

Mainstream

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The 17th Lok Sabha Polls (2019) in Kerala: A Decisive Political Vote

M.R. BIJU and M.R.B. ANANTHA PADMANABHA

Abstract

For the Left parties in Kerala it is the time for a clear introspection. Unless they adopt stringent corrective measures, they may soon be on the road to elimination. Arrogance of some topmost leaders of the Left parties and violence promoted by a section are primarily responsible for their decline in the State. While the Kannur model of violence practised by party workers across the State has had a drastic impact, even other factors cannot be neglected. While instances of apparent double-speak led to a loss of credibility, a sour lack of connect with the masses too may have contributed to the rout. The authoritarian style of functioning of the State Chief Minister also contributed a lot. For example, on issues like Sabarimala, the stand of the CM was not in tune with the ground realities prevailing in the State. The Hindus, comprising the Ezhavas and Nairs, have been main supporters of the CPM. The way the order of the Apex Court on Sabarimala was handled by the State Government forced a large section of the Hindu women to desert the party. Further, the Left parties, unlike the past, are unable to convince the people outside the party and take them into confidence. The leadership even refused to listen to the pulse of the common man; thus naturally the sympathisers began dwindling.

Prelude

When the Congress suffered a drubbing in most parts of the country, Kerala bucked the trend and stood firmly with it, handing the party-led United Democratic Front a landslide. While the

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UDF won 19 of the 20 seats on offer, the Communists suffered a humiliating defeat, winning only one seat in their only remaining bastion. The verdict was almost a repeat of 1977 when the UDF won all 20 seats. The Sabarimala factor made its impact, but not as predicted. While the CPM-led Left Democratic Front suffered a debacle, the BJP-led NDA failed to win even a single seat. The BJP, riding on the Sabarimala sentiments, had entertained hopes of winning at least two seats, but the best the party could achieve was a runner-up position in Thiruvananthapuram. In all other seats, the NDA finished third. However, the BJP was able to bag close to 3 lakh votes in Pathanamthitta and Thrissur.

Alappuzha turned out to be a face-saver for the Left as A.M. Ariff, the CPM's sitting MLA from Aroor, managed to wrest the seat from the Congress. In the UDF tally of 19, the Congress has 15, Muslim League two, and Kerala Congress (M) and RSP one each. Nine of these seats were won by a margin of more than one lakh votes, with Congress chief Rahul Gandhi breezing past his nearest rival P.P. Suneer of the CPM by a record 4.31 lakh votes in Wayanad. The ignominious defeat the Left suffered will have far-reaching repercussions in State politics. Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan will have too many questions to answer, especially on the Sabarimala front. It could even go a long way in redefining his political ambitions. State Congress President Mullappally Ramachandran and senior leader Ramesh Chennithala have demanded Pinarayi's resignation, terming the verdict a fitting reply to his "arrogance and the Left Government's anti-people policies".

While the LDF suffered shock-defeats in its traditional strongholds, including in north Kerala, the victory of underdogs Remya Haridas (Alathur) and V.K. Sreekandan (Palakkad) over sitting MPs P.K. Biju and M.B. Rajesh respectively should further demoralise the Front. Chief Minister Vijayan, who termed the verdict unexpected, said the party would look into the