

The Saviour Will Come

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There is a well known song from an old Hindi film, with a catchy melody whose opening words are “Aayega aaneval, aayaga, aayega, aayega”. What these words literally mean is that he who is to come will come. If one goes back to the Sudan of the nineteenth century when the Mehdi led a revolt against the Anglo Egyptian administration there, claiming to be the Chosen One sent to revive Islam or, for that matter, Osama Bin Laden of Al Qaeda or the leader of the Islamists in Syria and Iraq, the Nirankaris who claim that there will be an eleventh Guru of the Sikh or the Ahmediyas who claim that there will be one more Prophet sent by Allah, we would find that the song also speaks of the return of the absent one, though in this case it means the lover. What is surprising is that the Congress Party seems to have adopted this song as its own musical theme.

Strange? What else can one make of Sonia Gandhi going to Amethi and reassuring people there that Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka will return shortly. Do they need this reassurance because their beloved leader is absent? It is well known that Rahul Gandhi, soon after the debacle of the Congress in the Delhi Assembly elections, took leave of absence from Parliament and disappeared to some unknown destination. He thus missed the budget session, arguably the most important session of Parliament and has absented himself from critical discussions on certain legislation introduced by government which is opposed by the Congress in particular and the Opposition in general. Well, he will not be the first Member of Parliament in our history to be away from a session, but then such members are not Vice President of a major political party which ruled India for the better part of the 67 plus years of our Independence and which aspires to return to power as soon as possible. What is more, this particular M.P is widely acclaimed by the leaders of his own party, as one who will succeed his mother as President of the Congress and who is destined to be the Prime Minister in a Congress led government. This is not an ordinary backbencher about whom we are talking because his party has already anointed him as the Mehdi who will one day rescue India from the clutches of BJP. Is this a strategic retreat by the putative Mehdi in order to regroup his forces for counter attack? Or is it the action of a spoilt brat whose only claim to merit is his birth and the sycophancy of the party which his mother leads?

Mahatma Gandhi, during his struggle for independence, built a party which cut across regional, ideological and religious boundaries and brought together people of disparate thoughts to forge them into an unbeatable weapon which ultimately brought the British to their knees. Everything that Gandhi expected of his followers, austerity, simple living, the ability to bear hardship and willingness to face police brutality, he imposed on himself. If a man wants nothing, has nothing, what can a tyrant take away from him? Had Gandhi not adopted the poverty of the average Indian as his own state of being he could never have led India to Independence. Self abnegation, tapasya, concentration of thought, or dhyana, are all characteristic of the Indian sages and this is precisely what Gandhi adopted. If he ever retreated it was into a period of introspection which manifested itself as

the fasts that he undertook. Gandhi never retreated into luxury. Times have changed, India is modernising, but the basic values, the basic wisdom of India can never change. Its leaders are not expected to be ascetics like Gandhi, but they are also not expected to retreat to Sandringham for a week of grouse shooting. What Rahul Gandhi has done is almost a replica of a week at Sandringham.

The strength of the Congress Party was its workers at village level, the group leadership at the Mandal level and the elected District Congress Committee with its President in every district. The Mandal and District units then decided the composition of the Pradesh Congress. There was always a degree of centralisation at the High Command Level, but it was by no means a one man show. It is Indira Gandhi, through excessive centralisation of all authority in herself, who destroyed the inner party democracy of the Congress and gave it virtually a bureaucratic structure in which everything was dictated by the High Command. The state of the party can be judged by the fact during the last general election in Madhya Pradesh, thirty-eight district units had no chief and in the recent Delhi Assembly elections none of the DCCs had a chief because the units had been dissolved by the High Command and not reconstituted. No one in the Congress even envisages a situation in which neither Sonia nor Rahul nor Priyanka will be the leader and that the High Command will be representative of the States because the Pradesh units will have decided who should be a member of the High Command. In this scenario the statement by Digvijaya Singh that there should be properly conducted democratic elections for membership of the Congress Working Committee is most welcome.

Who should lead is an internal matter for the Congress to decide. However, in a country whose Constitution mandates that it will be a democracy is it proper for a leading national party to have a structure in which there is no element of democracy? Rahul Gandhi has never been a field worker, he has suffered no hardships, he has dwelt in the midst of silk and brocade, has been brought up from childhood in the belief that he alone is destined to lead. Every election he touched has resulted in a disaster for the Congress. His public presence is not inspiring and whatever his spin doctors might state, he makes an unlikely looking leader. His absence at crucial moments certainly does nothing for his image. Brutal though it may sound or read, Rahul exhibits none of the qualities of leadership expected of a politician of note, he is not only not a political savant but comes through as politically naïve and he certainly does not know the pulse of the nation. In his case absence is unlikely to make the heart grow fonder. Despite the newly adopted theme song, the Congress needs to cast its net wider in its search for the “Mehdi”.
