



INDIA'S 17TH LOK SABHA GENERAL ELECTIONS, 2019: ELECTORAL CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

Dr. Kuldeep Singh*

*Ph.D, from Jamia Millia Islamia (A Central University), New Delhi, Senior Lecturer in the subject, Political Science at GMSSSS Sector-55, Faridabad, under Haryana Education Department.

Since 1952, when the first Lok Sabha elections took place, Indian electoral politics has experienced continuity and change in form of various issues and trends. This paper in particular seeks to analyze the 17th Lok Sabha general elections from various perspectives. The verdict of these elections presents interesting and notable information about the Indian electoral politics and political culture. Analysis of the poll verdict of 17th Lok Sabha general elections brings up many facts about the continuity and change of the electoral politics.

INTRODUCTION

Elections provide an opportunity to various sections and segments of the society to influence the very system and process of rulemaking or legislation in their own favour. In the democratic countries like India, elections are viewed as an important tool to test the functioning and legitimacy of the political system. Elections ensure a chance to all interested citizens and groups whether parties or not to capture and control the levers of power and thereby take the mantle of decision-making. If seen from another angle, elections throws open many intrinsic and subtle aspects of the political system of that particular time. Many underlying currents, suppressed traits of politicians and political parties come into open in the democratic set-up, is based on adult franchise under cover of secret ballot, direct elections, individual freedom, and competitive party politics in the country. Taking note of the cited facts it may be said that the study of elections in India is of particular importance, because elections are not treated here, merely as a ritualistic or symbolic exercise, rather as an effective means for the recruitment of political elite and political socialization of the masses (Chahar, 2004).

Article 324 of Indian Constitution authorises the Election Commission of India (ECI) to superintendent, direct and control all elections to Parliament and to the State Legislatures and to the offices of the President and Vice President (Subhash Kashyap, 2010). General Elections for 17th Lok Sabha were held for 545 seats in multiple phases, to better handle the large electoral base and security concerns. According to the Election Commission of India, about 910 million people were eligible to vote in 2019, and voter turnout was 67 percent, the highest ever (<http://en.m.wikipedia.org>).

OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

The main objective of this paper is to highlight and analyse the vibrant issues and factors which highly influenced the 17th Lok Sabha General Elections, 2019. Here, an attempt has been made to focus the old and new trends that emerged in this election. The present paper analyses the leading factors that led BJP to an amazing victory with more than majority. This paper aims to present the electoral continuity and change in the perspective of 17th Lok Sabha General Elections. This paper is based mainly on secondary sources of data collection.

ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN

Main Slogans

Electoral campaigning is the backbone of elections in a democracy and plays crucial role in determining the electoral outcome. BJP and Narendra Modi launched electoral campaign with the slogan "Main Bhi Chowkidar" meaning that I am too watchman. This slogan was aired by BJP to counter the slogan, "Chowkidar Chour Hai" that became main slogan of Rahul Gandhi and Congress Party during the whole campaign. Another main slogan of BJP was "Modi hai to mumkin hai". This slogan was mainly linked with the surgical strikes in 2016 and air strikes operated by Indian Army in Balakot region of Pakistan to counter the terrorist attack on Pulwama. This slogan was also linked with the economic condition of India as India remained the fastest growing major economy in the world consecutively in the last five years. Seeking to encash Prime Minister Narendra Modi's image of a doer, BJP had chosen the slogan of 'Modi Hai to Mumkin Hai' – 'Modi makes it possible'.

Rahul Gandhi was presented as a weak and immature leader. But with the tagline 'Ab Hoga Nyay', which resonates with the flagship promise 'NYAY' (minimum income guarantee scheme), the party highlighted its promises as well as the critique of Modi government through a theme song 'Main hi toh Hindustan hoon'.

VIBRANT ISSUES

Strong Leadership versus uncertain Leadership

BJP presented PM Narendra Modi as the strong and able leader having ability to lead the country. Modi has demonstrated during the last five years indefatigability by literally working round-the-clock, Jaitley said in the 'Agenda 2019 – Part-4' blogpost.

He further said Modi as a quick learner has demonstrated his ability to take quick decisions. "It is both the motivation and the leadership which made the vital difference. It is precisely for this reason that India will witness an election where people will get an opportunity to endorse Prime Minister Modi's leadership, decisiveness, integrity and performance. Indeed he makes it possible," the finance minister said. On the other hand, BJP campaigned that the opposition is leaderless and there is no certainty about who would be the prime ministerial candidate from the opposition?

Communal and Caste Factors

Communal and caste cards were also seemed to be used to polarize particular communities. In this election main focus was on Hindu voters. BJP always presented itself as the interest articulators of Hindu, but Congress too tried to use soft Hindutva strategy to attract Hindu voters. Shah looked at the market segmentation in UP, and hit upon his now famous "60% formula". He realised he could not deliver the votes of Muslims, Yadavs and Jatavs, who were 40% of the population. So he focused on wooing the other 60%, including non-Yadav OBCs and non-Jatav Dalits. He carried out versions of these caste reconfigurations across states, and according to Jha, covered "over 5 lakh kilometres" between 2014 and 2017, consolidating market share in every state in this country. This year's polls, held over seven phases starting on 11 April, have been described as a contest for the soul of India. They pitted Modi's Hindu nationalist government against a disparate group of opposition parties including Congress, whose secular vision has defined the country for most of the past 72 years.

That so many Dalits and OBCs voted for the BJP in 2019 is astonishing. Shah went past Mandal politics, managing to subsume previously antagonistic castes and sub-castes into a broad Hindutva identity. And as the BJP increased its depth, it expanded its breadth as well. What it has done in West Bengal, wiping out the Left and weakening

Mamata Banerjee, is jaw-dropping. With hindsight, it may one day seem inevitable, but only a madman could have conceived it, and only a genius could have executed.

(<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/may/23/india-election-results-narendra-modi-bjp-victory>).

Congress particularly its President Rahul Gandhi also tried to present his Hindu identity by visiting many Hindu temples to attract voters of forward Hindu castes. However, Efforts of Congress in this regard had begun much earlier of the Lok Sabha elections, 2019. The Congress party claimed party vice-president Rahul Gandhi is a janeu-dhari (the one who wears Brahminical thread) Hindu before Gujarat Assembly elections. The Congress' claim came after a row erupted over Rahul's visit to Somnath Temple in Gujarat wherein his name was allegedly listed as a non-Hindu visitor in the visitor-book. Addressing a press conference, Congress spokesperson Randeep Surjewala said, "Rahul Gandhi is janeu-dhari Hindu." (Outlook Web Bureau, "Rahul Gandhi Is Janeu-Dhari Hindu, Says Congress", 30 November, 2017)

Amid his tight schedule which included campaign rallies in Sultan Bathery, Thiruvambady, Wandoor and Thirthala in four districts of Kerala, Congress president Rahul Gandhi visited the famous Thirunelli temple in Mananthavady taluk of Wayanad district in Kerala on Wednesday. The temple comes under the Wayanad Lok Sabha seat from where he is contesting. The Congress president wore traditional Kerala dhoti and had a darshan of the presiding deity Lord Vishnu. He spent almost an hour at temple, which is one of the top few temples in Kerala which attracts large number of devotees.

(ET Bureau| Last Updated: Apr 17, 2019, 08.13 PM IST, "Temple visit was part of Rahul Gandhi's last leg of campaign in Wayanad on Wednesday")

However, BJP and its leaders attacked Rahul Gandhi and Congress for the temple visits and called them pseudo Hindus. Making sure that Hindutva is the highlight of this election, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath lashed out at Congress president Rahul Gandhi and his sister Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, saying they visit temples only during elections. Adityanath was addressing the Vijay Sankalp Rally at Prabhat Chowk in Ghatlodia, traditionally a BJP bastion. He said, "They (Rahul and Priyanka, who is the AICC general secretary of eastern Uttar Pradesh) go to temples only during elections. They do not have time to visit holy sites if elections are not around." He was apparently referring to Priyanka Gandhi Vadra's recently concluded Ganga Yatra from Prayagraj

to Varanasi during which she visited several temples. Rahul Gandhi has also visited temples during campaigning in various assembly elections. Adityanath said, "It is the people of Gujarat who exposed Rahul Gandhi. When he went to Somnath temple for *darshan*, he sat like he was offering *namaz*. It was the priest who had to reprimand him that this was a temple. 'Sit here in discipline, cross-legged' he was told," said Adityanath.

(Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka visit temples only during polls: UP, Ahmedabad Mirror | Updated: Mar 27, 2019, 06:15 IST)

According to a data analysis by the *Mint*, "Overall, the BJP's appeal seems to transcend the divides of caste, education, and affluence, but there are some differences — with the BJP less successful in more educated constituencies" in a study of about 140 seats where Congress and Others were more successful. The BJP was favored in all income groups, states the *Mint*. The newspaper added, "In constituencies with high presence of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes (SCs/STs), the BJP is more popular than other parties, but in constituencies with high presence of Muslims, it is less popular."

The election had been called a referendum on Modi and the BJP's Hindu nationalistic policies and advocacy. According to *The Wall Street Journal*, Modi's victory "sets (sic) the stage for further economic change in one of Asia's fastest-growing economies." Alasdair Pal and Mayank Bhardwaj, in an article published by Reuters, claimed that the result was a mandate for business-friendly policies and tougher national security positions, reinforcing "a global trend of right-wing populists sweeping to victory, from the United States to Brazil and Italy, often after adopting harsh positions on protectionism, immigration and defense."

Nationalism, Pakistan and Rafael

17th Lok Sabha election was highly cornered with the issues of nationalism, terrorism, Pakistan. BJP and Narendra Modi made best efforts to focus on nationalism and attacked Pakistan for sponsoring terrorism in India. Right before elections, terrorist attack on Pulwama based CRPF highly aroused patriotic and nationalistic feelings among the people. This led voters in favour of government and Narendra Modi. Many times, Pakistan was mentioned by BJP during election campaign. Sometimes, opposition mainly Congress was propagated as supporter of Pakistan. Rafael fighter plane deal was also a serious issue that was highly raised by Rahul Gandhi and Congress. Rahul Gandhi strongly attacked on PM Modi and alleged him for huge corruption in Rafael deal. For targeting PM Modi, Rahul allegedly gave a slogan, Chowkidar Chor hai.

Demonetisation and GST

Among many significant issues, Congress and some Opposition parties raised the two issues – Demonetisation and GST throughout the campaign. However, these could not make a dent to the image of BJP and its leader Narendra Modi. The results show that Congress and other opposition parties failed to reap any political benefit out of it. The Narendra Modi government had pulled out high-value currency note from the economy on 8th November 2016. Modi government also rolled out the GST in 2017. Opposition parties alarmingly criticized BJP and PM Narendra Modi that the two decisions allegedly crippled the economy, dealt a blow to businesses, lessened job opportunities and caused discomfort to people, particularly in the country's rural areas where cash was predominantly the preferred mode of transaction. Dr Manmohan Singh said the notes ban was perhaps "the biggest scam" of independent India, dealt a blow on the country's economy and decimated the informal and unorganised sectors with crores of people turning jobless. (Press Trust of India, Updated: May 05, 2019, Modi Government Left Economy In "Dire Straits", Says Manmohan Singh)

Congress president Rahul Gandhi, in particular, was relentless in his criticism of the two economic schemes. "We will simplify the tax regime. We will remove 'Gabbar Singh Tax' and bring about the GST," Gandhi had said at a public meeting in Bhilai, Chhattisgarh, on April 20. "Unemployment rose as soon as Narendra Modi imposed demonetisation. As soon as your money was taken from you, you stopped buying and the producers stopped producing. The economy of the country was destroyed," he said at Tikamgarh in Madhya Pradesh on May 1, 2019. (HT, "Lok Sabha election results 2019: GST, demonetisation had no impact on the ground", May 23, 2019)

SHIFTING LOYALTIES

Most of the rebels of Congress seemed highly impressed with Modi wave in 2014 that game of shifting loyalties continued even in 2019 and many leaders of opposition parties decided to join BJP right before the election. In UP, a heavyweight leader of Congress, Rita Bahuguna Joshi had left Congress much earlier in 2016 and joined BJP. BJP made her its candidate in 2019 and she won election for Lok Sabha from Allahabad Constituency. Leading the pack of defectors on the eve of Lok Sabha elections (2019), actor-turned-politician Shatrughan Sinha, decided to switch his loyalty from BJP for the Congress. While Sinha has been a vocal critic of BJP leadership, his break with the party after when the two-time Patna Sahib MP met Congress chief Rahul Gandhi.

Apart from Sinha, the list of defectors included 50 top leaders from across the political spectrum, including nine sitting MPs and 39 MLAs. Among the sitting lawmakers, three MPs and 10 MLAs defected to the BJP, while three MPs and one MLA switched over to the Congress. The Congress lost one MP and 21 MLAs to the cycle of defections, while the BJP lost five MPs and 12 MLAs.

(<https://www.news18.com/news/politics/tis-the-season-of-defections-50-mps-and-mlas-have-jumped-ship-in-the-run-up-to-elections-2084809.html>)

Defection From Congress to BJP

22 sitting MPs and MLAs defected from the Congress, out of whom, eight MLAs joined the BJP. Asha Patel, MLA from Unjha town in Mehsana district of Gujarat, resigned as a legislator and quit the party to join the BJP. Congress's Manavadar MLA Jawahar Chavda resigned from the Gujarat Assembly and was soon made cabinet minister in the Vijay Rupani government. Three more Congress MLAs from Gujarat also resigned from the Assembly as well as the party to join the BJP. In Karnataka, Congress leader Umesh Jadhav, MLA from Chincholi in Kalaburagi district, resigned in a huff after being denied a ministerial berth when the Congress aligned with the Janata Dal (Secular) to form the state government in May 2018. In Arunachal Pradesh, Markio Tado, Congress MLA from Tali, moved to the BJP.

Sujay Vikhe Patil an MLA joined the BJP after Congress ally NCP rejected his request to contest from Ahmednagar Lok Sabha seat in Maharashtra. Within a week, his father Radhakrishna Vikhe Patil also quit as Maharashtra Leader of Opposition. The BJP fielded Patil Jr. from Ahmednagar constituency in 2019 Lok Sabha election.

(<https://www.news18.com/news/politics/tis-the-season-of-defections-50-mps-and-mlas-have-jumped-ship-in-the-run-up-to-elections-2084809.html>)

In a big embarrassment to Congress just ahead of Lok Sabha elections starting next month, Congress leader and a close aide of Sonia Gandhi, **Tom Vadakkan**, joined **BJP** today and attacked the grand old party for questioning Balakot air strike. Vadakkan was the Congress party member for nearly 20 years. He joined the saffron party at a time when Congress president Rahul Gandhi is in Kerala to review the preparations for the Lok Sabha polls in the state. BJP may field Vadakkan in the Lok Sabha elections from a seat in Kerala.

(<https://m.economictimes.com/news/elections/lok-sabha/india/tom-vadakkan-key-sonia-gandhi-aide-joins->

Defection From BJP to the Congress

However, BJP could not escape from opportunistic politics of defection and its many leaders shifted their loyalties from BJP to other parties mainly the Congress. Navjot Singh Sidhu who had remained MP four times on the BJP ticket had switched sides to the Congress. In 2017, he joined the Indian National Congress and was elected to the Punjab Legislative Assembly from Amritsar East. Three top MPs from the BJP too had defected to the Congress - Kirti Azad (Darbhanga, Bihar), Savitri Bai Phule (Bahraich, Uttar Pradesh) and Ashok Dohray (Etawah, Uttar Pradesh). Azad contested Lok Sabha election from Dhanbad constituency in Bihar.

Phule, a prominent Dalit MP, had resigned from the BJP, alleging that the saffron party “was trying to divide the society” and ignoring the rights of Dalits and backward communities. She has been very critical of the BJP over several issues and had resigned from the basic membership of the party in December last year. She will contest from Bahraich on a Congress ticket this time. Etawah MP Dohray resigned over denial of ticket for the Lok Sabha election, and joined the Congress. Avtar Singh Bhadana, BJP MLA from Meerpur in Muzaffarnagar, also joined the Congress last month. Four-time MP Bhadana is considered an influential Gujar leader in Haryana and western UP. Former BJP minister Mahadev Nayak from Goa also joined the Congress, alleging that the BJP has been trying to “destroy the *bahujan Samaj*”.

(<https://www.news18.com/news/politics/tis-the-season-of-defections-50-mps-and-mlas-have-jumped-ship-in-the-run-up-to-elections-2084809.html>)

DYNASTIC FACTOR

As always in 17th Lok Sabha elections too, many of the party leaders in states had given chance to their family members to contest. It creates doubts on the selection procedure of political parties for candidates. Almost political parties tried to utilize dynastic culture to score victory in the election. However, many candidates who were members of popular political dynasties faced defeat across India.

The BJP has highlighted that the Congress party has relied on Nehru's dynasty for leadership since India's independence, its lack of internal party institutions and claimed that whenever Congress has been in power, the

freedom of press and Indian government institutions have "taken a severe beating". During the election campaign, its leaders have attacked the nepotism and dynasty of Congress. However, BJP too has not been much behind the dynastic approach in politics and used dynastic card by allying with dynastic parties and fielding family members of its senior party leaders in 17th Lok Sabha election too. The Congress has alleged hypocrisy by the BJP, claiming that the BJP itself forms alliances with dynasty-based parties such as the Akali Dal in Punjab, and that family relatives of senior BJP leaders such as Rajnath Singh and Arun Jaitley have been in politics too. BJP also accommodated other family members of former senior leaders of BJP. BJP fielded Jayant Sinha, son of Yashwant Sinha from Hazaribagh. BJP's Menka Gandhi and her son Varun Gandhi too belong to dynastic politics. Vashundhra Raje too belong to an established dynasty. Incidentally, Pritam Munde, Poonam Mahajan, Heena Gavit are three dynast MPs of BJP from Maharashtra who are daughters of top BJP leaders. Anurag Thakur, a member of Lok Sabha and the son of BJP leader Prem kumar Dhumal also represents dynastic politics. Rao Inderjit Singh and Brijendra Singh both MPs from Haryana too belong to famous dynasties of Haryana.

According to an India Spend report published by the Bloomberg Quint, the smaller and regional parties such as the Jammu and Kashmir National Conference, Lok Jan Sakti Party, Shiromani Akali Dal, Biju Janata Dal and Samajwadi Party have higher densities of dynasty-derived candidates and elected representatives in recent years. While both the Congress and the BJP have also nominated candidates from political dynasties, states the report, the difference between them is that in Congress "top party leadership has been handed down from generation to generation within the same [Nehru Gandhi dynasty] family", while there has been a historic non-dynastic diversity in the top leadership within the BJP. According to the report, while BJP has also nominated candidates from political dynasties, its better public relations operation "can leap to its defence when attacked on the same grounds". In contrast to the India Spend report, analysis of Kanchan Chandra, a prominent professor of Politics, of the 2004, 2009 and 2014 general elections included a finding that the Congress party has had about twice or more dynastic parliamentarians than the BJP at those elections, and higher than all major political parties in India except the Samajwadi Party. Many of these dynastic politicians in India who inherit the leadership positions have never held any jobs and lack state or local experience, states Anjali Bohlken – a professor and political science scholar, and this raises concerns of rampant nepotism and appointments of their own friends,

relatives and cronies if elected. The BJP has targeted the Congress party in the 2019 elections for alleged nepotism and a family dynasty for leadership. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2019_Indian_general_election)

Here we can see how dynastic factor played an interesting part in nominations of candidates of various political parties. However it was obvious but then too worth to mention. Congress could not get rid of dynastic culture and it distributed tickets to the relatives of several Congress leaders. Congress announced Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi as its candidates from Raebareli and Amethi respectively. Congress chief Rahul Gandhi contested Lok Sabha elections 2019 from two seats – Amethi (Uttar Pradesh) and Wayanad (Kerala).

Candidates for Lok Sabha polls declared by Samajwadi party included the names of former party president Mulayam Singh Yadav from Mainpuri seat. Akhilesh Yadav was in fray from Azamgarh, and his wife and Mulayam Singh Yadav's daughter-in-law Dimple Yadav, contested from Kannauj. Mulayam Singh Yadav's nephew Dharmendra Yadav who was also an MP from Badaun, got the ticket for re-election. Mulayam Yadav's brother and former SP leader Shivpal Yadav contested polls from Firozabad against sitting MP and nephew Akshay Yadav, who is Samajwadi Party's senior leader Ram Gopal Yadav's son also. However, SP lost its ground and only Mulayam Singh Yadav and Akhilesh Yadav could succeed to score victory, which is the only achievement of SP in this election.

NCP Chief Sharad Pawar's daughter Supriya Sule contested election from Baramati seat which she already represented and scored victory. Sharad Pawar's nephew Parth Ajit Pawar contested from Maval constituency, however he faced a crushing defeat against two-time Shiv Sena MP Shrirang Appa Chandu Barne, RJD's Lalu Yadav's daughter Misa Bharti contested Lok Sabha election from Patliputra seat against her uncle Ram Kripal Yadav fielded by BJP. Three candidates belonged to Paswan family including Ram Vilas Paswan. Paswan kept reserved Hajipur seat for himself. His brother Ramchander was in electoral arena from Samastipur and his son Chirag Paswan contested from Jamui. It is interesting to see that trio Paswans have won. In Karnataka, it is former PM HD Deve Gowda and his two grandsons were in electoral fray. But not all such contests are about family unity-in Araku, TDP's V Kishore Chandra Deo faced electoral challenge from his own daughter.

In Haryana, Shruti Choudhary, the Congress nominee from Bhiwani, invoked the legacy of her grandfather and former Haryana chief minister late Bansi Lal at her rallies. The Congress candidate from Hisar, Bhavya Bishnoi, was also counting on the legacy of his grandfather Bhajan Lal, another former chief minister of Haryana. Bishnoi

was in a three-way contest with two other dynasts -- sitting Hisar MP and Jannayak Janata Party founder Dushyant Chautala and BJP's Brijendra Singh. While Chautala comes from one of the most prominent political clans in Haryana, Brijendra Singh is the son of Birendra Singh.

Sitting Congress MP Deepender Singh Hooda, scion of the influential Hooda clan, took on BJP's Arvind Sharma in Rohtak. Hooda has reminded voters of the development work done by him and by his father Bhupinder Singh Hooda -- a former two-time Haryana chief minister. Bhupinder Singh Hooda himself was congress candidate from Sonipat constituency. The BJP has no vision for the state and it has nothing to offer besides PM Modi, Hooda said. Talking about dynastic politics in Haryana, former head of political science department in Kurukshetra University, BD Sharma, said, "Loyalty for family is stronger than loyalty for party in Haryana and perhaps that is the reason why parties, other than the BJP, have relied on dynasts." Nine members of prominent political families are in the fray in Haryana including five from the Congress, two from the JJP and one each from the BJP and the Indian National Lok Dal. (<https://www.indiatoday.in/elections/lok-sabha-2019/story/lals-hoodas-dynasties-vs-pm-modi-haryana-1522251-2019-05-10>)

POLITICAL PARTIES AND THEIR ELECTORAL PERFORMANCES

The counting of votes was held on 23 May 2019, and BJP succeeded to achieve the verdict in its favour consecutively since 2014. The NDA led by Bharatiya Janata Party won the elections with the BJP itself winning a clear majority on its own. The BJP became the single largest party in the House and outshined expectations to achieve 303 seats. With its alliance partners NDA succeeded to win a total of 353 seats. As compared to 282 seats in the 2014 general election, BJP scored a gain of 21 seats more in 2019 Lok Sabha elections. It was the second time in India's independent history that voters re-elected the same party to power with a bigger majority to the Lok Sabha – India's lower house of parliament. Modi became the only Indian Prime Minister in history whose government was re-elected with both an increase in the total percentage of votes along with a full majority.

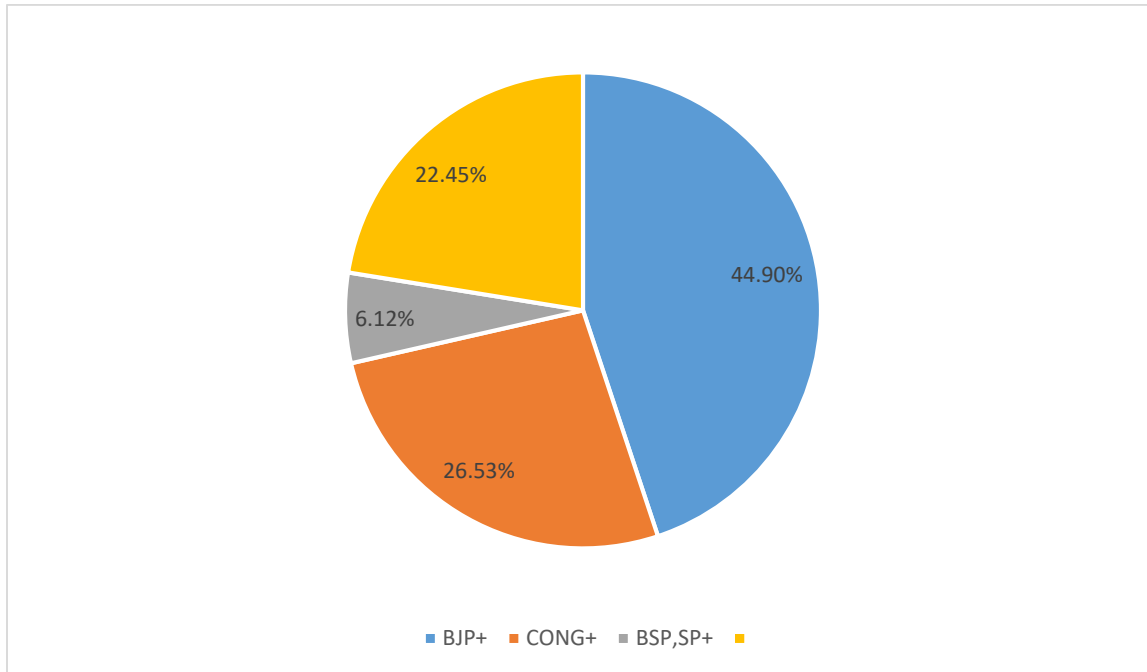
Congress President Rahul Gandhi, competed in two constituencies from Wayanad, and Amethi, but he could win Wayanad only and lost his conventional seat Amethi – the seat he, his mother (Sonia Gandhi), his father (Rajiv Gandhi), and his uncle (Sanjay Gandhi) had collectively held for decades. Congress registered slight gain over its 16th Lok Sabha performance and could win 52 seats only. Though, Congress remained deprived even from the post

of leader of opposition (LOP) for second time consecutively as it could not secure minimum 10% of total seats in the lower house that 54 seats .BSP and SP went in an alliance in Uttar Pradesh and intended to give a tough challenge to BJP and PM Narendra Modi. But both could secure 15 seats, 10 by BSP and 5 by SP. However, this coalition could not survive and it dissolved after election. AITC could not repeat its earlier performance and it scored 22 seats. Other national parties, NCP, CPI, and CPI (M) were also in fray but their electoral performance was very poor as these won only 5, 2 and 3 seats respectively. Some State parties performed well. DMK secured 24 seats and YSRCP obtained 22 seats. Shiv Sena, JDU and BJD succeeded to win 18, 15 and 12 seats respectively. TRS, LJP and TDP achieved 9,6 and 3 seats one-to-one. 27 seats were secured by other small parties. Independent candidates won 4 seats.

As far the vote share was concerned, BJP persisted at the top. The BJP's total vote share remained 37.4 per cent that was an increase of over 6 percentage from 31.34 per cent in 2014. The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) secured a vote share of 45 per cent, compared to 38 per cent in 2014. On the other hand, the vote share of Indian National Congress remained the same at 19.5 per cent. BSP and SP collectively scored 6.12% votes. Other parties and independents achieved 22.45 % votes. About 1.04 percent of the voters in India chose to vote for None Of The Above (NOTA) in the 2019 elections, with Bihar leading with 2.08 percent NOTA voters.

(<https://www.hindustantimes.com/lok-sabha-elections/vote-share/>)

The vote share has been presented through following pie chart.



WOMEN REPRESENTATION IN 17TH LOK SABHA ELECTION

It has been observed that women electoral participation and representation as well was not satisfactory in India. Due to male-dominance, they remained lagged behind in connection with electoral representation. They have been politically underprivileged even after more than seventy years since independence have passed out. In case of electoral representation, their position has been worse than the downtrodden too as SCs (15%) and STs (7.5%) have representation in Lok Sabha as according to their populous ratios. However, it is the policy of reservation due to which SCs and STs are getting represented in Parliament (under Article 330) and State Assemblies (Article 332). Electoral data since 1952 shows that the political plight of women has not been good and their role in electoral politics has been very humble. In the 16th Lok Sabha elections, record 61 (11 percent) women candidates got elected. 17th Lok Sabha election brought an improvement over the 2014 Lok Sabha in terms of women representation. Out of the 716 women candidates who contested elections, 78 got elected, which is 14% of the lower house. However, it is not a matter of more pleasure because this figure is much less than 33% women activists are demanding for a long time. But parties are not taking women reservation as a serious issue and it is very worry able as far as women interest is concerned.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

16th Lok Sabha general election, 2014 has been recorded as remarkable in the political and electoral history of India for different trends and several changes. First of all, after three decades a single political party (BJP) achieved success in scoring 282 seats on its own, which is 10 seats more than the magic figure (272). As far as 17th Lok Sabha general elections, 2019 is concerned, the electoral strength of BJP remarkably improved. However, in this election also, BJP was in the electoral fray having pre-poll alliances with several parties like Siromani Akali Dal, LJP, Apna Dal, so on. But as of now both elections seem to break the continuity of coalition politics that was in existence since 1989 successively. Both elections present centripetal form of coalition governments, whereas Indian electoral politics was in grip of centrifugal form of coalition since 1989 to 2014. Under centrifugal coalition, each partner was important and core party or leading party was dependent on its partners. In other words, there were weak governments or pure coalition governments in the Centre as no party could win the majority. But in 2014 and 2019, a new type of coalition politics emerged as at both times, BJP scored majority. Under this coalition, strong central governments took place as BJP implemented its electoral agenda and made bold decisions that was not possible under pure coalition governments. The real credit of this tremendous win goes to Narendra Modi who charismatically prepared the platform by his untiring electoral meetings throughout the country. He did not only defeat the opposition but also defeated the factionalism within BJP and all other efforts which were being made nationally and internationally to pull his legs.

The continuity has been observed in huge victory of BJP consecutively under vibrant leadership of PM Narendra Modi. On the other hand, change has been notice in burning issues. BJP highly focused on many issues. But the most vibrant issue that worked in favour of Modi and BJP was nationalism. Patriotic feelings and nationalism following the Pulwama attack, were very high in the county. Indian army operated air strikes at terrorist camps located in Balakot. Army gave all credit to free hand policy of Narendra Modi government due to which Army could take revenge. Modi was presented as strong Prime Minister. Modi during his electoral campaign arouse patriotic and nationalistic sentiments of the people. He strongly campaigned that *Main Desh Nahi Jhukne Dunga, Desh nahi mitane dunga*. This all prepared atmosphere in favour Modi and BJP.

In this election, BJP did not vehemently raise issues of good governance, zero corruption, complete transparency and better law and order, which were the key issues in 2014. Issue of Development and welfare of vulnerable

sections of the society like poor, downtrodden, backward and women too seemed to work. Welfare schemes mainly

Ujjawala during Modi's first government too much favoured BJP.

Caste factor influenced or did not influence this election, is a matter of serious analysis. In my opinion, this election too did not remain fully untouched of the caste factor. It means, caste factor did not thoroughly disappear from the electoral scene. Most of the political parties kept caste in consideration while distributing tickets to the candidates. Political parties fully attempted to do social engineering to ensure their victory. However, except BJP, social engineering of all parties failed particularly in north India. Amit Shah, the main strategist of BJP tried to cash the support of non Yadav OBCs and non Jatav SCs in Uttar Pradesh. Yet, the caste chemistry that seemed to lose its grip in the 16th Lok Sabha general elections came back in its new colour in 17th Lok Sabha elections.

Another point of discussion is whether, there was a polarization of votes on the basis of religion in this election also. It is not easy to answer this question but polarization issue cannot be thoroughly ruled out. Muzaffar Nagar riots were used by parties to polarize voters in their own camp. BJP and SP alleged each other in this regard. Congress, SP and BSP alleged BJP for communal polarization. BSP supremo Mayawati during a rally, allegedly appealed Muslims not to divide their votes against BJP. BJP mainly focused on Hindutva and Hindu voters. It seemed ignore Muslims as it did not field Muslims as its party candidate. Other parties mainly Congress seemed under pressure of Hindutva and had to take shelter of soft Hindutva. Congress President, Rahul Gandhi tried to attract forward caste Hindu voters by visiting Hindu temples during electoral campaign. In the last two elections a different type of trend seemed to emerge. BJP highly criticized Congress for Muslim appeasement. BJP highly tossed in air the statement of former Prime Minister, Dr. Man Mohan Singh that minorities have more claim over the resources of the country. Hence, echoing minority cause benefited BJP as it polarized Hindu voters in favour of BJP. That was the reason that Congress and other political parties could not openly raise minority mainly Muslim issues. However, BJP considered as a party of Banias and Brahmins obtained votes from all sections of the society. Triple Talaq issue also seemed to favour BJP and some Muslim women too likely voted it.

The core issues like Kashmir issue and Article 370 that are part of BJP's manifesto have been almost settled down by present Modi government. Issue of Ram Temple also has been resolved. However, Supreme Court of India has brought this issue to its end. Honb'le Supreme Court finally accepted claim of Ram Lala and decided in favour of Ram Temple. Supreme Court also have ordered its decision to tend five acre land to Muslims for construction of

a Masjid. BJP will propagate it as its success and capability and try to cash its contribution towards solution of these issues in the next elections. Beside it, BJP has prepared its electoral pitch to bat by producing new issues like CAA, NPR and NRC, which will possibly be BJP's core issue in future. However, these issues are considered anti-Muslims and along with some activists belonging to Hindu community, Muslims are protesting these issues with tooth and nail. Shahin Bagh of Delhi has become the epicenter of the movement against CAA, NPR and NRC. Recently, these issues have thrust Delhi into communal riots too and about 50 people have become victim.

Lastly, Modi government will have to prove all speculations wrong which show him as anti-Muslim. According to C. Uday Bhashkar, an expert of security matters and a well-known columnist, assumption is very important in a democracy and it is noticeable that there is no representative of Muslim community of 16 crore in such a huge victory of BJP. This is really a matter of concern from the point of view of minorities. PM Narendra Modi if he wishes can smash this postulation by an inclusive politics only. Equality based society cannot be replaced in this country which is full of diversity. No doubt, Modi government, in future, will have to face a new challenge in form of slow economy adversely hit by Covid19, a worldwide fatal disease. Possibly, it will affect electoral politics of India also in coming days mainly in 2024 general elections for Lok Sabha.

However, since 2019 when elections for 17th Lok Sabha were held, no remarkable downfall has been noticed in the image of Narendra Modi. Last five years brought mixed electoral verdicts for BJP as far as Assembly elections were concerned. BJP got electoral drubbing in West Bengal, Karnataka, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and Delhi and recently in Telangana but registered huge victories in Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chattisgarh. It shows that on one hand BJP and Narendra Modi maintained their popularity among people. On the other hand, it is obvious to state that it is not impossible to defeat BJP and Narendra Modi. But no doubt to say that Narendra Modi still is a most attractive and reliable face for people and they are preferring him than others. There are many issues which can influence the electoral behaviour of voters but Hindutva still is most vibrant issue in the country mainly in Northern part.

However, opposition block led by Congress is trying to turn the fight in its own favour by tossing issues like social Justice through caste census. Nitish Kumar led JDU-RJD government in Bihar has taken lead in the fight for social Justice initiating caste survey which revealed astonishing caste data regarding OBCs. The Survey showed that OBCs are 63 percent in Bihar. On the basis of this caste survey, Nitish Kumar led Bihar government has made

provision for 75 percent reservation in the state. There is clear increase in reservation of OBCs and SCs. After it, caste census has become a vibrant political issue in Indian politics. Now, it is to be seen that whether it will become a decisive electoral issue in 2024 or BJP will neutralize it and it will not harm BJP more. It is also to be seen that even BJP will adopt this issue and go into elections with the promise of caste census.

Another significant factor will be alliance politics. On the one hand, Congress is trying to add more allies with it to give strong fight to BJP and Narendra Modi. For this purpose, with the efforts of Nitish Kumar and others I.N.D.I.A. alliance has come into existence having 26 political parties. But, it has many weaknesses. Its first weakness is that it lacks a strong and all-accepted face. Still, there is uncertainty on the leadership of this alliance of opposition. It's another big weakness is that all affluent leaders of its member parties are ambitious for the post of Prime Minister. Such leaders are Nitish Kumar, Rahul Gandhi, Mamta Banerjee, Sharad Pawar, Kejriwal etc. As far as BJP is concerned, it doesn't seem overconfident and it too has enlarged its alliance, the NDA has added 38 political parties with it. The strength of BJP and NDA is that they have a credible and performing face as Narendra Modi. BJP will be in a fray along with slogans such as "Modi hai to Mumkin hai, Modi ki Guarantee, Sabka Sath Sabka Vikas Sabka Vishwas" etc. BJP and Narendra Modi will make full efforts to gain political dividend of Ram Mandir that will be open for devotees from January 2024, deletion of Article 370 which Supreme Court too has justified and passing of Women Reservation Bill.

Now it is to be seen that only brand Modi shall be enough to defeat the opposition having strong local leaders or the united opposition along with issues like inflation, unemployment, expensive higher education, social justice, OBC empowerment through caste census, danger to constitution and democracy etc will be in position to dethrone Narendra Modi. Undoubtedly, the electoral fight is going to be very interesting in 2024 and opposition will be in position to give a strong fight if it managed unity and its leaders succeeded in lifting them up from selfishness and personal ambitions. The opposition alliance can be in position to defeat BJP, if it becomes successful in deciding common minimum program and having true commitment by making their efforts together. BSP too will be a crucial factor in this election. If opposition succeeded to include it with their alliance, they will definitely be in an advantageous position and if BSP contests the elections alone or with BJP then it will definitely benefit BJP. In brief, it can be said that Lok Sabha elections of 2024 are going to be very interesting indeed.

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