

Shift in Indian Politics

1983 ELECTIONS IN
ANDHRA PRADESH AND KARNATAKA

Edited by

George Mathew



CHRISTIAN INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF
RELIGION AND SOCIETY

SHIFT IN INDIAN POLITICS

(1983 Elections in Andhra Pradesh
and Karnataka)

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✓ GEORGE MATHEW

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Preface

THE Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society (CISRS) and its founders who worked in different social concerns before the formation of the Institute in the forties and fifties were concerned with the growth of Indian democracy and social justice through the electoral process. This has resulted in a number of valuable studies on Indian democracy, political parties and social change since 1955.*

When Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka voted for a party other than the one they were voting since independence, the CISRS convened a writing party of distinguished scholars and political observers at the Institute for Social and Economic Change, Bangalore, to assess the importance of this for the political process and social change in India. Issues were analysed and drafts of some of the papers were discussed. The contributors to this volume, who are scholars in the respective areas of society and politics on which they have written, strongly argue that this election had significance for the future politics and centre-state relations in the country.

NEW DELHI

SARAL K. CHATTERJI
Director

February 1984

*See page 186.

List of Contributors

AMAL RAY

Professor of Development Politics and Administration and Head of Department, Administration Unit, Institute for Social and Economic Change, Bangalore. He is the author of *Federal Politics and Government* and co-author of *Political Development and Constitutional Change*.

BASHIRUDDIN AHMED

Director, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi. He is the co-author of *Caste, Race and Politics: A Comparative Study of India and the United States* and *Citizens and Politics Mass Political Behaviour in India*.

LALITHA NATRAJ

Teaches in Institute of Development Studies, University of Mysore. Her special interests are political aspects of development and planning; state level politics in India. She contributes regularly to *Economic and Political Weekly*.

G. NARAYANA

Faculty member of the Administrative Staff College of India, Hyderabad. He has worked on several projects in the areas of political sociology, health and population programmes, and rural development; present areas of interest include bureaucracy and politics, health and population programme management.

V.K. NATRAJ

Reader in Institute of Development Studies, University of Mysore. His particular interests are decentralised planning, mobilisation of backward classes, and regional planning. Joint editor, *Regional Planning and National Development*, author *Decentralisation of Planning in India*.

K. RAGHAVENDRA RAO

Reader in the Department of Political Science at the Karnataka University, Dharwad. He writes poetry in English and translates Kannada poetry into English; currently working on a study of the theoretical encounter between Gandhi and Marx.

RATNA NAIDU

Faculty member (Sociology) of the University of Hyderabad, is the author of *Values in Models of Modernization* and *The Communal Edge to Plural Societies* and co-editor with P.C. Joshi *Studies in Asian Social Development*.

M. SHATRUGNA

Teaches physics in Gupta College, Hyderabad. A keen student of politics, he is a regular contributor to *Economic and Political Weekly* and *Mainstream*.

G. SRINIVAS

Research scholar in the Department of Sociology at the University of Hyderabad. He worked on "Congestion, ghetto culture and communal tension in the old city in Hyderabad" and continuing his study on "the impact of congestion on tensions" for Ph.D.

F.D. VAKIL

Reader in the Department of Political Science at the Osmania University, Hyderabad. Associated with several research projects on electoral politics and Indian political system, his specialization is electoral studies and rural politics.

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1

INTRODUCTION

GEORGE MATHEW

ANDHRA PRADESH and Karnataka were two bastions of the Congress party. Even when many other states had rejected Congress rule¹, these two southern states stood by the oldest political party which had won independence for the country. Ironically, at a time when the Congress party at the centre was consolidating its power and a state like Kerala which had a tradition of non-Congress governments was limping back into its fold, the people of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka were looking for alternatives which made them vote decisively for Telugu Desam Party (TDP) and Janata-Kannada Kranti Ranga respectively. This shift is of great significance for the polity in India.

Political analysts have offered several reasons for the voting behaviour of the two states comprising 51.2 million voters. Corruption in the ruling party, factionalism, erosion of the traditional support base of the Congress among the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, minorities and other backward classes, poor performance of the party when in power and the resulting misery for the deprived sections of the society, Congress (I) central leadership's lack of respect for regional aspirations and the decline of prime minister Indira Gandhi's charisma—these are some of the reasons advanced to explain why the

people opted for parties other than the one that had ruled for almost 35 years. Many of these aspects of the 1983 elections are discussed in their proper setting by the contributors to this volume.

Although the chapters were written by various authors, there is an underlying unity running through them. If people's will is allowed to have its way, (the fact of the matter is that in most countries of the world, people's will is not permitted to assert itself) in Indian polity unexpected changes do occur in the direction people have decided to take. There are several variables that have influenced this process in our country and will do so in future: and these are the focii of discussion in the book. K. Raghavendra Rao's approach is theoretical. He sees the Karnataka election as increase of "materialisation" of the people's culture and the growing shift from caste to class as the focus of identity. Lalitha Natraj and V.K. Natraj place the 1983 elections in the background of caste politics in Karnataka. They trace the development and the political role of backward classes and minorities from the first decade of this century up to the 1983 elections. The article points out that Devaraj Urs's policies had helped backward classes to move up in the state politics. However, the authors come to the conclusion that after 1980 the backward classes have been groping in the dark.

We then move on to Andhra Pradesh. F.D. Vakil surveys the long 35-year period of Congress rule in Andhra Pradesh and makes the point that the gradual decline in the Congress party's "support structure" has resulted in its overthrow. He maintains that all is not yet lost for Congress (I), because it could return to power with an improvement of 6 to 9 per cent in its popular votes. M. Shatrugna analyses the circumstances in which Telugu Desam entered the political scene in Andhra Pradesh and suggests that it is a trend-setter for the political process in our country. He has analysed the caste, educational and age distribution of TDP and Congress (I) candidates. The chapter on the social background of TDP legislators which is a joint effort of three scholars in Hyderabad helps us to understand who got elected. M. Shatrugna and G. Narayana have analysed the caste background, educational qualifications and age of the legislators and have also gone into the details of

these aspects, regionwise. G. Srinivas has researched into the 1978 Congress(I) legislators' age, education, occupation, previous political experience, association with co-operative movements, trade unions, cultural organisations and compared these with the similar data regarding the TDP legislators. G. Srinivas's study gives us an insight into the comparative social background of MLAs representing the new party and those MLAs who represented an old party (Congress) in 1978. The authors conclude *inter alia* that a larger number among TDP legislators have higher educational as well as professional qualifications as in medicine, engineering and teaching. This is a notable change from the well-known fact that hitherto lawyers were the largest group of professional in Indian politics.² Ratna Naidu researched into an important sociological variable in the elections in Andhra Pradesh, namely, the symbolic imagery used by Telugu Desam. She is of the opinion that although a majority of the voters in the country are not literate, they know their cultural heritage and N.T Rama Rao presented to them the issues in the cultural categories which were meaningful to the people.

The last three chapters analyse the common factors which influenced the elections in both Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka and discuss their implications for the Indian polity as a whole. Amal Ray has linked these elections to "environmental dynamics", namely, changes in spatial levels of political economy, developmental investments, and so on. He sees in the new regional pulls "a highly explosive potential" if they are allowed to "operate in an extremely resource-scarce economy". Bashiruddin Ahmed argues that in both the Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka elections the electorate has put into practice the accountability principle therewith indicating that its support cannot be taken for granted. The new factor emerging from the analysis of the electoral outcome, according to Bashiruddin, was the negation of the elite political culture. This factor has become more powerful than economic or other reasons in influencing electoral behaviour in India. The concluding chapter on primordiality in Indian politics puts forward the case that the flowering of regional culture and aspirations does not necessarily pose a threat to the federal structure at this stage of our social

development. It questions the premises of scholars and political activists who maintain that India will disintegrate if people in the different regions assert their identities.

II

A question that may be raised is : How far does money influence a politically conscious electorate? Can financial resources tilt the balance in favour of those who have more?

Money power in elections is an accepted "evil" in a democracy.³ It has come to a point where we accept the norm that if a party has sufficient resources it can win the election. The premise is that the majority of voters in India are poor and that they seek money or goods in return for their vote for a candidate. Therefore, if a party has enough money, it can buy votes, win the elections and come to power. In other words, what is important in the perception of the voter is not the "performance" of the party in power or the capabilities of opposition parties to perform better than the ruling party. Such a situation makes a mockery of democracy.

On an all-India level the one occasion when the above thesis was proved wrong was the 1977 Lok Sabha elections. Now the 1983 elections at the state levels also has demonstrated that money is not the sole means for winning elections, when other vital issues grip the people's minds. It is common knowledge that Congress(I) which was in power in the two states of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka had monetary resources at its disposal, while the opposition parties were perhaps not so flush with funds. As *The Week* reported: "The Congress(I) spent an unbelievable minimum of Rs. 10 lakh per assembly segment. Almost Rs. 10 per voter. In certain selected ones—as in Venkatagiri where Janardhan Reddy was contesting—unofficial estimates say that per head expenditure was ten times the average."⁴ The Congress(I) contested 515 constituencies (294 in Andhra Pradesh and 221 in Karnataka) and it must have spent a staggering amount of money. The resources of the opposition parties like Janata-Kranti Ranga or TDP were no match to those of Congress(I). Chandrasekhar, the Janata Party President had stated during his *padayatra* that, from the

central office of the party, they could not send even Rs. 5000 each to their candidates. Some candidates could not be given any financial support at all.⁵ The TDP had said categorically in its election manifesto that "the present trend, where money-power alone wins the elections should go".

In spite of this disparity in financial resources why were people's votes not lured away by the party which spent the maximum amount of money? Does it mean that material incentives cannot any longer play a decisive role in swaying the voters? If this is so, it proves that the electorate is coming of age. The popular saying among the people of Andhra Pradesh was "take money from the hand and run away on bicycle".⁶ H.R. Khanna, the former Supreme Court Judge made a perceptive comment on this critical issue:

One aspect of the Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka elections deserves particular attention. It is said that each candidate belonging to a major political party was paid a substantial sum of money and provided with one or two jeeps for campaigning during the polls. The other candidates do not seem to have enjoyed the benefits conferred by such financial resources. In spite of this disparity, the candidates of the party with ample funds at its disposal fared rather badly. This clearly shows that though money does play an important part in elections, it can be effective only up to a point. If the general trend of public opinion happens to be against a particular party, money cannot tilt the balance in its favour and reverse the prevailing trend.⁷

Money is needed in an election for publicity, travel, meetings, and so on. But in most cases people make the decision for whom to vote according to the issues involved. When the issues at stake in an election are important to the people, they even raise resources locally to support the candidate who, they think, would best represent their cause.

Further systematic research needs to be done on this crucial variable in the electoral behaviour of Indian voters. It is extremely difficult to gather data on the subject, but through "participant observation" in the election campaigns, students

of election studies may explore this area which is shrouded in secrecy.

The parties that have come to power respectively in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka have different political backgrounds. For the second time in Indian politics (the first being M.G. Ramachandran in Tamil Nadu) a cinema star entered politics in Andhra Pradesh and, within a short period of a few months, captured power. Swinging popular feelings is one thing, but governance without previous training or experience as well as without political skill and ideology is quite a different matter. When voted to form governments parties that are not anchored in history and rooted in an ideology will tend to depend on the bureaucracy (including the police) and be surrounded by sycophants. Excessive dependence on the bureaucracy and the police may create a situation where the end result of their actions will be unhelpful to the people in spite of the party leaders' intentions to do good for the people. For instance, in its election manifesto, TDP pledged that "in all circumstances and in all matters it will abide by democratic values and traditions". But within three months of his coming to power the chief minister, N.T. Rama Rao, admitted in an interview that the police might have been violating the citizens' democratic rights. However, he went on to defend the actions of the police saying it was a law and order problem and that it was not in his hands.⁸ This raises an important question: What are the political implications of a phenomenon such as the Telugu Desam Movement (TDM) converting itself into a political party within months of its inception and being swept to power? This needs further study on the basis of its origin, political victory and subsequent performance.

Only a party that has an adequate political ideology can bring about structural changes. A semblance of this seems to be taking place in Karnataka. The new government in Karnataka has the backing of a party with a long tradition of political battles; its leaders like Ramakrishna Hegde are experienced politicians. The Karnataka government is avoiding populist measures and facing the hard realities of running a government. No less important are the issues upon which it has focussed its attention, such as centre-state relations, role of

the office of governor, attempts to eradicate political corruption, lowering of the voters' age for elections to the local bodies and the setting up of the *Lokayukta* bringing the chief minister also under its purview. The issues have potentials for structural changes and are not merely reformist. In this context, it may be revealing to compare the performance of the state governments of Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh on the one hand and of Karnataka and West Bengal on the other.

One point stressed at the "writers' party" to produce this volume was that the new politics has created a situation where the states may become reference points for the centre in contradistinction to what has been happening so far: that is, till now the centre was the reference point for the states. The appointment of the Sarkaria Commission to review the centre-state relations, the appointment of an expert panel of economists at the centre, the centre's blessings for sharing the waters between Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu through the Telugu-Ganga Project are some instances where the centre recognises the new trends and initiatives in state politics.

But all is not well with the political system. Its pathological nature has come to the surface. This is mainly reflected in the seeming intolerance of the party in power at the centre towards other parties that have come to power in the states. Corrupt and anti-democratic means by which the parties in power try to discredit one another, going to the extent of toppling a party which poses a threat to another are some of the ominous trends. However, there is reason to believe that what is happening today is a churning process in Indian politics and if people retain the ultimate power of being the final judges and assert their will, our polity is poised for a vibrant democratic progress. This is the message of the 1983 elections in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka.

III

Some major personalities were involved in the shift in Indian politics that is discussed in this book. It is hoped that the profiles of three among them given below will provide the reader with a background, however brief, to what follows: