

Lok Sabha Elections 2024: A Perspective for Opposition Unity

Prem Singh

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This article is the sequel to my three previous articles on this subject namely – 'Relevance of the Third Front' (May 2014), Lok Sabha Elections 2019: A Perspective for Opposition Unity – One' (June 2018), 'Lok Sabha Elections 2019: A Perspective for Opposition Unity – Two' (April 2019). Apart from these, the article 'Opposition alliance's knots and Muslims' (October 2018) can also be seen in this regard. Links to all the articles are given at the end.

I was of the opinion that there should be an independent alliance of parties generally called the third force of politics apart from the Congress and the BJP – by the name of Third Front, National Front or by any other suitable name in the Lok Sabha elections 2014. There were also some serious efforts to form a third front before the elections. If those efforts had been successful, at least Indian politics would not have been in the multi-dimensional downfall that has happened after the 2014 general elections. I had the same belief in the Lok Sabha elections 2019 also. And now the same belief is there in Lok Sabha elections 2024 also. In the course of political discussions with some of my colleagues I have been suggesting that in the Lok Sabha elections 2024, a front of the non-Congress parties of the opposition block should be formed, its common minimum program should be placed to the public, and also the name of the prime ministerial candidate. In my opinion, I used to suggest West Bengal's Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's name for the prime ministerial candidate of the front. A provision can be made for two deputy prime ministers, from South and North India along with her. Where Congress is in direct contest with BJP, the front should not field its candidates. Congress should also avoid fielding its candidates against the candidates of parties having a mass base in the front. A 'friendly fight' can take place on those few seats where agreement could not be reached.

Along with this arrangement, Congress should announce before the elections that in case of victory of the front, it will support the front government from outside for a full five-year term. If Congress wants to join the government it can do so under the leadership of the front. If the position of Congress as a national party improves after this election and in the next 5 years, then the front should promise to support its government in the 2029 elections. I also believe that the formation

and existence of the front should not be limited only to the Lok Sabha elections 2024. In case of BJP's victory in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, work on the program and organization of the front should continue in future.

With this happening, triangular politics will be recognized at the central level in the scenario of Indian politics. This will be in the interest of the country's diversity and federal structure. It is important to understand the importance of the role of third power parties in Indian politics in order to realize the significance of socio-cultural-geographical diversity and constitutional federalism in India. This is a task which the leaders and political pundits of the country should perform without delay. It is true that the third power parties, under whatever urge they had been formed and strengthened, for example, the will to fulfill regional aspirations and social justice, have often remained imprisoned in the shell of individualism/dynastism. They do not even have internal democracy.

Efforts should be made in the political thought/discourse to change this negative trend of third power parties, and they remain and function as a separate political block on the basis of the ideology of the Constitution. If this does not happen, then they will keep adopting an opportunistic attitude by joining sometimes BJP which practices extreme communalism and sometimes Congress which practices soft communalism. The whole country will always be in the grip of majority communalism because of this trend. On the other hand, the influence of communalism will accentuate among the minority communities of the country.

Both Lal Krishna Advani and Dr. Manmohan Singh had suggested that India should have only two political parties – Congress and BJP; All other parties should merge themselves into one of these two parties. This advice of both the senior leaders was given after the decisive implementation of neo-liberal economic policies in the country. That is, if Congress and BJP have adopted the path of liberalization-privatization, then there is neither need nor scope for any different path for other political parties. It can be noted that both the leaders and their parties were probably assuming that despite abandoning the value of socialism enshrined in the Constitution, the value of secularism would remain there. Advani did not outrightly deny the secular nature of the Indian state; In those days he used to talk about “positive” secularism as opposed to “pseudo” secularism of Congress and other parties. He had to resign from the post of party president for the “crime” of calling Mohammad Ali Jinnah a secular leader while traveling in

Pakistan. Since then a lot of water has flowed in the Ganga. *Ab na ve Ram rahe na vo Ayodhya!* (Ram and Ayodhya too have gone through a complete transformation) Narendra Modi, who was Advani's charioteer in the Rath Yatra taken out for the construction of Ram temple, and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief Mohan Bhagwat have put an end to the constitutional secularism from the politics by bowing before the corporate houses and the market forces spread across the world including India.

Wise people used to say that a true disciple is the one who can overcome even the dilemma of the Guru. The dilemma of "Ram-protector" Advani would also have been erased with Narendra Modi becoming the Prime Minister of the country and the construction of a "grand" Ram temple in Ayodhya! He will also be happy that his disciple has taken care of everything well; The temple is going to be inaugurated by his disciple; Sitting away from the inaugural ceremony Advani must be feeling a mixture of happiness and surprise that what he was calling "Shining India" in the elections of 2004 Lok Sabha is actually a sparkling "Hindu India"!!

Anyway, the presence of the third front in the political scenario of the country will continue to put some brakes on the fast pace of corporate-communal nexus politics. Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) intends and plans to replace Congress in future. The Congress leadership itself has paved the way for it by first handing over Delhi and then Punjab to AAP. AAP, which does not follow ideology in politics, is a true miniature copy of BJP in terms of corporate-communal nexus. Whereas even if Congress wants to, it cannot become a true copy of BJP due to the burden of its Nehru-era legacy. This is, in fact, the reason why Narendra Modi and RSS target Congress first. So that the creation of a third front can never become a topic of serious political discourse in Indian politics.

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If the Lok Sabha elections 2019 were lost on ideological claims, it could have been won in 2024. But, unfortunately, in the era of corporate-communal nexus politics, there is no seriousness towards ideology in the mainstream parties. The situation becomes worse when most of the concerned intellectuals and civil society activists also become a party to those who bid farewell to ideology from politics. Or watches everything happening with absolute neutrality. Some progressive organizations/groups active in politics resort to pictures, statements, slogans,

birth anniversary celebrations, death anniversary celebrations etc. of the icons to fill the ideological void. They do not understand that the corporate-communal nexus has taken the icons hostage.

By going through the ideology of the Constitution, one could have moved towards a more progressive/transformational ideology. But for the last three decades, the ideology of the Constitution itself has been roaming around seeking shelter. Even if you talk about complete dedication even to the ideology of the Constitution in national political life, you will be labeled as a “purist”. Actually, in the present environment, discussion on ideology is an unpleasant affair. People get angry. Those who express concern day and night over the violation of democratic institutions and values at the hands of fascist forces, do not even once question the violation of the basic spirit of the Constitution by imposing New Economic Policies in 1991.

Rahul Gandhi says that he is not against privatization but against giving all the facilities to one or two business houses. That, obviously, means the country's wealth and resources should be distributed among all the big business houses; Small and medium traders have no rights over them. When Rahul Gandhi says that only Congress has an ideology; And Sitaram Yechury answers him by saying that Congress follows the line of soft Hindutva, then it becomes clear that the Communist block of India also avoids talking about the egalitarian ideology directly. However, they talk a lot about capitalism. To such an extent that they saluted “Kerjwal Kranti” with a prompt “Lal Salaam”.

It is not that there is any potential among the new generation communists. The student-youth wing of the most *garam* (fiery) party of this block announced the end of ideology in student politics by forming an alliance with the student wing of Aam Aadmi Party. Communist friends should not take this criticism otherwise. After the merger of the Socialist Party in the Janata Party in 1977, which actually resulted in the extinction of the Socialist Party from the political arena of the country, there was still hope from the communist block for a strong and sustained advocacy of socialist policies against the neoliberal assault on the Indian economy and polity. Because this block has been equipped with various organizations/fronts related to laborers, farmers, students, teachers, cultural personalities along with the party organizations. Loyalty to constitutional secularism has been much more in the Communist block compared to other

secular political parties. The communist movement in India has nothing to lose today. An existential crisis can give rise to independent and new initiatives.

When we look at India's Socialist block in terms of ideology, we see a mixed scenario. Whereas, the decisive and reasoned resistance against the New Economic Policies imposed in 1991 came from this block. Chandrashekhar in the mainstream politics and Kishan Patnaik outside the mainstream politics warned the political and intellectual community of the country about the immediate and long-term ill effects of those policies without any hesitation and delay. Once in Parliament, when Manmohan Singh started quoting Jawaharlal Nehru in favor of New Economic Policies, Chandrashekhar interrupted him saying, "Please do not quote Nehru in favor of these policies."

It was the socialists who underlined the need to build an alternative politics against neo-imperialist slavery, and made efforts in that direction. However, it is also true that the socialists running various janata dals were neither aware of the crisis then nor are they now. Such socialists kept focusing on strengthening their individual and family power, and continue to do so today. Latent/hidden neoliberals have been present in the Socialist block as well like other groups. The specialty of hidden neo-liberals is that they make inroads everywhere. They sabotaged the efforts done in the direction of alternative politics under the leadership of Anna Hazare and Arvind Kejriwal.

Some of them these days, sitting in a private university of a businessman of higher education, do trade of Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia sometimes with Home Minister Rajnath Singh, sometimes President Ramnath Kovind, sometimes with Jammu and Kashmir Governor Manoj Sinha along with various local BJP/Congress leaders. The day Narendra Modi himself arrives to deliver the 'Lohia Memorial Lecture', their dream will be fulfilled. A few of them have returned to the service of Congress again.

Let us take the issue of ideology in the current politics of India a little further. Those progressive and secular intellectuals/activists who have been turning their backs on neoliberal policies saying it is necessary to deal with communalism first, can see that not only the politics of the country, but the entire society has come under the grip of communal fascism. They fight against communalism together with the intellectuals who are open supporters of neoliberalism. They include

renowned lawyers, judges, economists, sociologists, writers, NGO leaders, professors, journalists etc. They have money, status, and big international awards. It can be assumed that progressive and secular intellectuals feel that one day their fellow neoliberals will reconsider their stand; And will advocate formulating economic policies in the light of the Directive Principles of the Constitution. But they can see that even after three decades, the supporters of neoliberalism have no regrets about the terrible side effects of neoliberal economic policies. Even today they are found calling for intensified “reforms”.

The progressive and secular intellectuals are not at all sorry that they had destroyed the nationwide protest against the New Economic Policies imposed in 1991 and the voice of alternative politics by using the weapon of 'anti-corruption movement'. There is no need to explain in detail that that movement itself was an infallible weapon of the nexus of capitalist-communal forces against the Constitution of India and the working masses. India's progressive and secular intellectual class has been loudly calling for the values of independence, the values of the Constitution and the destruction of democratic institutions for the last 10 years. But no one listens to them. Because they are not ready to express even the slightest regret for their deceptions and misdeeds. By keeping their creation “Chhota Modi” in reserve, they have once again united with the same “corrupt” Congress, which they had taken up the task of destroying ten years ago!

One more thing can be paid attention to here. There is a race among political parties to promise to conduct country-wide caste-based census. Congress, which opened the doors of neoliberalism, has announced in favor of caste census; If it sees benefit in winning the elections then BJP will also not lag behind. It is heard that RSS, which has given the country a “Pichhda” (backward) Prime Minister and Dalit and tribal Presidents, is considering a caste-based census. The data on how many socio-economic identities reside in the society of any nation must be available. To some extent, this work has been happening, and also the politics of social identities.

The question is whether all this meant to ensure a share in the power and wealth of corporate India, where about 75 percent of the wealth is concentrated in the hands of about 10 percent of the people and the bottom 50 percent of Indians have 3 percent of the wealth, or meant for equal distribution of resources and wealth? Caste-based census cannot be called casteism, but it can be said that the

claimants of caste-based census are not advocates of socialism i.e. even the ideology of social justice in politics is not their true concern.

The market economy and its agents are being openly praised and propagated in the country. It is as if there has never been any egalitarian ideology/movement in India. As a result, we are witnessing a New India based on religion and caste identities created on the ruins of modern India having Indians with the sense of citizenship. When a glorious freedom struggle was covered with greed, superstitions, lies and hatred, it was not only the politicians who were responsible for this. Intellectuals have a bigger role in this. Whether they are leftist or rightist. The decadence of the society carried out by the intellectual class pushes the society into further decadence.

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The opposition has formed an alliance named 'India' (Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance) to counter the BJP in the Lok Sabha elections 2024. Details of the alliance are available in the press. Therefore, there is no need to write much on this topic. However, it can be noticed that the structure and nature of operation of this new alliance has not been decided yet. The question of seat distribution has also not been resolved. Different regional parties including Congress keep coming up with their own claims on who will contest how many seats. As if the Lok Sabha elections are only a personal matter of the leaders of the parties included in the 'India' alliance.

It is surprising that the alliance wants the votes of the countrymen to oust the BJP, but does not want to give them even a little time to think and decide. There are not even 6 months left for the general elections. Nothing has been clearly presented to the public yet except a strange name of the alliance. Not even the common minimum program, which should have been printed and distributed across the country in all Indian languages along with the announcement of the formation of the alliance. Even though the parties involved in the alliance would have come out with their manifestos later. Only speculations are being served to the people in the name of the prime ministerial candidate.

One thing is clear that if the alliance comes to power, it does not want to promise to stop the exclusion of a huge population being pushed out of the process of economic-educational development due to the blind policies of privatization-

liberalization. No problem, but doesn't the opposition also want to create an atmosphere of confidence among the people to defeat BJP? Till now, among the leaders of 'India' alliance, some are busy in settling Sanatan Dharma, some in Manuvad, some in Ramayana, some in Saraswati; Some are roaming around as Hanuman devotees, some as Ram devotees, some as Shiva devotees. As the issue of Shahi Eidgah in Mathura heats up, and a corridor like Ujjain and Banaras is built in Vrindavan, many Krishna devotees will also come out. These leaders are not even ready to understand that their such actions make minorities even more insecure. What can be expected from them to dispose of the corporate-communal nexus, at present it does not seem that they will be able to dispose of even BJP in the Lok Sabha elections? Even if the alliance wins with the cooperation and support of the public, the fear of instability of the government will remain.

The process of completing the formalities of the structure and operation of the 'India' alliance, releasing the common minimum program of the coalition government and the process of seat distribution should be completed as soon as possible. If the alliance puts forward its views before the people on the earlier Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), labor and agriculture laws and the three criminal justice laws passed without proper debate in the winter session of Parliament and the laws related to the appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners, then there will be seriousness in it. For example, the government had withdrawn the agricultural laws, saying that they would be implemented when the opportunity arose. The alliance should tell what it will do with these agricultural laws? Will it oppose the corporatization of India's agriculture if comes to power? Similarly, the position should be clarified on many subjects like labor laws, education policy etc.

At the same time, the 'India' alliance should reject the system of corporate funding through electoral bonds made by amending the Finance Act in 2017, about 90 percent of which is going to the ruling BJP. In case of victory, a promise to repeal this system should be made which is said to be negative for democracy. A promise should also be made to review the New Education Policy 2020. Also, a promise to provide justice to citizens jailed out of political malice under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), which was primarily designed to identify and punish those involved in terrorist activities. Also, a promise should be made to keep all investigating agencies including the police force free from

political and governmental pressure. Needless to say, the issue of employment should be kept prominently and seriously in the common program.

Can a 1977-like charisma be expected from the public in the Lok Sabha elections 2024? Probably not. The country has changed a lot from the times of declared emergency to undeclared emergency. That was the “old” India, this is the “new” India. The entire political, intellectual and business class together has launched a campaign to convert the free consciousness of the citizens into the consciousness of slavery. To fill the “hole of slavery” in their minds, people feel proud of their religious and caste identities. There is a cut-throat competition to settle and study in Europe, America and Australia in “Atmnirbhar”, “Vishwaguru”, “New India”. At the same time, “digital”, “developed” and “superpower” India is being made by borrowing third-fourth grade technologies from these very countries.

The biggest casualty in this entire process is that people, especially the working population, have been transformed from independent citizens to the subjects living on dole. The middle class, fed on the scrapes of neoliberalism, also does not want to be left behind in looting the free tavern. The builders of the new India should have ghee to drink, even if every fiber of the country is drowned in debt. Rather, they give various convoluted arguments while explaining the status of debt burdened on India by the World Bank or IMF. They stand with governments in denying the statistics of global organizations on poverty and malnutrition. Those few people among them who occasionally say that politics should not be done on the basis of religion, but on the basis of problems faced by the people like economic difficulties, employment, education, health, etc., are the ones who support the economic policies that create terrible economic disparities. They don't talk about changing them. If they are told that education is the responsibility of the state, that private and foreign universities which make education a profit-making market should be closed, then they will look at you as a wonder.

Modi builds his image by spending billions of rupees from the government treasury. The remaining gap is filled by the anti-Modi opposition and civil society activists. Their jokes on Modi's catchphrases work as manure for Modi. Sometimes they announce Modi's defeat even before the elections, sometimes they seem troubled by his invincibility by saying 'Aayega toh Modi hi' (Modi will come in any case) ten times a day. They should understand that Modi has been

using his opponents as his campaigners. Hence, in this election, the 'India' alliance should stop cursing Modi and tell the people that the government has to be changed in this election because in a democracy, governments should keep changing.

BJP got 31.34 percent votes in 2014 and 37.04 percent votes in 2019. The vote share of the Democratic Alliance (NDA) was 38 percent in 2014 and 45 percent in 2019. That means, in 2014, about 70 percent voters and in 2019, about 63 percent voters did not vote for BJP. About 62 percent voters did not vote for the BJP-led NDA in 2014 and about 55 percent voters in 2019. Even if the opposition does not learn from this reality, the RSS/BJP do. Then along with spreading communalism, they spend billions of government money on Modi's image. The wealth of corporate houses is always there for sure.

Links:

<https://muslimmirror.com/eng/relevance-of-the-third-front/>

<https://countercurrents.org/2018/06/lok-sabha-elections-2019-a-perspective-for-opposition-unity/>

<https://countercurrents.org/2019/04/lok-sabha-elections-2019-a-perspective-for-opposition-unity-2/>

<https://agnialok.com/the-knots-of-the-opposition-alliance-and-the-muslims/>

(The writer associated with the socialist movement is a former teacher of Delhi University and a fellow of Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla)