

## All About Poll

WHEN UTTAR PRADESH (UP) VOTES IT REVERBERATES throughout the country as the heartland of north India matters a lot to a number of stakeholders in Indian politics. The Gandhi dynasty continues to attach too much importance to the outcome of UP polls even when Congress Party sees no prospects of recovering its lost glory anytime soon. This time third generation Gandhis, including the crown prince Rahul Gandhi, were pressed into service to bail the beleaguered Congress out of the woods. But Gandhis cannot win what they have lost—credibility. Voters don't believe they could bring lasting peace and prosperity to the impoverished millions of UP. True, UP still means Bharat that lives in medieval age of caste and patriarchal rule, albeit India's most populous state has been continually sending prime ministers to New Delhi, barring a few interruptions as is the case with the present incumbent, since the days of Nehru.

At the time of writing all major political parties of UP—Congress, Bharatiya Janata Party, Samajwadi Party, Bahujan Samaj Party and Rashtriya Loktantrik Dal—were in the visible mood of jubilation after the 7th and final phase of assembly poll on March 3 as if all of them would be voted to power, hopefully to run a rainbow coalition in the event of a hung assembly the possibility of which looked bright as per exit polls projections. So they began horse-trading or donkey-trading as the late Charan Singh once dubbed it—even before the Election Commission called it a day in UP. As the counting began in the morning of March 6 the swing was clearly in favour of Mulayam Singh's Samajwadi Party. It doesn't matter whether Mulayam replaces Mayawati or Mayawati manages to cling to power by way of manipulation as people will remain powerless as before.

India's constitution and electoral law stipulate that any Indian over 18 years old has the right to vote and be elected regardless of caste, religion, gender, occupation, education, family background and wealth. But ground reality is something different as voters make choices in the context of the social relations they're enmeshed in, the options they have within those relations—which may not be of their own choosing. They confront those relations day in and day out for sheer survival, they are being forced to choose options they don't like, sometimes at the point of gun. Then money plays the tricks in every poll everywhere and it is now an open secret these days ; the limit of poll expenses coupled with observance of model code of conduct during electioneering as set by the Election Commission just mocks at what they call free and fair poll. All the five states—UP, Punjab, Uttarakhand, Manipur and Goa—that went to polls recently witnessed massive utilisation of money and muscle power to buy votes, ostensibly to strengthen the biggest democracy of the world. Then everything goes in the name of people, rather people's welfare. But they implement the most ruthless anti-people policies all the time, again in the name of people. And people become irrelevant immediately after poll.

In UP—and in north India in general—caste prejudice is so pervasive that all parties despite their commitment to secularism, social justice and gender equality, simply bank on obnoxious backward ideas to win elections—or lose them—while deliberately polarising people around

their respective communities, strictly following sectarian and divisive rules. They sell what sells most—caste-based quota and sub-quota or wheels within wheels. Though they know well it is next to impossible to create jobs for the unskilled in the changed economic environment where most activities are services-driven. All those fantasies of high growth and India becoming a superpower have vanished in the thin air. The ever declining growth-rate illustrates among other things that India can hardly grow in a vacuum, it is part of the world cycle of boom and bust.

The outlook for the global economy in 2012 is not encouraging even to the advocates of over-optimism. Asian economies are exposed to China. Latin America is exposed to lower commodity prices as both China and the advanced economies slow down. Central and Eastern Europe are exposed to Euro-zone. And turmoil in the Middle East is causing serious economic risks—both there and elsewhere—as geopolitical risk remains high and thus high oil prices will constrain global growth. Meanwhile, flaws in India's growth model are becoming obvious. Rising inequality is a burning issue in UP and elsewhere but what all they could think of is more of the same—demanding and promising quota and sub-quota reservation based on caste and backward criteria.

To blame it on the saffron brigade for communalising the polity by overly or covertly practising brahminical orthodoxy and minority-bashing is meaningless as in vote market all the self-styled secularists propagate reverse communalism to woo minority voters as it is the case with Mulayam Singh's Samajwadi Party. In truth this time the saffron club didn't try to exploit the Ayodhya issue. Instead they were busy to build their caste solidarity otherwise fractured due to Mayawati's machia-vellian measures. But the Sahi Iman of Delhi intervened in electioneering on behalf of Mulayam Singh's Samajwadi Party which is neither samajwadi (socialist) nor a mainstream party in true sense. Whether he could fool the minority community voters is a different matter but his reverse communalism speaks volumes about secular credentials of the so-called secular outfits.

The hard reality is that it is caste that ultimately decides the final configuration of rainbow culture in post-poll situation. Tragically enough, even the muslim community, not to speak of the Sikhs, is equally afflicted by caste hierarchy. In other words caste-lords in north India will continue to be viewed as living gods for the laymen who have nowhere else to go but their community for redressal of grievances.

Elections come, elections go. But voters, be it in UP or elsewhere, remain unaware of their rights enshrined in the constitution. Then elections are not held in accordance with all regulations and original purposes of the constitution—guaranteed universal adult-franchise. And no party is interested in realising real democracy and empowering ordinary people because that might be dangerous for the powers that be. □□□

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