

'COMMENTARAO' in "THE Telegraph" of May 12 2014

"BEYOND FAMILY VALUES

- Birth and breeding *versus* experience" by SLRAO

A huge media and Congress party furore arose when Mr Narendra Modi said that Rajiv Gandhi as Prime Minister had on a visit to Hyderabad as P.M., lambasted Chief Minister Anjiah in public (on the airport tarmac and in the presence of the media). Priyanka Gandhi responded emotionally about her martyred father. This airport incident prompted the Telugu mega film star N.T. Rama Rao fury to react furiously to the insult to Telugu pride and honour and the founding of the Telugu Desam party. Andhra was lost to the Congress.

The two Gandhi Prime Ministers sacked others in this cold and public manner. Karnataka's outstanding Chief Minister Devraj Urs was removed when he was grieving. Rajiv Gandhi dismissed another excellent Karnataka Chief Minister, Virendra Patil, when he was recovering from a stroke. Rajiv told the media in public when the then Foreign Secretary PRVenkateshwaran, who was nowhere near retirement, and was sitting beside him, that they would soon see a new Foreign Secretary. This public dismissal led to the Foreign Secretary's resignation.

The Gandhi family's arrogance increased over years of inheriting power. The founder, Jawaharlal Nehru, was impatient and angry with superstition, stupidity and slowness. He was much loved for his leadership of the country, and could in the public eye, do no wrong. His descendants became accustomed to being treated as royalty, and their manners reflected this.

The Nehru Gandhi dynasty has given India three Prime Ministers who ruled for 37 years. Others ruled for 30 years of which the current one has held the position for ten years when he was fully under the control of the family. In fact therefore the family has exercised power over India for 47 of the 67 years since independence.

Only two had functioned as Chief Ministers, Morarji Desai for almost ten years in the then Bombay presidency/state, and Deve Gowda for two years or

so in Karnataka. The first had a reputation as a good administrator. The other did not. But both were ineffective Prime Ministers. Morarji was ineffective because of his rigidity, competitors pushing to take his position, and a wily Indira Gandhi out to destabilise his government. Gowda was a poor communicator, with little understanding of the complexities of the job, and had poor administrative skills.

If he becomes Prime Minister next week, Modi will bring to the job significant political skills, a high reputation for decisiveness, administration and integrity, and with a forbidding knowledge of modern techniques in communication, social media, and use of media. Modi will become the first Prime Minister with successful experience as an effective CM. He will also bring considerable grass root political and organizational skills. Unlike Manmohan Singh he has the deviousness required in the jungle of Indian politics. He has prepared for his election campaign like an American Presidential candidate. He has built teams of experts who have used their knowledge, and policy workshops to develop ideas on issues and create policies for an administration to come. He and his advisors have built talent pools after intensive search. In all this he has been very different from every member of the Gandhi dynasty including Indira Gandhi.

With all these skills he also carries huge self-obsession, centralizing power with himself and not delegating it, abrasiveness and arrogance. He is not above misstating facts to make a point. His education is limited and he is weak in history, English, and most Indian languages except Hindi and Gujarati.

As a child brought up in an impoverished family, he might be expected to have a soft corner for the poor. But his focus is much greater on growth, building human capacity, providing opportunity, not charity. He has expressed himself in favour of many social schemes in force but he has expressed determination to make them effective and honest, while focused on the truly deserving.

The UPA has popularised some policy phrases and made them the fulcrum of its social policies. These include reducing "inequalities", "inclusive growth", safeguarding the "environment", etc. Modi's catch phrases are "good governance and development", through expanding

education, building skills, and expanding employment through growth. He is not for spending vast sums on charity for the poor though he wants to focus on the deserving poor, a smaller number than the present beneficiaries of social schemes. . He is the first politician to respond to the challenges of population numbers and demographic change. He wants to expand planned urbanization, so that people can move to better paying jobs than they would otherwise have. We must expect economic policies to focus on improving the macroeconomic parameters, spending on infrastructure, education, skills, etc. He can be expected to strengthen defense, and build local production capacity for it. He will expect to reduce the deficit by better revenues because of growth, and sharp cuts in expenditures on social programmes while ensuring that the deserving are not ignored. We can expect a great deal more emphasis on implementation and a larger role for the private sector. He cannot escape doing everything possible to get foreign investment and reduce the pressure on over stretched local banks.

A victory for the NDA and the predicted defeat of the Congress in the Parliamentary elections will not just weaken the Congress party, it will greatly weaken the family's hold on the party, and the unquestioning obedience of members however senior. Their past loyalty was predicated on the family winning elections so that loaves and fishes of office were available to the followers.

The last time the Congress was defeated was after the Emergency was lifted. A newly cobbled alliance became the Janata party. It swept the polls. The Congress led by Indira Gandhi and ably strategised by her master manipulator son Sanjay ensured the Janata's breakup and in the election that followed the Congress swept back to power.

The Congress and its present first family will not be able to deal with the prospective winners, namely BJP and Modi. The BJP is an established party unlike the Janata and Modi is the unquestioned leader unlike the squabbling and ambitious Charan Singh, Devi Lal, Chandrasekhar and others. Neither Rahul Gandhi nor Priyanka have the political skills of their grandmother and uncle. Modi as Prime Minister is unlikely to make vengeance his first priority. The misdoings and the secrets of the dynasty and its acolytes will emerge as the Congress loses power. Trials and punishment will be based on hard

evidence. There will not be the sympathy that Indira generated when Charan Singh hounded her in his crude way. The Congress will have to undergo some years of churning before it finds leaders from outside the family who can rebuild the party and its ideology.

A new Congress must move away from central planning, state ownership and control, and to creating the conditions for stimulating enterprise, to bulding physical, social and human infrastructure, than disbursing charity through social schemes. The states must get more power than has been the case under the congress whose chief Mionisters were subservient ot the family and the central government.

The Congress ideo;logy will move to be closer to the BJP but without the Hindu coloring.

(1204)