

NOTE

VOTE FOR MODERATION

Asghar Ali Engineer writes :

What is important to note this time is that per-centage of vote got by the Congress and that by BJP is much more decisive : ten percent. In 2004 it was mere 4 percent. It can be seen as a vote for stability for secular forces so that secular forces may get an opportunity to concentrate on development. However, it is difficult to say, as many analysts maintain that it is a decisive vote against regional parties. Both Congress and BJP together got 47% votes whereas regional parties together got 50 percent including the left parties.

There is one good lesson for all parties, regional or national. It does not pay to field candidates on the basis of caste, sub-caste and communities as all parties do. The voters have voted on the basis of secularism and development. Thus it is proved once again that identity politics has its own limitations though it may have some utility for the weaker sections of society and minorities. But it should never be a sole criteria.

Another important thing to be noted in the context of this election is that Muslims have come back to the Congress, especially in UP Muslims were angry with the Congress for long for its failure to protect Babri Masjid. Congress suffered in election after election since 1989 elections. The Muslims in UP voted for the Congress and it could get 21 seats which would not have been possible without Muslim support.

The BJP got great shock as Shri L K Advani was all prepared to assume the role of Prime Minister of India, a dream which now could never be fulfilled. The BJP leaders themselves have realized that extremism does not pay. Arun Jaitley, a BJP election strategist and spokesman, himself has admitted that voters have voted for moderation. He has described election results as triumph of moderation. He wrote, "There are important lessons, the political class can glean from the results. Sober government helps, shrillness does not. Moderation and understatements are virtues."

Apart from UP in other states too Muslims voted wisely to get secular candidates elected irrespective of the party. This clearly proves Muslim vote is not in any party's pocket. The Ulama council formed in Azamgarh district should also learn a lesson of the same kind. Religious extremism does not pay. They contested seats and used extremist rhetoric which only helped BJP win those seats. Thus it should be remembered extremism does not pay on either side.

It also should be noted that many so called Ulama become active at the time of election and are hired on behalf of many parties to appeal to Muslims on their behalf to vote. These parties must note that Muslim masses do not listen to these seasonal ulama and make their own decision. Politicians like Lalu Prasad should also learn that only secular rhetoric cannot always win Muslim votes.

Nitish Kumar of JD(U) could get Muslim votes though he was aligned with BJP because he not only prevented communal riots a la Lalu Prasad but also , worked for political representation and uplift of Muslims of Bihar and he also got rioters of Bhagalpur punished which Lalu Prasad had failed to do. Nitish could

also checkmate BJP extremism in Bihar. Thus mere secular rhetoric, like identity politics, has its limits.

Mayawati too has to learn a lesson or two. Initially she benefited by using dalit rhetoric but always aligned with BJP for coming to power. Then she went for what was called social engineering and aligned with higher castes in search for absolute power at the state level and subsequently at central level. But she never delivered in terms of development. She only spent public money to install dalit icons' statues and grand parks in their name. So Muslims of UP and a section of dalits shifted to Congress and she practically drew blank in other states. She was hoping to grab number of seats in other states too through her social engineering.

The left also has to seriously contemplate the causes of their failure. Firstly, Sachar Committee report showed they had hardly done anything for Muslims in West Bengal. Muslims in West Bengal had fallen behind even Gujarat Muslims. Secondly their mishandling of Nandigram and infighting in Kerala cost them dearly. In West Bengal they had undoubtedly achieved a great deal by way of land reforms but they could not have won eternally through it alone. Land acquisition in Nandigram accompanied by high handedness proved to be an Achilles heel. Poor and illiterate masses have displayed great wisdom in exercising their right to vote. Had voting right been left only to the educated identity politics would have been greatly strengthened and communal and casteist forces would have acquired upper hand. In fact it is educated people who try to benefit through identify politics. □□□