

PK's mantras and methods as an outsourced poll strategist

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PK is in news now with gossip of his chasing a different role. He seems exploring a vacuum in leadership of parties and a solo pursuit of leaders against a powerful incumbent. I'm sure PK is aware of the journey of Yogendra Yadav or Jaiprakash Narain of Lok Satta among others. Despite a psyphologist of concerns and long years of ground work, Yadav could not have a turn around so far. Yadav has a far better understanding of ground realities than most psyphologists, including a few who made it into politics.

PK of course has been an impressive phenomena with decade long engagements in six different states and assignments of seven different political parties. There was no other such outsourced assignment to compare except poll surveys and role of a couple of psyphologists. But PK is not described as a pollster or as a psyphologist. He is being referred, as he himself would like, as is a "poll strategist". The scope of poll time surveys proliferated in recent years has been going through changes in the last 25 years ending up now as outsourced poll opportunities. Poll time surveys to start with forty years ago were mostly independent exercise. They became sponsored by news media and then after 1988 political party or leader sponsored. Not all such assignments of parties were in news media. Their scope was limited to projecting win-lose aspects by way of percent of votes and number of seats and indicators of factors that matter in that process.

In my book by NBT in 2012, “*Poll Surveys in News Media*”, based on my over two decades foray into poll eve surveys, described how poll surveys in India were conducted, by whom, with whose sponsorship and with what kind of methodologies. I also indicated the cautions that voters as well as. Media should be concerned about the effects of such surveys. In my just published book, “*The Third Eye of Governance – Rise of Populism, Decline in Social Research*”, I reminded the perils of such surveys in manipulating voting trends.

"Outsourced services" by PK were at the instance and on behalf of the leader of a party. These services apparently include anything that takes to win or perceived as required in the pursuit. These multiple functions include those which go with responsibilities of the leader. These include shortlisting and selection of candidates, formulate and direct campaigns, provide critical inputs for the manifesto and speeches of campaigners, negotiate with potential and critical individuals irrespective of their party affiliations, and of course track feedback and influence poll surveys and media coverage.

Five critical factors

Five game change developments come handy for PK to emerge as a hero of polls. The First was ECI making available booth wise desegregated voting pattern for every constituency and on-line. The ECI was already having the voting trends for the past elections on line. The second was availability of a range of data bases openly or otherwise not just on demographics but also for beneficiaries of various government schemes, numbers of Aadhar, etc. and ownership (of phone, car, TV, etc.). The third was analytical tools (software interventions) which could help integrate various

sources of data with field data from surveys to facilitate segmentation of voters to focus voting trends and intentions and build scenario. The fourth was flooding of social media, particularly Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, etc. and more reliable broadband connectivity. These have opened floodgates to plant news as and when and targeted including the fake. The fifth factor was the party supremo who had outsourced indicates that fact to the cadres and even asks them to cooperate with. This obviously had helped gather ground level inputs faster and reliably and also tackle directly without any in the party being in the picture if such negotiations.

A certain vacuum in the political scene both at leadership level and in the confidence level of voters in leaders has increased uncertainties in voting intentions particularly because the percent of young has increased significantly. To seize this situation, tracking methodologies were unleashed with relay-surveys where responses are captured for huge numbers on a weekly or even daily basis starting much earlier even before the ECI's bubble. Instead of only one or two surveys during the 3 to 4 months period. Daily tracking, relay surveys involving huge samples had improved confidence level and helped initiative campaign interventions and counter the opposing party moves both at micro and macro levels. PK changed the scope of field surveys with evidence based experiments, including planted interventions. PK proved my idea of three SSS sample survey with smaller sample size was outdated.

Once field surveys and surveillance had identified who matter locally to mobilise and motivate voters and the potential candidates of parties, PK had used his negotiation skills to woo those who matter with whatever it takes to cross over cut off level of voting required to win. This mapping of vulnerable ties had increased his explore and

exploit moves for chasing those whose vote matters. All these inputs come handy for a Back-Track chase formula involving focus on pre identified constituencies, segments, booths, wards and even street wise voters that matter. PK had refocused on middlemen instead of directly focussing on voters. Instead of leaving it to the political leaders to read the survey reports (which he knew many will not even read), PK took the task and take required interventions without losing time and caring for the internal bickering's.

As a strategist PK was wearing multiple hats. As a pollster, canvasser, event manager, negotiator, PR man, analyst, and operational director of poll campaign. This is apart from that of the political leader. He even hired or took counselling of lyricists for coming up with slogans, copy writers and of course journalists. This is to strengthen many analysts and researchers of I-PAC. PK Mantra is what aspiring leaders of different parties in states are seeking these days instead of relying more on internal democratic ways.

Forming group networks, activating and engaging them is another methodology followed by his team. Confidence building in the cadres and voter groups is part of his task. Image building tools were availed liberally.

Assigning key political functions of a party to an altogether outsider involving hundreds of crores with no accountabilities or concern otherwise, will have its consequences to the very electoral system that we had adopted. The ECI cannot remain a spectator of such practice with implications to free, fair and transparency of elections to assemblies and parliament. even more it is the leaders who should ponder about.

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