

Pawan Kalyan's Political Journey : An Incoherent and Uncertain Path

- *S Swaroop Sirapangi*, Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, University of Hyderabad.

Abstract :

Pawan Kalyan is a popular film actor in Tollywood. His political innings started on behalf of his brother Chiranjeevi's launched Praja Rajyam Party (PRP). After the PRP became a political flop, Pawan began his party, Jana Sena (JS). The present article focuses on Pawan's political role as the prime leader of JS. At last concludes by observing how and why, so-far, Pawan failed to raise the JS flag above his image. The duration of Pawan's major political life covered in this article roughly covers upto November 2019, i.e., upto before ending JS alliance with the CPI, CPI (Marxist) and BSP.

Key Words : Jena Sena, Pawan Kalyan, Kapu, Coastal Andhra, Tollywood.

Pawan Kalyan (Pawan) is a famous film star in Tollywood. Tollywood refers to the Telugu film sector. Pawan's film entry was seen as a succession to his brother Chiranjeevi. Since Chiranjeevi's withstand in Tollywood, *Kapus* owned him massively. Moreover, Chiranjeevi's success increased *Kapus* further hold in Tollywood. Chiranjeevi and Pawan are regarded as representatives of the *Kapu's* pride in Tollywood. (Srinivas S. V., 2009) (Totten) Since the year 2008 onwards, Pawan has been in the electoral realm. First, Pawan started his political innings on behalf of Chiranjeevi's launched Praja Rajyam Party (PRP). However, the PRP became a political flop during the 2009 elections, as it failed to capture the exclusively targeted Chief Minister's (CM) position. As a

last resort, Chiranjeevi merged the PRP with the Indian National Congress (INC). After the PRP's 2009 electoral debacle, Pawan kept silent and maintained a visible distance from PRP activities. (Elliott, 2012) (KC Suri, 2009)

The united AP, which existed during 1956-2014, was bifurcated to form a separate Telangana State (TS). After the PRP merged with the INC, the INC political prospectus in the Coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema regions almost diminished with the emergence of the *Yuvajana Sramika Rythu* Congress Party (YSRCP) and the formation of separate TS. Thus, Pawan launched the Jana Sena (JS) at a conjuncture when the united AP was bifurcated, TS was formed, PRP failed and merged with the INC, YSRCP became a dominant player, and finally, after the INC political prospectus got diminished. However, Pawan's political inability was visible when he failed to articulate his response towards the PRP merge with the INC. In March 2014, all of a sudden, Pawan launched his political party, JS. Pawan's political life under the JS should be seen as the second innings after the PRP's failure. Since then, Pawan's political shifts were manifold as the prime leader of JS. However, Telugu electronic media particularly highlighted Pawan and his JS could be able to achieve substantially. On the JS launch occasion, Pawan even released the 'ISM' book declaring it as the maiden ideological version of the JS. However, the 'ISM' book received tremendous negative reviews from some intellectual sections.

(Srinivas S. , 2014a) (Srinivas S. , 2014b)
(TNN, 2017) (Bureau, 2014)

During 2014 elections to the Andhra Pradesh (AP) Legislative Assembly (LA), TS LA and Lok Sabha (LS) constituencies, Pawan extended JS unconditional support to the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) alliance. However, the JS did not contest in the elections. The JS emerged suddenly to extend exclusive support in the 2014 elections to the TDP and BJP alliance. Finally, the 2014 election to the APLA resulted in ensuring victory to the JS backed TDP and BJP alliance. Thus, it was understood and analysed that Pawan's JS played a crucial role in AP's TDP victory prospectus.

Interestingly, the BJP also formed the national government under the Prime Minister-ship of Narendra Modi, who headed the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) coalition government. (Gupta, 2014) As a result of the 2014 electoral victory to the JS, TDP and BJP alliance, Nara Chandrababu Naidu (Naidu) became AP CM. Naidu primarily represented the TDP. Even without any organisational structure, Pawan extended the JS support to the TDP and BJP alliance. Pawan's JS support base was understood to be emanating from the *Kapu* caste and his film fans.

Some sections observed that all fans of Pawan were not extending support to his JS. However, some fans developed much hope for Pawan and his JS possible optimistic political prospectus. Further, for some, at some level, there is a specific inter-sectional match between Pawan fans and Kapus shown favouritism to Pawan's political activism. Thus, a specific

section of Kapus also happens to be Pawan fans, according to such observation. Pawan's fan base is spread across many domains of society and life walks, like well-educated professionals, teenagers, co-Tollywood colleagues, etc. His fans in abroad even invited him to one of the world's most prestigious universities, Harvard, to address the gatherings. However, in regular day to day political life and activity, Pawan's enthusiastic teenage fan base is visible, lacking a strong political orientation on how to build the JS, as prominently observed by political scientist, Haragopal. (AP24X7, 2019) (Telugu Popular TV, 2019)

So far, Pawan failed to project his direct successful politician role. The politician style refers to the conventional way of conducting activities and engaging with the masses daily. This kind of nature was absent from Pawan's part. However, the Telugu media projected him as a sensational political hero. In a way, Pawan's political projection should be understood from the Tollywood celebrity background, but not directly concerning his political life. Lead celebrity film actors' media projection was extended to the politician turned Pawan. There should be a considerable variation in media projection over film celebrity personality status and politician role. In the case of Pawan, celebrity style media projection was continuously given to the politician turned Pawan. Thus, a fundamental flaw was committed manipulating mass opinion.¹ (Chomsky, 1994)

There was also a kind of critique made by the APLA opposition, YSRCP, that unnecessary media hype was given to Pawan's irregular public appearances; due to the JS and TDP tie-up. Pawan's intermittent public appearances

were compared to interval sessions in movies. As a result, Pawan acquired opposition's hurled notorious critique that interval haul was more in his political life; since he (re)appears in public almost after a lapse of six months duration or so. Thus, from one public appearance to another appearance, Pawan's interval was more. Moreover, the YSRCP branded Pawan as playing a B-team role for the TDP.² The YSRCP and a few political commentators believed that Pawan's support to the TDP in the 2014 election made a specific support base shift to the JS, TDP and BJP alliance; without diverting to the YSRCP. Moreover, the tilted support base was, by and large, understood as individual *Kapu* sections favouritism towards Pawan's led JS. If Pawan's JS was not launched and background political activity was not done, it was expected that the YSRCP could have won the 2014 election, and TDP might have lost badly. Moreover, individual sections propagated and believed that Pawan is acting as a convenient opposition leader to benefit the TDP; mostly, this dimension was massively propagated by the YSRCP. To substantiate such a version, the YSRCP leaders and pro media used to establish some susceptible evidence.

Even before the 2014 AP LA election, in previously conducted by-elections to the AP LA, TDP performed poorly. Then, it was understood that the YSRCP grabbed substantive *Kapu* vote bank and performed well. (DNA India, 2012) As a result, it was publicly suspected that Naidu engaged in background mode with Pawan and turned political prospectus towards the TDP by mobilising the *Kapu* vote bank silently during the 2014

election. The public belief was that the JS was launched after due negotiations with the TDP and BJP, in background mode. Thus, a political conspiracy dimension was suspected and believed by some sections of the society and media professionals behind the JS launch in a sudden manner. As AP was bifurcated and separate TS was formed, propaganda was unleashed during the 2014 election that Naidu was the only experienced administrator to lead residual AP towards a high-level development path; by claiming that Hyderabad under Naidu's regime had seen global significance. As a result of such a campaign and the background role of Pawan's JS and other factors, it was understood that the TDP was able to form the next government by securing an additional 0.3% vote share than the YSRCP. (Jha, 2019)

Though it was believed that a significant section of the *Kapu*'s rallied behind the PRP, ultimately, the PRP failed to operate as a full-fledged political entity with long-term vision and operational dynamics. The PRP's failure also haunted the *Kapu* and other sections. As a result, significant *Kapu* masses and other sections could not believe the JS venture to the fullest extent - since the JS was seen as an extended offshoot of the PRP in another reincarnated mode. That is one of the prime reasons behind the JS failure, as of now, in addition to other factors. Overall, though Pawan has had certain political leverage to show, primarily from his enthusiastic fan base, in reality, he failed to use his fan base positively by concretely setting specific agenda to achieve and expand the support base further. Rather, Pawan's prime existed fan base enthusiasm turned out to be an ultimate hindrance to

succeed him, politically, at some level. Pawan's fan base at some level created much trouble to his opponent sections, even at the individual level to persons like film critic Kathi Mahesh and actress Sri Reddy, to mention a few instances. However, Pawan kept on silent without advising proper political etiquette on how to conduct to his fans. In this respect, mutual failure can be observed on the part of the fan base and Pawan. However, since Pawan turned out to be a leader, he was blamed for his failure to use positively his fan base.

There is a wide gap in media hype, fans enthusiasm and the JS electoral prospectus. A primary understanding of Pawan's political role depicts his incoherence. Pawan's incoherence reflected on many occasions. To mention a few, while touring the Rayalaseema region, Pawan praised the region as close to his heart. Furthermore, Pawan declared that he would contest from the Rayalaseema region to the AP LA; but he failed to abide. In the same manner, while touring the North Coastal Andhra region, Pawan completely critiqued the Rayalaseema people as rowdies; and said that he would protect the North Coastal Andhra people's interests from the Rayalaseema region politician's exploitation. In AP, both the North Coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema regions are recognised as backward.

Regularly Pawan was invisible to the media, party men and women and the public. His party had no visible leadership, organisational structure and official spokesperson also for long. Even if a few were visible now and then, they failed to sail with him for long. All those who ended association with Pawan declared their dissatisfaction over his unsuitable political

life. Though the JS social media team, fans and *Kapu* sections unleashed tremendous trolling against such comments - society, by and large, believed the comments as genuine. Significant people who left Pawan and expressed dissatisfaction includes, but not limited to, Raja Ravi Tej and Sridhar Addepalli. (iDream News, 2019) (iDream News, 2020) The JS remained a mere letter-head party and never declared clear stands on vital issues of public concern. After the 2014 election, Pawan self-projected as a source to negotiate with the TDP and BJP about people's grievances. However, Pawan failed to realise people's aspirations. For instance, Pawan's incoherent stand during the 'special category status' movement for AP was one such occasion. His disappearance from regular public life was another instance that resulted in a lack of access to the general public. (Gaddam, 2018)

Pawan's ideological appearance aimed at declaring support to almost every party. He was known for ideologically left-leaning for his repeatedly declared admiration to Che Guevara, a revolutionary Marxist. However, he advocated during the 2014 elections the Prime Minister-ship of BJP's Narendra Modi (Modi) from Backward Classes (BC) category. Pawan's approach towards the BJP and Modi ideologically contradicts his first declared left-leaning to right shift. Pawan even-sided and extended support to the ideologically centrist TDP too. Pawan saw a vision in Naidu, who can effectively lead the residual AP as CM during the 2014 elections. However, from 2017-2018 onwards, Pawan started to oppose Naidu's TDP as the most corrupt. Pawan was also incoherent to the Telangana movement.

Though Pawan wished for the TS formation while touring in the North Coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema regions, he expressed a contrary opinion that residual AP lost substantially due to the TS formation. Thus, Pawan changed statements depending upon the visited regions.

Pawan did not engage with two mainstream parties, i.e., the INC and YSRCP. Pawan has been expressing opposition to these two parties. Between the INC and YSRCP, the former is almost routed in AP after the 2014 elections to the AP LA and LS constituencies. As a result, Pawan's future actions have to testify whether he will engage with the INC and YSRCP or not? From Pawan's long-standing opposition to the INC and YSRCP so far, certain sections expressed doubts; is he expressing opposition to Reddy's political prospectus in AP? Furthermore, doubts were expressed - is Pawan aspiring to replace Reddy's role in AP politics with Kapus and his JS? Towards this end, suspicion also grew that both the TDP and JS came together with this undeclared intention only.

Even before contesting and winning elections, the JS had acquired notoriety for entering into pre-poll alliances with political parties like the; TDP, BJP, Communist Party of India (CPI), CPI (Marxist) and Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP). Advanced pre-poll alliances made clear that the JS leadership was not confident of winning elections on its own. For the 2014 elections to the AP LA, TS LA and LS constituencies, the JS extended unconditional support to the TDP-BJP alliance. Later, Pawan broke that alliance in a phased manner. For the 2019 elections to the AP LA and LS constituencies, the JS ventured into a pre-poll alliance

with the CPI, CPI (Marxist) and BSP. However, the YSRCP and a few commentators observed that the JS had an undisclosed understanding with the TDP. As proof, a few pieces of evidence were offered where the JS and TDP failed to contest directly. (Jonathan, 2019)

Another dimension observed post-2019 election analysis; that the previous 2014-2018 TDP and JS (electoral) alliance break-up during the year 2019 election has caused specific damage to the TDP's electoral prospects in some segments, as the JS contested in alliance with other parties. Thus, the JS, CPI, CPI (Marxist), and BSP electoral alliance failed to spoil the electoral prospectus of the YSRCP much; but it was analytically expected that the alliance caused certain damage to the TDP's electoral performance. (Hareesh, 2019) At times, Pawan also accused the TDP of breaking an electoral tie with the JS, though he favoured the TDP during the 2014 election, and TDP benefitted prospectively by forming the AP government. However, Pawan's re-declared favouritism to the TDP surprised many; how, after accusing the TDP government as corrupt, he wishes to realign with the TDP for grabbing prospective electoral victory? Thus, a fundamental political flaw was observed on Pawan's part. Such an observed flaw also made the political commentators observe that Pawan lacked shrewd political dynamics to deploy options in the pragmatic political game.

During the 2019 election – the JS, CPI, CPI (Marxist) and BSP alliance won only one MLA on the floor of AP LA. This one MLA interestingly belonged to the Scheduled Castes (SC) *Mala* community and got elected from

SC reserved constituency in the East Godavari district of Coastal Andhra. Moreover, this one MLA won on behalf of the JS offered B-Form. Thus, though it was understood and expected by some sections that the JS would benefit more to the *Kapus*, under the *Kapus* leadership, in reality, a SC *Mala* section MLA own. That is the prospective dynamism of the pragmatic electoral democracy, which one can observe from this instance due to the prevalence of the 'first past the post electoral system'.

Interestingly, that MLA showed much inclination to join the YSRCP, though the YSRCP did not accept him into its fold, openly so far. This was also a kind of blow to Pawan's leadership. At another level, though Pawan contested for two AP LA consistencies, he lost badly. Overall, the JS, CPI, CPI (Marxist) and BSP secured – 5.53, 0.11, 0.32, 0.28 percentages of votes share, respectively, during the 2019 election. On the other hand, the TDP and YSRCP have secured 39.17 and 49.95 percentage, respectively, during the 2019 election.

Conclusion :

After political entry, Pawan failed to demonstrate minimum political acumen. The public observed Pawan's unsuitability to politics. Though vernacular Telugu media highlighted Pawan as visionary and fans also expected on the same line, in reality, his political prospectus declined, at least as of now, in bleak. How Pawan may rise to the next level of political prominence should be observed on how he

would play his effective political role according to the unfolding political situations sprang up. Without understanding the reality of life against rosy film life, Pawan ventured into politics and automatically aspired to enjoy the same film celebrity status. This was a significant drawback on Pawan's part. In addition to these factors, Pawan even failed to build a minimum credible organisational structure and base for the JS. His prime target was to occupy the AP CM position directly but failed to maintain minimum political basics and acumen tactics to build the JS base. Pawan appeared to have believed his persona was taller than the JS flag and expected to become AP CM directly, without doing the required activism to ascend the same position. Moreover, Pawan seems to have believed that showing mere individual opposition to certain leaders like against YSRCP's Jagan and TDP's Naidu might present him an automatic political edge. However, mere critique against political opponents is entirely different from building a strong party structure and base through proper constructive political activism and highlighted party agenda. Pawan failed to prove his political calibre in this dimension so far.

Acknowledgements :

The author had received peer review contribution from Dr Nageswara Rao A, Dr Ganesh Digal, Dr Ravi Sankar K, Rajashekaram M, VVS Narayana Muppidi, and Manikanta P. However, the author is solely responsible for the full-length contents of the paper.

Works Cited :

- ◆ AP24X7. (2019, December 08). Retrieved December 10, 2019, from www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL_rD0ehtkIKiAyVBp_rP2linxJ17bVI4C
- ◆ Bureau, O. (2014, April 03). Entertainment. Retrieved September 14, 2015, from <https://www.thehansindia.com/>: <https://www.thehansindia.com/posts/index/Cinema/2014-04-03/RGV-pans-Pawan-ISM/90833?infinitescroll=1>
- ◆ Chomsky, E. S. (1994). *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of Mass Media*. London: Vintage.
- ◆ DNA India. (2012, June 15). Retrieved July 06, 2020, from DNA India: <https://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-ysr-congress-sweeps-ap-by-polls-wins-15-assembly-seats-1-ls-seat-1702524>
- ◆ Elliott, C. (2012). *Political Society, Civil Society, and the State in India: An Ethnographic Narrative of the 2009 Assembly Election in Andhra Pradesh*. *Asian Survey*, 348-372. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1525/as.2012.52.2.348>
- ◆ Gaddam, S. K. (2018, August 04). Engage. Retrieved August 05, 2018, from *Economic and Political Weekly*: <https://www.epw.in/engage/article/pawan-kalyan-inconsistent-political-agenda-might-make-janasena-party-come-undone>
- ◆ Gupta, P. (2014). *2014 Lok Sabha Elections in Andhra Pradesh: A Tale of Two States*. *Research Journal Social Sciences*, 22(2), 234-247. Retrieved December 03, 2020, from https://www.lokniti.org/media/upload_files/PU-%20Andhra-Pradesh.pdf
- ◆ Hareesh, P. (2019, May 25). Vijayawada. Retrieved May 26, 2019, from *The New Indian Express*: <https://www.newindianexpress.com/cities/vijayawada/2019/may/25/jana-sena-dents-tdps-victory-prospects-in-40-andhra-constituencies-1981503.html>
- ◆ iDream News. (2019, December 22). Retrieved December 22, 2019, from [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ttO82Nh39E0): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ttO82Nh39E0>
- ◆ iDream News. (2020, January 20). Retrieved January 21, 2020, from [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uoggydydfko): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uoggydydfko>
- ◆ Jha, N. (2019, April 09). *Elections 2019*. Retrieved April 10, 2019, from <https://www.timesnownews.com/>: <https://www.timesnownews.com/elections/article/ap-elections-result-2014-all-you-need-know-about-andhra-pradesh-lok-sabha-and-assembly-polls/397280>
- ◆ Jonathan, P. S. (2019, March 22). Vijayawada. Retrieved March 22, 2019, from www.thehindu.com: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Vijayawada/jsps-choice-of-candidates-in-some-segments-raises-eyebrows/article26601790.ece>
- ◆ KC Suri, P. N. (2009). *Andhra Pradesh: A Vote for Status Quo?* *Economic and Political Weekly*, 108-113. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25663607?seq=1>
- ◆ Srinivas, S. (2014a, March 26). *Academia*. Retrieved July 15, 2020, from www.academia.edu: https://www.academia.edu/6746300/Poll_Stars

- ◆ Srinivas, S. (2014b, May 02). Politics. Retrieved June 15, 2020, from <https://caravanmagazine.in/>: <https://caravanmagazine.in/vantage/power-star-pawan-kalyan>
- ◆ Srinivas, S. V. (2009). Megastar: Chiranjeevi and Telugu Cinema after NTR. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- ◆ Telugu Popular TV. (2019, January 04). Retrieved January 08, 2019, from www.youtube.com: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KZIV0Sv4G_g&list=PL_rD0ehtkIKiAyVBp_rP2linxJ17bVl4C&index=109
- ◆ TNN. (2017, January 15). E Times Entertainment Times. Retrieved June 17, 2020, from <https://m.timesofindia.com/>: https://m.timesofindia.com/entertainment/telugu/movies/news/Ram-Gopal-Varma-writes-an-open-letter-to-Pawan-Kalyan/amp_articleshow/33291258.cms
- ◆ Totten, P. (n.d.). Cast and Caste: Kapu Actors and the Telugu Star System. doi:10.13140/RG.2.2.12646.88641

