

Myth-shattering mandate

BJP's victory in recent polls demolishes theories
that its fortunes would decline after
demonetisation



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THE BJP'S astounding performance in the elections to the municipal corporations and other local bodies in Maharashtra and Odisha shows that the party's juggernaut is simply unstoppable. There is overwhelming support, throughout the country, for Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his people-centric policies. The BJP's electoral base has remarkably cut across the urban-rural divide. The Maharashtra and Odisha results and other electoral successes in the recent past demolish the theory that the BJP's electoral fortunes would dip in the wake of demonetisation.

The elections have shattered another myth — that the BJP is a purely an urban party. The fact that the party secured majorities in zila parishads in nine backward and tribal-dominated districts in Odisha is a clear indication that people are with the BJP, irrespective of whether they hail from a city or village. It is unusual for a party to do so well after being in power and sweep election after election, be it elections to the state assemblies, local bodies or by-elections. The BJP has managed to do so under the leadership of Narendra Modi, guided by Amit Shah's astute political strategising. The trend started with the local body elections in Andaman and Nicobar in 2015 when the BJP bagged the Port Blair Municipal Council and a majority of the zila parishad seats; a majority of those elected as pradhans are also from the party.

Subsequently, the BJP scored a historic triumph in Assam, the gateway to north-eastern states and formed the government for the first time in that state. The party made steady inroads in states like Kerala where it had no significant presence; it secured more than 14 per cent votes in the assembly elections to the state. There was also an increase in the BJP's vote share in West Bengal. In the by-polls held in West Bengal, the Communists were pushed to the third position. I am sure the BJP would emerge as the principal rival to the ruling TMC in the months to come. Like the Communists in West Bengal, the Congress slipped to the third position in Tripura.

The party scored a landslide victory in the prestigious Chandigarh Municipal Corporation when it bagged 20 of the 22 seats it contested, while the Congress could manage only four seats. The BJP's vote share in these polls jumped from 28.16 per cent to 42.98 per cent. It should be noted that these elections were held a month after demonetisation. The party also performed impressively in the local body elections in Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, post-demonetisation.

What is remarkable about the BJP's

Maharashtra performance is that the party contested on its own after 25 years. Not only did it do well in the zila parishad elections, it maintained its winning spree in the urban areas by bagging eight of the 10 municipal corporations. Notable among them are Pune Municipal Corporation and Pimpri-Chinchwad Municipal Corporation, the bastions of the Nationalist Congress Party.

The party's performance in the local body polls in Odisha is also commendable: The BJP's strength in the local bodies increased from 36 to 297 seats — it increased almost 10 times. In contrast, the fortunes of the Congress have slumped and its strength has reduced from 128 to 66 seats. The hard work put in by party activists by enrolling new members and the positive impact of the pro-people schemes like Jan Dhan Yojana, PAHAL and PM's Fasal Bima Yojana at the grass root level have enabled the BJP to grow from strength to strength.

The remarkable showing of the BJP in Mumbai and elsewhere not only boosted the spirits of the rank and file, but also sent out a clear message to our political rivals and critics of demonetisation that people fully endorsed Modi's drive against black money and corruption.

From Andaman and Assam to the latest round of local body polls, the narrative has been similar — the BJP has emerged as a truly national pan-India party with the expansion of its footprint to every nook and corner, while the Congress party, which suffered defeat after defeat in a humiliating manner, has been reduced to a national party from being a national party.

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis is the young rising star in the country's political firmament. In Maharashtra, the combination of Narendra and Devendra proved to be the winning one. Moreover, the hard work put in by cadres, as in most other states, led to a three-fold rise in the party's strength in the country's richest municipal body — the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation.

The series of electoral successes post-demonetisation clearly bears out that Narendra Modi not only continues to be the most popular Indian leader, but also the most credible political personality. Apart from endorsing the NDA government's policies, the people have clearly rejected the Congress and its allies for pursuing opportunistic and decadent politics. Some of these opportunistic politicians have gone to the extent of politicising surgical strikes and also the recent warning by the army chief to those obstructing the anti-terrorist operations in Jammu and Kashmir.

With his unwavering commitment to development and transforming India into one of the top global economies in the world, the prime minister is determined to ensure that BJP's mantra of "Sab ka saath sab ka vikas" is achieved in letter and spirit, irrespective of the petty politicking and obstructionist politics by those opposed to the party.

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