

# Karnataka Assembly Elections 1994: A Pre-election Analysis

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ON November 26 and December 1, the voters in Karnataka will decide on the composition of the Tenth Karnataka Legislative Assembly. As the election date approaches, political parties and candidates are making all out efforts to win the support of a 'disillusioned, skeptical and election weary electorate'. An ideal backdrop for the analysis of the pre-election scene in Karnataka, would be the 1989 Assembly election in the State and the subsequent political developments.

The 1989 Assembly elections—held after a spell of seven months of President's Rule consequent to the dismissal of the Janata Dal government headed by S R Bommai—saw the Congress party winning 176 of the 222 seats for which elections were held (nearly 80%). Never before, had the Congress party—or for that matter any other party—secured such a high percentage of seats in Assembly elections in Karnataka. The party that had been elected to power in the previous election—the Janata party, now in its new incarnation as the Janata Dal—was left desperately holding on to just 24 seats, a steep fall from the 139 seats it had earlier won.

It must however be emphasised, that given the vagaries of the first-past-the-post system, the Congress party (in the 1989 elections) secured just over 43 per cent of the vote even though it secured nearly 80 per cent of the seats. From the 1985 to the 1989 Karnataka Assembly Elections, the percentage of votes secured by the Congress party increased by a mere 2.75 per cent (41.10 per cent in 1985 and 43.85 per cent in 1989) though the percentage of seats it secured increased by nearly 50 per cent (30 per cent—66 seats—in 1985 to nearly 80 per cent—176 seats—in 1989).

A deeper analysis of the 1989 Assembly elections shows that a swing of a little over three lakh eighteen

thousand votes (1.76 per cent of the total valid votes polled) in favour of the Congress candidates in 66 constituencies<sup>1</sup>, helped the party to win these

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The 1994 Assembly elections in Karnataka, appears to be one of the most keenly contested elections in the State. A survey of the election scene in Karnataka clearly indicates that if the entire electoral process—and the democratic discourse—is to be people centered, it is imperative that steps be taken to bridge the 'democratic deficit' that is so glaringly apparent.

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seats (these constituencies had in the earlier election returned non Congress candidates) and secure a majority in the Assembly.

On the basis of the 1989 Assembly election results, it can also be argued that if in 45 marginal constituencies<sup>2</sup>—in which the Congress candidates emerged victorious in 1989—there is a 5 per cent vote swing (a little over one and a half lakh votes) away from the Congress and in favour of the party which stood second in these constituencies, the Congress would not be in a position to retain these seats. Similarly, in 19 constituencies<sup>3</sup> where non Congress candidates emerged victorious in 1989, a swing of less than 5 per cent of votes in favour of the Congress party candidates could result in their victory. These trends become critical in view of the fact that a marginal swing of votes in favour of/against a political party, in previous elections has had a significant impact on the election results.

A survey of the political developments in Karnataka during the last five years shows certain clearly discernible trends. The nature of the mandate secured by the Congress party in the 1989 Assembly elections must to be

borne in mind in any analysis of the emerging political scenario in the State. The voters had endorsed the claims of the Congress party and had fondly hoped that the infighting and instability witnessed during the Janata party rule would be a thing of the past.

However, five years after having returned to power, the party appears to have frittered away the voters mandate. Having changed its Legislature Party Leader and Chief Minister thrice in five years, the ruling party has been plagued by infighting and internal discord which has contributed to a lack-lustre performance at the governmental level. Congress Party President and Prime Minister, Mr. Narasimha Rao has himself admitted that the Congress parties major problem in South India, is the internal dissensions within the party. It is very clearly, the familiar story of a public mandate not respected, a public mandate treated with insensitivity and the gradual evaporation of public support, all self-inflicted.

The report card of the other major political parties is equally dismal. The Janata Dal has even today, not learnt from past experience and continues to suffer from the all-to-familiar internal dissensions and convulsions dictated by the unbridled ambitions of its leaders. The BJP which managed to secure 29 per cent of the vote and 4 of the 28 Lok Sabha seats from Karnataka in the 1991 elections, appears to have failed to consolidate its position in the State. The Karnataka

TABLE 1

TOTAL NUMBER OF CONTESTANTS:  
KARNATAKA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY  
ELECTIONS 1983-1994

| Election | Contestants |
|----------|-------------|
| 1994     | 2500        |
| 1989     | 2011        |
| 1985     | 1795        |
| 1983     | 1356        |

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**TABLE 2**  
NUMBER OF WOMEN CANDIDATES FIELDIED BY THE MAJOR POLITICAL  
PARTIES IN ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS (KARNATAKA) 1983-94

| Election | Party          | Number of Women<br>Candidates | Percentage<br>of total<br>Candidates |
|----------|----------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1983     | Congress       | 7 (220)                       | 3.2                                  |
|          | Janata Party   | 4 (193)                       | 2.1                                  |
|          | BJP            | 2 (110)                       | 1.8                                  |
| 1985     | Congress       | 15 (224)                      | 6.7                                  |
|          | Janata Party   | 7 (207)                       | 3.4                                  |
|          | BJP            | 2 (117)                       | 1.7                                  |
| 1989     | Congress       | 11 (219)                      | 5.0                                  |
|          | Janata Dal     | 4 (208)                       | 1.9                                  |
|          | BJP            | 3 (119)                       | 2.5                                  |
| 1994     | Congress       | 14 (224)                      | 6.3                                  |
|          | Janata Dal     | 9 (223)                       | 4.0                                  |
|          | BJP            | 11 (224)                      | 4.9                                  |
|          | Karnataka Cong | 10 (222)                      | 4.5                                  |

Note: Total seats contested in brackets

Congress Party led by former Chief Minister Mr. S Bangarappa, has yet to firmly establish its independent identity and has attempted to project itself as the true inheritor (at least in the State) of the Indira-Rajiv legacy. The impact of all these factors is clearly seen in the manner the parties went about choosing their nominees to contest the coming elections.

What is striking in the coming elections is the large number of sitting MLA's who have been renominated by the parties. All the non-Congress parties—the Janata Dal, B.J.P., Karnataka Congress and the K.R.R.S.—have renominated all their sitting M.L.A.'s to contest the elections. In the case of the Congress, only 38 sitting MLA's (including four Ministers) were denied renomination. One trend that is clearly noticed, especially in recent times, is the defeat of a large number of sitting MLA's in the elections. In Karnataka itself, in the 1983 Assembly elections 68 of the 126 sitting MLA's who contested were defeated. In 1985, 63 of the 149 sitting MLA's were defeated and in 1989, 104 of the 165 sitting MLA's were defeated (Shastri and Vinod 1991:394). In the above analysis sitting MLA's who

contested as rebels have not been taken into account. Given the high incidence of rejection of sitting MLA's by the electorate, parties should have demonstrated greater caution while renominating their sitting MLA's.

Further, the aura of secrecy that has shrouded the process of selection of party nominees on the one hand and the 'leave it to the High Command' attitude in all the major political parties on the other has also seriously adversely affected the electoral prospects of these parties. Some political parties were not able to decide on the official nominees even after the last date for the withdrawal of candidates from the electoral contest. As a result long term planning of electoral strategies, constituency wise, becomes difficult. Such a situation has come about because most political parties suffer from the absence of internal democracy. In the process, the choice of candidates to contest elections is invariably left to a few individuals, at times even a single individual—the High Command! The 'leave it to the High Command' culture has throttled the democratic process. Any process of candidate selection must logically com-

mence at the local level where the image of the prospective candidates are evaluated on the basis of public reactions to their candidature. In this context, the recent direction of the Chief Election Commissioner to political parties 'to democratise themselves and strictly follow their respective party constitutions within four months or face possible derecognition' (*Times of India*, October 17, 1994) needs to be welcomed.

This election also witnesses a phenomenal rise in the number of contestants, with preliminary estimates putting the number at around 2500. With every election, the number of contestants has been steadily increasing. Table 1 clearly indicates this point. One factor that could have caused this increase, especially in this election, is the fact that four political parties—Congress, Janata Dal, BJP and Karnataka Congress—have fielded candidates in nearly all constituencies.

While all political parties have promised to ensure that adequate representation would be given to women while selecting their party nominees, very few women have been nominated by the major political parties in the 1994 Assembly elections. Table 2 provides the details.

It is also interesting to note that none of the major political parties, save the Karnataka Congress Party, is projecting any leader as the Chief Minister in the event of the party winning in the elections. Two developments need to be highlighted in this regard. The Congress President Mr. Narasimha Rao, while addressing pressmen recently, stated that the 'Congress Legislature Party will elect the man who will form the next government' (*Times of India*, October 20, 1994). This statement would have to be seen in the light of the manner in which the party changed three Chief Ministers in five years in Karnataka. Secondly, the leadership tussle within the State Janata Dal appears to have come out in the open. Mr. Ramakrishna Hegde's decision not to contest the elections, the recent statement of Mr. Deve Gowda that 'Mr. Hegde has made it clear that he will not contest for the leadership and that his vote is for Deve Gowda' (*Deccan Herald*, October 29, 1994), and Mr. Bommai's comment

that the leadership issue is still open (*Deccan Herald*, November 7, 1994), only reflects the differences within the party on this issue.

The main issues that the various parties are projecting through their election manifestoes, reflects the casual and cavalier manner adopted by them in this regard. Their commitments in the manifesto are, very clearly, superficial and skin deep. While the Congress is seeking votes in the name of stability, social harmony and development, the Janata Dal is projecting its commitment to economic development and social justice. While the BJP is vigorously portraying itself as 'the viable alternative' and the Karnataka Congress Party (drawing inspiration from the N T Rama Rao of 1982/83) emphatically states that it will strive to get an 'honourable and respectable status for Karnataka ... and restore self respect of five crore people of the State'.

Finally, it must be stressed that the fear of incurring the wrath of the Chief Election Commissioner has made political parties extremely cautious in their election campaign. Officers also appear to be discharging their responsibilities with greater impartiality. The recent case of a Deputy Commissioner ordering the seizure of the official car of a Minister who was on an election tour as a clear indicator of this trend.

The 1994 Assembly elections in Karnataka, appears to be one of the most keenly contested elections in the State. A survey of the election scene in Karnataka clearly indicates that if the entire electoral process—and the democratic discourse—is to be people centered, it is imperative that steps be taken to bridge the 'democratic deficit' that is so glaringly apparent. While the efforts being made by the Chief Election Commissioner to provide for a 'level playing field' that permits the aims and aspirations of the voter to be more effectively and authentically articulated need to be appreciated, the time has come to think in terms of the creation of a non political 'Ombudsman' like authority, in every constituency, to monitor the election campaign and ensure that the code of conduct to which all parties have given their commitment is not violated.

## References

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2. Athani, Bagepalli, Baindur, Balloli, Belthangady, Bhatkal, Bydagi, Channapatna, Chikkodi, Chincholi, Doddaballapur, Guledgud, Hadagalli, Hanur, Harapanahalli, Holalkere, Hubli rural, Huliyaadurga, Hulsoor, Jagalur, Keragodu, Kirgaval, Kolar, Kortagere, Kottur, Krishnarajapet, Kunigal, Kushtagi, Lingsugur, Mangalore, Muddebehal, Nargund, Puttur, Raibag, Rannibennur, Sadalga, Sankeshwar, Shivajinagar, Sira, Srinivasapura, Srirangapatna, Tikota, Tumkur, Udupi, Varthur
3. Bailhongal, Basavakalyan, Basavanagudi, Bidar, Bilgi, Chamrajnagar, Chiknayakanahalli, Chitradurga, Haliyal, Heggadevana Kote, Hirekerrur, Kalghati, Kanakapura, Nippani, Raichur, Shimoga, Tirthahalli, Vittla, Yelburga.4. Cheluvu Raju, K. H. et al., *Karnataka Assembly Elections 1983: A Post Election Survey, Bangalore, Department of Political Science, Bangalore University, 1983.*
5. Shastri, Sandeep and Vinod, M. J., 1991. 'Dynamics of Electoral Politics: A Case Study of the Karnataka Assembly Elections 1989'. *Indian Journal of Social Science*, Vol. 4, No. 3, pp. 387-406. □

## Otto-Burlingtons' tie-up to internationalise Mail Order Shopping in India

**B**URLINGTON's pioneer and market leader in mail order shopping in India, announced on November 1, the signing of its joint venture agreement with Otto Versand, Germany, a world leader in the field. The agreement was signed in Hamburg.

Otto Versand will hold 51 per cent of the equity in Otto-Burlingtons' as the joint venture company will be known. Burlingtons' equity stake will cover the remaining 49 per cent. The company will have an initial authorised capital of Rs. 36 crores, and the management is confident of targetting a net sales of Rs. 100 crores within the next few years.

'Otto Burlingtons' 150 page plus Spring—Summer catalogue 1995 contains over 500 items, thereby making it a mail order department store that aims to meet every conceivable need of the Indian consumer, from every segment of society, thus providing the discerning consumer with the first ever opportunity of ordering an exclusive international range of quality merchandise like garments and select consumer durables from the comfort of their homes, through mail order.

Otto Versand, a world leader in the business of mail order shopping has an annual turnover of Rs. 48,000 crores. In addition to its famous Otto catalogue in Germany, it owns internationally acclaimed catalogues like *Speigel* and *Eddie Bauer* in the US, *3 Suisses* in France, *Grattan* in the U.K., *Postal Market* in Italy and *Otto-Sumisho* in Japan, to name a few.

Burlington's a Rs. 100 crore group, and a leading manufacturer and exporter of high fashion garments, has been on the Indian scene for six decades. Being the first to successfully launch the main order shopping concept in India in 1990, it has 26 retail establishments in the country.

With the increasing trend of cost effectiveness in mail order shopping, and a burgeoning Indian middle class of over 180 crores, Otto-Burlingtons' foresees India as having a tremendous market potential for the mail order home shopping industry. Hence it has chalked out a well planned marketing strategy aimed at bringing about a revolution in consumer shopping trends in the country.