

NOTE

COMPULSORY VOTING

N Divakar writes :

The low percentage of voting across the country, especially in cities like Mumbai and Bangalore, has caused an uproar in the media and intellectual circles. There has been numerous debates in the media and the mainstream political parties are up against the voters for their callousness to come out and vote. All the acrobatics of the celebrities to woo the voters have failed much to the discomfiture of the political class and the civil society they represent.

While scores of analysts have critiqued on the developments and the effects of low voter turnout the fact remains that the man on the street, the *Aam Admi*, has felt betrayed by his political masters over the years and frustration has manifested itself in low voter turnout.

But strangely there are some voices from political and intellectual quarters for making voting compulsory, with a view to increase voter consciousness. This measure if ensured would tantamount to snatching the fundamental right of the sovereign citizen to exercise his will in electing the representatives. The Constitution of India has conferred its citizens the right to choose their representative under adult franchise system. This does not mean that the citizens are bound to exercise their right to vote. There are numerous instances of people boycotting the elections either voluntarily or by force and the constitution does not consider such boycotts, as ultra vires. The sovereign public have a right not to vote thereby registering their anger and frustration against their representatives and the government of the day.

Moreover making voting compulsory may, in a sense, make the state more offensive and stronger and the chances of coercion and threat of punishment would snatch the democratic rights from the citizens. Though legal experts are mum on this issue, political parties, particularly BJP are more enthusiastic to bring in such legislation.

Be that as it may, to confuse the voters more, BJP and its cohorts are making strong pleas to rid the electoral system of multiple parties. There are voices coming from different quarters for bringing two-party system, like USA. But the fact that in, US too there are multiple parties in the election fray, but in the presidential race only two dominant parties hold their sway. Money and power play major role in US elections with Pentagon and Corporates having their own say in pumping huge funds into the electoral arena. If India adopts two-party system, as argued by BJP and others, it would be a travesty of constitutional justice, as it may do away with most of the regional parties and smaller ones. And finally some voices are being heard to bring in a presidential form of government, *a la* USA, and make full term compulsory for any elected government. This would be nothing but jumping from pan into the fire.□□□