

## **‘Congress Free India’ is a mortally dangerous slogan**

**-D.S. Nagabhushana**

Another General election for Lok Sabha has come. The Narendra Modi government of BJP and its allies in the last five years has raised so many controversies and so much of ruckus that no other government in the past few decades has. The reason for this being that Modi-led government has functioned very differently from any other non-Congress governments, including that led by Vajapeyi. It has tried to steer the Nation and discourse of Nationalism in a completely different direction. Without recognizing this, without discussing its pros and cons, just a discussion on successes and failures of its general governance, our choice in the coming elections cannot be decided. Not that these are not important, but in today’s situation there is something more crucially important than these things,

A few days back, a BJP spokesperson said something very interesting about Congress in a television talk show. I was taken aback when he said that the Congress which has such a glorious history is being ‘strangled by the dynastic politics practiced by the Nehru-Gandhi family’. Oh, BJP at least is acknowledging now that Congress is a party with a glorious history! If we do not understand the undercurrents of this significant statement in the new narrative of Nationalism being built up by the Modi led government, then you cannot go beyond the literal meaning of its ambitious slogan ‘Congress free India’. If we are calling our freedom struggle a nationalist struggle, it is because it led to the formation of a new nation of a definite form and character. Before this, India was just a ‘country’ in different forms and states.

Modi’s BJP, which has set out to construct a narrative of its own Nationalism, has no history of any nationalist struggle as such, to fall back upon. Hence, it is building up its brand of nationalism around hatred of the ‘other’ – the other religion, the other country etc. But this brand of Nationalism has played out fully in the form of street vandalism and mob lynching during the last five years and the party has come to know that this has now started earning the wrath of common man in the absence of any kind of promised ‘achhe din’. So in search of a kind of ‘dignity’ and goodwill for its brand of Nationalism it has become imperative for BJP to incrementally appropriate the nationalist narrative of the

Congress through gradual and clever moves. They have carefully put to scrutiny the secular character of Congress and its various moves in this regard in post-Independence era and has presented most of them as suspicious. And then they have picked up those parts which they have endorsed as above suspicion for appropriation. This they have done after a realization that masculine Hindutva of Savarkar is not sufficient to build an alternative discourse of Nationalism that was attempted by RSS till now.

In a sense, there has always been an effort to sanitise Congress from its secular ideals and convert it back to Tilak's saffron Congress. This well thought out effort reached a critical moment when Godse touched Gandhi's feet before firing at him. But this effort could not continue because of the strong influence of the values of dynamic Hinduism that was spread by Mahatma Gandhi.

Congress, in the later years, began to slowly liberate itself from Gandhi's legacy and became a party of opportunist politics only to go steadily downhill in the eyes of the people. All the anger that people began to accumulate against the Congress was taken advantage of by the well-organized –cadre based-RSS driven parties, first the Jan Sangh and then its enlarged version the BJP. Yes, the Socialist leader Lohia in the 60s had formulated a strategy called Non Congressism that had advocated a politics that is beyond the Congress. But in due course, it was realised that Non Congressism was not really politics of non-Congress parties, but only politics of different versions of Congress party, as most of the leaders of these parties including communists and excluding the Jana Sangha were only disgruntled Congressmen of one kind or the other! Congress was a movement against Imperialism and hence it was based on a large and all inclusive philosophical ground, but when it turned into a political party, it disintegrated into several parties over the years with their own ideologies. Gandhi in his great wisdom wanted the dissolution of Congress when India got Independence, but it was rejected by the stalwarts of Congress who had their sights elsewhere. The product of that opportunism is the nouveau nationalism of BJP, an experiment that is dangerous but gaining ground substantially.

There is no point in blaming history. This new experiment of cleansing the Congress of its pollution of secularism and then appropriating it has reached a vital stage with hijacking of Madan Mohan Malaviya, Govind Vallabh Pant and then Sardar Vallabhai Patel into it BJP legion. That is how BJP with its slogan 'Congress Free India' is trying to gobble up a political tradition itself.

Helplessness of congress at this is striking and also is of its own making. But we have to remember that Congress doesn't merely mean a political party, it is a huge political family, an umbrella under which all kinds of cousins, uncles and aunties live and do politics of certain Congress kind only- both good and bad, of course with mandates of their own. It is also a great tradition that was built on the sacrifice and the mass struggle of our elders. Hence what 'Congress Free India' means ultimately is this: there will be no real alternative to BJP. This is such a scary situation. Let Congress go to hell and reinvent itself at its will. But what about us, the people? Our civil rights? Our own little and varied religious and cultural traditions? What is and where is India without these?

We must note that it is only as a part of this project of 'Congress Free India' that attempts of interference and degeneration of major Constitutional institutions of the country, as also the judiciary in the last five years by the Modi Government. We must also recognize the blunders committed through several ill-conceived economic decisions. Most importantly, the sufferings of farmers and small enterprises. Corporate appeasement, ecological damage, migration of the poor, record unemployment, the increase in the assets of the rich as well as their numbers, war mongering in the name of patriotism, vigilante goondaism, mob lynching etc. A governor under this dispensation, knowingly full well that his own Central government has failed to control the situation in Kashmir, gives a public call to ban Kashmiris and their products and yet continues to enjoy the comforts of the constitutional post! Is this what is called a stable and efficient Government?

Because of waywardness of Congress politics a rootless, but prosperous middle class has emerged and now it is Modi who is pampering it. This new class in its endless hunger for comforts and consumption has lost the awareness of values of democracy, tradition and civil rights. It is this middle class that is the custodian of all communication infrastructure now and is determining the direction of political discourse. Its only concern is stability for its uninterrupted and unlimited prosperity, which it thinks will be provided by Modi. Hence they are ready to sacrifice everything else for this.

True, Congress is now weltering with all its legitimate and illegitimate progeny. But we must think what it means today to allow this whole gamut of a political tradition with a great history to fend for itself for survival and go with Modi's BJP. Congress is not just Congress party. And Hindutva is the erasure of the tradition of a dynamic and nurturing Hindu Dharma which has protected the

country all these years with its ingrained secularism; today it is committed to destroy the complete political value system. We must be careful; we must not facilitate permanent damage to our body politic by resorting to short sighted political moves. This is not the time to think of frivolous issues. We have to exercise our voting rights with caution this time.

**P.S.:** It is hoped that Congress party will reinvent itself well before the first phase polling starts, at least as a party of some consequence in these elections. Its election manifesto smells fresh and seems to be very innovative. But it should start a new age of its own by coming out with a sincere apology to the public for all its follies, both political and economic during its last term as a leader of UPA.

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