

By Sidharth Mishra



The longtime-waiting heir to the Congress leadership, Rahul Gandhi, is back from ‘*agyatwas*’ (time spent incognito) and is doing everything possible to catch the eyeballs. However, his performances in the past three weeks have been unable to define whose attention he was seeking. Questions have also emerged about who were appreciating the Gandhi scion’s acts and what plans he has to revive the party’s fortunes.

Let’s take a quick count of his acts in public life, since the Gandhi scion returned from his sabbatical. His first major attack

against the present government stems from the “suit-boot” comment he made in Parliament. The Gandhi scion then took a trip to Punjab in the general class coach of passenger train. Rahul also went to Kedranath when the Himalayan shrine reopened after the winter break. Soon after, he went to Vidarbha in Maharashtra to express solidarity with the grieving families of farmers, who had committed suicide. Finally, he presented a show of camaraderie with affected flat owners in Noida, a suburb of the national capital.

So in a fortnight’s time Rahul Gandhi has tried to win over the support of the farmers, trust of the middle-class and the sympathy of a Hindu majority. However, can anyone acquire the support of a class, caste or community that easily in this country?

Since all these events received very good coverage on television, newspapers and went viral on social media, Rahul Gandhi’s strategy planners must have noted with satisfaction that their plans were paying off. But have they really cared to find out that if these acts would have any impact electorally. More importantly will these theatrics be able to energise the Congress rank and file, whose motivation is at a low ebb now?

His team of political managers may make good copy for English language magazines and newspapers but they do not bring good news to the masses; rather they make no sense to the people. They wear their foreign degrees on their sleeves and show themselves to be carrying the burden to do good for their “lesser” brethren. I do not resent their foreign degrees, but they are not the first people in Indian politics to have returned from abroad to join politics.

Much before them there was Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and for that matter even Jawaharlal Nehru. Both mass leaders were educated abroad. However, they cut their teeth in Indian politics by participating in mass movements. While Mahatma came to India with the

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impressive reputation of having taken on the British might in South Africa, Nehru was sent by his mentor to participate in the Kisan movement of Faizabad district under Baba Ram Chandra to get a feel of the issues facing the Indian masses.

Even Arvind Kejriwal registered his presence through a public movement. Unfortunately for Rahul Gandhi, all his tutoring about Indian politics have been theoretical with no participation whatsoever in a political agitation or even an effective management of an election campaign.

His 'hop-step-and-jump' style of tours are not going to take him very far politically. In the past his 'intervention' in Bhatta Parsaul or breaking bread at a Dalit household failed to make the desired impact. His recent forays in different streams will also fail to achieve the necessary impact. Such efforts at event management bear no fruit, as it has been proven time and again.

The relationship between the Congress party and the Indian masses survived for over a century because its top leaders had nurtured some very strong grass root connections. It was through these grass root leaders that Congress high command managed to connect to the masses. However, a close look at Rahul Gandhi's team would suggest that it bears a close resemblance to a crèche of modern day princelings. Despite flaunting a flurry of smart phones and other gadgets, they have been the worst communicators.

I fail to understand why the Congress leadership does not trust its cadres to communicate its plans and policies to the masses. Why does it have to outsource its communication channels to sympathisers and supporters with a definite accent? Why is the top Congress leadership, including the party president and vice-president, following the policy of remaining incommunicado and making sporadic appearances?

Gandhi is making the current splash thinking that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's popularity has ebbed. It's true that between a prime ministerial candidate and a prime minister, the former will always have the greater ability to raise louder cheers. Modi as prime minister may not be able to draw the same kind of cheer as he was used to do in the run-up to the polls. However, as prime minister, he still enjoys credibility.

Even if there is some loss to the prime minister's mass popularity, it does not mean that Rahul Gandhi has grown enough in stature to match Narendra Modi, who has shown time and again that he is a man in command of his government and party.

Modi's stamp on his government is most visible. Unlike his predecessor Dr Manmohan Singh, Modi's governance record does not give the impression that somebody else was taking decisions for him, especially "Karyavahs of Keshavkunj", about whose intervention in matters of

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governance was much feared when the Bharatiya Janata Party came to power.

Rahul Gandhi has an onerous task at hand and it will not be completed by merely creating events. Several party veterans including prominent faces like P Chidamabaram, Amrinder Singh and Sheila Dikshit have in one way or other expressed a lack of confidence in Rahul Gandhi's ability to replace his mother as the party's helmsperson. He will have to create such models, which would make his party leaders confident about his ability to revive the party and match Narendra Modi.

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