

By AMITA KANEKAR



The more things change, the more they remain the same. So goes an old French saying, ^{Not the government we voted for} implying that even apparently turbulent changes can result in a continuation of the status quo. The Goa election scene 2022 might have been one of the most turbulent in the history of the state, given the astonishing number of parties in the fray, their huge rallies, big-shot campaigners, and strangest of promises, not to mention the last-minute party-hopping – both real and sham – by politicians of every hue, all in all leaving the electorate with a headache from trying to keep up with everything happening even in a single constituency.

But, as expected, the result of all the pre-election hoopla has turned out to be the proverbial damp squib. The press is making much of the many new faces in the Goa assembly (a sizeable 47%) and the fact that many old and experienced politicians have bitten the dust. It is also interesting to note that it is the Old Conquests areas which have by and large chosen change, while the New Conquests areas – the seat of much traditional and casteist power, from massive landowners like the Ranés, to powerful temple bhatkars – have chosen to stay with the BJP. The long and short of it all, however, is that the sitting government, with its terrible COVID record, horrible environmental record, atrocious disregard for social justice, vast collection of scams and super-scams, and basically failures on every single front, has come back to power with a big increase in seats.

At this moment, on the eve of another five years of what will surely be impossible-to-imagine misgovernance, what can we do but just correct some of the arrogant presumptions of those who would credit us for keeping them in power. We refer to the BJP, who, as expected, have declared their victory as proof of the people's support, and are spending a ton of public money on advertising a promise to continue as before, along with thanks for "placing your faith and trust once again in BJP".

The truth, though, is that we did not. We did not vote for the BJP. By 'we', I mean the majority of voters of Goa, since majorities are the big issue in electoral politics. The BJP has got only 33.3% of the votes polled in Goa, which means that 66.6% of the voters, i.e. a pretty vast majority, did not vote for the party.

And yet the BJP has won. So what happens to those majority votes? Are they just to be forgotten? How can it be that the majority of votes have no value and no representation? Here we have a party which has won just one-third of the vote getting one half of the seats in power, and becoming able to form a government almost "by itself" – i.e. without consulting anybody else. What this also means is that the two-thirds of the voting population are going unrepresented in the corridors of power. How can this be called a democracy?

Just look at the actual numbers. AAP polled 6.8% of the votes and won 2 seats, i.e. 5% of the total number of seats. The Congress polled 23% of the vote and won 11 seats, i.e. about 25% of the total seats. Both of these results seem reasonably close in votes and seats. But the Goa Forward Party polled 1.8% of the votes, and got one seat, while the Trinamool Congress polls 5% of the votes and got zero. And the independents, the Revolutionary Goans Party and the Nationalist Congress Party all together polled 19.37% of the votes, but won only 4 seats in all, i.e. just 10% of the total seats. While the BJP polled 33.3% of the votes but won 20 seats, i.e. 50% of the total seats.

Once again, we have proof in our faces that the First-Past-The-Post system followed in Indian elections is not a democratic one. How many seats won by a party does not depend on the actual votes they get, but on how good they are at micro-managing and manipulating the voting numbers in each constituency. Which means that the votes of the majority, or a sizable minority, will always be left by the wayside. What India needs - urgently - is electoral reform. We need to switch to Proportional Representation, i.e. an electoral system which gives importance to every single vote that is cast, and gives seats to parties (and independents) according to the votes that they have polled.

It is, of course, true that, in the present situation, a system of proportional representation will not automatically mean radical change. But one thing that proportional representation will ensure that people don't have to worry about their vote being 'wasted', and hence that they will vote for whom they really want, rather than for whom they think is likely to win. It will thus also mean some balance in the corridors of power, where many more inclinations and visions will have to be accommodated. It is true that most people in politics today are not people with any vision for the future, much less for bettering the lives of their constituents; they are professional politicians, who have chosen politics as a lucrative job, just like some people choose medicine or engineering - and they win because they, or their party, knows how to 'manage' elections. But proportional representation is less easy to 'manage' and thus gives scope for real representation and, through this, towards real change.

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