



E-ISSN: 2706-9117
P-ISSN: 2706-9109
IJH 2020; 2(2): 197-200
Received: 14-07-2020
Accepted: 05-08-2020

Nirmal Kumar
Ph.D. Research Scholar,
Centre for Historical Studies,
Jawaharlal Nehru University,
Delhi, India

The mandate in the first general election of India

Nirmal Kumar

Abstract

The First General Election was conducted in the backdrop of independence and partition, when the atmosphere was charged with exuberance of freedom on the one hand and communal clashes and violence due to partition on the other. Amidst this our nation was to realize the dreams of our freedom fighters to make India a democracy through electoral process based on universal adult franchise. This election resembled like a war between the ideas of secularism proposed by the flag-bearers of the freedom struggle such as the Congress Party, the Communist Party, the Socialist Party etc. and communalism to make India a Hindu nation by right wing parties such as the Hindu Mahasabha, Ram Rajya Parishad and others. Therefore, it becomes highly interesting to explore the mandate in the First General Election that established India as a secular democracy.

Keywords: Democracy, general election, secularism, communalism and mandate

Introduction

The last decade preceding the elections of 1951-52, along with of independence was the decade of Communal flash outs. The Central, Western, North and considerable part of east India was under the direct stroke of Communalism, which included Madhya Pradesh, Madhya Bharat, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Orissa, West Bengal, Punjab and PEPSU (Patiala and east Punjab states union) of that time. Hyderabad was also under Communal effect of Muslim League. Therefore, it becomes interesting to look at how these Communal organizations were marginalized in the first general elections that took away their energy gained from the partition and blunted their growth. How were they outplayed from the minds of the people leaving full ground for Secularism and the aura and legacy of freedom struggle to consolidate and establish it? Thus, the study of ideological war perpetrated by various political parties, between the ideas of secularism and communalism in the first general elections in its immediate context and circumstances becomes extremely useful to find solutions to today's Communal problems. Hence, this is an important historical exploration to learn lessons to save our country going astray on the communal lines.

In the First General Election, The Congress party won 364 seats out of 489 seats for the House of the people. In total, 61.2 percent of eligible voters exercised their vote, out of that 45 percent was polled for the Congress party. Socialists and Communists were the first and second runners up with 10.59 percent and 3.29 percent of total votes respectively ^[1]. Thus, that was the straight mandate for the secular parties, which is brought upside down in the 16th General Election.

This captured the imagination of the Nation, and left her thinking about the Communal ideological force, capturing the seat of democracy politically. This led intellectuals on a retreat journey into the past to find out, how come a Communal Ideology become victorious with a full majority in a democracy like India, which has a secular civilizational base and a rich secular legacy of its freedom struggle? What are the reasons behind its acceptability among the common public? Do they have any contribution in the freedom struggle before independence or in the nation building process after the independence? Are they suitable for the nation that uphold and feel proud of its diversity and plural culture since antiquity? Does their brand of Hindu Communalism represent the aspirations of diversity of India? Does this nation belong only to Hindus and the rest vast of humanity residing in this country are foreigners? There are many more questions raised by intellectuals, media houses national and international, secular parties and the common public, but it looks absurd to put all those questions here after asking the last two, the answer of which completely delegitimizes this ideology of Hindu Communalism to be the national ideology of India. It can represent a community but not a nation.

Corresponding Author:
Nirmal Kumar
Ph.D. Research Scholar,
Centre for Historical Studies,
Jawaharlal Nehru University,
Delhi, India

Communalist can only create farce rhetoric of Hindu communalism or nationalism. They call India the motherland of Hindus and consider the rest children of their 'Bharat Mata' as foreigners. They just play over the emotions of majority, which is put in by Bipan Chandra as, 'communal party minus communalism is a big zero'. Their idea of nation and nationalism, which is actually communalism, based on myth and the wildest imagination of a fanatic Hindu V. D. Savarkar, which has nothing to do with the historical past of the nation or the rationality of mind, that reads:

At last the great mission which the Sindhus had undertaken of founding a nation and a country, found and reached its geographical limit when the valorous Prince of Ayodhya made a triumphant entry in Ceylon and actually brought the whole land from the Himalayas to the Seas under one sovereign sway. The day when the Horse of Victory returned to Ayodhya unchallenged and unchallengeable, the great white Umbrella of Sovereignty was unfurled over that Imperial throne of Ramchandra, the brave, Ramchandra the good, and a loving allegiance to him was sworn, not only by the Princes of Aryan blood but Hanuman, Sugriva, Bibhishana from the south-that day was the real birth-day of our Hindu people. It was truly our national day: for Aryans and Anaryans knitting themselves into a people were born as a nation. It summed up and politically crowned the efforts of all the generations that preceded it and it handed down a new and common mission, a common banner, a common cause which all the generations after it had consciously or unconsciously fought and died to defend ^[2].

This imagination of a maniac can never be accepted by the majority of the people and will remain only an ideology confined in the bounds of its community that too only followed by a section of this community. Bipan Chandra aptly explained this as:

The people of India will not readily yield before the forces of disintegration. If secular nationalism is seen as inadequate in meeting their challenges, the people will turn to communalism masquerading as nationalism. Ideologies like fascism, Nazism and communalism grow only when secular and democratic forces are unable to overcome the crisis plaguing a society ^[3].

This narrative by him clearly helps in understanding the recent election in which the major secular national parties like the congress and the Left parties lost their major share of deposits and gave way for a basically communal party, BJP.

Thus, Bipan Chandra says that 'Communalism is a single ideology which takes Hindu, Muslim, Sikhs and Christian forms' ^[4]. Majority or minority Communalism both are dangerous, especially the claims of communalist to serve the Nation and its people is regressive and destructive. He further says that, 'Minority communalism hurts minorities above all. Muslim communalism became a major force before 1947- and even successful in its own terms. And Muslims of the sub-continent are still paying the price of this success, whether they live in Pakistan, Bangladesh or India. The main victims of Sikh communalism have been Sikhs-and the longer it prevails the more this will be so ^[5].'

Thus, it can be understood clearly that, Hindu communalism will do maximum damage to the plural fabric of the Hindu community. And to say precisely, a great amount of damage has already been done to their community and their religion, since they have started riding on the back of religion to be

home in the life of its people. Hinduism is misrepresented as a homogeneous religion, by the Hindu communalists, which has been heterogeneous religion like an ever-expanding confluence of varied faith born in India or outside.

These communalists have harmed their community in a big way, as their assertion is breaking apart the social relations of the Hindus with other communities residing in this country or outside. This has also made Hindu community vulnerable to be looked at it by others with suspicion. And to make it more precise, Hindus are doomed to suffer a setback in their people to people relations with the other people of the world, due to bad nature of Hindu communalists who are even in minority in the Hindu community. The repercussions of the upsurge of a bad element from a community is well understood by one and all seeking wisdom from defamation of the Muslim Community brought by 1 percent of terrorist like mentality of people among them.

Therefore, majority to a communal party is only because of the failure of the secular parties at different levels and the counter rise of BJP under the guise of development agendas. Thus, Bipan Chandra's argument looks apt here that, 'success of Hindu communalism will precisely mean fascism over the majority as also the destruction of the centuries old Indian culture and value system ^[6].' He further blames secular parties for the rise of communal parties by tracing their support given or taken from these communal parties to earn political dividends as:

A major factor in the growth of communalism since the 1960s has been the political opportunism, towards the communalism practiced by secular parties, groups and individuals. They have often permitted the intrusion of religion (and caste) into politics. They have compromised with communal forces. And, far worse, they have entered in alliances with communal parties. The Congress was the first to do so in Kerala in the early 1960s. The Congress several times opened its doors to Sikh and Hindu communalists in Punjab, while the Communists, on their part, allied with the Akali Dal. In 1967, the Socialists and other secular parties and groups did not hesitate to join the RSS-Jan Sangh in forming governments in several states. The high watermark was reached when Jan Sangh was permitted to become a part of the Janata Party in 1977 ^[7].

Hence, the present context, in which a communal party is ruling the country with full majority, made me inquisitive and curious about the results of the first general elections. Because that was the period when India faced the biggest Communal flash out in its history, in the form of Partition, violence and displacement. No tragedies in the world have witnessed the violence and displacement of people at such a large scale ^[8]. This gave Communal parties a chance to communalize our society by fanning religious emotions in the people. This communalization of society and politics by the activities of Communal organizations also became the sole reason for Mahatma Gandhi's murder by a Hindu Mahasabha fanatic Nathuram Godse ^[9].

Looking through election results

Analyzing the results would give us an understanding of the varied political landscape of the Country. It makes us aware about the people's choice in the elections. Though the policies and programs of the Congress were liked all over the Country, however, other parties were also liked in their strong belts. These strong belts of other parties must be

looked at to find, whether these other parties were secular or communal parties. Overall, it will help to establish the extent of victory of Secularism over Communalism. To say in other words, it would help to analyze the contribution of all the secular forces together in quelling the dangerous communal waves flowing in the Country, which was aggravated by the communal parties. In sum, under this theme, it will be comprehensively analyzed to find answer to the question, whether this election was a mandate for Secularism or Communalism?

Evaluating the comparative strength of parties in the House of the People would help us understand, the mood, character and nature of the electorate and their mandate, due to varying reasons in different regions of the Country. This will also help to analyze the question, which party's policies and programs, got maximum support in general or were accepted by the people in a specific region in particular; and why?

In the first General Elections total number of members for the House of the People were 499 out of which 489 were elected. None of the parties contested all these seats. Even Congress contested only 472 seats^[10]. Out of 10 nominated members 6 was from Jammu and Kashmir, 1 from Andaman and Nicobar, 1 from Assam Tribes and 2 were from Anglo Indian community. Total number of electors on rolls was 173,213,635 and the total number of electors in the contested elections was 171,747,300. This election also had several 2 and 3 membered constituencies.

Now, when we look at the results of the general elections to the House of the People^[11], then we find that the Congress party won in almost all parts of the Country. This party won majority with total 364 seats and got polled approx. 72 million votes, which was 45 percent of the total vote polled. The Communist party of India contested 49 and won 16 seats, which were located in the coastal regions of South, Southeast, East and Northeast India, that includes Madras (8 seats) in the South to Orissa (1 seat) and West Bengal (5 seats) in the East and Tripura (2 seats) in the Northeast. Why they won in the coastal regions only is a point to be explored. This Party got approx. 8 million votes, which was 4 percent of the total vote polled. KMPP won total 9 seats, of which 6 were in Madras, 1 in Mysore, 1 in Madhya Pradesh and 1 at Delhi. The founder of the party J. B. Kriplani won from New Delhi, a parliamentary constituency out of 3 seats of Delhi. This party got approx. 12 million votes, which was 6 percent of the total vote polled. Socialist party won 12 seats, of which Bihar (3), Uttar Pradesh (2), Manipur (1), Assam (1), Madras (2), Hyderabad (1), Orissa (1) and Madhya Pradesh (1). This party got approx. 18 million votes, which was 11 percent of the total vote polled. This party also had the presence in almost all parts of the Country.

A communal party Jan Sangh won only 3 seats, of which Midnapore and Southeast Calcutta were in West Bengal and Chittor in Rajasthan. This party got approx. 6 million votes, which was 3 percent of the total vote polled. They were present in almost all parts of the Country, but were outplayed by the people in the elections. This election also witnessed the considerable number of Independent candidates or candidates from other small parties elected for the House of the People. They were total 85 in number, who polled approx. 54 million votes, which was 31 percent of the total vote polled. Among these independents many were the former members of the Congress party and the erstwhile

Princes and Maharajas raised many others^[12]. This huge chunk of votes shared by them will be more clearly analyzed and understood while looking at the results of the State Assembly elections.

When we look at the elected members then the Communist party of India was the second largest party. Whereas taking the share of votes polled for a particular party, Socialist party was the second largest party followed by the KMPP, leaving The Communist party to be settled at the fourth position. Whatever may be their position in the election results, they all stood for the principle of Secularism. They all were progressive in their approach, willing to meet the basic necessities of the people through tackling various day-to-day life problems facing them. They only varied in their methods and approach to solve these problems, which was natural, as different leaders could have different ideas to solve the same type of problems, while keeping their center fixed at the core values of Secularism, such as unity and peaceful co-existence among co-inhabitants.

Secularism or communalism

Seeing this way, total percentage of votes polled for Secularism was approx. 100 million, which accumulates to 66 percent of the total votes polled. Mentioning communal parties like Jan Sang (3 seats), Hindu Mahasabha (4) and the Ram Rajya Parishad (3) looks irrelevant here, as they got total 10 seats sharing only 6 percent of the total votes. And they were down to this mark while contesting in more than half the total number of constituencies for the House of the People. Among these Jan Sangh alone contested 93 seats and won only 3^[13]. Thus, the results for the House of the People shows that, the policies and programs of the Communal parties were completely rejected by the people, barring few pockets of the Country dominated by the erstwhile Princes and Maharajas such as Orissa, Rajasthan, Madhya Bharat etc.

The former Maharajas of princely states dominated all the Communal strongholds of Central and western India, including Orissa. They promoted feudal system and reactionary laws to maintain their status quo, as the principles of democracy were death knell for them. Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and west Bengal were communalized because these states had have the largest mix of Hindu and Muslim population, who were polarized, faithless and apprehensive of each other due to prevailing situation of recent past of partition and violence, and present controversy about the Hindu Code Bill. Punjab region was polarized maximally due to the maximum partition violence there. And Communal parties continuously aggravated this situation through their propagandas. This was the broad framework in which the first general election was held.

These communal groups in various regions of India had formed some regional communal parties like Akali Party in Punjab, Ganatantra Parishad in Orissa and Jharkhand, which won considerable number of seats in the State Assembly Elections. Their success can be studied in comparison with the success of secular parties in the particular state to see, whether the study of their results becomes relevant in comparison to the secular parties or not? Then the national and regional, both types of communal parties taken together with their results at center and state level combined can be compared with the combined results of all the secular parties to establish the exact mandate of the electorate for Secularism against the vile of Communalism. Thus, to bring

out this outcome in the first general elections overall, looking at the manifestoes of all the regional parties and State Assembly election results becomes a necessity to demarcate them as secular or communal parties while establishing the extent of acceptance of policies and programs of these parties. Hence, this remains to be explored in my next venture of research work. But as per my recent study of the sources, it is pretty much clear that; more than two third mandates was for the secular parties contesting the first General Elections.

Therefore, the most remarkable trend set by this election was the huge mandate for Secularism, which was either represented by the Congress or other secular parties like Communist and Socialist. At whatever places Congress lost, was mainly because people accepted the radical ideas of other secular parties to promote Secularism and bring radical social change through rapid economic progress, barring few pockets where reactionary Maharajas were still dominant promoting their feudal system. Thus, after this election Communal Parties were outplayed from the political scene, however, they kept themselves alive at the grass-root level through various kinds of cultural activities and creating their network of educational institutions. However, the first general election was a big blow to these Communal parties that ruined them off their legitimacy to play a part in India's progress. To say in other words, their policies were taken by the people as, divisive, reactionary and regressive after they were exposed in the first general election campaign by secular leaders especially Nehru.

Though the campaign by Jawaharlal Nehru and other secular leaders, suppressed these communal wings, but these Communal parties kept discovering new cultural means to enter into the lives of the people through Prabhat Pherie, Shakra, through organizing Kusti competition, Ram Leela and other cultural events organized at the grass root level. These are so popular because it has direct connections with the day-to-day lives and practice of the people. The most important of all, they have opened thousands of schools at primary and higher secondary levels to capture the young minds to give them communal education tainted with religious principles. These institutions are Vidya Mandir, Sarasswati Vidya Mandir, DAV Public Schools and others. Therefore, Bipan Chandra argued that, Nehru could only fight communalism on its ideological level. There was no countrywide movement against communalism after independence, similar to the scale of one launched by Gandhi against the imperialist state. Nehru believed that with the advance of logical and rational thinking Communalism will wane per se. However, the first general election campaign by Jawaharlal Nehru looked per se a nation-wide war against communalism, in which in almost every speech Nehru spoke about it at considerable length. He attacked their method, policy and program in full.

The campaign for Secularism yielded dividends par expectations. For example, in the regions of Orissa and Punjab, Gantantra Parishad (31 out of 140) and The Akali Party won considerable number of seats in the State Assembly elections respectively, not only restricting the Congress Party from sweeping the polls, but also reducing it to a minority party in the State Legislatures. However, in the same region the Congress Party swept the polls for the House of the people ^[14]. Thus, a clear mandate to the Congress Party for the House of the People in these regions was exclusively for Nehru to be the Prime Minister of this

Country. His election campaign had a huge impact on the people, who convinced by the words of Nehru, even rejected the policies and programs of communal parties in their strongholds to support the ideas of secularism. Hence, the countrywide massive campaign by Nehru to establish the principles of Secularism and Democracy in the first General election was an ideological war against the vile of Communalism.

References

1. Election Commission, Election Commission Report of first General Election in India 1951-52, New Delhi: The Government of India Press 1955;2:94.
2. Savarkar VD. Essentials of Hindutva, Hindus-A Nation P6.
3. Bipan Chandra. Essays on Contemporary India, Har-Anand Publications, New Delhi 1991, P169.
4. Ibid P159.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Bipan Chandra. Essays on Contemporary India, Har-Anand Publications, New Delhi 1991, P140.
8. See Sucheta Mahajan. Independence and partition: The erosion of colonial power in India, Sage Publication, New Delhi 2000.
9. Bipan Chandra. Essays on Contemporary India, Har-Anand Publications, New Delhi 1991, P169.
10. Election Commission, Election Commission Report of first General Election in India, 1951-52. New Delhi: The Government of India Press 1955;2:94.
11. This study of results of the General Elections to the House of the People, 1951-52 will fully depend on my study of the Map given in the Election Commission report 1.
12. My inferences from the speeches made by Jawaharlal Nehru in the Election Campaign for the First General Elections.
13. Election Commission, Election Commission Report of first General Election in India, 1951-52. New Delhi: The Government of India Press 1955;2:94.
14. This study of results of the State Assembly Elections, 1951-52 will fully depend on my study of the Maps given in the Election Commission report 1.