



CONCEPTUALIZING AND CONTEXTUALIZING POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

Mr. Suwendu Kumar Baral

[Research Scholar, Institute for Social and Economic Change (ISEC) Bangalore – 560072] Assistant Professor, Department of Local Governance, Rajiv Gandhi National Institute of Youth Development

ABSTRACT

This research paper examines the dynamics of political leadership. There are arguments and counter arguments over the concept of leadership. What does it mean? Where does it lie? Is it the individual or the collective? Whether it is internal or external or both? It attempts to understand the various aspects covering leadership. It further tries to uncover the inherent power attached to it. Leadership is not only about lead but also lead in order to serve. It is simple at the same time critical, it depends on the time and space.

KEYWORDS : Leadership, followership, Political parties, Democracy

Introduction

Leadership is central for promoting inclusive governance in terms of responsiveness, transparency, accountability and efficiency. Leaders with ethical values such as honesty and integrity bring development and prosperity for the society. Ethical leaders with vision and commitment play constructive role in the process of nation building. Leaders with democratic principle and secular character maintain social synergy and cohesiveness.

Throughout centuries there is quest for leadership. There are enormous stories about the leaders' character, capability and competencies. People also discuss the powers, duties and obligations of leaders. Societies have their own explanation of leaders command and subjugation to their commands.

There is ongoing debate whether political leadership or institutions matters for better outcome. Because leaders follow prescribed norms and standards which determines their power and authority. Leadership gets legitimized by the manner the recruitment takes place and the person's decision making performance. Political leadership is multi-dimensional and covers a wide rays of aspects. It affects also multiple stakeholders like political parties, bureaucracy and common people.

In twenty first century, political leaders play crucial role. There are increasing responsibilities on the shoulders of parliamentary democracy. Among the political parties, there is centralization of leadership and personalisation of power. There are professional political leaders to fulfill the changing demands of the party and the people (Seligman: 1950).

People have the perception that leadership is the panacea for all societal ills. Leaders are considered both as consensus builder and regulator. Leaders are not only power hunger but also power makers. There are growing voices against the depersonalization of authority. The real power rests with the constitution, laws but not with the person. There are prescribed limitations on the leader to use the quantum of power to provide some checks and balances. Nobody can acquire power by violating the designed laws and regulations.

Research Problem

There has been a decline of ethical norms, values and standards among leaders. Individuals with criminal background and huge wealth are entering into politics (Chopra: 2003). There are increasing cases of criminalisation of politics, politicization of criminals and corruption by top political leaders. Leaders are also defecting the political parties every now and then. Leaders hardly respect the democratic standards and secular ideas. The credibility and integrity of political leaders have also declined and even questioned by the common people. Leaders are opting for shortcuts to reach and

establish power. Political leaders involved themselves in many scams and scandals and compromised the rule of law (Jafferrelot: 2003).

There are very common scenes you can see in legislatures and Parliament like uproar, unruly behaviour and manhandling. Political parties accuse each other on political issues. There are instances, where important bills are passed without debate, discussion and deliberation (Kumar: 2003). People never know the true picture of a particular bill on important public issues due to blurred picture presented by the political parties (Narayan: 1991).

There is a dominant trends of money and muscle power among political leaders in India (Tripathi: 2000). Both money and muscle power of a leader is inter dependent, without one the other may not flourish. One of the serious concern is the unaccounted expenditure by the political leaders. The required money comes from various sources including a big part from the supporting party. For the leaders, it's all about prestige and status which comes with political power (Godbole: 2003).

Corrupt leaders bypass the institutional processes, and procedures. Public offices are manipulated for personal profits forgetting about the larger society. Everything comes with a price tag, the public offices are also not indifferent. The educated intellectuals don't show any inclination to join politics, because it involves huge money and possibility of violence. The honest person hardly aspire to be a leader because of the perceived consequences and outcomes (Dhar: 2003, Sangita: 1993, Kumar: 2003, Seshadri: 2001).

Conceptual Review

Leadership is known as the reciprocal relationship between the leaders and followers. One person influence and other persons oblige (Dion: 1968). Leaders try to motivate, mobilise and inspire the followers to achieve the designed common goal by fulfilling their rights, needs and demands (Burns: 1978).

The leadership need to look forward the lager social purpose and how he/she can provide service to the mankind (Narayan: 1991). It creates conditions and opportunities to promote social health and welfare. It is instrumental about the complete social environment where we live ((Encyclopedia of Social work in India, 1968). Different concepts like power, authority, command and control are integrated with political leadership. It also tries to explain about the political elites, political systems and regimes. (Edinger: 1990).

Leadership is the some form of manifestation of power. Motive and resource are considered as two important ingredients of power. For centuries individuals act as agents or victims of leadership (Burns: 1978). Leadership is all about the resources. How it is controlled, accessed and distributed to different stakeholders. It also acts as a

motivational factor and style of behaviour (Edinger: 1975).

Leaders and followers are complementary to each other. They are like two sides of the same coin. They reflect each other, without one other cannot be defined. No person can become a leader without followers and vice-versa. The individual who acts as an active follower may change his/her role and can become leader. It is all about role exchange to fit into the environment (Hollander: 1961).

Political thinkers wrote about the role and responsibilities of leader. They also enlightened us with different aspects of leadership like the justice, freedom and rights. They also highlighted that power need to be used to uphold justice. Leaders are for their decisions at different circumstances. Many times leaders employ rewards and punishments for positive outcomes. It is the role of the leader to optimize on his/her strategies (Keohane: 2005).

Leader is considered as an agent of innovation of political strategies. It depends on the leader's capability to feel the feelings of followers and responsive to their needs and aspirations. Leadership performs a wide range of activities in a complex setup within competing power circles.

Any society has to live with its leaders who are elected to public positions to perform their duties. A lot of attention ought to be given to those aspiring leaders, whose motto is service to the society in the best possible manner (Besley: 2005). As Oomen points out three types of leadership attributes – ethical, performance and ascriptive. Ethical attributes covers truth, honesty, integrity, helping others and no biasness to anyone based on their backgrounds. Achievement attributes shows the level of education, capacity to solve problems, serving the mankind, utilize innovative methods and the ability to add certain value to the existing system. Whereas the ascriptive attribute emphasizes on the powerful caste you belong or aristocratic family, hereditary, ownership of massive wealth and power and lands (Oommen: 1969).

One person cannot become a leader by certain personal qualities, rather its relevance to the time and different circumstances enable the person to become a leader by associating with the followers (Stogdill: 1948)

Max Weber identified three categories of leaders. These are charismatic, traditional and legal rational and all these are situational in practice. A successful leader has to move from one style of leadership to other. How the leadership is accepted is dependent on the social stability about the norms and standards. Charismatic authority reflects the outstanding powers to inspire and motivate the followers. Traditional authority comes from the association of the leader from certain class, dynasty or caste. Whereas the legal rational authority is known by the knowledge and technical expertise the individual possess. It is believed that this kind of authority demonstrates impartiality and independence in all circumstances ((Bendix: 1960).

Theoretical Review

Kautilya is known for his writing Artha Shatra but it is referred because of its relevance to the present situations. He highlighted that the leader should possess some extraordinary qualities like vision, mission and motivation. The leader must have sound understanding about the human nature to run the administration efficiently. It is the acceptability of the followers which is the foremost quality of a leader. He emphasizes on ethics and justice as two important aspects of governance. He also pointed out that concentration, character, capability, communication and vigilance are qualities needed for the leadership. He further stated that the ministers must have the wisdom, resolving skills and positive attitude. He also focused on the use of prudence but to uphold justice. The leader should understand the needs and motivations of the followers to guide them better. A great leader must have the courage to lead at any circumstances and predict the possibilities

In *Republic*, Plato mentioned about the concept of ideal leader called philosopher king. He should have all the qualities like education, order and the power of reasoning to run the city state. Plato in his *The Politics* always emphasized on education to be the parameter to be a leader and pointed that lack of virtues among the leader will lead them nowhere. Machiavelli's *The Prince* focused on the leaders' firmness to deal with the law and order situation. The leader has to establish his control and power among his followers and subjects. The leader can use any tools and techniques to run the governance if required to use brute force, violence, deceiving and unethical methods. He also pointed that the leader must know how to adjust his behaviour to the changing scenarios and act accordingly. Sometime the leader can be soft-spoken, simple and polite but base on the situation the leader can behave completely opposite. Machiavelli argued that the leader cannot always follow the path of ethical principles because some circumstances may demand to be unethical rather following ethics. The leader has to visualize the short term, midterm and long term implications of any act taken by the leader. (Machiavelli translated by George Bull: 1960). Hobbes *Laws of Nature* points out the contracts between the leader and the society. The leader must create sufficient conditions in the society so that the followers will not behave in selfish manner and respect the contract.

Bass argues that the leader is known by the dynamic qualities like originality, creativity and problem solving. There are so many things to be handled by the leader. The leader must have confidence and tolerance to face any challenge and accept the possible consequences (Bass: 1981). Bass focuses about Trait Theory, Great Events Theory and Transformational Theory to become leaders (Bass: 1989-90). The leader should have multiple sources of knowledge and skills. Because there is no alternative of the wisdom, reason and judgement to govern better in an effective manner (Tucker: 1977).

Edinger states that the role of the leader is to look after the public policies of the state. Because the political leader is having the legitimization to initiate and implement the public policy given the checks and balances by the rule of law. He strongly argues that it is the leader who takes the ultimate decision over the utilisation of state resources. It decides what should be done, who should do it when where and how should be done in terms of deciding any policy implementation (Edinger: 1975).

Jalal states that democratic leaders are inclusive than non-democratic leaders (Jalal: 1995). Leaders in democracy don't fight war among themselves. They are considered as wise statesmen to provide responsive, transparent and accountable governance. Democratic leaders try to protect rights of the weak and disadvantaged and promote secular values (Mohanty: 2006). But it is contested and debated that sometimes authoritative leadership can also provide inclusive governance.

Democracies do better job than autocracies by improving the standard of life by more distribution of resources by providing better goods and services. They also spend quite a big share of revenue for providing service to the society especially to the poor sections. But how far the spending reach to the unreachable and produce sustainable outcomes, is a larger issue to be investigated by social scientists. Democratic leaders spend on public services because they are accountable to the people. Because these leaders have to accommodate and assimilate a variety of interests by producing more public goods. Whereas non-democracies don't have the compulsion of accountability and transparency provisions which may lead them to serve the elite class rather than poor (Ross: 2006).

Amartya Sen argues that the poor have the power to punish the leaders in democracy if they fail to check the famine. He points out that in a democratic setup there is upward flow of information to the center from the poor than non-democracy. Democracies are also more informed and know the suitable time for taking action to

prevent any famine like situation. He further believes that more redistribution of public goods are only possible in a democratic form of government.

Varshney points out that democracies try to avoid any kind of emergency situations by constantly attacking poverty by different plans and programmes. But the outcome is not very positive. Poor people are the largest turnout in Indian democracy and they use this tool to force the leaders to initiate and implement friendly policies towards the downtrodden. They mainly use political mobilization and their voting as instruments to push the public policies from below. But in authoritarian system there is only top down approach (Varshney: 2000).

There should be a balance between the competing means and competing ends. In order to make this, the leader has to be flexible and at the same time follow certain principle (Encyclopedia of Democracy: 1995). Michels justify the incompatibility between democracy and leadership. Even Leaders elected democratically becomes oligarchic in nature and unable to behave democratically due to some compulsions and reasons. Leaders get attracted towards corruption which comes with power and authority. Leaders are considered as the cream of the society. The educational, cultural and economic edge over others make them unique and special. The privileges comes with leadership distant them from the society. Leaders' attention and attraction towards insatiable wants get them diverted to accumulate more powers and positions (Michel: 1911)

The leader has to manage inter and intra-group problems faced by the society. (Mohanty and Tondon: 2006). Leaders also successfully handle powerful social movements to bring a transformational change. They inspire people to participate in the political process against their oppressiveness and marginalization. Moyser argues that competition of leadership is very crucial in a democratic system and no amount of citizen participation can replace that feature (Moyser: 2003).

Critical Analysis

Leadership is multidimensional, it covers so many factors. It is all about the functionality between the leaders and the followers. They define each other and fulfill each other. It is creative at the same time original and individual or group specific. We may find similarities and differences of opinion about leadership. But it is all about the people who follows the leaders. Leader has to read and understand the mind of the followers and take suitable decisions conducive to them. It may take quite some time to climb the ladder of leadership but you may lose everything in one go. It's all about status, prestige and power associated with it. It is very attractive to individuals but everyone may not be successful in dealing with that. No leader can grow without fulfilling the need and rights of the people who trust him/her. The leader has to create conditions to develop trust, and once the trust is built the leader continuously strives to keep and build that trust.

Common people get attracted toward to be in the race of leadership. Because leadership determines the distribution of vast resources. Leadership comes with power and power comes with responsibility towards society and its people. Leader who enjoys the trust among the masses can mobilize them to do certain productive and fruitful work. Leadership not only comes with enormous opportunities but also major challenges. The person who can withstand against any negative currents earn the credibility of the masses.

Conclusion:

Political leadership has the power to push public policies for the betterment of the society. The need of the hour is to create conditions, opportunities so that people with honesty, integrity will come forward to lead us and provide us a better standard of life by implementing better policies. The society has to brace itself against any kind of bad elements to affect and infect the social and political system. Political leaders come through the channel of political

parties so we have to build the parties democratically. We have to ensure that the leadership maintains transparency and promote accountability in letter and spirit.

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