

Election Statistics Sans Analysis

Reviewed by SANDEEP SHASTRI

THE dynamics of the electoral process in India, has been increasingly focussed upon as a subject of study, in recent years. In the light of four decades of conduct of elections to the Lok Sabha and State legislative Assemblies, studies have sought to draw attention to a wide range of factors and forces that have played a critical role in shaping electoral politics. S.P. Agrawal and J.C. Aggarwal, in their work *Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha Elections in India 1989 and 1990: Process and Results with comparative study of Manifestoes*, have sought to explain the purpose of the book as being to present the readers with a 'handy reference volume providing an overview of elections to the Lok Sabha in 1989 and Vidhan Sabha in 1990'.

In this book, which runs into more than 250 printed pages, only 35 pages, are the original contribution of the authors. The rest of the book catalogues, in original, the manifestoes of the major political parties, election statistics, and press reports relating to the Lok Sabha Elections (1989) and Vidhan Sabha Elections (1991). The book also contains the text of V.P. Singh's address to the nation after assuming office as Prime Minister and the list of Ministers in the National front Government with portfolios, which appears slightly out of place as it has been expressly projected by the authors that the work deals with the process and results of the 1989 and 1990 elections.

The introductory chapter, deals with several basic issues including those which are not even remotely connected with Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha elections (the role of the speaker and deputy speaker of the Lok Sabha, the Business Advisory Committee, a list of presidents and Vice Presidents of India

and speakers of the Lok Sabha can be cited as examples) — and gives an impression of being over simplistic in its analysis. A statement in the introductory page that in the 1989 elections the National Front/Janata Party came to power, clearly demonstrates that the

Lok Sabha and vidhan Sabha Elections in India 1989 and 1990: Process and Results with Comparative Study of Manifestoes

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niceties of parliamentary government appear to have been ignored.

While the sub-title of the book indicates that the work attempts a 'comparative study of manifestoes', in reality there is a mere narration of the election manifestoes of major political parties—in their original form—running into more than 150 pages and the comparative analysis is limited to a tabular presentation.

In recent times, experience has shown, that once voted to power, political parties are known to give scant regard to the promises made in the party manifesto. The election manifesto of the National Front issued prior to the 1989 Lok Sabha election (which is contained in the book) states that Article 356 should not be misused for political purposes and Governors should not be used as agents of the party in power at the Centre. Soon after

coming to power, the National Front Government secured the resignation of several Governors appointed by the previous Congress Government and recommended fresh appointments in their place. Later, it invoked Article 356 in Karnataka in a situation when the Congress party was plagued by internal crisis. The issue of election manifestoes prior to an election appears today to have become ritualistic and seem to have been shorn of any practical significance.

While highlighting the significance of the 1989 Lok Sabha elections, the authors have focussed only on issues of marginal significance. The highlights of the elections according to the authors include: Winner with the highest number of votes, candidate elected as M.P. while in jail and three members from one family winning the elections.

An analysis of the distortion between the percentage of votes polled and seats won by political parties and independents, the electoral victory of an increasing number of candidates inspite of their securing less than fifty per cent of the votes polled, the impact of independents on the electoral process and the pressing need for electoral reforms—all basic issues that should figure in any serious study relating to the electoral process—do not find any mention in the study. The book also contains several factual inaccuracies. Only two are cited here as examples. In the discussion on the voter turnout in the 1989 Lok Sabha elections (pp.186-87), the authors have taken into account only the first phase of polling and have based their analysis only on this phase.

The National Front government has been described as being the

first multi-party Government in independent India (p.187). The Council of Ministers headed by Charan Singh which was administered the oath of office in July 1979 had ministers drawn from the Janata [S], Congress[U] and the A.I.A.D.M.K.

The above limitations notwithstanding the election statistics that the book contains and the election manifestoes of the major political parties that are detailed can serve as useful reference material for researchers.

However, the quality and utility

of the book would have been further enhanced if the authors had devoted sufficient time and space for undertaking a meaningful analysis of various basic issues that are fundamental to understanding the nuances of electoral politics in India. □