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In this age of coalition government in India the author says that BJP will lose its followers if it dilutes its own agenda for the sake of getting along with its NDA partners . But is there an alternative? The obvious solution is not going back to the Hindutva agenda alone, but to educate the cadres and supporters on the compulsions of coalition government, the dramatic changes in global environment and above all, to move away from historical grievances to a positive and constructive future. Director

The changes in Union Cabinet, elevation of L.K. Advani as Deputy Prime Minister and reins of the BJP in the hands of younger generation have recently been the main focus of attention in the media. In fact the high voltage coverage of these developments gave an impression as if the BJP has reached to a new peak of its popularity and is ready to launch its decisive electoral battle against its political opponents aggressively. If we analyse the ground situation in the historical perspective of the party, there is hardly anything to rejoice either by the party cadres or its supporters. The BJP is still a victim of ideological crisis - a price the party had to pay for joining hands with parties, which do not have anything in common with it ideologically.

The BJP identified itself as a party believing in governance rooted to Hindu culture and tradition, which the party calls cultural nationalism. If we look back to the history of governance in post-colonial India, we find that its ideological genesis was borrowed from the West. Nehru and his successors, who carried this legacy, made the people of India accept the western model of governance in the form of parliamentary democracy, socialism, secularism, industrialism and nationalism. Even though, this practice was ideologically rooted in western culture with Christian traditions, almost all the political groups at the time of independence accepted it. Even the Communists and Socialists hardly had any reservations against the borrowed ideology of governance.

Contrary to the Nehruvian system of governance, Bhartiya Jana Sangh (BJS), which was formed after four years of Independence in 1951 placed its qualified protest against it before the country as its perception of governance was ideologically rooted in Hindu culture and tradition. In its corresponding election manifestos the party sketched the road map to the overall development of Indian society. The five commitments of the BJP, a subsequent incarnation of the BJS namely nationalism and national integration, democracy, positive secularism, Gandhian socialism and value based politics were also deeply rooted in its ideology of Hindutva. But ironically, the Congress, Communists and Socialists, who joined together since the beginning of Nehruvian era targeted this party as a danger to social democracy. They even accused it as "killer of Mahatma Gandhi" and branded the party as anti-Muslim and communal. Even after its long journey of over half a century this party of Hindutva continues to face this challenge from its opponents.

The BJP did not take any lesson either from the Janata experiment, when it was in power or from its disastrous setback in 1984 elections, which the party contested, when it was in opposition. In the Janata Party experiment, Vajpayee assumed a moderate image, which he later projected in a more pronounced manner as a founder president of the BJP in 1980. In both the situations the loss of the party was due to the ideological crisis. The BJS constituent in Janata party was humiliated on the issue of dual membership and was forced to come out of it as the Socialists tried to hijack AIVP and BMS, the students and labour fronts of the RSS, which the latter did not allow.

Even though during over forty years of Congress rule, people of the country gradually adjusted with the Nehruvian system of governance, the BJP emerged as a democratic alternative to Congress at national level and even formed a coalition Government at centre in 1998. But taking over the governance of the country as a head of coalition government the party did not formulate any strategy to have unity of hearts and minds with its allies having divergent ideological and sectarian background. The party leadership did not visualise that patronising the opportunistic elements either within the party or among allies to counter the crowd of wrestlers in parliament and outside was a part of Congress culture, which was contrary to the political philosophy of the BJP.. It was the misrule of successive Congress governments over the years, which attracted the people towards the ideology-linked assurance of the BJP for better governance. But when it backed out from its promises and assurance and failed to translate them in action, people also developed a distaste for it.

RSS, the ideological mentor of the party, which is known for its ideology-centric approach and believing in character building of the nation cautioned the BJP for its power-centric strategy from time to time and expected it to guide the nation in its march to developments with

ideology - based governance. But Vajpayee ignored the caution and preferred to re-project himself as a Prime Minister with moderation and pluralism as his national policy. The BJP therefore had plunged into a deep ideological quandary. Its coalition with ideologically divergent parties, which did not produce the result as per expectation of the people, disappointed the voters and as a result it had to face successive defeats in elections during last four years of its rule.

Realising the ground situation the party leadership went for introspection and if its declaration in Goa session is any indication, the BJP has undoubtedly taken a bold initiative to re-project it as a party committed to Hindutva. Revamping of the union cabinet and handing over the leadership of the party in the hands of ideologically committed young generation under the guidance of L.K. Advani, a leader with tested record for rejuvenating the party in late eighties are part of the exercise in this direction. But as the political situation stands today, will this new facade of the BJP bring electoral success to the party? We may like to examine the issue on the basis of the following points:-

1. Capability of the younger generation of leaders in the party to make BJP acceptable to the electorates.
2. Capability of the new leadership to guide the NDA in providing good governance keeping in view the ideological clash between the party agenda and the national agenda of governance.
3. Strategy of the party to regain the confidence of the voters.

There is no doubt that the young generation of leaders, who have taken over the command of the party are of proven merit with their deep roots in the political philosophy of the party. But will only age factor generate confidence among the party cadres for making the BJP acceptable to the people? In fact all the previous presidents of the BJS/BJP except Bangaru Laxman and Jana Krishnamurthy(they could not complete their tenure) were in fifties (similar to the age of the new president, who celebrated his 53rd birth anniversary - the day when he took over the presidentship of the party), when they had taken over the presidential post of the party. Shyama Prasad Mukherji was 51-years old, when he became the founder president of the BJS in 1951. Vajpayee was even in his forties, when he succeeded the party president Deen Dayal Upadhyay following his death in 1967. Again Vajpayee was only 56 - year old, when he became the founder president of the BJP in 1980. Advani was 58, when he succeeded Vajpayee as President of the party in 1986. Of all these presidents it was only under the presidentship of Advani that the BJP could increase its electoral performance and brought the party to the centre-stage of Indian politics. This achievement of the BJP was however, not only due to the age factor of the president but it was all due to aggressive ideological campaign of the party.

With an impression gaining ground that the BJP may launch high voltage ideological campaign, the opposition is equally prepared to isolate it. Opposition unity on Gujarat situation is a part of strategy to counter the potential electoral success of the BJP. Moreover, the BJP's slogan of good governance was exposed in its last four years of rule. While the party cadres and supporters of the party are unhappy with the ideological deviation of the party, peoples' impression of its closeness to the opportunistic politics has left the party without any issue.

Now, Venkiah Naidu pronounced another slogan in an interview published in RSS mouthpiece Organiser in its issue dated July 4 - "EK HAATH ME BJP KA JHANDA - DOOSARE ME NDA KA AGENDA" (Ideological banner of BJP in one hand and agenda of NDA in other).

Now the question arises as to how Naidu would reconcile the ideological clash of the party with the agenda of the NDA at implementation level? Contrary to Swadeshi philosophy of the BJP, the Vajpayee Government has gone for globalisation, which is more or less synonymous to westernisation of Indian economy. The BJP was strongly opposed to the entry of multi-national companies except in high-tech areas but the NDA Government has permitted foreign investments in insurance sector, print media and even in consumer goods. Naidu now says, " for forty-five years we had an opposition mindset; we have to change that." Such double standards of the party in opposition and in treasury bench may not convince the people.

People viewed the BJP, while it was in opposition as a party with immense potential to provide democratic alternative based on Indian tradition. Even its philosophy of good governance was linked with such tradition. The party was critical of Congress for materialistically driving away the Indian society from its traditional values, which were linked with intellectual, spiritual and cultural nationalism. "Integral Humanism", the main political philosophy of the party is for the overall development of Indian society with an ultimate objective to make the country a resurgent nation. Deen Dayal Upadhyay, who propounded this theory said, " The basic cause of problems facing Bharat is the neglect of its national identity" (Integral Humanism - page 5).

Contrary to its political philosophy, if the new leadership does not like to differentiate between national identity and globalisation now synonymous to westernisation, it may simply add to further confusion among the party cadres. Naidu wants them not to be apologetic on Hindutva related issues but keeping such issues away from the agenda of governance is ridiculous. It is true that in an era of coalition politics the BJP may not come to power on its own if it remains ideology-centric, but it is equally true that the party cannot expand its base so long it is power-centric.

By and large there is a prevailing distrust in public mind against all the political parties and leaders associated with them. The BJP had created an impression among the middle class by taking the initiative to transform the Indian society. But alliance of the BJP with the parties, which do not have any ideological affinity or community of ideals to its political philosophy proved to be only an opportunistic combination with the sole aim to grab power. Therefore, the party could not translate its slogan of value-based politics and good governance to practice as it had to meet the demands of the self-seeking leaders of its regional allies in the government.

The Coalition Government of Left Front in West Bengal is continuing for the last 25 years due to the common ideological root of its partners. In fact coalition without any integrated ideology may not have a lasting and effective impact on the voters.

The Janata Party experiment, which was also a coalition of divergent political groups also, failed, as it had no positive political philosophy except to isolate Indira Gandhi and make her dynastic politics irrelevant. Similarly, the National Agenda of Governance without any political

philosophy except to remain in power could hardly meet the aspirations of the BJP supporters and rather disappointed them. Vajpayee tried to evolve a politics of consensus but failed due to inherent competition and conflict for power among the political parties in a parliamentary democracy. In the absence of tolerance and consensus among the leaders and intellectuals, the coalition cannot provide good governance. Thus, so long the new leadership of the BJP carries the NDA agenda, its claim to remain unapologetic on Hindutva agenda of the party is an over simplification of the situation. Voters expect positive results and not just assurance.

Another important change in the BJP is the elevation of Advani as Deputy Prime Minister. Though, he has given a statement that there has not been any difference in his status after becoming Deputy Prime Minister, people by and large have viewed it as a signal that he may be a possible successor to Vajpayee if the situation demands. He may be viewed in party circles as a prospective Prime Minister but his charisma if any to bring back the party to power in states in 2003 and at centre in 2004 depends upon the performance of the NDA Government, which still has two years to prove its merit for good governance.

In the Bangalore session of the BJP in 1993, Advani in his presidential address asserted that if entrusted to power the BJP " would succeed in making the society riot-free, the administration corruption-free, economy debt-free and the elections violence-free." Now the people may wait for two years to see how these commitments of the Deputy Prime Minister are translated into action on the ground by the new leadership.

For any party, the authority of the Prime Minister rests on his ability to get his party's candidates elected to state assembly and parliament. In fact after Nehru and Indira Gandhi no party has produced any leader at national level on whose charisma its candidates are assured of their electoral victory. Successive electoral defeats of the BJP since it came to power have proved that its Prime Minister hardly had any charisma. Advani with his Rath Yatra may have a past record of pushing the party to its present position in parliament, but his projected image of Sardar Patel has no relevance in the absence of his achievement in combating terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir as Union Home Minister. His hype making pro-active and hot pursuit statements have no takers among the voters.

Ayodhya is no more an emotive issue to attract the voters. BJP no more talks on article 370. Uniform Civil code cannot be taken up because it is not in the NDA agenda. BJP-BSP coalition Government in U.P does not have any ideological sanction. Chief Minister Mayawati hardly gives any importance to the state BJP president Vinay Katiyar , a known hard line leader of the party. The neglected legislators of the party in Mayawati Government are found frustrated. States like U.P., Bihar, Rajasthan, M.P. Maharashtra and Delhi ditched the BJP in elections after the party came to power at centre in 1998.

Apart from the odds against the BJP discussed above, the new leadership may have to face the following challenges:-

1. During its four years of rule, the BJP failed to formulate a strong and coherent strategy to balance its ideology with the compulsion of coalition Government.
2. BJP failed to recognise and reward its cadres and class of supporters for their contribution to the growth of its parliamentary strength. Middle class and Government employees, who have been the vote bank of the party became the main victims of the corresponding Union budgets.
3. Coalition being collaborative governance should have a corporate culture for delivering goods to the people. In corporate governance there is no scope for appeasement to share holders as its policy is framed for the profit of the company.
4. Vajpayee Government lost most of its time and energy in appeasement of alliance partners than to the welfare of the people. Vajpayee expanded his cabinet to its largest strength the country had so far.
5. In its pretensions to moderation and adoption of conciliatory attitude towards the opposition and appealing to liberal sentiments in media, the BJP diluted the very purpose for which it was founded.
6. Playing its Hindu card for electoral gains but succumbing to the pressure of regional card and putting on a Congress mask to project its liberal image, when it came to power exposed the party for maintaining double standards.
7. Ever since the BJP held a centre stage in Indian politics, its opponents' main aim has been to isolate it and make it politically isolated. Opposition unity on Ayodhya, Gujarat or any Hindutva related issue created discomfiture among the party's allies.
8. The party did not formulate its strategy for expanding its ideological base and consolidating its electoral strength by extending outside support to any party to form Government. It could have waited to form its own Government.

Unless the new leadership makes an honest attempt and convince the voters to accept the undiluted ideology of the party, erosion in its base is difficult to be arrested. So long the party keeps hanging on the support of self-seeking allies, its changed façade may not help it to gain the confidence of the people.

Looking back to the history of electoral balance sheet of the BJP, it seems that the party had to suffer in election, whenever it diluted its philosophy of governance with ideological moderation. In the absence of any neat strategy to balance its ideology in the era of coalition politics, the BJP may remain a victim of the onslaught of not only its political opponents but also to the pressure of its allies.

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