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- ❖ **India - Russia Bilateral Relations**
- ❖ **Junta's Resurgence and China-Myanmar Engagement**
- ❖ **China's Belt and Road Initiative in South Asia**
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Babuddin Khan
Third Concept,
LB - 39, Prakash Deep Building,
7, Tolstoy Marg, New Delhi-110 001.
Ph : 23711092, 23712249, Fax No: 23711092.
E-mail : third.concept@rediffmail.com
Website: www.thirdconceptjournal.com

Designed by: Pt. Tejpal

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Electoral Campaigns in India

Face of electoral campaign has drastically changed with the growing advent of technology and digital platforms. Erstwhile tools like newspapers, television, radio, advertisements, and hoardings etc., too have undergone digital. Social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter now X, You Tube, and Instagram) and WhatsApp have changed the way campaigns are being approached by different political parties. However, rallies and road shows by star campaigners of parties have not lost its relevant and have been happening in full-swing. Political parties have fast adapted in terms of evolving strategies with the ever-growing interface between technology and electoral campaigns. New normal is proving conducive even for cash-strapped parties. The contests are being organized not only on streets of India but also in the vast expanse of cyberspace.

Campaigning has really gone smart. All political parties are becoming increasingly innovative to woo the Gen-Z and Millennial voters as India continues to be young with 65% of its voters are in below the age of 35-years and nearly 72% are in the age-group of 18 to 23-years. Great majority of them are tech-savvy. Political communication, through effective content creation is proving more engaging on digital platforms, which further facilitates to comment and forward to friends and relatives, thereby expanding the outreach in a natural process. Indeed great improvement upon the traditional media sources. Candidates contesting can now target their demography (read vote bank) easier than yesteryears. Wholesale canvassing is now being organized within a digital war-room of political parties for mass mobilization. Digital media promotions are happening through video ads, ad mails, message alerts and reminders, bulk SMS, and bulk voice calls.

Narratives are being formed and transformed with each phase of the General Elections of India. The campaigns which began with stories of development claims and policy interventions by each political party for different sections of the society gradually gave way to dynasty politics, *mangal sutra*, *virasat* tax, communal polarization of bitterest kind. Even Ram and Aurangzeb became live in Indian politics. Land jihad and vote jihad entered the vocabulary of campaign. External interventions in electoral politics of India too were highlighted. Business tycoons too were accused of changing sides from ruling dispensation to opposition. Inflammatory and divisive rhetoric became the tool for most political parties, where each accused the other of violating 'code of conduct' during campaign. Maligning the image and character of leaders through use of verbal slangs has long-been in use during campaigns, this election it became more vigorous and personal to be characterized as dog-whistling. Foreign media too has been reporting in favor of one or the other party of their choice.

Digital media platforms could have been used to reshape the narrative more in terms of achievement of the ruling and opposition parties. The electoral campaigns thus far, reveal that there are limitations too of the new tool. Digital platforms are also proving double-edged weapon, with pitfalls of overdose of content, deep-fake, fake news, disinformation and misinformation thereby leading to disillusion and confusion among the voters. The on-going campaign may have sounded more like a referendum on Prime Minister Narendra Modi highlighting issues such as unemployment, social justice, and economic inequality. Things would still have been better.

Good thing is that digitalization of electoral campaigns have brought employment to young trained citizens and business to Startups. Companies like CoreInsightsAI, Right2Vote, F6S Community, BallotNow, InfoVOTE, RASTRA, Eggfirst Advertising, and Polymath Solution are to name a few. Political Parties are going to spend nearly \$50 million on AI-generated election campaign material in this election. Largest democracy on the globe, need to have ethical campaigning than aggressive campaigning to woo their voters. Election Campaign Management Services while resorting to political branding, rally management, and campaign's content development for political parties must resort to ethical practices rather than guided by profit dynamics of the business.

— BK



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