

## Modi is Back in Power: The Opposition Needs to Watch Out and Hold Its Flock Together

Harish Khare 5 mins read

As I switched on the TV for a brief while to watch Narendra Modi's third swearing-in ceremony, my mind flashed back to his first, in 2014. I had been a bit nervous as I was sure to be the fall guy, as the then CEO of Prasar Bharati, if any glitch occurred in the television and radio coverage. A few days earlier, he had alleged that Prasar Bharati had mischievously cut off parts of his last interview on Doordarshan.

Though I survived that episode, the new regime kept gunning for me. But the law protected me from the evil eye and I could hold the fort for two full years of unprecedented hostility. As head of the national public broadcaster, I could observe and learn how this PM thinks, strategises and acts. But his *chakravayuh* (destructive circle) became so disgusting, that I finally threw in the towel and left well before my term ended.

Back to the TV, I switched it from the swearing-in ceremony to the more entertaining Roland Garros French Open tennis and then to the tense India-Pakistan T20 cricket, and back to the ceremony. But then, this third term of Modi means that whatever be the message of voters and despite our euphoria, Narendra Damodardas Modi, has mounted his horse once again.

His formula of Hindutva, Ayodhya, vegetarianism and hate did not click, and the BJP lost a whopping number of 83 seats in north and west India. It would not have been in a position to form a government had it not won 20 seats (many unexpected) from the south and the east.

Maharashtra [taught a sound lesson to BJP's politics](#) of ruling by seduction, division and defection—punishing all those who betrayed for forty coins of silver. Bengal dumped BJP's upcountry swagger and genetic Islamophobia, quite decisively, into the adjacent Bay.

Tamil Nadu and Kerala threw the party out (one manipulated seat means little) and even the meticulously-poisoned Karnataka managed to detoxify almost half its seats. We may analyse this for weeks and months and however much we congratulate ourselves that we almost got him, politics is rather brutal.

There are no silver and bronze medals for those who almost made it. It has space only for just one victor, the Sikandar. All others are losers, at least for the moment. So, let's switch mode to what is, most probably, coming our way.



There is a general delight at Modi's discomfiture in begging Chandrababu Naidu of the Telugu Desam party to chip in with 16 seats and Nitish Kumar's Janata Dal (United) to pool in its 12. But such schadenfreude only tickles: it also distracts us from ground realities. Nitish has already had a series of political marriages and divorces, and Naidu badly needs the Centre's munificence to build his second Shahjehanabad (after Cyberabad), in Amravati. To expect them to needle Modi endlessly and blackmail him for their 28 seats is much too wishful.

We also know, of course, that Modi is not equipped to be a magnanimous coalition leader like Vajpayee, but hoping that his imperious domineering compels the two balancers to topple the coalition is being rather delusory. Both came in fully aware of Modi's track record as a Black Widow spider, who feasts on his mates after the act is done.

This duo has seen Naveen Patnaik's gruesome left-overs in Odisha and have also heard the wails of Jagan Mohan Reddy in Andhra and K Chandrasekhar Rao in Telangana after Modi dumped them. They gave their unstinted support to him to survive the numbers game in the Rajya Sabha, for years together.

So, let's get real. The NDA still has 24 seats, other than the 28 of these two partners. In case the two parties ditch Modi, he needs just 8 seats to cross the half way mark. There are seven independent candidates and while four would never support the BJP, we cannot be sure of the remaining three. What worries the sensible is whether every MP of the INDIA bloc can resist mind-boggling offers.

The BJP has already felled nine legitimately-elected opposition-led state governments in the last six years. It must have a tool-kit ready, along with obscene amounts to splurge. Modi has also kept several ministerial berths as dangles, within his cap of 81. Much would depend on other factors, like how well and how fairly (or otherwise) the party leaders have behaved with their own MPs, because grouches and hurts run deep in every outfit. MPs also calibrate how different sections of their constituency would react if they take this move or that.

The real skill of the opposition alliance leaders lies, therefore, in holding their flocks together, against irresistible temptations. Mercifully, all MPs have heard the unequivocal voice of the people of India and few would have the gumption to defy vox populi and annoy their electorate. But it does not mean that this stasis is permanent. The kaleidoscope of politics will surely throw up completely new designs and equations, in the months to come — so the danger of poaching remains.



The other major factor is Modi's ego. He has never taken a beating ever since he became chief minister. Vengeance runs deep in his system. He now has state power back with him and this legitimacy is enough for him to drive his agencies and hounds after those he targets. True, a section of officers may be cagey or extra-careful, now that there's whiff of change in the air. It was hardly noticed how in the just-over Modi 2.0 era, many conscientious or careful officers slowed down the speedy sale of public assets to cronies that the ministers demanded.

But the conduct of some officials of the civil aviation, environment, power and shipping ministries, in gift-wrapping goodies to the biggest crony during Modi 2.0, was surely collusive. Their files will be under the scanner, sooner or later, as all records don't die. So would the conspiratorial actions of the Enforcement Directorate. These canines can still bite, under cover of the law, and many can go to any sadistic extreme.

Courts nowadays are as chancy as roulettes, and it is a fact that certain judges at the top echelons have been rewarded for orders that benefited the regime and its cronies. This may not change, but the over-enthusiastic state-level judicial officers, many of who were hell bent on introducing a Hindu Rashtra or in clapping behind bars all the hapless souls the police or agencies wanted, may slow down a bit. For, the people have spoken.

The godi media is likely to be a little less virulent against the opposition, as one never knows who may come in next. But the screaming television prosecutors, including a few rotund well-dressed creatures who revel in tormenting anyone who dares to question Modi, would hardly change — as they earn unimaginable amounts of crores. It would be fascinating to watch media quislings now, after Davids like Dhruv Rathees, Ravish Kumars and Kunal Kamras have put them on the run.

The mood is upbeat. but it is best to be prepared for the worst. Modi is not one to give up power, even if he loses, without a volcanic upheaval, never mind how much death and destruction follow. If pushed to a corner, he is likely to inflict new elections on a tired and financially depleted opposition, mainly because he has unending resources and still controls many of the levers of the narrative. But now that he failed to create the third tsunami, he would just have to give some consideration to the views of other units and leaders within the Sangh parivar. This internecine matrix may be interesting to watch.

The first parliament session of the 18th Lok Sabha will give us a taste of things to come. Modi has been checkmated for the present from changing the Constitution—to erode human rights further, destroy federalism and democracy and to enhance his powers. This is surely a positive gain of this election.

Even so, everything is possible for a government that gloats after suspending a world-record number of 146 MPs and passes the most critical laws that affect civil liberties and the environment is split seconds, without debate. The 'divider-in-chief' deliberately removed the common central hall and the common canteen in his new nouveau riche parliament building — to divide and rule. None protested.

Even after losing absolute majority, he is currently engaged in removing Mahatma Gandhi's statue, the traditional prominent protest site for all parties, to an obscure corner — to undermine the power of dissent. He has ravaged all checks and balances that democratic India nurtured for 67 years. We surely need to retain our high spirits after the recent election mandate, but we also need to remember that the Modi is back in power, and a leopard does not change his spots, just because the EVMs beep signals at him.

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