

AFTERMATH OF FIRST PHASE OF ELECTION

The electoral process has suddenly ground to a halt after its first phase following the ghastly assassination of the former Prime Minister and the Congress(I) President, Rajiv Gandhi. Now is the scene with the Congress(I) promptly setting about to cash in on this violent twist and the other bourgeois parties pandering to other sentiments to woo the electorate and the social democrats keeping the option open to extricate maximum of parliamentary benefits at these polls.

The electioneering has turned into an almost savage scramble for power among the parliamentary parties. In this race scruples, values, norms and ethics have all been thrown off, the aim is to grab power anyhow, by any means, going to any length whatsoever. Everyday people are dying in poll clashes engineered by these parties. Candidates are being gunned down. Armed gangs have been led even by a Chief Minister and a Union Cabinet minister to capture polling booths. Besides money and media, mafia power is ruling the electioneering and above everything, communal-casteist-parochial-divisive sentiments are being raked up and exploited by these parties with criminal calculations as never before. The people have truly no place in this electoral game except that they are to be exploited like pawns and in the rhetorics everything has to be sworn in their name.

Even so, none of these parties or combinations, it seems, could assure an absolute majority for itself, at least till the first phase. Even the Congress(I) could not, and the apprehension of another spell of a hung Parliament, no doubt, bred a sense of uncertainty among the people. In this background of a no-holds-bar power struggle yet marked by uncertainty, the first phase of the polls passed off, then the ghastly assassination, and now the final phases are in the offing in changed circumstances.

This poll picture quite naturally is the culmination of the prevailing situation in the country. A situation in which, over the last four decades, the hard-won democratic rights, norms and values have been

systematically trampled on although behind the facade of the parliamentary democracy. Lest resentment and grievances of the masses went against the ruling class, cultural depravity has been unleashed to wreck their moral and the forces of communalism, casteism, parochialism and separatism have been fostered, fomented, abetted and instigated to disrupt the people's unity, to arm the state with draconian repressive powers and not the least, to create vote banks for contending parliamentary parties. Majority communalism—although communalism practised by any community majority or minority, is a dangerous virus to be fought out by all means—has been posing now a menacing danger being championed and spearheaded by the brand of Hindu religious revivalism of the BJP.

Punjab, Assam and Kashmir are the fruits of these politics. Not only fruits, they have been nursed wilfully and are now being used as sticks to beat the people and widen the cleavage among them. Fires of communal-casteist-parochial-separatist violence have engulfed the country and the people are being incited into fratricidal bloodbaths. The greed for power of individual political leaders to satiate their petty parliamentary personal interest has aggravated these problems further.

There is, of course, lip service to secularism, values and value-based politics, but there is no real effort to solve these problems politically. The ruling class, in its own interest, is sustaining them. And the criminalisation of politics on the one hand and the politics of individual assassination coupled with state terrorism on the other, have worsened the situation as never before. Had the people's interest ever counted with the parties in power, they would have long back taken precautionary and preventive measures against these divisive forces and phenomena, but these have been allowed to grow unabatedly. Flowing from the mesh of the crisis and its attendant phenomena, the situation has reached such a stage when any violent incident, or the meanest of things, may happen anytime now.

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Comrade Nihar Mukherjee condemns dastardly murder of Rajiv Gandhi

Condemning the dastardly attack and assassination of Sri Rajiv Gandhi, Comrade Nihar Mukherjee, General Secretary, SUCI, has issued the following statement to the press :

"No word is strong enough to condemn the heinous attack on and murder of Sri Rajiv Gandhi.

Once again it is proved that in our country criminalisation of politics has surpassed all limits.

We demand that this criminal act must be thoroughly unearthed and made public and the culprits should be given exemplary punishment."

Namboodiripad's latest appeal unmasks tacit deal between CPI(M) & Cong(I) —Comrade Mukherjee

Comrade Nihar Mukherjee, General Secretary, SUCI has, in course of a statement, said : E. M. S. Namboodiripad's latest appeal to the newly elected President of the Congress (I), P. V. Narasimha Rao to review its stand on Left parties once again proves to the hilt our party's analysis since long that the apparent hostile relations between the Congress (I) and the CPI(M) has not been of a real one but rather a manifestation of a mock fight to serve their petty parliamentary interest by hoodwinking the common people.

The CPI(M), in fact, has come to a tacit understanding—whatever the protestations—with the Congress(I) in its bid to retain power in the states in return of which the CPI(M) would help whole-hog to bring the Congress(I) at the Centre.

(Excerpts from the dailies and periodicals depicting different aspects of poll)

The first round a deadly prelude

"... Nearly a hundred people died and scores were wounded, and it was not clear whether this was an election or a battle. Large scale violence in 204 Lok Sabha constituencies resulted in the countermanding of elections in five Lok Sabha and 15 Assembly Constituencies. If anything violence appears to have been the keynote of the first phase of elections...."

"... Besides the 15 Assembly seats where polling was countermanded, the Election Commission ordered repoll in 1000 booths across the country....."

"... There was undoubtedly rigging, intimidation, booth capturing. Some of the areas where it happened had already been determined to be "sensitive" by the Election Commission. But the Central Observers who submitted their reports to the EC indicated the magnitude of the task that confronts those who seek to ensure 'free and fair' elections. You can reel off statistics of force deployment, and so on, but that cannot overcome the reality of ineptness, partisan behaviour, sheer lassitude and apathy which many of those charged with conducting elections have at the best of times."

"...The most alarming development was in U.P. which accounted for over 30 polling day deaths though just half of the state's 85 constituencies had gone to the polls. Through the campaign leading up to the elections there was fragile peace across the region. However, as polling day approached, there was communal violence in Kanpur, Meerut and Varansi. Some observers pinned the blame on the Bharatiya Janata Party which they said resorted to violence since it was unable to

coerce the minorities against casting their votes".

"...There is another alarming feature visible in the depredations of some gangsters in Ghaziabad—they were armed with AK 47 automatic rifles." (Frontline, June, 8-21, 1991)

Choice of candidates : pointer to criminalisation of politics

The righthand accomplice of Mulayam Singh Yadav in 1989 Thakur Tahshildar Singh, a deadly criminal, pitted against Mulayam Singh Yadav in Jasawantnagar as reported in the Ananda Bazar Patrika on 21. 5. 91.

"What have politics and politicians come to when Moradabad's senior Superintendent of police, Mr. Arun Kumar Gupta, can publicly announce that he is examining the alleged criminal records of all 326 candidates in the electoral fray? According to him the Shiv Sena candidate, Mr. Mango Tyagi, from Sambhal Assembly Constituency has already been detained under the Gangster Act, together with about a hundred others.... In fact, reading the ever vigilant policeman's detailed report of checkposts, seized weapons, security personnel, protective zones etc., one would imagine Moradabad is preparing for a long drawn out seize instead of the democratic exercise."

(Statesman, 15. 5. 91)

"The Congress(I)'s reported decision to field Mr Sajjan Kumar and Mr Dharam Dass Shastri for the ensuing Lok Sabha elections is yet another reminder of how short public memory is. For these two Congressmen, as well as Mr H. K. L. Bhagat and Mr Jagadish Tytler, were accused of leading and instigating murderous mobs in and around Delhi after Mrs. Gandhi's assassination, triggering off the anti Sikh riots which are be-

lived to have left about 3,500 men, women and children dead..."

(ibid, 21. 4. 91)

"... Some reports suggest that the Congress(I) is planning to field co-operative mafia dons as well as one of the prime accused in the Bhagalpur blinding case in the coming elections..."

(ibid, 24. 4. 91)

Bullets and ballots the deciding factors

"... In fact, senior administration and police officials, not wanting to be blamed for poll related bloodshed, have already warned that bullets, and not ballots, will decide the outcome in large areas of north and central Bihar.."

(Statesman 24. 4. 91)

'Booth capturing has become the norm in Bihar, so much so that even Mr. Lallu Prasad Yadav freely admits that caste groups would indulge in bulk stamping of ballot papers in their respective areas of influence.... Mr. Yadav observed that in an area where Yadavs were the dominant caste, they would indulge in bulk stamping of ballot papers in booths and so would people belonging to other caste groups like Rajputs, Bhumihars and Brahmins, in their areas of influence... On the winning prospects of Janata Dal in Bihar the Chief Minister says, 'I am more than sure that we will win all seats'..... 'Dekhiye yehan par mera fatwa chalenga' (Look here in Bihar it will be my decree that would run)".

(Statesman, 29. 4. 91)

Patna, April 18, Come election time and Bihar's numerous illegal gun factories start proliferating many of them working overtime to meet of the increasing demand for firearms, reports PTI.

The State, which has earned the notoriety for largescale poll linked

violence has, according to police estimates nearly 1000 clandestine gun factories. Surprisingly, 50 per cent of them are concentrated in Nalanda district, which has been described as the paradise of gun runners".

(Ibid, 19. 4. 91)

'Bihar gangs smuggling in AK 47s' (Ibid)

Rigging & widespread violence apprehended

640 coys of forces to be deployed

300 Constituencies sensitive

New Delhi, April 26, The Centre has drawn up a list of 70 to 80 Lok Sabha constituencies as being hyper sensitive and prone to communal and inter party violence where the security forces will have to maintain utmost vigil during the ensuing elections.

These form part of nearly 300 Lok Sabha constituencies which have been categorised as 'sensitive' after detailed discussions with the director general of police, chief secretaries and home secretaries of the states during the last month'. (The Times of India 27.4.91)

The Chief Election Commissioner, Mr. T. N. Seshan, today said six states, including West Bengal, were 'causing preliminary concern' on the prospects of holding free and fair elections and the commission would send senior officials for close monitoring

(The Telegraph, 30. 4. 91)

Calcutta, May 7: On the eve of ensuing polls about 21,000 polling booths out of 50,000 in West Bengal has been categorised as 'sensitive', says the State D. G. Mr Aroon Prosad Mukherjee."

"3 Member team of Government of India sent a report to the President Mr. R. Venkataraman to the effect that the law and order situation in many places in West

Bengal was far from satisfactory. The team composed of Union Home Secretary Mr. R. K. Bhargava, Officer On Special Duty in Cabinet Sectt. Mr S. L. Kapur and the head of the UB Wing Mr Narayanan."

(Bartaman, a Bengali daily, 7. 5. 91)

"The Chief Election Commissioner, Mr T. N. Seshan, today warned political parties and candidates indulging in election propaganda based on religion, caste, creed and language. He said they could be prosecuted and disqualified for six years."

(Statesman, 2. 4. 91)

Election norms observed more in violence

"Apart from promising to build the Ram temple at the disputed site in Ayodhya—which after all, is the BJP's main election plank—the absence of the word, secularism, in its manifesto is a further pointer to the direction in which it hopes to take the country. The chauvinistic overtones of its latest slogan of 'swadesh and swadharma' shows that... even commitments to 'integral humanism' and 'positive secularism' let alone 'Gandhian socialism', are now very much things of the past... Now it will be the heady mixture of nationalism and religion, obviously of the majority community that will be the party's driving force....but that is most disturbing is the party's clear....threat to dispense with Article 30, which is perhaps the nodal point of a modern, culturally vibrant society, since it ensures the right of the minorities to set up their own educational institutions." (Statesman 3.5.91)

Fall out

Although the recent eruptions of communal

this 'Largest Democracy'

violence in Orissa and Uttar Pradesh were mercifully brought under control...the outbreak is undoubtedly the first sign of what might recur as the election campaign gathers momentum...First reports have blamed the BJP and VHP for igniting the spark by taking a procession through a sensitive area and shouting provocative slogans. As a result, it was not only Sharanpur which was affected; the trouble spread to Hardoi, Etah and Mau as well, giving rise to the fear that Uttar Pradesh might turn into a powder keg in the coming days.

Already, wide areas including Kanpur, Agra, Mathura, Aligarh, Meerut, Moradabad, Gonda and Faizabad have been declared 'hyper sensitive', apparently a new term which has been coined to describe the kind of communal tension fostered by the Ram Janmabhoomi campaign promoted by the BJP and the VHP. In Orissa, too, Mr Biju Patnaik has blamed the BJP for the riots in Bhadrak and nearby areas...

(Statesman, 4.4.91)

"The Fact that Mr V. P. Singh that apostle of secular rational politics, actually went to the Jamma Masjid to discuss the Janata Dal's list of candidates was only very weakly denied by a party spokesman. Meanwhile the Congress(I) was busy trying to cultivate the Shah Imam's son. Under the circumstances, it was not surprising to learn that the political secretary of a Western embassy in the capital also called on the Muslim prelate the other day for his election assessment. Will the BJP ever learn that if you can't beat them you should join them? But like the Congress (I) the BJP is, of course, green with envy at the Shahi Imam's call on the faithful to vote for the Janata Dal..."

(Ibid 8.5.91)

In Kumkum Writ

Viswa Hindu Parishad volunteers as well as the ladies of the BJP camp have hit on an effective way of winning over female voters in Andhra Pradesh's Rangareddy district, adjoining Hyderabad City. Small groups of women go from door to door with a bowl of kumkum (vermillion) and say to the lady of the house in the local Telugu dialect that the stuff is 'Sitamvari kumkum' especially brought from Ayodhya. Having anointed foreheads and hair partings, they take leave of potential recruits with a resounding cry of 'Jai Sri Rm'.... Being the canny operators that they are, not once do these canvassers ask people to vote for the BJP's lotus; they are convinced that the kumkum conveys the message more effectively than words." (Ibid, 10.1.91)

Role of Money Money Talks

"With all this talk of a hung parliament industrialists and businessmen are in a quandary about whom to support. The Congress(I), of course, had no dearth of funds, thanks to Mr Sharad Power, literally the darling of the money bags, with one possible exception at Maker Towers. The BJP, too, appears to have enough funds this time, though with the Jan Morcha group deserting him, Mr V P Singh may feel the pinch. Actually, most businessmen have been playing safe by backing all the parties."

(Statesman, 29.4.91)

Big firms forced to fund CPI(M)

"In its drive to raise funds for the elections, the CPI(M) has started to 'export money' from big companies and Govt. undertaking. On Thursday officers of some of the

city's big engineering concerns like Burn Standard, Jessop, Braithwaite, Texmaco, Titaghur Steel and Westinghouse Saxby Farmer who had gone to collect payments from the Fairlie Place office of Eastern Railway's Financial Adviser and Chief Accounts Officer for supplying wagons and other rolling stock to the Railway Board were forced to pay donations for the CPI(M)'s election fund.... When some of the officers of the Government Undertakings refused to pay saying there would be audit objections as there was no official sanction for such donations to political parties the clerk retorted, "Tor company-f baap debe" (The father of your company would give—Ed P Era) "The officers were told that giving donations of Rs. 200 to the CPIM party fund was peanuts compared to the payments they were receiving one of which was nearly 1.90 crores." (Ibid, 4-5.91)

"Nevertheless it is a fair conjecture that the largest business—who have more at stake naturally—are playing it safe by making contributions to all major contenders, viz. national parties like the Congress(I), JD (S), BJP as well as important regional parties like the AIMDK and the CPIM." (Business World, April, 27-3 May)

Different aspects of rigging

"Out Damned Spot!"

"Our report (April 22-23) about 'silver liquid' which is used to give a glitter to artificial jewellery—and is also put to other less innocent uses—disappearing from the market in Machilipatnan in Andhra Pradesh resulted in the Election Commission coming down heavily on the industry. All the units engaged in

gold plating costume Jewellery were closed down till May 27 (at that time the day after the elections) rendering 50,000 workers idle. But the entire stock of silver liquid had vanished from the market by the time the closure order was issued early this month. Teen aged boys queuing at polling booths in Hyderabad on May 20 were seen carrying small bottles of the precious stuff. As soon as they emerged from the booth, they rubbed off the 'indelible' ink with a drop of silver liquid and joined the queue again and yet again, to vote a second and a third time..." (The Hindu, 22.5.91)

"While all eyes are fixed on Bihar which is regarded as the main centre of booth-capturing and other abuses, the same things go on quietly in the capital but carried out with much more sophistication. At booth number 209 in New Delhi constituency where Mr L K Advani is the BJP contender against the Congress (I)'s matinee idol, Mr Rajesh Khanna, a number of people impersonated others and voted. By 9.30 in the morning some 10 persons, all from a certain area, had to be turned back as their votes had already been cast..... Talking to a man behind him in the queue, he (a colleague who went to discharge his democratic duty) discovered that while the man's name figured on the rolls...his address was the same as our colleague's, who has lived in the building for the past 40 years and is absolutely certain he has never set eyes on this man who claims to have shifted to Delhi from Ghaziabad a year ago." (Statesman 21.5.91)

"The West Bengal Government Press Employees' Union in a letter... urged the Election Commissioner to see to it that the ballot papers for both the Lok Sabha and Assembly

elections of the State Govt. were printed at the State Govt. Press at Alipur; which is well equipped for the purpose. It alleged that a conspiracy was afoot by the ruling Front to shift the printing of the ballot papers of a number of constituencies to Saraswati Press, a Govt. undertaking and 'not a protected place'. It was alleged that ballot papers had been smuggled out of the Press during the last Lok Sabha Poll.

(Statesman 2.4.91)

Poll day violence and rigging

"48 killed on first day of polling"

"Army out in Meerut, 27 killed"

"Extensive booth-capturing in Patna, 13 killed in statewide clashes."

(The Telegraph, 21.5.91)

"The Election Commission has ordered a repoll in at least 842 polling booths spread over six states - Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, West Bengal and Haryana."

(The Hindu, 21.5.91)

"While Bihar and Uttar Pradesh lived up to the reputation of being the most lawless of States during Monday's voting, what undoubtedly came as something of a shock were reports of the direct and unabashed involvement of senior politicians like Mr Subodh Kant Sahay and Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav in capturing booths and threatening opponents. The Union Minister of State of Home must have set a record of sorts by being the first functionary, whose primary responsibility is to maintain law and order, to be seen going from booth to booth in his own constituency (Ranchi) with his usual complement of armed bodyguards but, apparently, to enable his supporters to indulge in false voting. In some places, Mr Sahay was said to have

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Rigging : Silent and Violent

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personally snatched ballot papers and torn them up in front of hapless officials..." (Statesman, 22.5.91)

"...Mr Mulayam Singh Yadav's foray into the election arena, accompanied by his armed companions, is a blatant attempt to intimidate and, if need be, eliminate opponents and their supporters and was just as reprehensible. It appears that during a shooting spree, the Congress-man who had the temerity to stand against the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh narrowly escaped being gunned down. That Mr Yadav put the fear of God into so formidable an adversary as the former dacoit and BJP candidate, Mr Tehsilidar Singh, who is himself no stranger to bloodshed, shows the extent to which the Chief Minister has succeeded in terrorizing the people of the area"

(Ibid, 25.5.91)

"...It is, in fact, a sad comment on the system that the process of law had to be content with the decision to countermand the election, and that no effort has been

made to launch a criminal prosecution against those—including Mr Mulayam Singh Yadav—who were personally present during the outrage and who reportedly seemed to direct the booth capturing operations that led to three persons being killed and more than 30 injured.

(Ibid 26.5.91)

"One person killed in a bomb attack in Jharia and as many as 40 booths were captured by BJP supporters today...."

"CPI(M) and BJP cadres threw bombs in Jharia, Bhaga, Bhalgora and Nirsar areas to terrorise the voters... A group of antisocials snatched away 50 ballot papers from the polling officer at Sidhgora school centre ..."

(Reporters from Dhanbad and Jamshedpur: The Telegraph, 21.5.91)

"Roving CPM cadres jam booths, assault voters"

"CPI(M) cadres today used bombs, firearms and daggers to terrorise voters and polling officials in parts of Calcutta North-east Lok Sabha constituency covering Assembly segments of Belgachia

(West). Entally, Sealdah, Vidayasagar, Burtolla and Manicktola.

Armed CPI(M) cadres resorted to violence and unleashed unprecedented terror to ensure large-scale rigging as a partisan police remained a mute spectator.

After a session of brisk polling....., in Calcutta Northeast, the CPI (M) began terrorising voters in areas like Beadon Street, Scottish Church College, Phulbagan, Beniapur, Cossipur, B. T. Road, College Street, Amherst Street and several other places.

In what seemed to be a pre-planned crackdown, CPI (M) led antisocials began throwing bombs and then moved inside the booths brandishing revolvers and arms to intimidate...polling agents. They forced the polling officials to allow random proxy voting. In all the places, the police remained inactive and even the Control Room at Lalbazar refused to divulge acknowledge the incident, saying, 'polling is more or less peaceful'.

(The Telegraph, 21.5.91)

"Day-long battle at Wellesley."

'Rafi Ahmed Kidwai Road and Haji Mohsin Square, in Central Calcutta, became a battleground between groups of antisocials armed with bombs daggers and revolvers (antisocials whose loyalty divided between the CPI-(M) and Cong. (I)—Ed. P. Era) and the police, supported by detachments of the BSF all through the day today'. (Ibid, 21.5.91)

Where minors were allowed to vote

"Polling was reduced to a farce in a booth in the Uluberia Lok Sabha and the Kalyanpur Assembly constituency area of Howrah district on Monday where votes were cast indiscriminately by people, including women and minors throwing to the winds all rules laid down by the Election Commission.

According to eye-witness accounts the Presiding officers and other polling officials were rendered ineffective owing to the absence of adequate security

arrangements. The booth was allotted a couple of Home Guards in spite of requests for armed police personnel'.

(Statesman, 21.5.91)

"Special Cell logs 1000 complaints"

"Calcutta, May 20 : The Independent Initiative of West Bengal (IIWB), a non-political citizens' body, today received more than 1000 complaints of electoral malpractices from various constituencies of Calcutta and its adjoining areas

An Independent Initiative spokesman told The Telegraph today that calls started pouring in well before 7 am and the complaints covered malpractices like intimidation of voters barricading people to prevent them from exercising their franchise, booth jamming, harassment of voters, over identification, sporadic incidents of violence; and false voting.

(The Telegraph 21.5.91)

Resist State Terrorism

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Because of this nature of the situation, it is not the people's verdict really which decides who will win at the polls and go to the governmental power. The top echelon of the industrial - bureaucratic - military complex which is the extra-constitutional seat of power acting from behind the screen pulls the string to decide everything in the country today. In view of the specific historical stage and the specific process which brought into being this invisible seat of power and its modus operandi, it cannot be ruled out that when necessity demands, this force can go to

any length to meet its class design. There is no heinous act it is incapable of doing or will stop short of doing. This force, having its base in powerful modern state structure, is fraught with the gravest danger for the people. Until and unless this invisible force is exposed, its predatory politics cannot be stopped. There has not been any thorough probes into the heinous political crimes committed in the country in the past several years, the truths have not been unearthed. No open trials have been held, or the real culprits apprehended and meted out exemplary punishment. Its design, therefore, requires to be exposed to the people and whoever may go to the governmental power,

if they claim to champion the cause of the people, have this task to perform.

The portent are very grave. All the well-meaning, democratic and freedom loving people should waste no time to step out now in order to resist and put an end to the criminalisation of politics, politics of individual assassination and state terrorism and along with it build up broadbased united democratic mass movements throughout the country on the burning problems in the people's life. No matter whoever wins at the polls and forms government, the task for the people is this, it remains this at this hour.

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