

Lok Sabha Elections 2019: BJP Swamped Congress in Madhya Pradesh

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Madhya Pradesh¹ polity has largely been a two-party system with state level parties not having succeeded in making their mark in electoral politics in the state since its formation in 1956. Madhya Pradesh even after the creation of Chhattisgarh remains one of India's largest states both in terms of area and population. Madhya Pradesh has 230 seats in State Legislative Assembly. The state also sends 40 members to the Parliament of India: 29 are elected to the Lok Sabha (Lower House) and 11 to the Rajya Sabha (Upper House). The two 'winnable parties' in the state have been the Indian National Congress (INC) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

Till the 1990's, the INC had dominated over the political history of Madhya Pradesh. Despite the fact that the state of Madhya Pradesh has sizeable population of ST and SC and also a formidable presence of middle/intermediate castes, the lower castes' support based parties have not succeed in galvanising the votes in their favour. For the long term dominance of the Congress, one of the possible reasons was the programmes launched by the Congress led state government during the 1980s for the upliftment of the weaker and marginalised sections in the state which made significant changes among the perception of the lower castes/classes. The initiatives of the then state government gave a strong indication that Madhya Pradesh was emerging as a 'caring state', taking on the mantle of state-sponsored social reforms by stoking the aspirations of the backward and marginalised sections of the population (Gupta, 2005). In the context of Madhya Pradesh, social basis of political power in terms of politics is clearly discernible. The state of Madhya Pradesh is a very strong example of the thesis of party political competition (Yadav and Palshikar, 2009), wherein the arena of this thesis has greater autonomy in determining the quality and outcome of democracy. In Madhya Pradesh, the elections of last two decades are testimony to this fact of party political competition. BJP continuously dominated the state electoral polity from 2003 to 2019.

This paper makes an attempt to analyse electoral politics in the context of the outcome of Lok Sabha elections 2019 to assess the structure of competition and its relation to the election outcomes.

Issues in Election Campaign

The election was scheduled in the state from fourth to seventh phase (April 29, May 6, 12 and 19) when the campaign was already in full swing. BJP's campaign strategy was to showcase the achievements of the national government under the tutelage of Narendra Modi, particularly national security and the performance of major welfare schemes along with the issues of cultural nationalism and majoritarianism which were raised by the party cadre. Simultaneously, in Madhya Pradesh, the BJP's election machinery aptly persuaded the rural electorate that Congress could not adhere to the promise of loan waiver to farmers which was a master stroke for Congress in Assembly election 2018.² BJP also very smartly raised the issue of un-scheduled power cut and linked it to previous Congress regime kind of scenario wherein acute shortage of power-cut was experienced. These local issues in Madhya Pradesh became incremental for BJP in garnering the mammoth victory with enormous margin.

This election was under the shadow of Assembly election 2018 which witnessed a closest vote share between the two major political parties Congress (40.85%) and BJP (40.91%) ever in the history of Madhya Pradesh as there was a huge gap of 8.5% in 2013. The final tally was: Congress-114, BJP-109, BSP-2, SP-1, and Independents-4. Interestingly all the four independents were rebels of Congress and therefore this arithmetic went in favour of Congress to form the government. Hence, this milieu narrates the complete change over within such a short time for Lok Sabha election 2019 in Madhya Pradesh.

BJP deliberately chose to concentrate its campaign around Modi and it has paid huge dividend to the party. Notwithstanding the parliamentary form, elections to the Lok Sabha 2019 took a clear presidential form with a slogan '*Ek Bar Phir Modi Sarkar*'. The political narrative tactically shifted by BJP leadership particularly by Modi from first phase to third phase and further shifted from fifth phase for Hindi heartland and accordingly the political metaphors were coined and used. This election also observed very aggressive campaign in Madhya Pradesh as it was one of the very important battlegrounds for 2019.

Congress led the campaign with issues of farmers' unrest, unemployment among youth, corruption (Rafale) with a direct attack on Prime Minister,

inflation, demonetisation and GST. Congress also came out with a proposal of NYAY scheme to lure the marginalised section of the society. However, the corruption issue could not resonate and Modi's impeccable image of incorruptible rather backfired. The idea of NYAY could not reach and appeal to the potential group of electorate as was envisioned. In Madhya Pradesh, Congress was barricaded effectively by BJP on several issues with regard to the performance of the state government which could not be responded adequately by the rank and file of the Congress party upto booth level due to a weak organisational structure. The Congress' inability to advertise its good work proved a stumbling block for it.³

Congress confronted against a much organised, cadre base, booth level micro management, and resourceful political party with an extraordinary premiership of Narendra Modi whereas Congress fought this election with less of available strength and more of inherent weaknesses.⁴ Biggest weakness of the party has been poor organisational structure, less of resources, diminishing vibrant leadership at state level and several other similar issues. Congress campaign was in a very stereotype manner with same political narrative and metaphor all through whereas the requirement was much larger, changeable and bigger so as to percolate down upto the rank and file of the party resulting in making an opinion across the caste, class, gender with length and breadth of the state.

Out of 26 sitting MPs of BJP, 14 were denied party tickets due to the internal adverse reports and other considerations whereas Congress fielded many new faces. The voter turnout has been comparatively very higher from 2014 in all the phases and that too with more than 10 percentage points. This incremental growth of voter turnout was highest in Madhya Pradesh across India. This increase both in terms of additional voter turnout and new voters has immensely contributed to the lead of BJP in the state.

The Verdict

Madhya Pradesh has come to be identified as a stronghold of BJP, however, the role of Congress in the state has never been decimated. Being a bipolar state, fortunes of one party almost proportionately reflect in the performance of the other major competitor in the state. The BJP got a landslide victory in Madhya Pradesh with winning 28 of the 29 seats, registering its best performance (Table 1). The party's victory almost resonates with the results in other bipolar states in the

neighbourhood such as Rajasthan and Gujarat. Although Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), Samajwadi Party (SP) and Gondwana Gantrantra Party (GGP) stitched an alliance and contested 26, two and one seat respectively. However, the electoral performance of this alliance remained worst out of the last four elections and this has reconfirmed the nature of electoral bipolarity of the state.

Table 1: Madhya Pradesh Lok Sabha Elections of 2019, 2014, 2009 and 2004: Comparison of Results

Party	2019		2014		2009		2004	
	Seats Won	Vote (%)	Seats Won	Vote (%)	Seats Won	Vote (%)	Seats Won	Vote (%)
BJP	28	58.00	27	54.03	16	43.45	25	48.13
INC	1	34.50	2	34.89	12	40.14	4	34.07
BSP	-	2.38	-	3.79	1	5.85	-	4.75
SP	-	0.22	-	0.75	-	2.83	-	3.20

Source: CSDS Data Unit

BJP completely obliterated Congress in Madhya Pradeshin Lok Sabha election 2019, despite having a background of Assembly election of December, 2018 wherein Congress ousted BJP after 15 years. Out of 29 seats, 28 went to the BJP and only from Chhindwara where son of Chief Minister Kamal Nath from his erstwhile seat somehow managed victory with a slender margin. BJP won 27 seats in 2014 with a margin of 19% vote share which rose to 23.5% this time whereas this gap was almost mitigated in Assembly election 2018. The victory margin on most of the seats has ranged from 1 to 5.5 lakh which is in most of the seats even higher than 2014.

The difference between the vote share of the BJP and the Congress rose to 23.5 per cent this time. The result of this election was significant in the state in terms of its victory margin: it ranged from 4 lakh to 5.5 lakh on the 7 seats whereas it was only on 2 seats in 2014. The margin which ranged from 3 lakh to 4 lakh was on 10 seats this time whereas it was only on 5 seats in 2014. BJP did exceedingly well in Lok Sabha election in all parts of the state.

It is quite astonishing that the electorate which gave a chance to the party just five months before has deserted it so quickly. Although since 1991, in all Lok Sabha elections the BJP has been performing much

better and it was assumed that BJP would be garnering much more seats as compared to Congress but clean sweep of this magnitude was unforeseen initially. The election was scheduled in the state from fourth to seventh phase when the campaign was in full swing at the national level in general and state in particular.

Madhya Pradesh is predominantly a rural state and Assembly election 2018 witnessed Congress domination in rural areas, however, the NES 2019 survey data of Lokniti-CSDS clearly endorsed the fact that the favour for BJP was enormous in both rural and urban areas. Survey also revealed that support for BJP among both male and female was higher unlike all recent elections. Survey also revealed that while the BJP was able to retain much of its support among the economically upper and middle class sections whereas it was almost equal among the lower and poor class (Sisodia and Ram Shankar 2009; Sisodia 2014a).

BJP was much ahead of the Congress when it came to the support from those with access to education and only group of non-literate had more support for Congress. Survey demonstrated that there was a visible liking for BJP among respondents with higher media exposure, however, liking for BJP remained higher among respondents with moderate and low media exposure as well. Therefore, the political parties generating narrative on media and especially on social media and assuming everything is transcending to the electorate has appeared to be worked for BJP. The survey data showed an increase in vote percentage for both BJP in all the caste groups except for ST and SC where it was relatively low (Sisodia 2014b; 2019b). BJP's support base among upper and middle castes has sharply ascended.

Changing Caste and Social Base

There is also a class dimension to the Congress's defeat. While the BJP was able to retain much of its support among the economically well-off sections, simultaneously, BJP could regain the support of weaker sections which diminished drastically few months back in Assembly election. Similarly, support for the BJP was more or less uniform across different economic classes. Congress had much higher support from the poor as compared to the economically more affluent. The poor had traditionally been supporters of the Congress (Gupta 2005; Manor 2004; Ram Shankar and Sisodia 2009; Sisodia 2014c). But this time it has not happened; despite the fact that there was an announcement of loan waiver for farmers. While retaining its support among the economically well-off, the BJP succeeded in making incursion in the support base of the Congress among the poor to a large extent.

Role of caste and community in elections has two dimensions. One is of the parties and candidates, and the second is of the voters. The former seeks support of the voters, projecting themselves as champions of particular social and economic interests. At the same time, the latter dimension indicates what the support base of parties is (Sisodia, 2014d; 2019b). Has the caste factor played any role in the electoral politics in the state? The social character of the support base of the two major contenders in the state shows the emergence of a clear social alliance in support of the parties. It is very important to have a look at the caste-community voting pattern in elections. With the highest ever voter turnout of 71.16% (it was 61.6% in 2014) in the state in the Lok Sabha elections, Madhya Pradesh has retained the trend of high mobilisation and politicisation. However, high voter turnouts do not necessarily ensure a broadening of the social base of politics (Palshikar and Kumar, 2004).

Concluding Remarks

To conclude, it can be inferred that the campaign strategy of BJP was at different level and unprecedented. Madhya Pradesh elections outcome has traditionally followed the national trend (Sisodia: 2014a) and the Lok Sabha elections 2019 were no exceptions. This election was clearly about the Central government. This also explains the rout of the Indian National Congress in three important States where it was voted to power last December in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh. The vote last year was for a change of guard at the State level. The vote this time is an unequivocal endorsement of the claims of the BJP for another term in office.⁵ The extraordinary performance of the BJP was based on the solid platform created by 'Modi Magic'. It was a completely presidential form of election where the opposition was very feeble and fragmented to head on with the charisma, oratory, analogy and narrative of Modi. In-fact, it was not the BJP, it was only Modi who was fighting from all the 29 seats of party and electorates were so spellbound and cajoled with the leadership of Modi that irrespective gender, caste, class, region went in favour of BJP. This thunder was so magnanimous in Madhya Pradesh that stalwart like Jyotiraditya Scindia was also swayed away notwithstanding nurturing and cultivating the constituency for so long against a lesser known face. Digvijay Singh from Bhopal despite putting all efforts lost the battle with a huge margin wherein multiple factors worked against him and likewise was the case of few other bigwigs. The campaign strategy of BJP was at another level and unparallel. BJP's slogan '*Modi he to Mumkin he*' worked for them completely.

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Reference

- [1] The Madhya Pradesh as of today is territorially a conglomeration of Madhya Bharat (a union of states in the Malwa Plateau region), Vindhya Pradesh (a union of states in the Vindhya Mountain region) Bhopal (a centrally administered princely state) and Hindi-speaking portion of the Central Provinces. *Malwa* region occupies a plateau in western Madhya Pradesh. Over the centuries, the region has developed its own distinct culture, influenced by the Rajasthani, Marathi and Gujarati cultures. Agriculture is the main occupation of the people of Malwa. Malwa has been a traditional stronghold for the BJP since the time of Jansangh. *Mahakoshal* lies in the upper or eastern reaches of the Narmada River valley. It has Satpura) and Maikal ranges of deep forests and) also major) rivers namely Narmada and Tapti. Both major political parties have equal presence in the region. *Vindhya Pradesh* was created in 1948 from the territories of the princely states in the eastern portion of the former Central India. It was named for the Vindhya Range, which runs through the centre of the province. It lies between Uttar Pradesh to the north and Mahakoshal region to the south. This region has an influence of socialist movement and also some similarity with political nature of Uttar Pradesh.
- [2] Yatindra Singh Sisodia, 'It is difficult to predict the poll outcome in MP', *Mint-Hindustan Times*, May 14, 2019, <https://www.livemint.com/elections/opinion/opinion-it-is-difficult-to-predict-the-poll-outcome-in-mp-1557773413152.html> (viewed on 21 June, 2019).
- [3] Anando Bhakto, 'Reverse swing', *Frontline*, July 5, 2019, <https://frontline.thehindu.com/cover-story/article27265123.ece> (viewed on 27 June, 2019).
- [4] Yatindra Singh Sisodia, 'Congress needs to revisit strategy and organization', *Mint-Hindustan Times*, May 24, 2019, <https://www.livemint.com/elections/lok-sabha-elections/opinion-congress-needs-to-revisit-strategy-and-organization-1558634315053.html> (viewed on 21 June, 2019).
- [5] Suhas Palshikar, Sanjay Kumar and Sandeep Shastri, 'Post-poll survey: explaining the Modi sweep across regions' *The Hindu*, May 26, 2019, <https://www.thehindu.com/elections/lok-sabha-2019/post-poll-survey-explaining-the-modi-sweep-across-regions/article27250054.ece> (viewed on 27 June, 2019).