

Opinion

SUNDAY, MAY 26, 2019

ON MAY 17, 2019, WHILE addressing a rally at Khargone, Madhya Pradesh, Mr Narendra Modi said, "From Kashmir to Kanyakumari, from Kutch to Kamrup, the whole nation is saying 'Ab ki baar, 300 paar, phir ek baar, Modi Sarkar'." He got his psephology right, but geography wrong. The final tally proved that his electoral marksmanship deserved a perfect 10.

So, congratulations are in order to Mr Modi, the BJP, the millions of workers of the party and the allies. As he begins his second term of office, I wish the Prime Minister success in steering the government and in the service of the people.

The exit polls were published two days later on May 19 and at least two of them were spot on: 300 for the BJP, 350 for the allies and about 50 for the Congress. These two polls restored some faith in statistical sampling and election forecasts!

The rival visions

Another journey begins today. The journey will never end. At five-year intervals, there is a rest stop, and the journey will resume. There are — and will be — differences among the party-contenders for the right to govern India. These differences are the hallmark of a multi-party democracy, especially a vibrant democracy in a plural and diverse society. A party may refuse to accept the diversity and yet win a national election, but that does not mean the diversity is not real.

The BJP has a vision of India: one nation, one history, one culture, one heritage, one civil code, one national language, and many other aspects of 'oneness'. The Congress has a different vision: one country, many interpretations of history, many sub-histories, many cultures, plural civil codes, many languages, and many other aspects of diversity, in which one seeks unity. The regional parties have their own vision: while the vision may differ from state to state, there is a common thread running through their political statements: that the history, language and culture of the people of the state are entitled to the highest respect and, especially, the language of the state has to be nurtured and given primacy.

Saliency of language

Language, in particular, is an emotive issue. The culture, the literature, the arts, and every other aspect of the life of the people revolves around the language. This is true not only of the Tamil people but also of those who speak Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada, Odia, Bengali and, I suppose, every other ancient language. The saliency of language in politics, especially political communication, cannot be disregarded.

I know the Tamil people reasonably well. Language is at the centre of their civilisation and culture. Tamil is the identity of the Tamil-speaking person, the *Tamizhan*. The three great composers in Carnatic music were born in Tamil Nadu but wrote their verses in Sanskrit and Telugu. The Tamil Isai (Music) movement was born in order to assert the primacy and pride of Tamil. *Archanas* in temples were performed in Sanskrit and are still the language of choice of most temple *archakas* and worshippers; the Tamil *archana* was

ACROSS THE AISLE

P Chidambaram



To be or not to be inclusive



Prime Minister Narendra Modi flashes the victory sign along with BJP president Amit Shah in New Delhi

mandated by government as an alternative and the policy was accepted by everyone. Hinduism, as we know it today, was Shaivism and Vaishnavism and that is how they are recorded in Tamil history and religious literature. In fact, Tamil classics were vehicles of religion as much as they were examples of fine literature. Besides, Christian and Muslim scholars and authors contributed in great measure to enriching the Tamil language.

What I have said about the Tamils and Tamil language is equally true of the people and the languages of Kerala, Karnataka, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal. Just ask your friends.

Let me come back to the competing visions of different political parties. The results of Election 2019 cannot be regarded as a decisive choice of one vision over the others. Even more true, religion can never trump language or culture.

Secular in the 21st century

The idea of a secular state was not born in India. It is one of the hallmarks of a modern democracy and republic, the best exemplars of which are the countries of Europe. No one can say that the people of European countries are irreligious, but they are determined to be secular in their politics and systems of government. Secular indeed meant, originally, 'not connected with religious or spiritual matters'. In course of time, especially in Europe, it meant separation of the State and the Church. In the modern day, particularly in plural and diverse societies, secular means eschewing extreme positions and being inclusionary. The thrust of my argument is India — and the Indian government and all other institutions of governance — must always remain inclusive.

Did the BJP fight the just-concluded elections on the plank of inclusiveness? I doubt it. According to news reports, among the BJP's 302 MPs there will not be anyone from the Muslim community. There are others who feel excluded such as Dalits, tribals, Christians, tenant-farmers and agricultural workers. There are some sections that are actually excluded from the developmental process because of caste, poverty, illiteracy, old age, minuscule numbers or remoteness. There is, therefore, a need for the Prime Minister to reiterate his original slogan '*Sabka saath, Sabka vikas*'.

I am afraid the BJP fought the election on an exclusionary agenda. I hope the process of governance will be inclusionary.



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INSIDE TRACK

COOMI KAPOOR

New look Cabinet

Some familiar faces in the Modi Cabinet might be missing in his second innings. The average age is likely to be 10 years younger. Several protégés of senior ministers have over the last year switched loyalties to Amit Shah, 54, as he is seen as the man who matters. Incidentally, the only three Cabinet ministers on the dais when Narendra Modi was felicitated at the BJP office were Rajnath Singh, J P Nadda and Thawarchand Gehlot.

Manifesto mistake

Congresspersons privately blame P Chidambaram and Navjot Singh Sidhu for damaging the party's image. Chidambaram as chairperson of the manifesto committee, along with Rahul Gandhi's young apolitical brains trust, insisted on inserting a clause in the party manifesto calling for amendment to the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA). While human rights activists applauded the move, it hardly made political sense in the wake of Pulwama and Narendra Modi's campaign whipping up nationalistic fervour. Voters frequently mentioned the manifesto as a black mark against the Congress. Similarly Punjab chief minister Amarinder Singh was infuriated with his minister Sidhu for giving a bear hug to Pakistani army chief Qamar Javed Bajwa when he visited Lahore for Imran Khan's swearing-in ceremony. The BJP made capital out of the photograph. Many are too timid to blame Rahul for surrounding himself with inexperienced youngsters who have an NGO mindset rather than an understanding of electoral politics.

Family first

Did the Congress fritter away an opportunity in Priyanka Gandhi Vadra's debut in national politics this year? What was hoped to be the party's Brahmaputra was introduced belatedly and somewhat casually in the middle of the campaign, and Priyanka was unable to make much impact. Her charm and strong personality attracted crowds and media attention, but did not garner votes. Unlike Rahul, Priyanka writes her speeches herself and has an intuitive understanding of what issues to take up with different audiences. But since she did not want to overshadow her brother, she played a secondary role. Some in the party believe that if she was put at the helm instead of her brother, the Congress's fortunes could revive. There is no competitive rivalry between the two siblings, who are very close. But Sonia, like Indian

and Italian mothers, believes that dynasties can only have a male lineage. The suggestion from well-meaning outsiders that a charismatic non-Gandhi be made party president, say Captain Amarinder Singh or Sachin Pilot, is unthinkable since it could lead to a potential bloodbath among aspiring candidates.

Weathervane leader

LJP chief Ram Vilas Paswan has been described as a weathervane of Indian politics for good reason. He is one of those rare politicians who manages each time to sniff out which is the winning side and jump onto the bandwagon. From 1989 onwards he has been in the Cabinets of V P Singh, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Manmohan Singh and Narendra Modi. In 2009, when for a brief period he was aligned with neither the BJP or Congress, he managed to get a Rajya Sabha seat from Lalu Prasad. And though he did not contest polls this time, his son Chirag Paswan got a ticket from the NDA and he himself has been assured a Rajya Sabha seat by the BJP. That way he continues to retain his government residence, 12, Janpath, which he has occupied for three decades.

Mother's love

In this election, three sets of parent and offspring candidates contested. Only one duo was successful, Maneka Gandhi and Varun Gandhi, who won from Sultanpur and Pilibhit respectively. Maneka, in fact, sacrificed her own safe seat of Pilibhit for Varun and agreed to fight from Sultanpur, a much tougher contest. In western UP, Ajit Singh nominated son Jayant Chaudhary to his father Charan Singh's old seat of Baghpat and decided to fight from the possibly safer seat of Muzaffarnagar, which has a large Muslim population. But both father and son lost. In Haryana, former chief minister Bhupinder Hooda, a reluctant candidate, was defeated from Sonapat, while his son Deepender lost narrowly from Rohtak constituency, which was considered the family's citadel.

Market celebrates

Ever since Narendra Modi used the phrase 'Khan Market gang', his followers want to make the point that the market's customers need to be taken down a peg. BJP leader Ram Madhav announced to the media that he and his partyworkers would occupy the market to celebrate the poll victory, as it was no one's exclusive property. Meanwhile, the market shopkeepers hastily decorated the area with green-and-saffron BJP balloons.

Cup wide open

With regards to India, the onus would be on Rohit Sharma and Shikhar Dhawan to provide good starts followed by Kohli's brilliance

RINGSIDE VIEW

Shamik Chakrabarty

THE WISDEN EDITOR and the Daily Mail 'cricket pack' Lawrence Booth made the correct prediction. We were having a Twitter interaction after the England and Wales Cricket Board announced the provisional England squad for the World Cup last month. We differed on Jofra Archer. The fast-bowling allrounder wasn't included in the provisional Cup squad but got the nod for the preceding home ODI series against Pakistan. After a successful audition, Archer was drafted into the Cup squad at the expense of David Willey.

Booth predicted it and his logic was that Archer's inclusion would increase England's winning odds. This correspondent mentioned that it would be harsh on the player who would eventually face the axe, despite being part of the group for the last three-four years. As it turned out, Archer's x-factor was far too

big a temptation to resist.

The World Cup is returning to its place of birth after two decades and among all the teams, England arguably pack the most powerful punch. They have just completed a 4-0 rout of Pakistan in a five-match ODI series — the first game was abandoned. Their batting was awe-inspiring. They posted 373/3, 359/4, 341/7 and 351/9 in four completed matches. Twice they chased down totals north of 340. Batting has lifted England to No. 1 in the ODI rankings and as Virat Kohli put it, Eoin Morgan and company look "obsessed" to become the first team to post 500 runs in a single ODI innings.

Easier said than done, for the World Cup is a different ball game. To start with, this edition of the tournament offers no softies. It features 10 top teams who will play each other in a single group. This means, each side will play nine matches at the group stage, with top four teams progressing to the semi-finals. On paper, England, India and Australia are the top three favourites. West Indies, South Africa — if they can shed the chokers' tag — and New Zealand, too, have the wherewithals to go the distance. Pak-



New Zealand's Trent Boult, left, reacts after India's captain Virat Kohli, right, hit a boundary during the Cricket World Cup warm-up match in London

istan are the dark horse. Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Afghanistan are not title contenders, but they are good enough to cause major upsets.

Pitches are usually batting-friendly at the ICC events, but it's early summer in England and there would still be some nip in the air. As 10 captains gathered to

address a joint press conference in London on Thursday, Kohli put things in perspective. "It could be high-scoring, but I think 260, 270 will be as difficult to get in the World Cup as 360, 370. I see 250 being defended, too. I don't see many high-scoring games happening in the latter half of the tournament. That's the

kind of pressure the World Cup brings," he had said.

Morgan spoke about the tough competition. "Nobody is head and shoulders above everyone else. It is going to be very difficult. These are the 10 best teams in the world, so it is going to be extraordinarily competitive."

England haven't yet won the World Cup because twice in the finals they lost their nerve at crucial moments. In 1987, at Eden Gardens, Mike Gatting's impetuous reverse sweep had cost them the Cup. In 1992 at the MCG, two deliveries from Wasim Akram that dismissed Allan Lamb and Chris Lewis had crippled them. The 2016 World T20 final at Eden Gardens further attested England's propensity for failure under pressure. Ben Stokes couldn't defend 19 runs in the final over, as Carlos Brathwaite clinched it for West Indies.

Recently, the England football team manager Gareth Southgate, a big cricket fan, had dropped in at England cricket team's Cardiff training camp and spoke to Morgan and his mates for over an hour. Southgate experienced the mental block issue first-hand after he took charge of the Three Lions on the heels of a forgettable Euro campaign in 2016. Two years previously, the England football team had a disastrous World Cup in Brazil. Southgate presided over the regeneration and helped England reach the semifinal in the 2018 Russia World Cup. The England football boss spoke

about his journey and the cricketers were impressed. For Morgan and his team mates, the challenge this time would be to live up to the expectations.

With regards to India, the onus would be on Rohit Sharma and Shikhar Dhawan to provide good starts followed by Kohli's brilliance. A lot will also depend on MS Dhoni, if he can replicate his IPL batting form in the World Cup. The bowling has Jasprit Bumrah's mastery, Mohammed Shami's refund confidence in white-ball cricket and KL Rahul — if he is an option at No. 4 — doesn't inspire confidence. This middle-order doesn't have a game-changer like Yuvraj Singh in his pomp or a Suresh Raina of the 2011 vintage.

The return of David Warner and Steve Smith has made Australia stronger. Both have all to prove. West Indies, too, have their big players back following a change of guard in their cricket board. New Zealand are a pretty balanced side, captained by the sublime Kane Williamson. South Africa will miss AB de Villiers, but bowling is their strength. Also, watch out for Aiden Markram.

And then there are Pakistan; a gloriously unpredictable side. They came back from the brink and won the Cup in 1992. They lifted the Champions Trophy two years ago, defeating India in the final.