



PEOPLES PULSE
an ear to the ground

THE SHAM OF RAHUL GANDHI'S LEADERSHIP

On 7th July Rahul Gandhi tweeted why the Prime Minister or the BJP led NDA government has not insisted on status quo ante in the Galwan Valley and not mentioned the nation's territorial integrity over that part of India. Nothing of this is wrong. On the contrary it is right. In fact, he has been doing so on all key issues concerning the country.

More than an year later he stepped down as Congress president and during this period has consistently said that he no longer is party president, that the party has to elect a new leader and any suggestions that he back at the helm is met with a terse one-liner asking one to read his statement from May 2019.

The question to be asked now is: why is Rahul Gandhi tweeting like a bird in the prime of spring, happily, merrily and without a care in the world. In fact, he is the only person from where the main Opposition party is articulating its point that too in less than 280 characters. Twitter does not allow more than that even from a songbird.

There are several more questions which he needs to answer. What is he shooting for? And why? Has he recovered self-belief? And possibly why his tenure at the helm has been a terrific disaster? So, what's he shooting for?

One needs to look at this from an entirely different angle. In a few months from now there will be elections in Bihar. None has written off the incumbent Nitish Kumar led government. In April-May 2021 elections would be held in Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and Assam.

In February-March 2022 elections are scheduled in Goa, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand. Six months later the voters would choose in Himachal. In December Gujarat would vote. In 2023 eight more states would have elections. (Chattisgarh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Rajasthan, Telangana and Tripura). And there would be general elections in 2024.

Two questions need to be posed now. Does Rahul Gandhi know the task ahead? Does the Congress and its central leadership including the all powerful Congress Working Committee (forget the plenary) have any clue about the near term in Bihar and the medium term in those four states?

Its teenage political talk shows that the Congress is not on the field, so to speak, in Tamil Nadu and West Bengal. The reason is it is not aspiring for power, but only for presence. But they are the main Opposition in Assam and Kerala. In Assam the BJP boosted its vote share vis a vis the Congress that would put a B grade T20 match to shame. In Kerala the Congress is waiting for the Left Front government to make their mistakes. So, primarily, the Congress is not proactive in Kerala and possibly reactive in Assam.

Going back to Galwan it is for the media to take the meat from the 280 characters. Same is the case with the economy, J&K, demonetisation, GST, among several other issues. So the 280 words becomes the media's responsibility because they have to play their part in a democracy.

The question has to go back to Rahul Gandhi's performance. In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections he promised the NYAY scheme. We may forget what it is, but he has not even mentioned it to help it stay in public memory. The basics are lost on him and his acolytes. It takes more than a while for the public to digest a new scheme. A case in point in YS Rajashekara Reddy promised free power to agriculture in the 1999 elections. The Congress lost. In the next five years in the Opposition he kept repeating the same thing, plus others over time, to make free power the arrow head of the Congress campaign in united Andhra Pradesh, though it was much to discomfiture of their central leadership.

From 2014-2019 Rahul Gandhi coined slogans like ‘Suit-boot ki sarkar’, ‘Gabbar Singh Tax’ and ‘Chowkidaar Chor Hain’. The last boomeranged into the Congress and his face once all BJP leaders starting from Narendra Modi downwards prefixed their Twitter id with the slur. And the BJP went on to win a record 300 seats plus.

There are 4,120 Assembly constituencies in India, including 87 from the past state of J&K. Hand to heart, can the Congress field candidates in all those Assembly constituencies even as elections come as their respective schedule demands? In a month or two from now, can the Congress summon the main leaders, say three from each Assembly constituency and hold a one-day meeting? If so, what’s the message the leadership would give?

Now, I rewind back to the conversations I have had with politicians, particularly from the Congress. To organise a public meeting addressed by Rahul Gandhi it costs Rs 1 crore. This is counting mainly the dais, security and public mobilisation of around 10,000 people. Those leaders asked why they need to go through that effort, when the “in thing is tweeting”. The more mature asked “if” Rahul Gandhi could deliver a “meaningful” message that would give “josh” to the cadre. None wants to stick one’s neck out. On the contrary, they have simply given up hope.

Will any of these leaders say the same thing to one in the Central leadership, if not to Rahul Gandhi himself? There is an amiable smile, shrug or indifference following which the discussion would dissolve. No Congress leader is able to hold the mirror to Rahul Gandhi’s face or the party’s as he is the “privileged son” of the family.

This is no longer tenable. Rahul Gandhi can no longer continue shirking responsibility. Nor can he believe that he is not accountable, even to his own party. He knows that Sonia Gandhi and his sister Priyanka and scores of Congress leaders believe that he is the “future”. But his record over the years (not to forget revamping the Youth Congress and the NSUI) is his party has slid further.

When a leader can consistently ensure that the party does not gain the Leader of the Opposition status for two successive terms and with no contribution known or unknown aspires to be in the forefront again, it is criminal.

Now why kind of an arrogance is it that a leader who pushed his party to further depths, who lost from his home constituency and who won from a backup constituency aspire once again political leadership.

Why is Rahul Gandhi the only Congress leader who is talking about national issues? Why is he unable to ask his colleagues, youth if you will? And why not the senior leaders, setting aside the fact that he is cut up with them. Is he wanting the limelight, even from within the Congress space?

By trying to keep himself in the limelight through “social media politics” and doing nothing else either for the party or democracy, at large, it can be safely concluded that he is nourishing a vested interest to return as Congress president.

It is in the interest of India’s democracy for Rahul Gandhi to step behind and stay in the background. At 50 years old he knows the perils of arrogance and the company of sycophants.

STANLEY THEODORE

(The writer is a Senior Journalist, Political analyst and consultant with Peoples Pulse, a Hyderabad based research organisation.)

peoplespulse.hyd@gmail.com