

e-Book

BEYOND RAHUL *vs* MODI

2014–2024: THE BATTLE FOR INDIA'S SOUL



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© Author

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Preface

Rahul Gandhi and Narendra Modi are seen as the two rival contenders to lead India in the next decade. While media attention is focused on the 2014 Lok Sabha Elections, analysts with a long term perspective are looking at how India will move along till 2024. Irrespective of the outcome of the 2014 elections, the Rahul *versus* Modi narrative will remain an integral part of popular debate and controversy in the next decade. This promises to be a truly fascinating and often emotional battle as the two fight to capture the heart, mind and soul of Indian citizens and voters. In the electoral arena, the battles will decide the future of the two major parties, the Congress and the BJP as well as the many regional parties across India. But as the suggested title of the book indicates, this battle goes well beyond electoral outcomes and **acrimonious** media debates. The sudden emergence of Arvind Kejriwal with his Aam Aadmi Party has compelled many analysts to wonder if this "Third Force" could upset the political landscape of the country. The book will factor the *Arvind factor* though the longer term consequences of the emergence of AAP are still not very clear. The party could become a formidable force; it could also implode because of internal contradictions.

The book will argue that Modi and Rahul matter more as symbols than individual leaders. They represent two divergent ideas of India which have been in conflict since 1947. This divergence goes beyond the popular debate over Secularism *versus* Communalism. It is reflected in a difference in fundamental attitudes towards the role of the State; the ideological contours of economic policy making, the rapidly changing aspirations of the emerging 'neo middle' class and the role of social & political institutions in channeling change in India. Since 1947, public discourse as well as policy making has been dominated by the so called Nehruvian Consensus which is an article of faith for the Left-Liberal media and academic Establishment. Even Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the first and only BJP Prime Minister of India by and large learnt to operate within the confines of this Consensus.

Narendra Modi is the first mass leader to openly challenge this idea of India. It is the seriousness and credibility of this challenge that makes the Rahul *versus* Modi battle so intense and acrimonious. And also because the issues involved will directly affect the future of India.

Is the kind of Secularism practiced today hypocritical? How does India treat its minorities? Have dynasties become a permanent feature of Indian politics? Does the Modi model of good governance offer better solutions to society? Should the State retreat from economic and business activities? Do the poor need doles or opportunities offered by markets? Are voters of Gujarat more ‘communal’? Is Hindutva the sole reason for the rise of the BJP? Does Rahul connect with the aspirations of Indian youth? Will social media really have an impact on elections? Does the mainstream media really set the agenda in India? Why do so many Indians hate Modi with such passion and ferocity? Do urban Indians really prefer Modi while rural Indians still opt for Rahul? The book will attempt to answer these important questions.

It would be too simplistic to call it a battle between India and Bharat, though one can clearly see contours of a conflict between emerging and aspirational classes and the entrenched elite in the country. For example, the first chapter of the book compares Rahul and Modi by using three parallels: Amitabh Bachchan *versus* Shashi Kapoor in movies, Dhirubhai Ambani *versus* Nusli Wadia in business and Jagdish Bhagwati *versus* Amartya Sen in thought leadership. The book will analyze the battle lines, identify the reasons behind the ferocity of this battle, interpret historical data to explain why this battle has gathered momentum in India and finally, make an attempt to provide a glimpse of India in 2024. Summing up, Beyond Rahul *versus* Modi seeks to explain and analyze the first serious challenge posed to the ‘Nehruvian Consensus’ in India since 1947.

Sutanu Guru, the author of this book has obtained invaluable help and advice from Yashwant Deshmukh, The Managing Director and Editor-in-Chief of C-Voter, one of the best known and respected opinion poll consulting firms in India.

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Drawing the Battle Lines

It is very difficult to maintain a sense of balance in this brutal and no holds barred war of words, ideas, ideologies, dirty tricks, posturing, grandstanding and sheer vitriol. You can be sure that Narendra Modi and Rahul Gandhi are not very fond of each other, though it is difficult to gauge the intensity of their personal dislike for each other. But it is easy to figure out the "With us or Without us" mindset of the two gladiators by merely observing how their respective supporters and sycophants behave and react. It is pretty normal for opponents to be critical of each other, even disrespectfully dismissive and derisive of each other. But most will agree that the amount of vitriol, bad blood and abuse witnessed in this battle between the so called Rahul and Modi has never been seen before in independent India. Watch any debate on a television news channel, read any column in a newspaper or magazine, read the exchanges on Twitter and Facebook or just go through any blog posted on the Internet and you cannot but be amused with the free entertainment provided. Or cringe if you are sensitive. You might belong to the set of people who think this whole Modi versus Rahul showdown is more hype and hot air than substance; that it is an artificial war manufactured by a breathless 24/7 media that has sold its voice and soul to sensationalism and worse. But you are mistaken this time. There is not a shadow of doubt that this war and its outcome will have repercussions that could well reverberate for decades. And really, the two individuals Modi and Rahul are secondary characters in this drama. They are symbols of two different and divergent ideas of India that are inexorably heading for a final showdown. Except, like so with so much else in Indian history and civilization, the final showdown often becomes a preview of a more decisive battle that is yet to come. Happily ever after is not embedded in our civilisational heritage. Nor is an eternity in hell. And by the end of 2013, a new joker in the pack called Arvind Kejriwal was added to the volatile war between Rahul and Modi. Suddenly, it is no longer a two way

THIRD TIME LUCKY ?

How the Modi-Rahul Fight is 65 Years Old

By October 29, 2013, Narendra Modi had already made his presence felt across India as the BJP candidate for Prime Minister. Two days before that, he had taken Patna by storm in a "Hunkar Rally" that gave unmistakable signals of Modi's surging popularity in Bihar. Even critics of Modi reluctantly admired the calm the man displayed during the rally despite a series of bomb blasts. But even as pundits were discussing his rivalry with Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar, by October 29, Modi returned to his favorite theme of raising doubts about the legacy of Nehru. In the first chapter, we have already argued how the battle between Modi and Rahul is actually a serious challenge to the Nehruvian legacy and consensus that has dominated discourse and public life in India for decades. Proof of that was amply evident on that morning of October 29, 2013. During a public function held in Ahmedabad to inaugurate a museum dedicated to Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Modi repeated his view that the Congress party, led by the Nehru-Gandhi family, had deliberately ignored the contributions made by Sardar Patel in uniting India. In fact, he went a step ahead and announced, "every Indian regrets that he (Patel) did not become the first Prime Minister. Had he been the first Prime Minister, the country's fate would have been different, its face would have been different."

The irony was that while Modi was delivering his caustic speech, sitting on the dias and looking suitably glum and grim was the Prime Minister of India Dr Manmohan Singh. By the time it was the turn of Dr Singh to address the gathering, the war was out yet again in the open. In what can only be called a direct albeit veiled attack on Modi, Dr Singh said, "Sardar Patel was secular to the core. He had a deep faith in the integrity of India. He believed that the whole country was a village and people of all communities here were his relatives

LOTUS 123

It was a desolate looking scene that day, recalls a former associate. The super star of the Hindu right had been humbled. Atal Bihari Vajpayee has always been known for strategic pauses while speaking. But that day, he was speechless. The results for the Gwalior seat were already in. A young and dashing Madhavrao Scindia, the son of one his most trustworthy colleagues and friends Maharani Vijayaraje Scindia of the royal family of Gwalior had defeated the President of the Bhartiya Janata Party by a margin of more than 175,000 votes. There was more than personal humiliation for Vajpayee. The BJP had managed to win just 2 Lok Sabha seats. Thirty two years ago, in 1952, the earlier avatar of the party, the Bhartiya Jan Sangh under Shyama Prasad Mukherjee had performed much better with a total of 3 Lok Sabha seats. In 1952, the voters had clearly indicated their preference by overwhelmingly choosing Congress and Jawaharlal Nehru. In 1984, his grandson Rajiv Gandhi delivered a performance that stunned even Congress party workers. At that time, it did appear as if the Hindutva challenge to the Nehruvian Consensus had been demolished once and for all.

Though not a serious contender for power at Delhi; the party had contested just 224 seats, the humiliation was galling. The party won about 7.5% of the total votes cast; the Left parties CPI and CPI (M) had together won about 9% of the total votes and won 28 seats. The BJP won one seat each in Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat while the Left parties won seats in Andhra, Bihar, Bengal, Kerala and Tripura. Of course, the Congress won 404 out of 514 seats. In the first Lok Sabha elections of 1951-52, the Jan Sangh led by Shyama Prasad Mukherjee had contested 94 seats and won 3; two of them from Bengal (almost certainly because of the personal popularity of Dr Mukherjee) and one from Rajasthan. It had polled a little more than 3% of the votes. The undivided Communist Party of India had won 16 of the 49 seats it contested and polled 3.3% of the votes. So more than 30 years after India held its first elections, it did appear as if the Left was stagnating while the BJP was declining. The Left

Goebbels Versus Goebbels

In May 2012, the Editor of Business Standard A.K. Bhattacharya wrote a column with a headline: 'India's Breakout States?' In his usual ponderous style, Bhattacharya argued that the growth rate of Gujarat averaged just about 6.3% a year between 2004-05 and 2010-11, far lower than the growth rate of poor states like Jharkhand and Bihar which clocked double digit growth rates in the same period. The column pontificated that: "It (Gujarat) has seen the most stable of governments for the last several years. And yet, it has seen its growth hovering around 6% for the last seven years." Soutik Biswas, who was the South Asia Bureau Chief of BBC then, followed up with a column for the BBC website with a titillating headline: 'Is Gujarat's Red Hot Economy a Myth?'. There was mayhem within minutes of the columns appearing online in Business Standard and BBC. Modi fans promptly dug out data from the Planning Commission and concluded that Bhattacharya and Biswas were either mistaken or lying because they had got their facts wrong. Thousands of tweets and retweets mocked Bhattacharya and Biswas and pointed out that the average growth rate of Gujarat was actually more than 10%. There were scathing attacks on the credibility of BBC for peddling "lies, lies and damned statistics". Biswas hastily tried to salvage the situation by changing the headline of his column to: 'Gujarat is a Red Hot Economy'. In his updated blog, Biswas explains: "I wrote a blog post with a link to the piece wondering whether Gujarat's red hot economic growth was an invention of the foreign media which has been written extensively about Mr. Modi's reformist government. I had also wondered whether there was something amiss with the data on Gujarat in the Business Standard article. Indeed there was – and I have updated the blog post to reflect this." Bhattacharya and Business Standard too were compelled to make changes, though their *mea culpa* was more convoluted.

The man who exposed and embarrassed a host of media outlets (many carried the Bhattacharya column) tweets under vijay@centreright. After finding out that the data used by Bhattacharya for

From Mai Baap to My Dreams

Supporters of Rahul Gandhi and the ruling establishment of Delhi keep insisting that the 2014 Lok Sabha confrontation between Modi and Rahul and Indian politics beyond that is a do or die contest between two ideas of India. According to them, pitted against the inclusive, egalitarian and tolerant Idea of India espoused by Jawaharlal Nehru and his successors is the bigoted, antiminority and exclusivist Idea of India espoused by the RSS and its foot soldiers. In this Ma-habharata, Rahul symbolizes the "Secular" Idea of India and Modi espouses the "Communal" Idea of India. Even leaders of the Aam Aadmi Party, that has suddenly emerged as a potential challenger to the BJP and the Congress keep talking about this divide. AAP leader Yogendra Yadav never hesitates to lament in TV studio discussions that his Idea of India will die a painful death if Modi manages to become Prime Minister.

If these ruling elites had their way, the pugnacious challenge posed by Modi would be decisively rebuffed by Indian voters. That is why you simply cannot fail to find gratuitous references to the 2002 Gujarat riots every time the name of Modi crops up in any discussion. But there is a problem here. In contemporary times, it seems that economics seems to ride rough shod over politics in the mind of voters. In 2014, more than 300 million neo middle class aspirational and young voters are expected to pay a visit to the polling booth. For these voters, it does appear as if their economic future is more important to them than slogans about secularism and communalism. Modi has succeeded to a large extent in shifting public (not media) debate towards his promises on development and a better economic future for voters. In rally after rally, he keeps asking why Indians remain poor despite 65 years of independence. While his critics dismiss his slogans and promises as propaganda by a dangerous demagogue, Modi does seem to connect with voters when it comes to economics. Behind this connect could lie a deep yearning of the 21st century Indian for higher incomes, better lifestyles and

Indian Mythological Tales

If you are someone who sits mesmerized in front of an idiot box during elections, simultaneously fiddling with the laptop or the tablet for the latest updates, you can be proud of being categorized as political groupie or junkie. In that case, you should be quite familiar with the term psephology. In case you are not, the roots, like so many things western, lie in Ancient Athens. Now Athens is called the cradle of western civilization (contemporary Greece is far from it though) and of democracy. People used to have kind of elections and actually vote back then (Slaves, women and foreign born were not allowed the vote of course, restricting polling to less than 20% of the population). Folks in those days apparently used pebbles to exercise their franchise. Pebbles in Greek is psephos. From this ancient practice emerged the term psephology, the "scientific study of elections" according to the Merriam Webster dictionary. According to the Oxford dictionary, psephology is the "statistical study of elections and trends in voting". In that sense, democracy and psephology are inextricably intertwined. You can't have the later without the former. No wonder, psephology, like democracy is a relatively new concept in the world; it was formally coined in 1952.

Now if you are one of those who finds democracy exasperating, then psephology can be exasperating as well as infuriating. The British statesman Winston Churchill (better recognized in India as an Imperialist and a racist) once famously said: "It has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except all the others that have been tried". Invoking the same spirit, it could be said that "Psephology is the worst form of election and voter behavior analysis except all the others that have been tried". In contemporary times, psephology is often equated with forecasting who will win and which party will get what share of the votes and seats. No wonder, come election time and there is a frenzy of activity when psephologists and pollsters start gazing at the crystal ball. No wonder also, a lot of these forecasts turn out to be laughably far away from