

Elections (Indian): Statement on The Karnataka Verdict and the Future

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The undoubted good about the Karnataka assembly elections is the significant blow it has dealt to the BJP.

Despite Prime Minister Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah, and several CMs of various provinces virtually camping in Karnataka, Modi holding 19 rallies (public addresses) and six road shows including the 26 KM one in Bengaluru, BJP overall arranging 311 visits by party leaders to temples and mutts to highlight its Hindutva, along with holding 9125 public meetings, it lost badly. This focus on Karnataka by the BJP was not accidental. The BJP has set itself the goal of winning 350 seats or more in the next parliamentary elections, due in less than a year from now. Therefore penetrating the South has become imperative. With the CPI(M)-led LDF ruling and the Congress led UDF as the principal opposition, Kerala has not shown pro-BJP inclinations. Tamil Nadu has a Chief Minister proudly calling himself atheist and an heir to the Dravida movement.

In Karnataka, the Lingayats have been, over the last three decades, the firmest base for the BJP. But the base was clearly not as firm as the BJP hoped, and despite Modi crying about being abused 91 times, despite Amit Shah publicly saying that a Congress victory would mean riots, the electorate did not move in the direction of social engineering that the BJP was bent upon. This time a section of the Lingayats shifted from the BJP as also a section of Vokkaligas from the JD(S) (a party now in serious decline) to the Congress. That the BJP got a vote share (36%) that was about the same as in 2018 is because while losing seats in most other regions of the state, it gained vote share and seats in the more urbanized Bengaluru region. Sociologically speaking there was also a disproportionate shift of the lower classes among castes and sects towards the Congress.

The mandate of the people of Karnataka has been against the massive corruption of the BJP government, rising prices and cost of living, collapsing infrastructure, actions and laws that go against workers and peasants, rising unemployment, huge violence against women and assault on Muslim women's right to education in the name of targeting the Hijab, large scale aid to caste atrocities, and over all these, the drive to make communalism and violence on Muslims and Christians the core political strategy.

As even Rahul Gandhi, Congress leader and son and grandson of prime ministers who had started the liberalisation process from the 1980s, was compelled to admit--the poor people had voted out crony capitalism. Within a bourgeois electoral framework, in a context where the "poor" are not yet able to transform themselves into becoming a working class with militant self-awareness, the vote for the most likely to win anti-BJP party was the best way to express their anger to what the BJP has done.

However, this verdict does not mean that Congress, and Rahul Gandhi, are to be seen as the emancipators of the people. Opposition minded people, not just Congress leaders, but others, including some on the Left, along with the handful of journalists not controlled by the regime-

dominated media, have started hailing his walk as a turning point. What this ignores is the grass roots level social activism of the Gauri Lankesh type, the Karnataka Komu Sauhardya Vedike type, and the anti- CAA campaigns. When such social activism is not linked to independent class political mobilizations, the electoral benefit will necessarily go to those that simply oppose the most right wing party/forces, without necessarily benefitting the workers and peasants. It is now necessary to keep up the pressure to ensure that the incoming Congress government reverses the actions of its predecessor BJP government.

This election saw the defeat of several ministers from the incumbent BJP government. Both the Health Minister Sudhakar, who badly mismanaged the Covid-19 crisis and the Minister for Education BC Nagesh, who enforced the unjust Hijab ban and humiliated Muslim women students depriving them of an education, lost. The defeat of CT Ravi, National Secretary of the BJP, can also be read as the rejection of the vicious communal agenda of the BJP in Karnataka. However, the Hindi heartland is not the same as the South. In the most populous state UP, the BJP swept the local body polls--- a reminder, if required, that there is still some considerable way to go to defeat the BJP/Sangh at the national level.

At the all-India level, it is for the Left to realise that it must go for sustained mass movements rather than set piece one-day actions, and make the movements for social justice and against the deprivations caused by neoliberal economic policies (even accompanied by limited handouts—charity in another guise) as well as against Hindutva in its harder or softer versions primary. Pursuing opposition unity at the electoral level without recognizing that the priority must be the promotion of mass struggles on this programmatic basis will be a grievous mistake. For this the Left has to first get its act together both in word and deed and for which maintaining a crucial class independence is necessary. It must think beyond the ugly opportunism of lowest-common denominator electoralism.

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