



INDEPENDENT



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EDITORIAL : PSEUDO DEMOCRACY ?

(This issue is dedicated to Dr. S.C. Pandey)

Why do we need another supplement on Elections ? To give space to those beyond note bank and to lend voice to those who don't constitute a vote bank. It seeks to strike the Middle -centrist ground between political propaganda and populist rhetoric.

Basically, it is Public education - cum- media advocacy ; social literacy-cum-media activism. It goes beyond merely discussing what the issues are but what they ought to be. That too in a differentiated manner-zone wise. Not only are the social concerns(Sarokar) raised but the ones "ought " to have been raised too are underlined – the real concerns .In an aggregated approach-sectionally. It is the responsibility of the middle classes- intellectu-

als and creatives in particular- to try and ensure that the right issues are highlighted and correct social concerns underlined. The voter should not be at the mercy of the vested interests and narrow approach of the parties. We'll throw some light on electioneering - including its reverse ,perverse aspects .

Too much emphasis on elections is like studying only for exams- civil society must ensure continual evalu-



ation beyond and in between elections.

In the states where regional parties emerged – both local and national issues are taken care of. In M.P., undifferentiated polity means that if BJP comes to power then growth aspects take a hit and if Congress comes in the social indicators slip. Till the parties reform or regional parties emerge – it is likely to be more of the same . A serious tribal outfit is long overdue.

We are bringing out a

Citizens' Manifesto-cum-Vision Document-cum –White Paper in multiple formats . A bilingual (English & Hindi) print supplement -cum- visual document -cum-weblog. The idea is to complement and supplement the Vision document(s) of political parties - not to substitute them besides cutting the hype and the hyperbole by pointing at limits and limitations. To contextualise their manifestos without replacing them besides rationalization and to buttress & cushion the Agenda-sans subversion besides preventing its derailment and distortion. If even one idea gets included in the public discourse and one counter social proposal retraced our job would be done - else we're living in a pseudo democracy.

VIRTUAL ELECTIONS IN MADHYA PRADESH 2018 – CHANGE, NO CHANGE

This is the dullest election that I've seen in a long time - at least fifteen years- in Madhya Pradesh. Barely a few weeks away from polling the only buzz is in rural areas and media / social media. Media coverage is often misleading - everything looks larger than reality .This is a paradox given the fact that it is the toughest challenge that Shivraj has faced - from a combination of anti- incumbency and united Congress.Scratch a little below the surface and it is clear that war is on - only the approach has changed .BJP has chosen to do surgical strikes instead of an all out war fearing collateral damage while Congress has taken to tactical battles rather than a scorched earth policy do avoid snatching defeat from the jaws of victory.The battlefieldd and weapons too have undergone a change - with cyberspace and dark aspects becoming key.This too would appear to be paradoxical to the conventional eye - for, the logic is whenever there is greater competition- due to multipolar contests the agenda should improve. Unfortunately , in underdeveloped areas the opposite happens - real agenda is scuttled and emotive ,peripheral issues become centrestage and the lowest common denominator of populism becomes the manifesto.That is precisely what is happening in Madhya Pradesh.

On all big issues both the major parties have adopted similar stands and on all major scams they've really not gone for the kill- being coopted. The issue of agrarian crisis has been simplified by both parties to a one point agenda of loan waiver or interest free loans. No comprehensive vision or roadmap is brought out - to double the income by 2022 for instance. It

was precisely this lack of vision which led the current state wherein Shivraj government couldn't anticipate the bumper crops crashing markets for seasons on end and to take preventive steps like building storage facilities .The issue of unemployment - with a crore of unemployed youth- is also superficially addressed without a realistic plan. Nor is the issue of Education sufficiently highlighted despite VYAPAM and ASAR / P R A T H A M reports placing the state at the bottom rung. They're peddling an omnibus term "development"- without ever explaining what each party means by it.

Likewise, on all key concerns they're treading a consensual path.While Congress has taken to soft Hindutva , BJP has initiated soft secularism -Modi interacted with Bohra Muslims recently and Shivraj visits Mosques on festivals while Rahul Gandhi is perpetually temple hopping.

Environmental concerns and illegal mining are almost totally off radar. Over 48 lakh malnourished children do not appear as a major concern - perhaps since they aren't voters . As for topping in crimes against women and human trafficking , it doesn't come anywhere centre stage. Instead ,sectional concerns such as prevention of atrocities act and reservation in job promotion grab major time and space. As they're notional concerns the parties do not have confront any unpleasant data.

Eventhough parties -esp. Congress -had said that they'll announce candidates in advance - nothing of the sort happened - for the fear of poaching. As it is

they speak only their "Man ki Baat "- pushing their own agenda rather than listen to people's agenda.

Manifestos have become mere photo-ops : it ranges from BSP not declaring a manifesto at all to AAP having a manifesto for each district (the last time out). Various spins are given on nomenclature - from Sankalpa patra to Ghoshna Patra to Vachan patra. In essence , they're all competitive populism. The worst part is that the manifestos are published barely a few days before the voting- giving hardly any chance to an ordinary voter to read them ,much less discuss their details.

Though leaders talk of a vision and a roadmap they hardly come up with one. Tokenism of taking suggestion from people ending up in a mere compilation .The end result is merely a wish list masquerading as a vision- with numbers not adding up and priorities all jumbled.

So, when voters aren't aware about the candidates or about the manifesto - most voting is on belief / faith than informed / educated views/ opinion.No comprehensive report card or a vision is brought out by the civil society. Changing a host of candidates at the last moment confuses voters even further besides the turncoats - he's left to the guidance by vote brokers.Each party copting the other party's iconic leaders further befuddles him. Party managers parrot the term "winnability" as the sole criterion for choosing a candidate- what about "winnability" of a party from a particular seat irrespective of the candidate ? What about making a point - by giving

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more tickets to minorities and women for instance ?

In a scenario where Agenda is narrowed down , the average voter is left with no real choice. Whichever way he votes - any party or candidate - he's going to roughly get similar agenda and governance. While it is good in a sense that the boat doesn't rock too much but the downside is that the power equations do not change - they're merely realigned. You get a more populist government , focused on short term aspects and delivering low hanging fruits.The voter only realizes this in the middle of the term when the gap between delivery and promises hits him. If post that point the government in power is able to curb the dissatisfaction below the boiling point they get another term .Polity seems to have come a full circle since independence - then there was hardly any opposition. In fact, there was no opposition party when Madhya Pradesh was formed.

Only in "negative" aspects is there some differentiation- more "veto" than vote , tactics more than strategy , running down the opponent more than presenting one's plus points. When no movements have been built , no agitations launched , it is but natural to try an build an undercurrent and create some churning- usually by passionate issues and emotive concerns. It is true that dark aspects prevail roughly in the ratio of development but in the current Madhya Pradesh scene the degree of darkness is far greater than its level of backwardness.

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EVERY ELECTION IS DIFFERENT- HERE ARE SOME WAYS IN WHICH 2018 IS DIFFERENT

- * For the first time ,a Multipolar election in the true sense- with 5 parties (BJP, Cong , AAP,) fighting on all 230 seats.
- * The new twin electoral techniques are -controlling the data and managing the info / headlines.
- * Many ore professionals & bureaucrats entering the fray- SAPAKS, AAP, JAYAS
- * Much more flow of cash (this is a worldwide trend for some-time).
- * Much greater use of social media
- * Enhanced Caste weightage in seat allocation.
- * Enhanced role of religion/ spirituality.
- * Tribals using / being targeted via smart-phones for the first time in a big way.

ON THE OTHER HAND , AS THE SAYING GOES THE MORE THINGS CHANGE , THE MORE THEY REMAIN SAME.

- * Despite tall clais , candidates were not declared by the major parties till the last moment- for the fear of poaching. SAPAKS went to the extreme on not declaring publicly and making them file nominations directly.
- * As always manifestoes were not brought out till the last phase- pending competitive populism.
- * As the deadline closed , the dirty tricks department became ever more active- fake letters ,recruiting turncoats, planting news.
- * In the name of winnability everything goes- suitability goes out for a toss.
- * Women, poor and minorities had ever decreasing proportion of tickets.
- * Your identity- dynasty, caste , religion is mo re important than your track record .
- * Candidates with serious criminal charges given tickets (even the ones going for re-election) 41% in BJP and 27% in Congress.