



A Year since 19th Party Congress

Speaker: Dr. Avinash Godbole

Chair: Prof. Patricia Uberoi

Date: 24 October 2018

Seminar Room, ICS

The event commenced with Professor Patricia Uberoi's opening remarks explaining the contextual significance of the topic of presentation and narrating the short bio of Dr. Avinash Godbole. Welcoming the speaker and referring to his focus on sixth generation Chinese leadership, she said that it is wonderful for her to witness the sixth generation of Chinese studies scholarship in development at the ICS.

Dr. Avinash began his presentation by giving a brief explanation for his selection of the present topic. He said that he selected this topic primarily due to two reasons. Firstly, it is the first anniversary of 19th Party Congress which was held between 18 and 24 October 2017 that redefined Xi's status in Chinese politics. Secondly, he wanted to have occasional refreshing of his thoughts on Chinese politics.

He briefly explained the major features of 19th Party Congress in which Xi Jinping announced that China is entering into a new era which will establish socialism with Chinese characteristics. Asserting the importance of Xi Jinping's speech at the 19th Party Congress, he noted that Xi's speech at the event was more than three and a half hour long and had about 35000 characters.

Analyzing the backdrop of 19th Party Congress, Dr. Avinash brought the audience's attention to Xi Jinping's statements and policies in the past few years. Focusing on Xi's anti-corruption campaign, he challenged various observer's tendency of placing Xi as a unique leader in Chinese politics. He argued that Xi's anti-corruption campaign is nothing but a continuation of ideas proposed by Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao. He noted that Hu and Wen often observed corruption as an existential threat to the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the Chinese state.

Looking into the widespread anticipation that existed before the 19th Party Congress about the emergence of sixth generation leadership in China, the speaker argued that Xi didn't do anything unconventional as many asserts. In his view, Xi was merely following the rule book while he decided not to bring a new generation of leadership to the front. The speaker asserted that Xi practically had no space for accommodating a new generation of leadership at that point due to conventionally established age criteria practices. Talking about the removal of term limits for the presidency by the National People's Congress, he said that we definitely cannot underestimate Xi Jinping's power though as of now most of his actions and policies are just part of the process than out of the way attempt to grab the power. By insisting that Xi is still a few steps away from achieving the status of paramount leader, he observed that four out of seven members of the current politburo standing committee are not from a pro-Xi group within the CPC. He noted that out of the seven-member current politburo standing committee, Li Keqiang and Wang Yang are still proteges of Hu Jintao and other two, Han Zheng and Wang Huning, are part of a third group called Jiang Zemin group. However, he added, Xi has significant influence over the politburo as at least 12 out of 25 in a pessimistic sense and 16 out of 25 in an optimistic sense are his supporters.

Talking about the other things that emerged out of the 19th Party Congress he observed that there was an idea of China being a model for other developing countries and that widely figured in discussions in the days immediate after of the event. However, it disappeared subsequently from the Chinese official statements and other publications.

The speaker explained the new principal contradiction pronounced by Xi at the 19th Party Congress. In Xi's view what China now faces is the "contradiction between unbalanced and inadequate development and the people's evergrowing needs for a better life". Dr. Avinash observed that the pronouncement of new principal contradiction will have a long-term implication in Chinese politics and it remains as one of the understudied issues.

Explaining the issues related to the inclusion of Xi Jinping's thoughts along with his name in the Constitution of the CPC, the speaker said it is a new development though he doesn't see it as an assertion of Xi's paramount status in the Chinese politics. He argued that the inclusion of Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) would add more legitimacy to the program. However, he mentioned the Chinese scholarly response towards the BRI and the government's uncompromising attitude towards those who critically approaching the initiative.

Analyzing a recent news from China that the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI) will be responsible for maintaining discipline in the party and safeguarding Xi Jinping's status as a core leader, the speaker said that there is a possibility that Xi might be using the anti-corruption campaign to maximize his hold in the party. He observed a few studies indicating that if you are working in the province where Xi Jinping worked you are less likely to be punished for corruption. Another research says that you are less likely to be investigated/prosecuted/arrested with charges of corruption if you went to the universities with the politburo standing committee members, the speaker added. He noted that Xi Jinping's status as a core leader is not a moment of strength, rather it is a rallying cry for inviting people's support.

The speaker concluded by analyzing economic and security outcomes of 19th Party Congress. Stressing on his initial argument that Xi's policies are nothing but a continuation of what his predecessors had started, he said that the economic reform initiatives of Xi Jinping were largely a continuation of an already existing program. He brought audience's attention to Hu Jintao's idea of 'scientific development' to assert his view.

About the Speaker

Dr. Avinash Godbole is Assistant Professor at Jindal School of Liberal Arts and Humanities, O. P. Jindal Global University since February 2018. Earlier he was Research Fellow at the Indian Council of World Affairs from and before that, Research Assistant at IDSA. He was a Visiting Fox Fellow at the Macmillan Center at Yale in 2007-08. His research interests are in the fields of Chinese Foreign Policy, Environmental Changes in China, Minorities in China, Domestic Politics in China, China's Asia strategy and India-China Relations.

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