third Front) and the Fourth Front are presently licking their wounds and would not dare challenge the supremacy of the Congress-led UPA Government for quite some time to come. The aims and aspirations of the Indian electorate have now emphatically indicated that the topmost agenda of the day is to have a decisive government at New Delhi.

ECONOMIC REFORMS

The Left had often prevented the Congress during 2004-09 to surge ahead with its agenda of reforms in strategic sectors like insurance, banking and provident fund. This had stymied the Congress and the UPA Government that was occasionally being perceived as indecisive and weak-kneed in the popular perception. So good governance has most certainly been a verdict of the Indian people when we happen to take a critical gaze at the analysis of the poll results.

The Congress would now surge ahead with its pre-electoral allies and ignore the requests (not demands) of regional parties to be included in the Union Cabinet. This is an important benchmark that would qualify the style of Congress leadership during the next five years. Congressmen would now occupy the key Cabinet portfolios and enable the new government to speak in a single voice with a defined sense of administrative purpose and political direction.

Another significant outcome of these elections is the manner in which the pro-poor and pro-people economic development would be handled by the new regime. India under the UPA Government (2004-09) had consciously tried to strike a critical balance between state welfarist policies and neo-liberal economic reforms by assuming a humane face of governance.