

Statement (India): Victory for BJP in the Haryana and J&K Elections

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That this is the case in Haryana is obvious but why this is also the case in J&K will be explained later. The Congress vote share in Haryana is almost the same as the BJP's nearly 40%, but in a FPTP electoral system it is the concentrated character of vote distribution that is key and this gave the BJP 48 seats to the Congress's 37 out of the total 90. It is always easier to be wiser after the event. So the reasons why the Congress, contrary to all expectations, did poorly in Haryana are now on public display. The Congress lost votes among its two key social and caste bastions, the Jats and the Dalits, respectively around 28% and 21% of the state's population. One-fifth of the former's votes went to the BJP while of the 17 SC reserved seats, 8 went to the BJP.

The BJP heard the alarm bells sent by the Lok Sabha elections. To appease primarily Jat farmers who were involved in the 2020-22 agitation, 14 crops were procured by the previous government (whose leadership was changed) at MSP and the payments moved to farmer bank accounts within 3 days. The BJP strategy of seeking to consolidate the non-Jat OBCs---the more urban-based Brahmins and upper castes are solid BJP supporters---and to cut into the Dalit base, paid dividends. Yes, there was internal factionalism in the Congress; its Dalit leader Selja was relatively sidelined while there was over-reliance on former CM, Hooda to mobilize the Jat vote. Moreover, the third party coalition of INLD-BSP took away 10% of the total vote. But the real difference between the Congress and the BJP is that the latter has the RSS as an unmatched grassroots mobilizer and accepted its campaigning strategy. This time in Haryana there was no projection of Modi as the 'great overlord' of the Sangh Parivar whose personal 'magnetism' is central to vote-catching success. Within the RSS hierarchy and structure there has been growing resentment of Modi's deliberate effort to make himself more important than the RSS let alone the BJP. After the LS results there is a desire to rein him in. Hindutva appeal, however pernicious, has stable roots in northern and western India and must be confronted with an alternative vision and programme promising justice, equality and massive material redistribution. Instead the bourgeois opposition that behaves badly enough in pursuing economic policies that are increasing inequalities and reducing jobs absorption either bypasses this responsibility or adopts Hindutva in softer versions.

But why should the J&K results be seen as a victory for the BJP/Sangh? The most important outcome is that the major parties of the region have accepted the abrogation of Art. 370 and will not fight for its restoration. When it was first annulled in 2019 the Congress decried the unconstitutional manner in which it was done but has since then not called for its restoration. The PDP which once shamelessly allied with the BJP has been reduced to the margins in this election while Omar Abdullah, now the would-be CM, has clearly said that it is foolish to talk of restoring Art. 370 and that the focus must now be on getting statehood while both he and Modi exchanged greetings and talked of future cooperation. The Congress from 1950 to the end of the 70s was responsible for the steady, illegal and cumulative degradation of the autonomy promised and constitutionally given to J&K from its accession. What was left as autonomous powers was that the Central parliament had no right to legislate on matters of J&K barring those on the concurrent list. Even this space was then taken away while Ladakh was separated and the remainder J&K made a Union territory albeit with a legislative assembly.

Besides all this, since the late 80s a system of continuous brutal repression of the people of the Valley in particular, has been institutionalized and deepened by Congress and BJP governments at the Centre, the latter being even more vicious and ruthless given its anti-Muslim character. The PDP and NC have always been more concerned to get and stay in power in Srinagar and to play games with the Centre that can help them get more resources and score over their regional rivals. Beyond occasional rhetoric, they have not seriously and practically opposed this ongoing repression nor have they ever been committed to defending the people's right to political self-determination. It is this that has led to an array of other political forces both religious and secular to take up this struggle in both armed and peaceful ways.

As for what is now likely to follow, it remains uncertain. It is not necessary that there will be a quick movement towards even statehood. Since the annulment we have seen a phase-by-phase pattern of political change where there has been gerrymandering of electoral constituencies, years of clampdown of civil political life especially in the Valley, forcible and unjustified land grabbing for resettlement of Pandits. Nor is it unlikely that the BJP at the Centre will resort to efforts to buy or otherwise break the electoral majority of the NC-Congress or even move towards separating Jammu from the Valley which many in Jammu want. These elections have shown that rescinding Art. 35A which safeguarded for regional permanent residents government jobs and land ownership and transfers, has not seriously alienated Jammu voters from the BJP. Furthermore, there is now greater religious polarization as shown by the votes. From 12 seats in 2008 and 25 in 2014 the BJP now has 29, all in Jammu and none in the Valley where its vote share is negligible.

What the knock-on effect of these results will be on the coming elections in Jharkhand and Maharashtra remains to be seen. We must remain resolute and avoid the temptations of false consolations.

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