Personality cult to the fore

BY JAGDISH BATRA, MAY 06, 2019

Much against what one would like to have, this election too, like most earlier elections, has veered towards personality cult rather than issues or ideologies. The single refrain on the lips of all opposition parties is ‘Narendra Modi’ and there is hardly any mention of a viable alternative by any opposition leader. Rahul Gandhi, the leader of opposition in the outgoing Lok Sabha, too has not officially thrown his hat in the ring even though Congress is projecting him as the choice for the PM’s seat.

Even though RSS had expressed itself against personality cult, yet it allowed BJP to uphold the image of Narendra Modi as a vote-catcher icon at a time when the opposition, devoid of effective unity, did not have a consensual candidate for the Prime Minister’s post. The main opposition party, with a weak leader in Rahul Gandhi, put in all its efforts to demolish Modi’s image, contributing obliquely to its larger-than-life stature!

It can be understood that the problem for the opposition lay in identifying the precise target. Modi had created the image of a hard taskmaster who took no rest and goaded those under him to work similarly. Many bureaucrats complained of lack of rest or leisure to which they were accustomed under the earlier regimes. His credentials as a nationalist champion of national
security were well-supported by the strong line taken against Pakistan. He had risen from humble dwelling and could connect with the downtrodden and the lowly in the caste structure. So, one could not attack him on these counts. They even forgot the ‘communal party’ tag which they applied to the BJP for its pro-Hindu stance, because they had themselves realized the folly of wrongly associating the term with the Hindus and were projecting themselves as devout Hindus or at least, well-wishers of Hindus, to get votes of Hindus.

Finally, they thought of cornering Modi on the issue of corruption and Rafale deal, with its complicated background negotiations, was seen amenable to their plan. So, a Prime Minister who had not amassed wealth for self, nor done any favour to even close relatives, was accused of corruption. If we believe Rahul’s word, then Modi had put rupees. Thirty thousand crore in Anil Ambani’s pocket. Now, the poor fellow – that’s what Anil Ambani literally is these days — was about to be sent to jail for defaulting on 500-odd crore penalty if his brother had not come to his rescue! How could a person flush with thirty thousand crores not spare five hundred crores to avoid a jail term hanging over him?

The Congress party strategists seem to have taken a cue from Joseph Goebbels, the Propaganda Minister in Nazi Germany, who is credited with his famous strategic formulation: “It would not be impossible to prove with sufficient repetition and a psychological understanding of the people concerned that a square is, in fact, a circle. They are mere words, and words
can be moulded until they clothe ideas and disguise.” So, the leader was guided to repeat ad nauseum the “chor hai” jibe without giving any credible proof, and dragging in the Supreme Court forcing it to issue a warning. Isn’t this what his colleagues have been calling ‘jumlebazi’?

But, of course, one can give allowance for the compulsion faced by the Congress strategists. Their leader could not comprehend complex arguments. Not even simple facts he could master so that 72000 would become 72000 crores at times and Ambani was credited with the debt burden ranging from 45000 to one lakh crore! The social media loved him for all the slips of the tongue (or mind!) that he made. Even if he is no match by any yardstick, he was asked to throw a challenge to Modi to debate. And one can easily visualize what the fate of such a debate could be: simply keep on repeating something even if you have been vanquished in the debate. Rahul will then probably be forced to answer some uncomfortable questions like his alleged British citizenship to float a firm in which his relative got the offset contract — something not rebutted by the Congress so far. One really wishes such a debate had come about and the public enjoyed some more fun!