

**By Sidharth Mishra**



One of the main driving forces behind the promulgation of the Anti-Defection Law by the Rajiv Gandhi government in the 1980s was the brute majority enjoyed by the Congress party in the Lok Sabha. It had won more than 400 seats in the 1985 General Elections thanks to the sympathy wave which followed assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. The Congress strategists loyal to Rajiv Gandhi at that point of time had advised for bringing such law which would keep the folk together lest the old school veterans carry out a coup against the reformist agenda of the 'young' Prime Minister. The law has withstood the trial of time and survived to end the politics of "Aya Rams, Gaya Ram", which had come to make mockery of people's mandate.

Three decades later, another government led by a Prime Minister belonging to another party is now pushing for another major electoral reform – simultaneous holding of the elections of the Parliament and the State assemblies. The move comes as for the first time since Rajiv Gandhi's term, we have a Prime Minister whose party enjoys absolute majority in the house and is also undisputed leader of his party.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is not only the undisputed leader of his the BJP but also its main poll campaigner. Ever since his ascendance started in BJP's pantheon as party's Prime Ministerial candidate in the run-up to the 2014 Lok Sabha polls he has remained party's undisputed poll mascot. He has been party's campaign spearhead in the states which went to polls post-2014 Lok Sabha elections – Bihar, Jammu & Kashmir, Maharashtra, Haryana, Jharkhand, Assam, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and off course Gujarat. Of these states, the party faced defeat in just one – Bihar, but there it has managed to have its old ally Nitish Kumar now back in its camp. Over the next 24 months, polls are scheduled in the major states of Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Chhattishgarh and also Tripura. There is a BJP government in the three states of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattishgarh led by powerful regional leaders Shivraj Singh Chouhan, Vasundhara Raje and Raman Singh respectively. Though they would be the face of the party, they all are battling humongous anti-incumbency factor and to neutralize the same the role of the Prime Minister during the campaign would be vital. Thus there would be no relief for Modi the poll campaigner and it's here that the issue of having 'One Nation One Election' becomes relevant. The propagators of this theory believe that with the administrative leader of the country getting repeatedly involved in poll campaign, governance suffers. This view is being aggressively articulated by Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS)-backed think tank Rambhau Mhalgi Prabodhini Academy, Mumbai.

The Academy is headed by BJP vice-president and Rajya Sabha MP Dr Vinay Sahasrabudhe. Its holding of a brainstorming session, which was slotted as apolitical, but had its participants from Niti Ayog's Vice chairman Rajiv Kumar, BJP chief Amit Shah, Haryana CM Manohar Lal Khattar, Election Commissioner Sunil Arora, JD(U) secretary general KC Tyagi, BJD MP Baijant Panda and Rajya Sabha member Rajeev Chandrashekar which clearly indicated the ideological leanings of the gathering.

Though Sahasrabudhe has been at pains to state, "We do not want to create any agenda by promoting this reform. The election phenomenon from Municipal corporations to Vidhan Sabha to Lok Sabha elections halts the development work and the movement of security personnel during elections is also another cost factor. Niti Ayog has also discussed on this reform and this will be proven as the mother of all reforms for a delivering democracy."

However, the major question is whether such a practice in the name of cost-cutting and administrative efficiency be able to deliver a robust democracy. According to former secretary-general of Rajya Sabha and later its nominated member BN Banerji, "Indian Constitution is federal in form but unitary in spirit." Another famous constitutional expert DD Basu wrote, "Indian Constitution is neither purely federal, nor purely unitary but a combination of both."

The constitutional history of the country of the past seven decades which includes constitutional amendments and Supreme Court orders have all been directed towards strengthening the federal characteristics of the Indian state. This in practice has meant lessening of central superintendence over the state governments, greater functional autonomy to the state governments and allowing co-existence of diverse ideologies in matters of state-centre relationship.

This has so far worked well for the democracy of the country though may have somewhat hampered 'administrative efficiency', as the case is being made out by Sahasrabudhe. For achieving 'administrative efficiency' could another major feature of the Indian state – Unity In Diversity, be put to risk. The first state government with an ideology diverse from that of the Centre was that of Communist leader EMS Namboodripad's in Kerala, which also became the first government to face dismissal by the Centre under Article 356.

## One Nation-One Election: Need For Discussion On Larger Forum

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The phenomenon of diverse governments at the Centre and in the states gained greater currency post 1967, when several non-Congress governments came to power in the states. In the next decade or so, these governments often faced the wrath of Centre facing dismissal under Article 356. However, the Supreme Court order in the SR Bommai case has ensured that the existence of the state government has not remained dependent of the mere 'pleasure' of the President (read Centre).

Administrative efficiency and cost-cutting could be good ideas but who would ensure that it would not cut into the progress which our polity has made from being largely unitary in nature to now greatly federal in spirit. These are issues which need to be discussed on larger forum than from the dais of a party think tank.

(The writer is Editor-CEO, CapitalKhabar.in. First Published In DB Post, Bhopal)