



Populist Politics in India Since 2014

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ABSTRACT

In the Present time, populism has become a dominant discourse and an observable phenomenon in all kind of polity around the world. In the context of India, there are many reasons, responsible for the emergence of populism like: economic issues, nationalist, security, corruption and employment issues and so on. Under this paper, researcher has discussed the populism of various political parties in India at both national and state level especially since 2014. The political parties which have been taken under this study are: Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Aam Admi Party, (AAP) Indian National Congress and Shiv Sena etc. This study reveals that, how rational or genuine issues are being ignored by the political parties and tactics like giving freebies, or using emotional issues to win elections are being used by the political parties just for the sake of political power. Through this study, researcher has made attempt to understand the nature of populism, and its repercussions on the democratic values and fiscal budget of the government.

Keywords : *Populism, Politics, Party, Allurement, Promises, Election Manifesto*

Introduction

Populism refers to word demagogue politics, where leaders show dreams before masses and claim that they are the real representative of masses. They present themselves as voice of common people and always try to get attention of people. Populists make slogans like “*Garibi Hatao*” (removal of Poverty), “*Achhe Din Aayenge*” (good days will come), “New India”, “Make in India”, “*Mai bhi Chowkidar*”, (I too Watchman), “India against Corruption”. Outside India there are also slogans like “America first”, “Make America Great Again”.

Generally populists divide society into two antagonistic group “Pure” and “corrupt people” and claim that they are the real representative of pure people and homogenous group. Populism is not just a reaction against power structure but an appeal to a recognized authority (Bram et al. 2016: 335-346).

Under the study of world politics, populism has completely different meaning. Firstly, it denotes that populist is led by those who actually remain aloof from politics and are not the part of existing party system. Second, being outsider they appeal to masses and attack the established political system (Thachil 2013).

Populism is a political strategy used by a particular type of leaders who want to gain unmediated support from masses. They tend to develop a cult of personality around themselves (Fukuyama 2017). Generally, populism indicates the rise of strong and charismatic personality; who personalize the power and make direct interaction with masses. Populism is a kind of term which is used by leaders and political parties to mobilize people and make them aware (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2017: 4).

Populists are anti-elite and anti-pluralist. They claim that they are true representative of the common people. Populists always present the pure, innocent and deprived people against the corrupt elite and consider that other political competitors are just part of the immoral corrupt elite (Muller 2016: 20-22).

Populism is viewed as a movement and is generally explained by demagogue and charismatic leaders, who claim that they are speaking on the behalf of people. They strive to strengthen their status and position through good versus evil world. Populists often criticize culturally liberal politician and their opinion (Eatwell & Goodwin 2018: 44-53).

The most noticeable characteristic of populism is to influence the government towards populist environment. Public becomes most powerful lobby, not only during decision making but throughout the rule. Populists are those, who are members of local and regional parties and participate in social movement. Populists are always keen to attract masses through tactics of formal and informal meetings (Clemens 1983: 96-98).

Evolution of Populism in India

Populist politics was witnessed in India since Independence. DMK emerged as major Populist Party during the time of post-independence era. It incorporates the Tamil nationalism within a populist discourse and shifted attention from critique of Brahmin to Clientelism of the bureaucracy (Subramanian 1999: 131-144). Post-independence, India witnessed its first ever populist election in 1971. At that moment Indira Gandhi launched numerous programmes to please poor or common people. Except it, many slogans like “*Garibi Hatao*” and “India is Indira and Indira is India” were given (Kumar 2019).

In the 1970s, when Indira Gandhi became supreme leader inside the congress party, she transformed the party structure from collective to personalize. Secondly, she established direct link with masses and avoid party bosses and she interacted with masses without any mediation through speeches and mass rallies. This is how Indira Gandhi introduced populism in Indian politics (Kenny 2017: 165).

Populist Politics in India since 2014

In 21st century populism is witnessing almost everywhere in the world. Whether it is USA, Europe, Latin America and Asian Countries, populism is growing rapidly across the globe. In the context of India,

the revival of populism after demise of Indira Gandhi in the hefty form was witnessed in 2014 general election and onwards 2014. During election campaign numerous promises were made by Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) like black money (*Kala Dhan Wapis Layenge*), construction of 100 smart cities, 250 million employment generations for youth over next ten years, and bringing bullet train to India and so on. Thus, in this paper our major focus is to study the populist environment and culture which has been developed by BJP and other national or state political parties especially since 2014.

BJP's Populism

Being a national party or largest party of India, BJP is also becoming a largest populist party within India. Through this paper, we have described various forms of BJP's populism in India especially since the 2014. Except it, in this paper we have also explained that how BJP has used its populist tactics to allure masses for winning elections whether it is parliamentary or assembly elections.

Nationalist Populism

Demonetization of 500 and 1000 rupees notes was major announcement from the view point of populism. This step was taken to curb the illegal hoarding of money in the country. Bharatiya Janata Party has presented this move very smartly as a new method of fighting against terrorism and connected this step with nationalism and security concerns of the country. Apart from this they describe this step that, through demonetization nation will get rid of corruption (Gudavarthey 2019: 44-46).

Narendra Modi led Bharatiya Janata Party government seems to carry forwarding its own party's legacy. And has presented many issues as issues of national concern these are: uniform civil code, the repeal of special status to Jammu-Kashmir and requirement of new educational policy etc. By doing this BJP is trying to make people convenient and allure them as well, so that they can attract masses toward its core ideas by propagandizing its ideas at large scale (Sylvie 2017).

Left Leaning Stance or Populism of BJP

BJP has also presented itself as a left leaning party on many occasions. It has demonstrated the attributes of left-wing populism such as showing egalitarian attitude, launching public welfare policies or philanthropic policies, emphasis on major distribution resources of its social and economic agenda (Amassare 2018). After coming to power, BJP has launched many schemes in its first tenure and one of them was the '*Saubhagy*' scheme or '*Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana*'. Under this scheme a large amount of 16000 crore rupees was allocated by government. This scheme also provides electricity connection at free of cost to those who do not have access to electricity (Dhoot 2017).

Another populist step taken by BJP is launching of Prime Minister '*Kissan Samman Nidhi*'. Under this scheme 6000 rupees are providing to farmer annually. By implementation of such farmer pleasing

scheme Modi government wants to present its image as pro-poor and pro-farmer. And we can conclude this step of BJP as a populist move (Raghavan & Nair 2019). Among all the BJP's programmes the major one is 'Ayushman Bharat Health Care' scheme. This scheme is poor-people oriented at provides health care facility for every citizen of India .This scheme covers 10 corer household and provide a cover of 5 lakh per family for medical treatment (Roy 2019).

Cultural Populism of BJP

After coming to power cultural populism began to flourish under BJP's rule. After 2014 two major campaign: 'Gharvapsi' (home return) and 'Love jihad' launched by Hindu nationalist organization came into existence under the influence of BJP. Under this cultural populist move BJP influence the people in the name of culture (Varshney 2019: 340-341).

Westernization of Indian culture is viewed as an attack on the Indian culture. Campaigns like 'Gaurakshak' (cow guard) and many others were run in the name of culture saving, which shows hard core face of BJP and by doing this BJP wants to strengthen its traditional vote bank especially among Hindus (Masoodi 2016). Except this, women were assault in the pubs by the members of Hindu nationalist organization. So, protection of cow campaign's main motive is to please the majority of people in the country, especially enlarging its vote bank among the Hindu voters throughout the country (Sylvie 2017).

Right-Wing Populism of BJP

Under Modi regime, hindutva has emerged with new product that is right wing populism. BJP divides society into two blocks one in elite society and another in common or poor people. Elite class consists of: the urban middle class, English speaking professionals, including left liberal. BJP always try to present these groups as corrupt, immoral and anti- nationalist. Furthermore, providing reservation to castes like: Jat, Patidar, Kapu and Maratha, by doing this BJP is trying to allure these communities and it is also trying to strengthen its grip over these castes especially in Hindi speaking belt (Ashraf 2018). In Uttar Pradesh BJP has demonstrated caste politics very clearly. BJP's chief invited former chief minister Kalyan Singh to include *Cods*, union minister Anupriya Patel to attract the *Kurmis*, Raj bahars to *Nishad* and kushwah to please OBCs. By doing this caste pleasing politics BJP has ethnicized the political culture of Uttar Pradesh. So more clearly BJP's right wing populism was seen in the Uttar Pradesh especially since 2014 (Gudavarthy 2019: 102-104).

Another important populist step of BJP in the same line is the citizenship Amendment Act which was passed in 2019. The Act provides citizenship to six migrant's communities these are: Hindu, Sikh, Jain, Parsis, Christians and Buddhist. These migrant Communities are considered as persecuted minority in the three neighboring countries: Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afganistan. By doing this BJP has tried to

fulfill its electoral promise made by party during election campaign of Assam in 2015 and simultaneously trying to spread its right wing agenda across the country. Thus, it can be concluded that 'Citizenship Amendment Act was somewhere a voter centric step taken by the BJP (Joyal 2019: 33-50).

Media & Technology of BJP

In present time major tool of populist politics is mainstream media and social media. Modi is a distinctive figure who uses media as a tool to interact with masses. And he has presented himself as tech savvy personality. Since, coming to power Modi has been using the social media platform to run several awareness campaigns like: cleanliness campaign, girl education and poverty alleviation. Except this '*Man ki Baat*' is the prominent example of Modi's tech populism (Zain 2014: 199-208).

Basically Modi or BJP used social media to bypass mainstream media and to establish unmediated link with masses. And his well established love for social media was also part of political makeover. Through the use of social media Modi has changed the political culture of India. His team coordinated its strategies on Twitter, Face book and WhtsApp platforms. Making Wi-Fi connectivity in smart cities is central feature of BJP's tech populism and by this BJP is trying to allure masses toward its ides (Sinha 2018: 4156-4180).

Authoritarian Populism of BJP

Basically authoritarian populism is literally anti-democratic, and excludes those, it nominates as 'enemies of the people' from the common masses. Authoritarian populism generally bypasses democratic institutions, process and transfers the power of institutions to the leader on the grounds that institutions are corrupt and leader is pure (Sinha 2021: 320-323). Authoritarian populism is another form of BJP's populism especially since 2014. In the past few years who has challenged the functioning of BJP is the political dissident, the activist, the public intellectual, the student, the lawyer and the journalist. And who dares to question and challenge a government are being considered as "anti-national" and subjects to harassment. In the past yeras, attacks on university students and killings of scholar-activists M.M. Kalburgi, Govind Pansare, Narendra Dabholkar and journalist Gauri Lankesh and so on, all these incidents more clearly denotes the BJP 's authoritarian populism (Nilsen 2018).

Furthermore, there are also several incidents of BJP's way of functioning which give out it a populist party. Since BJP came into the power, around 86% of attacks against Muslims and Dalit have been increased over the past few years. Most of these were taken on the name of cultural and political concern of the majoritarian Hindu community by the factions associated with rigid Hindu factions. In this episode we have witnessed internet shutdown when protest or agitation happen and social sites are banned by the government in the favour of national integrity and security. Thus, BJP government has introduced a set of

rules and regulations to increase its digital oversight which augments its control over internet users. Except it, BJP is also keen to rewrite school textbook and promotion of reconversion from other religions like Islam and Christian (Nielson & Nilsen 2021: 94).

Populism of Congress Party

Before 2019 General election congress party and Rahul Gandhi Advocated for the farm loan waiver; and insisted centre government to bring such scheme for farmers. In three states Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan congress promised waiver of crop loan up to two lakh per farmer. And in all the three state, the congress also won the election with the help of loan waiver scheme. So, congress is trying to keep the technique of this victory even further but this is not a rational solution of any problem rather an allurements for people just for the sake of political win (Bera & Das 2018).

Just before the 2019 general election Congress party presented itself a pro-poor party; and try to allure masses through its election manifesto. Congress party stated that if it would come to power will implement universal income programme, under this universal basic income (Nyay) scheme annually 72000 will be transfer to the account of poor people. Around 50 million household were expected to be benefited from this, which would costs around Rs. 360000 crore rupee. If this scheme is implemented, then the economic burden will increase. To launch this scheme purpose of congress party was to please the people and wanted to returned to power (Ghosh 2019).

Along with BJP, Congress Party is also practicing populist politics in India after 2014. The three important issues that are routinely referred to as core issues of the Bharatiya Janata Party are the testimony of congress's populist politics. These are as follow: first is Abrogation of Article 370 in state of Jammu & Kashmir, second one is enacted a Common Civil Code and third one is Preventing The Silent Invasion of Bangladesh Infiltrations into Assam. But Congress Party uses all these issues as a protective shield around its vote bank. Except this, congress party views Muslim community only from the angle of losses and gains in elections and which reflect its thrust for power (Sahashrabadhe 2021).

Populism of JDU in Bihar

Since 2014 a drastic change was noticed in Indian politics. Meanwhile this, sample of populist politics was seen in Bihar just before the 2015 assembly election. Nitish Kumar tried to present his image as a leader of poor people and initiated many programmes to lure masses. Some of his major populist work was to provide bicycles and sanitary napkins to girl at free of cost. During 2015 Assembly elections campaign Nitish led Janata Dal United (JDU) gave slogan 'Bihar or Bahari' (Local or outsider) and it was launched to attack its opposition party BJP at that time. And slogan gained much popularity during campaign (Gudavarthey 2019: 94-98).

Populism of Shiv Sena in Maharashtra

In the time of populism, even the Shiv Sena is not away from its influence which has been seen clearly before the 2019's, Assembly election in Maharashtra. In the manifesto it promised meal at Rs. 10, Scholarship for 15 lakh unemployed youth under 'Sarkar fellowship' scheme, 200 health test at Rs. 1, free education for girls from underprivileged families. Except it, Shiv Sena assured the slashing down electricity rates up to 30 percent per usage up to 300 units. This can be concluded as left leaning populism of hard core right wing Populist Party (Mulye 2019).

During State Assembly election campaign numerous promises were made by 'Shiv Sena' which is known for its right wing ideology & nativist attitude. Shiv Sena always try to raise the issues of local people especially maratha. But during the state assembly election, it changed its attitude and started talking about issues related to poor people and farmers. After coming to power Udhav Thakrey attempted to fulfill its electoral promises he announced an unconditional crop loan waiver up to Rs. two lakh or outstanding loan taken from 2015 to September 30, 2019. The scheme was known as 'Mahatma Jyoti Rao Phule Farmers Loan waiver scheme'. Except this Shiv Sena has promised reservation for local people in Jobs which reflect its populist stance too (Waghmode 2019).

Arvind Kejriwal and Populism in Delhi

Aam Admi Party has done much tremendous work after coming to the power and has shown left-wing and right wing populism's feature. Kejriwal chose the quasi hindutva way, he did not talk about Ram temple but he recited '*Hanuman Chalisa*' and he often visited Hanuman temple in Delhi. This presented his image as ardent hindu and was probably used to please party's hindu vote bank. Apart from this, he gave 'free bus rides' for women within the union territory by which he succeeded in wooing women from the election perspective (Shrivastva 2020).

Nowadays every political party is trying to attract the floating vote which is critical in any election. With less than seven months for election 'Aam Admi Party' took a populist step by announcing free electricity of 200 units and 50% subsidy for those residents who consume between 200-400 units of electricity. By this populist technique 'Aam Admi Party' (AAP) has succeeded to a great extent in attracting swing voters (Khana 2019).

Conclusion

Populism in India has witnessed even in 1970's during the time of Indira Gandhi, it is believed that populism in India has been revitalized in 2014 by Narendra Modi led Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Through this study, we come to know about the populist emergence of political parties in India and populist trend as well. Since 2014, Bharatiya Janata Party has no single face of populism; but it has many faces for many

situations like right-wing, left-wing, Nationalist, Authoritarian and cultural populism so on, and we could also conclude that BJP has numerous variety of populism within the country especially since capturing of the power in 2014. Through this study, we also get familiar about the populist politics of rest of the political parties too, like Indian National Congress, Aam Admi Party, Shiv Sena and so on. Through this paper we studied that how these parties have used programmes and freebies just to allure common masses to win elections. From the above study, it can be concluded that a negative trend of populist politics in India is being done by political parties. In current time political parties are trying to manipulate the system to fulfill their partial and undemocratic ideological agendas. By doing this democratic values and ethics of policies are being degraded by political parties. To avoid this negative trend of populism, there should be some checks and control over political leaders. For this, role of election commission must be important and political awareness must be spread among citizens. Except it, from the socio-economic point of view, economic and political stability within a country can help to overcome the feeling of dissatisfaction among masses. So applying these measures, populism can be halted to some extent.

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