




What is undeniable about the current political climate in Goa is that there are a number of people who are desirous of change. Most of them are in fact singularly opposed to the return of the Congress, as well as the BJP. This is already a good start. The problem is that those who are translating desire into political action and setting up political parties are all after the same pie, and hopelessly divided. It is this division, and the grandstanding in which each party will field its own candidate which, will ensure that the BJP will return to power. The fact that this singular fact has not seemed to percolate into the public rhetoric of the various parties, and that these various apparent opponents of the BJP are jostling each other suggests that we are in for very dark times indeed. Preventing this should be highest on our agenda.

What are our options if this is the bleak scenario that faces us in the upcoming elections? There are a couple of solutions that I have to offer. These solutions rest on the argument that we abandon the idea that the next elections are going to bring about a sea-change in Goan politics. Despite the tall claims that are being made by all and sundry, there is going to be no utopia following the elections. Such claims fail to recognize the complexity of the electorate and the electoral system. Indeed, I would argue that some of these utopian claims are based on a fundamental disrespect of the electorate and the way in which the marginalized use their vote. Further, some of challengers of the dominant parties fail to recognize that many of the problems we face are not the result of bad people in politics, but a problematic system that is in place. As such, unless one recognizes that it is the system which is the problem, even a good, honest, person usually becomes part of the same old system or is rendered helpless.

The problems as I see them are the following, first, there is a need to ensure that the BJP does not return to power. The second, is that we need to begin restricting the way in which electoral politics in Goa works. We cannot merely do good within the existent system, the entire system itself has to be overhauled. We are thus faced with one immediate agenda, and another more long-term agenda.



The strategies of BJP-opposed electoral parties in Bihar have already shown us the way to address the short-term goal identified above. Through their strategic grand alliance, the Janata Dal (United), the Rashtriya Janata Dal and the Congress Party effectively routed the BJP. This is the route that all individuals and political outfits serious about change in Goa must necessarily follow. Take the following scenario for example, where the Goa Vikas Party, the Goa Forward Party, the Goa SuRaj Party, the Communist Party, and the AAP come to an agreement that they will support each other, campaign for each other and field a single individual in every constituency. A combination of this sort seems unlikely now, and even crazy, but it would ensure not only a united front against the BJP and Congress, but would also yield a variety of long-term benefits.

To begin with even if a single party currently opposed to the BJP-Congress were to be able to win all forty seats, this would be bad for democracy. First, a ruling party with no opposition is a bad idea. This idea has already been articulated by Amita Kanekar in a recent op-ed, where she argued that “given the limited choices, what we should aim for is simply a weak government.” Her reasoning, with which I concur, is that even though we are constantly urged to vote for a strong government, such governments invariably ignore criticism and overrule normal procedures. Rather than a strong government therefore “ A weak government, i.e. a minority or coalition government, would serve better, with more assembly discussions and cabinet meetings, rather than dictatorial orders, and where everybody might be too concerned about their survival to do much damage.”

Like Kanekar, I propose that we should look to 2017 elections through a pragmatic lens even as we hold utopian visions. The 2017 elections should be an exercise in cooperative behavior, encouraging newer voices and parties to emerge. It is now more than ever that the dictum “united we stand, divided we fall” holds true. The buildup to the 2017 elections and the period until the next legislative elections should be seen as preparatory time necessary to challenge the system that currently obtains. Even as many new entrants to the political scene have begun campaigning, it would be more realistic to recognize that the swing towards new entrants will be minimal. It makes more sense to prepare for the elections scheduled in 2022. We would do well to recognise that the success of currently dominant parties has been built over such a long period and was never the result of campaigns of a couple of months. As such a politics of alliances makes the most sense.

Of course there will be those who will be horrified by this suggestion. “Make alliances with the corrupt and the cynical?” would be the question of groups like AAP in Goa. The various bahnujan groups that are trying to cobble together a response in the upcoming elections will ask if the suggestion is to make alliances with the various Brahmin-dominated parties. To such positions my response would be yes. Mayawati, the leader of the Bahujan Samaj Party, demonstrated that making alliances with Brahmins is not necessarily out of the question. What is important is not rhetorical grandstanding, or ideological purity, but gaining access to political power so as to begin to change the system. However, since process is also important, how one gets to power is also critical.

The politics of purity, whether ideological or otherwise, is a dangerous politics because it presumes a monopoly on the truth, and an almost divine power to realize it. The strategy of alliances would allow a diverse group of voices to get into the legislature. It would open the possibility for a legislative politics that is about debate and mutual respect. This would engender real political change in Goa. Democratic politics is the politics of compromise. One makes priorities, sees what one can suffer, what one cannot, communicates this to one’s partner/s, and then works towards maintaining the alliance, and hopefully influencing the other. When one realizes that the alliance is not working, one can pull out. As Kanekar has pointed out, it is an alliance-based weak government that we should aim for in the upcoming elections, even as our sights are trained for 2022.

(This post has been profoundly influenced by the theology of Pope Benedict XVI as contained in his encyclical *Spe Salvi*. I would encourage readers to engage with this text.

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Electoral Options and a Politics of Alliances