

Karnataka Elections: A Trial by Fire

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Abstract

May 13, 2023 was a D day for the state of Karnataka. On this day, it witnessed an unprecedented surge of seats in favour of Congress at 135, heavy depletion for the ruling BJP at 65 and near extinction for JD(S) at 19, which is unlikely to remain one piece while remain out of power for five years. It was an election to beat every election. The much touted BJP had to bite the dust with 12 of its ministers getting defeated. For the opposition Congress, it was an act of revival, a kind of booster dose after remaining in dire straits for long. Ten years of anti-incumbency, coupled with bad administration, poor leadership and change of corruption 'PayCM: 40% Ki Sarkara, led to the undoing of BJP. Neither the cult figure of Prime Minister Modi, nor his carpet booming rallies made any difference. The double engine government failed because the two engines were not in proper alignment and aggressive and abrasive Hindutva proved to be of no consequence for people who wanted good governance, welfarism and greater employment. The BJP lost its last bastion in south India. For Congress, new opportunities opened up and the coming years will be a trial by fire. In a space of barely five months, it has snatched two states from BJP – Himachal Pradesh and Karnataka. It has to be seen whether it can maintain a winning streak in the coming elections in the states of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chhatisgarh and Telangana. That would be its real test.

Keywords: Anti-incumbency, Muslim Reservation, Bajrang Dal, Nandini Milk Cooperative, Amul Milk Cooperative

Introduction

It is a widely held idea in India that the number thirteen is an unlucky one for some people. It truly proved unlucky for the BJP which after ten years of rule in this state, had to make an ignominious exit by obtaining a paltry 65 seats in a 224 seats House (George, 2023). Not only it was a body blow after two incumbencies, it caused an existential dilemma for the party which lost its only foothold in south India. With Karnataka slipping out of BJP's kitty, it was virtually wiped out politically in the vast swathe of south India. It was the gateway to south India for the BJP and assembly results meant a big climb down for this party. The results gave a resounding rebuff to the formidable BJP trio of Modi-Amit Shah and Nadda who were boasting of a roller-coaster ride in the

state. The verbose claim of big majority (Prachand Bahumat) lay shattered for the time being.

Candidate Selection, Caste Matrix and Regional Balance:

When poll was announced to take place on May 10, 2023, all political parties got energised and began putting names on the checkerboard for candidate selection. It was a complex exercise which also meant refusing renomination to old war horses such as JagdishShettar and LaxmanSavadi of BJP who had already over-played their innings. To offset 10 years of anti-incumbency, the ruling BJP denied tickets to 20 sitting MLAs. A backlash was imminent. The veteran warrior K.S. Eshwarappa decided to hang the bat when he was denied the Shimoga seat that was his political turf since 1989. But JagdishShettar and LaxmanSavadi, a former MLC and deputy Chief Minister quitted the party and joined the Congress. The Congress kept its door open for five legislators who had jumped out of the BJP and JD(S) bandwagon. The exit of two Lingayat stalwarts Shettar and Savadi became the talking point because the BJP had kept its hold on Lingayat electorate for long, thanks to the veteran BJP boss Yediyurappa. Two local leaders of BJP – Dharmendra Pradhan and CM BasavarajBommai were part of this exercise of pruning the list of hopefuls and hence were accountable for the final outcome.

The candidate selection was a strange mix of tactics – BJP putting all steps to conquer, and the Congress remaining united as never before. The JD(S) appeared to be a dark horse with its sagging fortunes in old Mysuru region. All were preparing for the ensuing battle royal. For BJP, ruling for the last 10 years, anti-incumbency was a problem. It had made a clean sweep of Lok Sabha seats in 2019 seats – winning 25 out of 28 seats. Of the 130 seats in six southern states of Karnataka, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry, the BJP accounted for 29 – 25 seats from Karnataka and four from Telangana. The BJP had a big task on her hand to come out a winner in the murky waters of Karnataka politics. Said BasavarajBommai, "A fierce battle is on. While Karnataka is a do-or-die election, for the BJP, it is a must-win. He exuded careful confidence. The regions to be catered were Kittur Karnataka – 50 seats, KalyanaKarnataka – 40 seats, Coastal Karnataka – 19 seats, Central Karnataka – 20 seats, Old Mysuru – 67 seats and Bengaluru Urban – 28 seats.

Reservation Gimmick: Every party faced its own challenges. The BJP had a CM who was rated as a fine intellectual but not an effective crowd puller or mass leader (Hebber, 2023). As against him, both Siddaramaiah and D.K. Shivakumar of Congress were rabble-rousers and hence it was 'advantage Congress' to begin with.

In Coastal Karnataka, BJP used the Hindutva card and effectively offset Hijab and Halal controversies to emerge an outright winner. It also had the support of formidable Lingayat community. In addition, it indulged in social engineering by scrapping the 4% reservation for the Muslims and distributed it

equally among the Lingayats and Vokkaligas. It increased by 2 per cent, the reservation of Scheduled Castes (SCs) in education and employment. The increase for Scheduled Tribes (STs) was 4 per cent. Internal reservation was made for the Dalits by appointing their 17 per cent seats among four groups – SC Left (6 per cent), SC Right (5.5 per cent), Touchables (4.5 per cent) and Others (1 per cent). This exercise helped the most backward Madiga community among the SC Left. It was their long-standing demand, but Banjara and Bhavi communities who made similar demands, were left out this arrangement. Most SCs and STs were settled in Kalyana Karnataka or the districts adjoining Hyderabad.

The Muslims who are 13 per cent of population in the state were unhappy at the scrapping of their 4 per cent reservation. The Congress manifesto premised to restore it. This consolidated the Muslim support for Congress. The Congress managed the support of Ahinda or Alpasankhyaturu – Kannada name for minorities, Hindulidavaru (Backward Classes) and Dalitaru (Scheduled Castes), in addition to that of Kuruba who constituted 7 per cent of population. Siddaramaiah is a Kuruba and MallikarjunKharge is a Dalit. ShivKumar is a Vokkaliga, who are 12 per cent of the electorate. Dalit population per centage is seventeen. The Lingayat percentage too is seventeen. MallikarjunKharge's elevation as a Dalit Congress party President added a resonant string to Congress bow.

The VeerashivaLingayat is the largest community to count and they were mostly with the BJP. In good old days, they were with the Congress but ever since the removal of VirendraPatil as Chief Minister, the community got disenchanted with Congress and joined the saffron bandwagon. The Congress was trying have to woo them back. On April 24, 2023, Rahul Gandhi made a holy pilgrimage to KudalaSangama at Bagalkot for BasavaJayanti Celebration. Basava was a 12th century social reformer of Lingayats and Rahul's gesture proved a valuable outreach to this estranged community. It mollified and soothed old frayed tempers. Congress gave 51 tickets to Lingayats to solicit their support and soften their attitude.

A Comatose Congress Awakens to Action:

From the day one, people wave expecting Congress to win and hence it was flooded with applications for party ticket. A whooping number of 1350 aspirants applied for Congress tickets for 224 seats. The BJP too had a glut of aspirants but the party was jinxed as the contractorsassociationcomplained of a services charge of 40 per cent commission being demanded by officers and ministers. Their allegation was that bills amounting to 17000 crores remained unpaid because to win tenders and get the bills passed, a 40% bribe has to be paid (Gupta, 2023). Another contractor Santosh Patil wrote to the PM that a minister E.S. Kshwarappa had demanded a bribe of 40 per cent to get bills worth 4 crores passed. The charge stuck and BJP paid dearly for this graft charge. To add to the

BJP's woes, the Congress exploited the Nandini versus Amul issue to invoke Kannada pride. It was alleged that Amul Milk Scheme of Gujarat will provide technical support to the Nandini milk supply scheme. This set alarm bells ringing. The Nandini people were quick to realise that it was a ploy by Amul to invade Nandini to finish it off and replace it. It was labelled as Gujarattake over of the flourishing Nandini scheme that made deep scars on Kannada pride and kicked up a virtual storm that harmed BJP. It was alleged that Modi government in New Delhi was trying to obtain a foothold in Mysuru through its One Nation – One Milk scheme which would put to jeopardy 2.6 million milk producers of Karnataka. Coupled with corruption conundrum of Pay Cm 40 per cent commission Amul milk project ignited a political backlash which was difficult to douse and it hurt Kannada pride for which BJP had to pay dearly in the election.

Guns were Silenced:

Ever since the announcement of election, the BJP mobilised all its forces to offset the effects of anti-incumbency of ten years. It used its star campaigners led by Narendra Modi and the rest consisting of Amit Shah, J.P. Nadda, Rajnath Singh, Yogi Adityanath and Himanta Biswa Sarma. It was confident that carpet-bombing by Prime Minister Modi will lead it to the podium of victory but this did not happen. The tumultuous campaign of weeks came to an end two days before the election day and door to door campaigning started but to no avail. The Karnataka crowd was in no mood to oblige the BJP and exonerate it of the charges of mounting corruption. The result was a deluge of support for the rival Congress. The Modi charisma seemed to be fading. It was on the wane.

Differing Regional Options and National Outcome:

Karnataka is a state that always had differing perception for state and national elections. Assembly elections were looked upon as localised contests that would hardly have any bearing upon national election. Since 2004, Congress and Janata dal (Secular) won three elections out of four but in the national elections, BJP turned the scales. Before 2004, people upstaged Janata Dal in state elections and Congress nationally. The only exception was 1989, when both elections took place the same year. Generally speaking, Karnataka voters opted for the dominant national parties in the elections to the Parliament and in the Assembly elections, regional issues dominated and regional parties were preferred.

Besides, in south India, election in one state does not produce any ripple effect in other states and they vote differently. Since there are state level rivalries, hence election outcomes too are different. Kaveri water dispute will not let Tamil Nadu and Karnataka vote the same way. Besides there is a high level seats volatility. From one election to another, seats keep changing and do not exhibit a fixed pattern. In the 2018 state election, parties retained only 93 of 224 seats. In 2013, this number was 98 and 54 in 2004. What remains stable is

caste representation and this is a defining feature of Karnataka election. Since 1952, the combined representation of Lingayats and Vokkaligas has oscillated between 48% to 59% and regardless of which party got what, these two dominant caste groups always triumphed. So does the geographical distribution of representation. Traditionally the Lingayats dominated north Karnataka and Vokkaligas, the southern Karnataka. A national contest is way different from state level election and this shows the sophistication of state voters and their disdain for uniform voting pattern in two elections.

The Final Kill:

Come May 13, 2023, the day of putting an end to suspense, declare results and cause the electoral surprise. The pollsters had indicated a hung assembly and fractured verdict. But the results defied all this and set aside all surmises. The Congress after the period of prolonged political hibernation, accounted a big win – 136 seats with BJP biting the dust and getting a merely 65 seats. The JD(S) tally was 19 and others got 4. This was the biggest win for Congress. The poll percentage was a historic high of 73.19%. As many as 79 constituencies witnessed a turn out between 80 to 90 per cent. (Vernier, 2023) Melkote constituency in Mandya and Hoskote in Bengaluru clocked the highest turn out at 91% and 90.95% respectively. Since 2013, the trend is towards a higher voter turnout which was 71.83% and 72.44% in 2013 and 2018 respectively. It was a big win after a lapse of 34 years in Karnataka. The Congress vote share cumulatively in all six regions was 43.

This election marked the receding prospects of JD(S) which suffered a loss of 12 seats. JD(S) was strong in old Mysuru area which had 64 seats. The Congress won 43 seats. It exploited the chant of 40% commission for any work done by the BJP ministers as alleged by contractors conference. The election also witnessed the upturn of polarisation bid by BJP which put an end to 4% Muslim reservation and banned Hijab. The BJP minister Nagesh who banned it lost the election. What added to the woes and agony of BJP was the untimely announcement of Amul's entry in the milk market controlled by Nandini. There were 54 seats that came under the spell of Nandini. Congress won 31 seats.

The scheduled castes are a large bloc, constitution 17% of electorate. The Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge is a Dalit. Together the SCs and STs have 92 seats reserved for them. The Congress won 32 of these seats.

One notable feature of this election was that it was in rural areas where the Congress gained most, as shown in Table-1, below:-

Table-1 Win by Parties Population-wise

	<i>Congress</i>	<i>BJP</i>	<i>JD(S)</i>	<i>Others</i>
Cities	24	23	0	0
Half Rural Belt	15	8	2	0
Completely Rural	97	34	17	3

Source: DainikBhaskar, Jaipur, May 14, 2023, p.1

The table shows the preponderance of people from rural belt taking the lion's share of 97 for Congress, 34 for BJP, 17 for JD(S) and 3 for others and Independents. It makes the government largely rural based. It was a kind of booster dose for a near moribund Congress suffering humiliating defeats in West Bengal, UP and Madhya Pradesh. After its victory in Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka is a big catch which would be a morale booster for the incumbent elections in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chhatisgarh and Telangana. It has infused Congress with renewed confidence.

For BJP, it is a lesson that the lack of strong and effective local leadership is a grave handicap that can't be washed over by frequently changing the Chief Ministers. Nor can it sleep over burning issues such as unemployment, price spiral and corruption. Simply harping over Hinduitva may not prove helpful. Nor can communal issues such as Hijab, Halal and Tipu Sultan anniversary ensure victory at the hustings.

One notable feature of this election is the reversal of fortune for Congress in Lok Sabha constituencies. In 2019, it won only one seat – Bangalore Rural. This time Congress had an edge over BJP in 21 of 28 Lok Sabha seats and its vote share rose from 38.1 per cent in 2018 to 42.8 per cent. BJP recorded a clear win in only four seats and in two seats, the honours were nearly even while in the Hassan seat, the JD(S) was ahead. Though this is encouraging for the Congress, it can not take much comfort from it because fortunes tend to get reversed in national poll. The BJP won 104 seats in Assembly poll in 2018 with 36% vote share. Its vote share rose to 54% in Lok Sabha elections an year after in 2019. Hence Congress functionary Salim Ahmed's optimism for the Lok Sabha elections in 2024 may not mean much. However, it is an improvement on previous performance. In Lok Sabha elections 2019, Congress was ahead in 35 assembly segments and BJP was ahead in 177 assembly seats. The JD(S) was ahead in 12 seats.

Muslim representation in the assembly remains perceptibly low despite a marginal increase from 7 to 9 seats. All are from Congress. The BJP did not field any Muslim and JD(S) fielded 23 candidates but none won. The average number of Muslim candidates since 1952 has been 8.5 since 1952. Their biggest tally was in 1978 when 16 Muslims were elected. One more was elected in a bypoll in the same year. Low representation is affecting their overall development. The Muslim grouse is that other communities such as Lingayats, Vokkaligas and Kurubas whose numbers are not significantly larger than those of Muslims are better represented. Khaji Arshad Ali lists lack of awareness and inspirational leader is the reason for this defeat in representation which should be at least 26 to 28 as per 2011 Census that puts them at 12.7% of population. All this is because of caste miscalculation according to Dipankar Gupta. He ascribes this to mutual repulsion among castes. To quote him, "This is because 'mutual repulsion' is the fundamental feature of caste order. Castes that appear

close to each other because of similar occupations, are never quite so. Yadavs and Jats may be agricultural castes but there are tensions between them. Among the Lingayats too, the Panchamasals want to break away, hoping that this will get them a greater share of reservations". Muslims too have caste difference between Saiyads and Pasmandas.

BJP is Back to Square one in South India. Karnataka was the one and the only BJP bastion in south India, which fell on May 13, 2023, said Nistula Hebber. For Congress, it was a joyful moment, a strategy of revival. A defeat in Karnataka for Congress would have encouraged wholesale defections in neighbouring Telangana. It will serve as a stabiliser there and the party may regain its number two position in Telangana after BJP to challenge TCR. It may not remain riven by constant defections and desertions.

The southern states account for 140 seats and BJP has 29 seats – 4 in Telangana and the rest in Karnataka. The BJP's boast of being a party with a national foot print stood shattered. The disenchantment of Lingayat voters meant further depletion in her ranks.

Fall of Titans: As many as 13 ministers, including the Speaker fell by waysides in the storm unleashed by this election. They included P. Srimamuly, MurugeshNirani, V. Somanna, J.C.Madhuswamy, B.C. Patil, Shankar Patil Munenakappa, R. Ashok, K. Sudhakar, B.C. Nagesh, Halappo Basappa Acha, K.C.Narayana, Speaker Vishveshwara Hegde Kageri and M.P. Renukacharya.

Yedi Effect: The enforced exit of B.S. Yadiyurappa and the ignominious exit of former Chief Minister JagdishShettar and former Deputy CM LakshmanSavadi accelerated the process of BJP's rout in a slow but steady stream. This coupled with denying the reservation demand of the Panchamahilis, the numerically stronger Veerashaiva,Lingayat set the pace for the further decline of BJP in numbers.

Modi Myth Broken:Karnataka election laid bare the claims of Modi for vote-grazing. The much-hyped hypothesis that Modi-Amit Shah due, is invincible and unconquerable was battered completely on May 13, 2023 when election results began trickling in Karnataka. The results indicated that a strong local leadership coupled with good governance was the only recipe for success and the charisma of a leader alone was no guarantee of victory. It may lead to BJP Mukh South. For almost 40 years, no party won the election back to back. BJP wanted to break this jinx but failed.

Impact of Bharat JodoYatra: A 3500 km Rahul odyssey from Kanyakumari to Kashmir's verdous green valley, became a talking point. The yatra (travel) spanning 21 days, passed through seven districts of Ballari, Chamarajanagar, Chittradurga, Mandya, Mysuru, Raichur and Tumakur led to significant political gains. The Congress won 37 of 51 seats in these districts. It improved its old tally of 18 seats in 2018. "The intangible impact was uniting the party, reviving the cadre and shaping the narrative for the Karnataka

elections. It was during the Bharat JodoYatra, that Rahul Gandhi had numerous contacts and conversations with the people of Karnataka, that the five guarantees and promises in Congress manifesto were discussed and finalised", observed Jairam Ramesh. Rahul stirred the party and the momentum was maintained during the campaign. The brother sister combo of Rahul and Priyanka did the trick. Rahul campaigned for 27 days and Priyanka for 22 days. It was a relentless campaign. MallikarjunKharge, assisted by Syed Nasir Hussain and GurdeepSappal kept close tab on the campaign at the granular level. The BJP's model of caste inclusiveness and religious exclusiveness faced a major set back", observed Verghese K. George".

Tinkering of SCs internal reservation resulted in sporadic violence and alienated both SCs and STs, with the result that Congress won in 22 of 36 SC constituencies, and 14 to 16 constituencies for STs. It gained 12 SC seats more than what it got in 2018. In the 15 ST constituencies, Congress won in 14 constituencies. It was eight more than what it was in 2018.

Causes of BJP's Debacle: They can be succinctly enumerated below:

- 1. Double Engine failure:**BJP was fond of speaking about double-engine pace for development. What it did not realise was that to win accolades, both engines must work. While the Delhi engine was working, the Karnataka engine developed faults and ceased to function. The result was a catastrophic decline in public support for the BJP.
2. The BJP suffered from a naïve illusion that the Hindus are her pocket borough and they had no option except to vote for it. This was fatal illusion. Far from uniting Hindus, it only consolidated Muslim support for Congress (Desai, 2023). Her views on Hijab and doing away of 4% Muslim reservation proved counter productive. It also failed to ignite Hindu revolt on the issue of Congress promising to ban Bajrang Dal. The Congress, on the other hand, by promising caste-based census, endeared itself to the bulk of Hindus.
3. The costly LPG cylinders hurt BJP. On the other hand, 5 guarantees of Congress, created huge public support for it.
4. The BJP was seen as a north Indian party, which won coupled with double anti-incumbency, proved its undoing. Its over-centralisation laid it open to the charge that it was a frail, but carbon copy of Congress of Indira Gandhi era. It followed every tactics of Congress such as enfeeblement of local leaders, loss of local initiative, penchant for using outside leaders and over-dependence on Prime Minister. This made it the another edition of the Congress party of Indira Gandhi era.
5. Over-confidence in PM's ability to sway votes also proved fatal. This election was a body-blow to both the Prime Minister and Home Minister. It is the withering away of charisma of PM and return to nativity of Congress that proved decisive.

Fall in Lingayat Vote: With the enforced exit of Yediyurappa, there was a perceptible decline in Lingayat support to the BJP. On the other hand, the Congress was the gainer. It gave tickets to 46 Lingayats, out of whom 37 won. In the case of BJP, only 15 of 69 BJP Lingayats won. The Lingayats are 14 per cent of population and they number 5.3 crores of states population. The Congress also won 30 of 61 Vokkaliga seats. But the Congress suffered reverses in Bangalore city where its share of 15 seats in 2018 fell to 13. The BJP gained from 4 seats in 2018 to 15 seats in 2023. The Congress also was a loser in coastal Karnataka where the Bajrang Dal was strong.

The BJP may draw comfort from the fact that its vote share remained the same and did not suffer any erosion. It was 36.2% in 2018 and 36% in 2023. But Congress percentage went up from 38% in 2018 to 42.9% in 2023.

One may look at the seats won by SCs and STs in 2018 and 2023. In 2018, Congress won 12 seats whose percentage was 39%. Its seats tally rose to 21 in 2023 and percentage swelled to 44.7%. In the case of STs, the Congress number was 8 seats (37.9%) in 2018 and it rose to 14 (47.7%) in 2023. As stated earlier, the saffron shone only in the Silicon city of Bengaluru and coastal Karnataka.

Reflection: A careful glance at the results of Karnataka would reveal the wider story that as India responds to the inevitable dynamics of modernity in its march of history, it becomes apparent that the country has "morphed from being an electoral democracy to becoming an electoral autocracy", observes Peter Ronald Dsouz in a write-up "under-reading and over-reading the Karnataka vote". It shows that despite loyal voters for both BJP and Congress, a swing in favour of latter, made all the difference in the electoral fortune. The civil society organisation (CSO) in Karnataka and elsewhere was under immense pressure of New Delhi, whose dictates tried to weaken it but it responded back with equal force to resist it. The work of organizations such as Eddelu Karnataka and Bahutva Karnataka indicated that CSO ceased to be docile and obedient. They hit back at New Delhi. It proved that political charisma of leaders has a short life and it gets routinised sooner or latter. Max Weber is on record having said that charismatic authority tends towards routinisation in legal, traditional or rational direction. Charisma and money power did not sway the Karnataka voters and its 'use-by', date has passed away.

Besides, seventy five years of freedom and dance of democracy made people party-minded who were not swayed by gimmicks like Congress-Mukt Bharat. The electorate today wants a wider choice of political parties to exercise its option in an election and not the elimination of political parties that would restrict its choice. The people of Karnataka, living under the spell of flourishing IT industry have become sufficiently vibrant and awake and they want political parties to continue and offer them wider choice. They do not stand for the elimination of any national party to restrict their voting option. In addition, they

seek socio-cultural accommodation and not separation in the name of religion. With its defeat in Karnataka, BJP is back to square one in south India. Of the six states in south India viz, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Karnataka, the last one was its sole bastion and its loss lays open the BJP that it is a party of Hindi speakers. The first electoral challenge that it would face in the south is in Telangana where in 2019 election, it won four seats. The six southern states account for 140 Lok Sabha seats. The BJP had 25 Karnataka, out of which 4 were in Telangana. If one subtracts Karnataka seats, BJP's presence is reduced to barely 4 seats. The Karnataka results have cast a dark spell on BJP's future prospects in south India. Her boast that it has a national footprint faces strong challenge and it will be a tricky balancing act in the days to come.

The Congress, on the other hand is upbeat because of her unprecedented victory in Karnataka. The party credits the template of five guarantees and Bharat Jodo Yatra for this emphatic win. It has provided the Congress a much needed boost to reclaim its past strength in states where it fared badly in the recent past. For her, this election will pave the way for the recovery of lost inheritance. In a span of five months it has conquered and snatched from BJP Himachal Pradesh and Karnataka and that would be a rallying point for her march ahead in impending elections in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhatisgarh. BJP's model of caste inclusiveness and religious exclusiveness faced a major setback. The Congress successfully pushed back allegation of being hostile to Hindu religion and its being unaccommodative of backward classes. D.K. Shivakumar is a staunch Hindu, Siddaramaiah stands for caste justice and Mallikarjun Kharge is a Dalit icon. A combination of such diverse leadership was enough to meet these allegations.

Much of what happened in this Congress surge for crossing the finishing line is related to Bengaluru which owing to its IT expansion, accounts for about one-third of Karnataka's economy. That is one reason people came out with the catchy phrase 'Pay CM and 40% Sarkara', which Narendra Modi has discussed. The BJP government continued with old policy of enhancing the economy of Bengaluru which had little or no space for entrants from outside who were forced out of agriculture. They did not find any place in Bengaluru's economy and were out of job. For them, the five guarantees of Congress came handy and they were sucked into the Congress orbit, deserting the BJP.

What then are the lessons for both BJP and Congress. The BJP was strong in its catchment area in the north India including Assam and parts of northeast as places for notable expansion. The BJP created an all powerful centre with weak states. It had an all powerful Prime Minister, having his own cult appeal, who was associated with a chain of low-profile, and weak Chief Ministers. Even the campaign in Karnataka was highly centralised with the Modi-Shah-Nadda triumvirate where locals like Bommai and Yediyurappa were only marginal

players. This is not a Karnataka specific spectacle. In all BJP ruled states, the norm was that the election will be fought in the name of Prime Minister without naming a Chief ministerial candidate. The only exception are U.P. and Assam where Yogi Adityanath and Himanta Biswa Sarma act as autonomous leaders. In the rest of states, the CMs did not exhibit real authority and appeared as pigmies before the central leaders who alone called the shots and ruled the roast, to the great disadvantage of locals.

So far as the Congress is concerned, it began as a favourite but its victory was far from guaranteed as it did not have an enviable record of acting as a united party. Yet to the surprise of all, it presented itself as a more united and disciplined party than the ruling BJP which could not get its act together. The Congress had before it two objectives. One was to delegitimize Bommai government on the issue of corruption by providing a counter-narrative on governance and the second was to contain the two contending factions of Siddaramaiah and D.K. Shivakumar. With an even-handed precision to ensure that they do not fall apart, it acted successfully to prevent a collision between them. Though it had a galaxy of tried and tested leaders such as Sonia Gandhi, Priyanka Gandhi Vadara and Rahul Gandhi triumvirate, who made fleeting appearances and relied more on local leaders and gave them full freedom to organise and orchestrate the campaign the way they wanted. The central leaders provided only peripheral support. The core support and the power of decision-making largely rested with the local leaders. As Asim Ali has very rightly pointed out "The Gandhis also did well to lead from behind, acting as bullhorns for state crafted narratives such as five guarantees and Pay CM while largely avoiding national issues". It had the advantage of a better streamlined leadership and a revamped high command that envisioned the strategy of Gandhis without discarding the managerial capacity of locals like Mallikarjun Kharge, Siddaramaiah and D.K. Shivakumar. And the result was an expected surge in favour of Congress – big and unprecedented.

The BJP came with its tested recipe of abrasive Hinduism and raised the saffron pitch in the slog overs without any record of good governance and welfarism. The result was that it led to the consolidation of minorities around Congress without achieving a sufficient level of Hindu unity. The Congress, on the other hand was facing an existential dilemma and had to put its act together to try for a regime change. Already the PayCM 40% Sarkara had estranged the voters. The lack of an inspirational leaders and failure of double-engine prescription led the BJP to its waterloo. The over-reliance on the charisma of Modi created a one-size-fits all approach that obstructed the development of synergy between local and imported national leaders, often looked upon as northern outsiders. This soured the mood of local electorate which became viscerally bitter each day. Myth making of Modi, contrived political unity among local leaders and targeted publicity on Hinduism failed to change the

electoral ecosystem for BJP. As Swapan Dasgupta has pointed out, "The Karnataka win has undoubtedly a booster dose of exuberance to these seeking a regime change. Over the past four months, the BJP has lost control over two state governments while the Congress has more than compensated for its loss of Punjab to AAP". This completes the tale of BJP discomfiture and the satisfaction of Congress.

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