Welfare Policies Shaping Electoral Behaviour: General Elections- 2019

Dr. Archana Sawshilya
Associate Professor,Aditi Mahavidyalaya
University of Delhi

Anstract-

The 2014 elections was a clear mandate against a corrupt government. The BJP government had been trying to grapple with the consistently declining GDP of India and had no clue about how to handle it. The economic policies that were hits of the Modi government were largely macro economic welfare schemes .Policies like the Ujjwala Yojna, Direct Benefit Transfer, the creation of the Jan Dhan Accounts and the Housing schemes that were introduced by the Modi Government were all aimed at direct delivery of public goods and benefits to the common man. The Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana,an initiative set up to create a financial institution for the development of and also to help the micro unit enterprises through refinancing facility.

Key words-Macro economic policies. Ujjawala yojna,Jan dhan, Pradhan Mantri Mudra

Introduction-

The 2014 elections was a clear mandate against a corrupt government which had left the Indian economy in shambles as also negatively impacted the image of our country in the international arena. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his government had their charter very clear- to put an end to corruption and revive the Indian economy with Make In India promise and more jobs. The government promised "*acche din*" to the Indian population and presented itself as a pro-business government and a government that could act decisively and aggressively. However a look at the economic statistics of the country today our GDP has been on the path of decline in a row for the last four years and even if

we count out the last year when the impact of COVID hit the world at large, the BJP government had been trying to grapple with the consistently declining GDP of India and had no clue about how to handle the same. Despite this the 2019 elections brought BJP back to power with a resounding majority leaving all political pundits in a daze for the electoral maths had completely changed and Brand Modi along with his partner Amit Shah had clearly changed the voting behaviour of the Indian electorate from 2014-2019.

Let us first attempt to look at the macro and micro economic policies of the BJP government from 2014-2019. The promise of "*acche din*" was a promise that BJP could not deliver in terms of the economic policies. The key economic policies introduced by the BJP were a mixed bag of success and failures. There were some which were well accepted by the Indian electorate and also were factors contributing to the win of Modi government in 2019.

The economic policies that were hits of the Modi government were **largely macro economic welfare schemes** introduced by the Modi government which projected itself as a government that was not a "suit-boot ki Sarkar" but a government that understood and designed policies for the common man. Policies like the **Ujjwala Yojna, Direct Benefit Transfer, the creation of the Jan Dhan Accounts and the Housing schemes** that were introduced by the Modi Government were all aimed at direct delivery of public goods and benefits to the common man.

The Pradhan Mantri **Jan Dhan Scheme** was one of the most significant schemes of the government to provide for financial inclusiveness for the weaker and poorer sections of the society. They could now open and maintain accounts with zero balance, have debit cards and also had free accident insurance with every account. This was a big feel good factor for the common man . To a very great extent it also reduced the inefficiencies in transferring cash to beneficiaries of any government scheme introduced this reducing the scope for corruption from middlemen. While these bank accounts may have limited use for onecannot take loans against these accounts, but they have given a strong sense of financial and economic inclusiveness to the marginalised section of the population **who were convinced that they were right to have voted for a non-corrupt government for this** government would make everything right for them and not for just the rich section of the society.

Another major initiative of the Modi government was the **Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana**,an initiative set up to create a financial institution for the development of and also to help the micro unit enterprises through refinancing facility. This was a big boost for the small and micro business enterprises **but did not really convert into votes** for the government in the 2019 elections for unlike the Jan Dhan Yojana and others which were made extremely popular in the social media by the media cell of the BJP this was not really talked about. Further an analysis of the scheme shows that it has not created any jobs which was the primary objective of the plan. Also, since the policy did not mandate any collateral against loans, the bankers say it has created huge issues for the banks and generated NPA. It has also opened a can of worms in the form of corruption. While the scheme had a great objective, once again it was not thought of and implemented to actually generate wealth and jobs.

One of the most successful schemes of the government was the **Ujjwala Scheme** for providing clean cooking fuel to rural households and in fact the government with the help of public sectors, finished this seven months ahead of timeline. This was also a scheme which was a major vote winner for the BJP government and was widely advertised by the digital media cell of the BJP. Every *labharthi* as they were called was taken a picture of by the BJP party worker at the grass root levels and posted on the social media and the story was that if someone is a labharthi today, we will definitely be a labharthi tomorrow and acche din were sure to come. This promise was a **big vote converter** during the 2019 election for the common man felt that there was a government which was actually making sure that there was a direct benefit transfer to the masses and no merely catering to the rich industrialists

Another scheme of the government that was widely publicised was the **Housing Scheme**. The scheme sought to target and provide housing to nearly 20 million economically vulnerable section of the population. While work has started and a small percentage of the work is also completed but the scheme is still far away from completion and one also has to see if they will come with supportive infrastructure of water, electricity and other essential services that would make living viable and affordable for the economically weaker sections.

Just before the 2019 election, the government also launched the **Ayushman Bharat** scheme aimed at providing health care access to the vulnerable sections of the society by providing health insurance and creating a wider network of health care centres across the country. While it may be a very good scheme to help the economically weaker sections, like most

other policies of the government this was not a well thought out and implemented policy. Even the low percentage of budget allocated to healthcare in 2019 budget shows that while on paper this may be a good policy it is not implemented to impact the poor positively and also **did not convert into vote** during the 2019 election in a big way.

Another great initiative of the government was the**Make in India scheme** which was aimed at boosting the manufacturing sector in India and attracting investment in India andwould have given a big boost to the Indian economy which was in shambles with no new industries being set up, no new jobs being created. This initiative promised to create jobs for millions and increase the GDP of the country because more jobs would mean more buying power and spending capacity for larger masses and turn a full circle with providing customer base for finished goods. Further the **Smart City e**nvisaged under the Make in India scheme would have led to huge investments in growth and infrastructure leading to growth of other infrastructure as schools, hospitals, colleges, housing and so on all of which would led to a stronger economy and at the same time create more and more jobs and more and more FDI into India

However, a **critical evaluation** of the plan shows that the contribution of the manufacturing sector has moved only by 2% approximately and is far away from the objective of the policy makers. Our economy and GDP is also on a decline. . If we see the FDI inflow into India most of them came from shell companies via Mauritius. Further, while industries were set up but we did not have skilled work force to man these industries and as a result our counterparts as Thailand Vietnam picked more business from China than we did. Unemployement was also at its 45 year high at more than 6% and the Make In India was not getting converted into jobs. Even the Skill India mission launced by the government to bridge the gap of skilled labour fell short of its target by a huge margin by more than 50%.

In June 2015, the "100 **Smart Cities Mission** " was launched by the Centre to enable investment in manufacturing setups but at the end of 6 years we are **still to complete** even one single project. Of the 5000 plus sub projects launched, only around 3500 were actively pursued and only 25% of the work has been completed. (Have taken this from the Make In India article)

Macro economic Issues took the back seat

Apart from the small welfare schemes which were a success and touched the lives of the common man, the BJP government's economic policies were a total fiasco. There was no clarity in its policies. On the one hand the government wanted to promote Atma Nirbhar Bharat and emphasize on Swadeshi while on the other hand t also pushed for FDI.

But the **worst impact on the economy** were the two policies of the government- the **Demonetisation and the GST policy**.

The Demonetisation policy which was aimed at curbing the black money and corruption failed miserably and our economic growth fell to a four year low in 2018. Further, around 99% of the 500 and 1000 rupee notes that were supposed to be invalid and in the black market were actually deposited in the banking system thus making it clear that they were not counterfeit notes. Result was that we had huge economic losses to our economy without any reduction in black money or corruption and immense hardships to the common man with new notes not being available enough for people to spend for their daily needs. The government dismissed this as anecdotal. In fact there were also several stories floating in the social media with the help of the BJP digital media team that Modi government had finally taught the rich and corrupt a lesson. The poor may have had a few days of hardship when they did not have cash to spend but the rich were biggest losers as they had to give up all the cash they had stored. This despite all the concerns, some respondents also felt that this led to conversion into votes for the BJP amongst the poor section of the Indian population.

To add to the woes of the business and the crumbling economy the government in an attempt to promote tax compliance introduced GST which added to the problems already being faced by the small and medium business enterprises who had been hit by demonetisation because they had neither the money nor resources and understanding of how to go about implementing the same. These two policies combined led to further fall in GDP and instead of creating jobs as promised by the government, more and people lost jobs as factories were shut down and business took a beating.

Agriculture sector was another sector which was badly impacted. The promise made by Modi in 2014 for fixing and increasing the MSP for rice, wheat and pulses was also not fulfilled and instead post 2019 the government has introduced the farmers bill which today has led to an agrarian crisis in India with the farmers staging a nationwide protest against the bill.

Perhaps the **most disappointing impact of the economic policies of the Modi Government** from 20140-2019 was the **lack of creating jobs** which was one of the major promises made by the government when it came to power in 2014. This could have resulted in fatal result for the Modi government during the 2019 election[1]

Despite the economic disaster that we witnessed during the BJP regime from 2014-19 with GDP being at records low and unemployment being at a record high level, in 2019, the Bhartiya Janata Party under the leadership of Narendra Modi proved all political pundits wrong and the traditional electoral prediction formulae failed completely. The BJP came back to power with an unprecedented and rather unexpected majority with more seats than in 2014 election.

Despite the fact that post the introduction of GST and Demonetisation the Indian Economy was going through its worst phase ever in decades, these schemes kept people invested in the idea of "vikas" and "acche din" as promised by the government. These schemes touched the life of the common man and the media projected Narendra Modi as a man who was connected with the grassroots, understood their problems and was helping solve their day to day problems. The bigger issues of economic slowdown were underplayed by the media as a fallout of the 10 years of mis-governance by the Congress regime and the Indian electorate was more than willing to forgive Modi for the mistakes made by the Bhartiya Janta Party in the process of implementing demonetisation because at least his intention was right, which was to end the corruption in the government machinery that had been the doing of the Congress rule. The electorate agreed that he definitely needed another term to correct all the wrongdoings.

The question here is, how BJP managed this spectacular win despite the economic disaster that India faced during its first term with Modi as the Prime Minister.

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[1] https://asiasociety.org/policy-institute/modis-second-term-economic-development-roadmap

One of the **major reason behind this spectacular win** was the role played by the **media team** of the BJP and the manner in which it created **Brand Modi**, a messiah who was heading not a suit boot ki Sarkar but a Sarkar that represented the common man , understood their problems of roti kapda and makan, gave them the right to a dignified life with Ujjwala , toilets, and homes, took care of their health, helped them open bank accounts which ensured that all government benefits reached them directly rather than be routed through the middlemen. Any one gas connection received, any one account opened was quickly captured and widely advertised by the digital media team and it was for the first time that elections in India were fought on the smart phones. The electorate saw genuine labharthi and were assured that this is a scheme that will ensure that every voter will soon become a labharthi. Acche din will definitely come. The media continuously portrayed Modi as someone who was honest and was genuinely trying to undo the wrongs of years of Congress rule and the electorate was more than willing to give him another chance for 5 years were not enough to undo the wrongs of the past.

While the scheme of demonetisation may have hit the economy nationwide leading to low GDP the story very smartly weaved was with stories of corrupt industrialist losing money and being punished by the Modi government. The common man, the poor Indian was willing to pay the price of a few months of discomfort because Modi was trying to cleanse the years of corruption by weeding out black money.

Another major factor was the emergence of the decisive leader in the form of Narendra Modi with the **Uri attacks and the Balakot Air strikes**. Modi's response to Pakistan projected him as a leader who was willing to take a stand against Pakistan and not follow the policy of appeasement as was done by his predecessors. They were convinced that the nation was in safe hands with a strong and decisive leader at the centre who was willing to take a stand. Even the urban population which was negatively impacted by the economic slowdown was willing to give chance to a leader who was decisive and could help regain its national pride rather than vote for anyone else as there was no other leader in the opposition who could stand up to the stature of Brand Modi created by the BJP media team.

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