

By Sidharth Mishra



That the Delhi BJP is in poor shape, one really did not really need to know from the organ of the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh – Organiser. In the editorial of its latest edition, it has been stated that the state units should not expect Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah to win all elections for them.

What the editorial preferred not to mention was that if the Delhi state unit was in poor shape, it was the making of the Central leadership. The state unit has been led for past four years by Manoj Tiwari, who is for sure is not an organisation man. A political traveler, Tiwari started his career from the Samajwadi Party in Uttar Pradesh, hobnobbed with the Congress for a while and finally took refuge in the Bharatiya Janata Party.

He may claim to be a second time member of Lok Sabha from Delhi, and that is the party's tragedy in the national Capital. Of the seven BJP MPs from the national Capital, at best two – Dr Harshvardhan and Ramesh Bidhuri, can claim to have risen from the ranks of the organization, the rest are all paratroopers. Likes of Hans Raj Hans and Gautam Gambhir may be celebrities in their own right but when comes to providing leadership to a political machinery they proved to be absolute nincompoops.

For that matter New Delhi MP Meenakshi Lekhi too was nowhere to be heard during the campaign and the MP who was most heard – Pravesh Verma, was asked to keep quiet by the Election Commission. In the good political structures across the parties, the Lok Sabha MPs provide the leadership to all the assembly segments falling under their constituencies. Same cannot be said anymore in the case of the Delhi BJP.

It also must be recalled that the Delhi BJP was not always a weak state unit. As rightly mentioned by the Organiser it had deep roots in the city even during the Bharatiya Jana Sangh days. Leaders like Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Lal Krishna Advani could always fallback on its

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Written by Administrator

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Delhi unit for passage to parliament as the party then did not have much presence in many of the states.

The Delhi BJP for long boasted of resourceful and grounded leaders like Madanlal Khurana, Kidarnath Sahni, Vijay Kumar Malhotra, Sahib Singh Verma and to an extent OP Kohli. They had a great connect with the workers and knew the party functionaries on one to one. On the other hand, present president Manoj Tiwari while meeting the eight victorious MLAs from just concluded polls needed a check on the political resume of veterans like Rambir Singh Bidhuri and Mohan Singh Bisht.

Why didn't the Delhi BJP leadership graduate from the older generation to the newer generation of local leaders? This question is important as the BJP in Delhi always had a crop of young leaders available, who had cut teeth into electoral politics by contesting the vigorously fought Delhi University Students Union (DUSU) elections. Even during the hey days of Rajiv Gandhi in the 1980s, the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad never got routed, they way they have been in the past two assembly polls at the hands of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and before that in the three polls at the hand of the Sheila Dikshit-led Delhi Congress.

First the ambition of the first-generation leaders, they refused to accept transition. The BJP rule of Delhi between 1993-98 is best remembered for fratricidal battle for domination between Madanlal Khurana and his successor Sahib Singh Verma. Then there was ambition of an ageing Vijay Kumar Malhotra and desire for power of a Jagdish Mukhi, which had to be accommodated.

While they fought with each other, they invariably came together to deny entry to DUSU leaders be it Arun Jaitley in the early 1990s and the later generation of the leaders in the future years. Even a scheming and always networking leader like Vijay Goel, though not of the same caliber as Jaitley, faced constant resistance.

Between themselves too, Jaitley, Goel and to an extent Harshvardhan resisted one-another, and often remained focused on arresting the rival's growth than propping up the fortunes of the party. Harshvardhan at the peak of his popularity in 2008 was denied the candidature of Chief Minister and Vijay Kumar Malhotra fielded instead. It's matter of record that Sheila Dikshit had a cakewalk in those polls.

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In 2013 Harshvardhan was made the Chief Ministerial face but again it was done at the last moment, making Vijay Goel, who was Delhi unit president then, feel like a victim. Despite the discomfort, the two managed to cross the Rubicon and emerge as the single largest party. But then Congress decided to play spoilsport and supported a minority government led by Arvind Kejriwal.

BJP had another chance at redemption in 2015, but to diffuse the faction fight and put at rest the personal ambitions of the leaders, former cop Kiran Bedi was propped as the Chief Ministerial face. Bedi had no worker connect, nor was she an organization person. The campaign went absolutely haywire with her own poll agent quitting midway and loss in the poll thereafter was never in doubt.

Unfortunately, in the past five years too, BJP central leadership has done little to strengthen the party organization. Manoj Tiwari doesn't belong to Delhi, nor to the party culture and organization. A party cadre which has always known its leaders attending 'Shakha' early morning could never get engaged by a late-rising Bhojpuri singer.

If the BJP wants to revive its Delhi unit, it would have to get over the psyche of winning all polls at any cost. It would have to find leaders from its local cadres and give them opportunity to build the organization once again, brick-by-brick. Unfortunately, that's unlikely to happen as in two years' time municipal poll would happen, and the party would want to win it at any cost, as it did last time replacing all the sitting councilors and stunting the natural growth of another generation of leaders.

(The writer is a senior journalist and political analyst)