



BY JAMES KOTTOOR

Akhilesh and Rahul provide lessons for the rising youth power and general election in 2014. If the two national parties, disqualified in UP, don't change the beaten track, a coalition without both should be worked out by youth >>>

Can you find better examples of presumption leading to perdition? "I promise Ma that we will get her all the 10 seats of Rae Bareli and Amethi," Priyanka is reported to have said while addressing a rally on Valentine's Day on February 14. No love lost, all else is lost!

Howler number two: "We will win over 125 seats and I will talk to you on Tuesday," said a highly confident Digvijay Singh on March 3, just three days ahead of UP poll results. He didn't open his mouth after the results.

Are they examples of presumption, arrogance, total ignorance of ground realities or calculated contempt for the

intelligence of listeners? I leave it to readers to judge. Both are reminiscent of Sonia's gaff "we have 272 MPs and growing" in 1999 presuming Mulayam's support which left her with egg on face when her noblesse oblige style didn't work with Mulayam and NDA formed government.

The Congress still runs in the same old aristocratic feudal track and does not have any dearth of sycophants, courtiers, flatterers and gaffers in its closed circle. Therefore it has to pray: "God save us from our fair-weather friends, we shall take care of our deadly enemies," especially in view of 2014 general elections looming like dooms day.

Priyanka is intelligent enough

to know that election is not a beauty contest or a family get together to share ancestral household goodies. Charisma of all stars in Gandhi family pooled together didn't work even in the family pocket boroughs in UP. Did they learn any lesson? And Digvijay Singh is mature enough to know that IT savvy young generation voters – first-time voters clamouring for change in UP is said to be astronomical – are able to tell fish from flesh and will not swallow any rubbish that pops out from the mouth of any mentally retired aging politician.

By contrast look at the dogged but cool headed performance of two youngsters, Rahul, 41, and Akhilesh, 38, the captains

of competing teams (both can't be winners) of the semi-final just over in UP. None of them was heard to make baseless tall claims like unthinking chatter boxes. Both were sweating it out from the forefront focused on the opponent's goal post.

Dogged Akhilesh

For example what was Akhilesh focusing on: "It is time our political energies are focused away from the politics of personal attack and sharp-edged hostility... It is time for change based on people's hopes and aspirations. It is not a war cry. It is not an aggressive call for political revenge... Samajwadi Party is a vehicle of hope, of change, of the aspirations of everyone, from the farmers ... to the teachers and government servants, to the college students who are the flag bearers of India's new tomorrow..." was his clarion call.

What is more he was quick both to admit past mistakes (my "party needs surgery" he had said) and correct them: "We have suffered a lot because of the macho, muscleman image. And I'll not make the mistake of taking the party on that road again." He in fact abandoned that road to perdition. Sachidananda Murthy writing in *Manorama* "The UP Fortune Wheel" describes what that path was. It was when bollywood celebrity culture and week-end parties literally killed the SP. Mulayam, under the mesmerizing spell of Amar Singh, who was both party general secretary and chairman of UP Development Council, alienated Mulayam's trusted lieutenants and capable leaders. Things turned topsy-turvy only with the induction of Akhilesh into commanding position in the party.

If Amar Singh was the dark

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knight, Akhilesh became the white knight who is to be credited for "throwing out Amar Singh and the group of actors he had brought like Jayaprada and Sanjay Dutt. Mulayam has kept his distance even from Amitabh" after seeing his son was "drawing bigger crowds than himself," according to Murthy. Thus Akhilesh became the youth mascot. He had ridden on the party symbol 'bicycle' for miles and flown or driven through the State for 10000 km in the last six months to address 800 rallies to become the youth face of the party.

Under his influence Mulayam has not only given up his anti-English stand but became a promoter in a big way: "As someone educated abroad, I stand as proof that we are not against English. And we are distributing laptops, if you

please," said Akhilesh, so that boys and girls get urban jobs. He was trying hard to work among the young voters saying his model of UP would be emulated by other States." That is how he cycled his party quietly, calmly to a 224-seat victory on March 6 and became the youngest Chief Minister of UP. On Rahul's defeat his comment was, he could win the next time.

Reluctant Rahul

Similarly Rahul, the young MP from Amethi, too reluctant to come forward unless pushed from behind, addressed 211 rallies, held 18 road shows in 48 days of campaigning and crisscrossed length and breadth of UP during his *Jan Sampark Yatras* (public contact programmers) that started last November.

At most of his meetings he took public stand against corruption,

lashed out against Mayawati for diverting central funds to be eaten by stone elephants. This was in utter contrast to his attitude of dead silence all through Anna Hazare campaign against corruption. In practice he was correcting his mistake of those days, although he stopped short of publicly admitting how his own party was drowning in corruption and scams worse than those in UP and needed course correction.

Even when the whole Congress crowd was trumpeting and projecting him as a giant killer in UP, he never lost his cool to say "Amen" to such adulations. His goals were modest, economic and social development of UP. When the Congress coterie projected him as the future PM he was blunt in word and body language to send out clear counter signals. "Don't want to be PM-CM", "I am here for the long haul" he used to shrug off.

When he kick-started his campaign from Phulpur, his grandpa's turf near Allahabad, I wrote an article: "Kicks to start a Campaign?" last November 28 (To read it visit: <https://sites.google.com/site/jameskottoorspeaking/>) pointing out the chance of Congress coming only as 4th and highlighting obstacles ahead if he is to become the Prime Minister.

His Party Became a Drag

Right from the start his party men, unlike those of Akhilesh, became a hindrance than a help to his one-man show. His Kick-off itself was marred by a kick by Minister Jitin Prasada to an SP protestor with black flag. From there all the way through Digvijay, Beni Prasad, down to Salman Khurshid defying the Election Commission's moral code and making himself a laughing stock before the nation,

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all Congress big-wigs were a drag on his campaign. "Finally he fell into the trap of leading from the front with an unreliable, sabotaging back-up, and no exit route," according to Ram Jethmalani, writing in Indian Express.

At the end when he lost out he showed his real metal. He took it with utmost grace. Even when his party heavy weights tried to deflect the blame to others, he was quick to own up the whole blame: "I own the responsibility ...this is one of my defeats... I led the campaign...from the front and so it is my responsibility... I expect victories and defeats... it is a very good lesson for me...I think it will make me think in detailed ways which I like to do...Organizationally we are not where we should be... The Congress fundamentals were weak. Until we set that right, that weakness will not go away... and the general mood was for the Samajwadi Party."

What is nobler, he was quick to congratulate the SP for its victory. The sober, sane qualities of humility, honesty and nobility definitely augur well and make Rahul a better leader than others in his party including her mother who put the blame on lack of proper leadership or too many leaders. If too many cooks spoiled the soup in her kitchen, under her nose and supervision, who else is to blame?

Youth Team to Lead India?

Akhilesh and Rahul are just two youth symbols with a definite message. To grasp the message the duo has for the nation one should read (also between lines) what they said and did and reported briefly above. It is hoped there would be more such young faces of their age to contest in 2014 at national level because it is time that the reins of the nation are handed over to Akhilesh-type youth, and corruption-prone elderly leaders retire on their own or asked to

step back.

For the moment the duo may be seen as the sunrise of a new brand of youth power on the Indian horizon, a youth power that is honest, hardworking, well intentioned and determined to wipe out the dark night of corruption in its multifaceted forms: 1. Looting public funds and cheating voting public; 2. Giving tickets to criminals and making them win using money and muscle power; 3. Promoting casteism, communalism and religious fundamentalism instead of meritocracy; 4. Neglecting to provide basic necessities – food, shelter, clothing, health care and basic education -- to the *Aam Aadmi*; and 5. Delaying or showing partiality in enforcing laws for personal gain. These things can be done only if youngsters with vision, conviction, action, honesty, integrity, discipline, sense of service, hard work and readiness to take risks are put in saddles of power.

Dynastic Taint Real

On the negative side the duo, of course, suffer from dynastic taint. It militates against democratic demand to provide equal opportunities based on merit. But at least these two are proving their worth in politics by working their way up from the bottom the hard way. After all, meritocracy should not mean denying opportunity to compete to those born with a silver spoon in mouth. How these two youth icons and those in their age bracket are going to play their roles are going to be very crucial for 2014 elections and for the future of a youthful and maturing nation.

Besides there is the general belief based also on past experience that the road to Delhi is through a thumping

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victory in UP which has 80 MPs to offer. Here comes then, the great hurdle for the national parties – Congress and BJP – who have already disqualified themselves for further contest in UP. So will they be rejected at the national level in 2014 to contest on the score that the winner in UP (SP a regional party) alone should with other challengers for Delhi? That is what a host of youngsters earnestly want, as they see Congress and BJP beyond redemption, reform and unable to reinvent themselves to suit the needs of the times. What then is the next option? A third front? Yes, but one in which neither the Congress nor the BJP has any role.

Non-Congress, non-BJP Govt.?

This is what Chief Ministers of Bihar, Odisha, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu are already whispering. Fence sitters in Karnataka and AP and Left leaders may also join this group. Can two ladies, Mamata and Jayalalithaa work together? Will Narendra Modi of Gujarat reinvent himself to join such a band wagon? If two regional parties BSP and SP could bring to naught the craze for power and pelf of the two national parties in UP, why can't all the parties of various states mentioned wipe out two competing blots on the national level? Emergence of powerful State parties in any case is a blessing in disguise to promote some of the benefits

of proportional representation that remedies the defects of the flawed First-past-the-post election model we follow in India.

In addition a think-tank of prominent intellectuals with probity in public life (like APJ Abdul Kalam) not attached to any political party, but are dead serious about rebuilding India politically, economically, socially, educationally, scientifically and culturally may be formed to come up with workable alternatives to liberate the nation caught between the devil and deep sea -- Congress and BJP. Enough is enough; they have been given a long rope to hang themselves!

Those who cannot dream of India without a Congress or BJP may brand this as a ridiculous proposition. But then didn't Gandhi himself want the Congress to disband after getting independence? May be this is the right time to cut down, following the Biblical injunction, the two unproductive and outdated trees {parties}, which stubbornly resist to budge from their high-command culture to function democratically. In crisis situations one has to dream frightening dreams. Such dreams may at least prompt incorrigibles in the Congress and the BJP to think hard on ways of reinventing themselves before a tsunami of youth power makes a clean sweep of them.

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