

Will Tea Party Shake Up Obama White House?

BY ARUN KUMAR

Taking a cue from the famous Boston Tea Party of 1773, a new Tea Party movement that mocks at President Barack Obama's "hopey-changey stuff" is pitching conservatives like Indian American Nikki 'Randhawa' Haley, who is poised to become South Carolina governor, at the forefront of American politics.

If American colonists dumped tea into Boston harbour to protest against British-imposed taxes, their present-day imitators mailed tea bags to Congress last year to create a "buzz and pop" against the corporate bailout and the stimulus bill signed by Obama to beat the recession.

Evoking images, slogans and themes from the American Revolution, such as tri-corner hats and yellow Gadsden "Don't Tread on Me" flags and "Taxed Enough Already" (T-E-A) acronym, the movement a year later has emerged as a force to reckon with in US politics.

With Haley, 38, and many other candidates backed by the movement prevailing in several Republican primaries, poll watchers have started gauging its potential impact on the November elections



Their similar ideological makeup and views suggest that the Tea Party movement is more a rebranding of core Republicanism than a new or distinct entity on the American political scene.

with the Democrats facing the midterm blues.

With the backing of tea party activists and Sarah Palin, Nimrata 'Nikki' Randhawa, born in a Sikh family, brushed aside allegations of marital infidelity and an ethnic slur to win the Republican nomination to run for governor in South Carolina. And by most accounts

she is poised to win. Palin, the 2008 Republican vice presidential candidate, herself has emerged as the top horse in PoliticalDerby.com's 2012 Power Rankings of horses that will vie for the Republican nomination to challenge Obama in 2012.

Haley and other Palin-backed candidates have cleaned up in the spring primary season and her appearances at Tea Party rallies generate more "buzz and pop than Justin Beiber on a Red Bull binge," as the Derby put it.

The political website cited a Palin remark at the Tea Party Convention earlier this year - "How's that hopey-changey stuff workin' out for ya?" — alluding to Obama's "Hope" and "Change" slogans in the 2008 presidential poll, to sum up her rise to the top of its Derby rankings among Republicans.

But the movement appears to have limited appeal among Democrats. As a new Gallup poll suggests, there is significant overlap between Americans who identify as supporters of the Tea Party movement and those who identify as conservative Republicans.

While Tea Party supporters are not universal in their backing of Republican candidates, they skew heavily in that direction. About 80 percent of Tea Party supporters say they will vote for the Republican candidate in their district, slightly lower than the projected 95 percent Republican vote among conservative Republicans.

This suggests that the potential impact of the Tea Party on Republican chances of winning in congressional and senatorial races in November — even if supporters turn out in record numbers — may be slightly less than would be expected.

"The Tea Party movement has received considerable news coverage this year, in large part because it appears to represent a new and potentially powerful force on the American political scene," wrote Gallup editor-in-chief Frank Newport in his analysis of the poll.

"Whether Tea Party supporters are a voting segment that is unique and distinct from the more traditional Republican conservative base, however, appears questionable," he said.

Honor Killings: Identity Politics To Blame

BY AMULYA GANGULI

Even a decade ago, khap panchayats - the caste-based village councils with their kangaroo courts functioning mainly in Haryana - were virtually unknown, and sporadic "honor killings" were reported only from northwest Pakistan. Now, these make headline news in India almost every day.

To understand this regressive phenomenon, it may be necessary to go back to 1990 when caste-based identity politics received a boost. Although caste was always a feature of Indian politics, except in areas like West Bengal, it was generally a muted affair before that fateful year.

A seminal change took place with the V.P. Singh government's implementation of the Mandal Commission report on reservations for Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in government jobs in 1990. This was followed by L.K. Advani's rath yatra to "remove" a mosque at the supposed birthplace of Lord Ram in Ayodhya to prevent the Hindu vote bank of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) being split by the upsurge of casteist sentiments.

The BJP's rise at the time was accompanied by the rise of parties like the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) and the Samajwadi Party, which championed the cause of the OBCs, and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), which was associated with the Dalits. The politics of identity, based on religion and caste, had suddenly acquired more importance than ever before.

A key feature of the segmented politics was the aggressive flaunting of one's religious and caste identity. Indian politics had never before seen such vituperation in public life. Inevitably, the strengthening of such divisive sentiments infected the social scene



as well. Hence the appearance of khap panchayats, which are not strictly legal entities like the three-tier panchayat system which operates in the rural areas. Instead, they are an informal gathering of village elders of one community, mainly the Jats.

Had these been a congregation of wise old men giving sage advice against moral turpitude, there would have been no cause for alarm. But the boost received by the caste system in 1990 has strengthened their traditional prejudices, resulting in the issuance of directives against inter-caste or even inter-village marriages. These panchayats have also forbidden marriages between boys and girls of the same gotra, a system of clans in Hindu society.

What is ominous is that these illegal bodies haven't stopped after issuing their regressive diktats. The excessive importance which the caste system has received has emboldened the khap panchayats to order even the killings of defiant couples to save the "honor" of their families.

It will be a mistake to believe that such outrages are the result of a generation gap or of a religious or class divide, the usual reasons of disagreement between parents and grown-up children. Such divergence of views can lead to estrangement, but not murder. The killings are the result of the whipping up of an intense antipathy towards perceived opponents.

Earlier, the fear was that the quotas will keep out the meritorious from employment and education, thereby affecting the quality of services and academic degrees. Now, as the "honor killings" show, the emphasis on caste can have other horrendous consequences, which were evidently anticipated by the politicians because of their eagerness to exploit the divisive sentiments to build up their bases of support.

How To Run A 'Freebie Junk' Newspaper



EDITOR'S CORNER
VEENA RAO

A comment on a popular Indian newspaper's online edition report about my entry into the 2010 edition of the Limca Book of Records read: "NRI Pulse and several others like it are freebie junk mail you also find lying around in cartons outside stores Indians frequent. Surprising Limca recognized this "achievement"."

This comment, which I do not think was posted by an Atlanta resident, stood out bold, audacious, taunting, amongst a bunch of congratulatory notes on that particular news website, and is the only negative comment I've received so far. What's worse, each time I google 'freebie junk newspaper' (try it), the report "US-based Veena Rao enters Limca Book of Records" comes right up on the first page without fail.

The comment begged the question: Is a 'freebie' publication 'junk' just because it is free? Or is it content quality, jour-

Is a 'freebie' publication 'junk' just because it is free? Or is it content quality, journalistic values and reach within the community that sets the standards for a publication?

nalistic values and reach within the community that sets the standards for a publication? Would a community continue to pick up, read, and come back for more 'junk' year after year? Would 'junk' material not have met its end soon?

Maybe there are businessmen out there who run 'freebie' publications with the only objective of filling it end to end with advertisements. There is no focus on maintaining journalistic standards, simply because there is no journalism involved. But even these publications must surely provide some useful material to the reader, or they wouldn't survive.

Setting up a newspaper has never been easier than it is today. All you need is computer software and Internet, and you can have an entire newspaper office online. But keeping a newspaper alive year after year is harder than it has ever been, because of the shrinking advertiser market. Our printer tells me that over 40 publications that used to print with him closed down in the past two years!

Mainstream US newspapers have had it worse. Dwindling circulation figures, shrinking revenue, massive job cuts... Some big names have closed down during the height of the current recession. People don't subscribe to newspapers any more. We get all the news online. Us desis too. Reading the day's newspaper with the morning cuppa is a habit long dead. We fall back into the habit during our trips o India, then fall into our online obsession when we come back home.

Ultimately, I think it is the 'freebie junk' nature of our newspaper that has helped us survive four years. People will always pick up a publication with plenty of good reading material if it is offered free of cost. It helps that our paper has news and features that are not all found online. It helps that we make news of Atlanta happenings. It also helps that our set up is small, and our overheads low. That, according to a recent survey, is the key to survival in these difficult times.

It also helps that we serve a community that is appreciative of our sincere efforts at providing a stronger platform for all of us- even if that platform is in 'freebie junk' format.