

By Sidharth Mishra



The first round of polls in Uttar Pradesh covering 73 of 403 Assembly constituencies is over. The worst fears of the BJP mandarins are coming true; if the poll percentage is any indication. The turnout was estimated at around 64 per cent till the close of polling. Though the first phase witnessed a three per cent rise in voter turnout, as in the same phase in 2012, covering these Assembly constituencies, it was 61 per cent, its district-level break-up which is throwing the real picture. According to Election Commission records, Etah recorded 73 per cent turnout, Muzaffarnagar 65 per cent, Bulandshahr 64 per cent, Noida 60 per cent, and Ghaziabad 57 per cent. Taking the analysis to more micro-level, a case study shows that in the upmarket Kaushambi locality of Sahibabad seat on Delhi-UP border barely managed to cross 50 per cent mark, wherein minority and low-income group dominated booths of Pasonda village and Khora locality in the same constituency the turnout was huge. The Sahibabad seat overall recorded a turnout of mere 51 per cent. In the neighbouring Ghaziabad seat, it was worse touching just 50 per cent. The district-wise percentage of Ghaziabad managed a somewhat better show, thanks to the performance in the rural seats like Muradnagar. The EC figures clearly indicate that Etah, a Samajwadi Party stronghold, has witnessed eight per cent higher polling at 73 per cent compared to communally polarised district of Muzaffarnagar at 65 per cent. According to the figures, in Agra it was 63.88 per cent, in Aligarh 64.66, in Baghpat 64.99, in Bulandshahr 64.65, in Etah 73, Firozabad 63.59, Gautam Buddha Nagar 59.17, Ghaziabad 58.10, Hapur 65.67, Hathras 64.10, Kasganj 64.83, Mathura 65.39, in Meerut 66.00, in Muzaffarnagar 65.50, and Shamli 67.12 per cent. In districts like Noida (Gautam Buddha Nagar) and Ghaziabad, it's abysmal, as low as 59.17 and 58.18 per cents respectively. Further study shows that the urban seat of Noida had the lowest turnout of 49.02 per cent in NCR, the highest turnout of 66.43 per cent was in Jewar, both in Gautam Buddha Nagar. Such low turnout despite a high-profile candidate like Pankaj Singh, son of Home Minister Rajnath Singh in the fray, raises question on the enthusiasm among the BJP voters. That lack of enthusiasm among the BJP voters is weighing heavily on the BJP leadership. It is best reflected in the tone and tenor of the speeches delivered by the Prime Minister over the past few days. The agenda of development has been replaced by a focus on running down his rivals, starting from the raincoat remark made against former Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh while replying to the motion of thanks to the President's Address in Rajya Sabha. His speeches at the political rallies have become increasingly venomous towards his rivals. Best illustrated by the acronym S-C-A-M (SP, Congress, Akhilesh, and Mayawati), he invented to target the rivals and asking the voters to teach them a lesson. Last week in Bijanpur, he attacked the UP Chief Minister for joining hands with Rahul Gandhi, referring to the latter as the person "who has the largest number of jokes on him on Google." To this, the Akhilesh Yadav-Rahul Gandhi combine retorted by saying that SCAM could mean Save Country from Amit Shah and Company' or SCAM could stand for -- Service of poor, Craze for bravery and honesty, Ability to keep promises, and Modesty. The voters in the region, especially those who had heard the Prime Minister at political rallies less than three years ago, find it very surprising that he has decided to completely ignore the agenda of development and engage in savage personal attacks and counter-attacks. On the same day as his rally in Bijanpur, Modi in Haridwar advised Congress leaders to hold their tongue or else risk getting exposed. "

Mein Congress ke logon se kehta hoon: jabaan sambhaal kar rakho, warna mere paas aapki poori janam patri padi hui hain

(hold your tongue, I have your entire horoscope)." Now, this is definitely a metamorphosis which the voters in the region did not ask for when they enthusiastically voted for Modi in 2014. What

is really marring BJP's narrative in the ongoing campaign? The answer lies in their inability to find an at-par counter to the script which has been rolled out by Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav, whose chances of retaining power has only got emboldened following a tie-up with the Congress. "

The UP Ke Ladke

" narrative for certain seems to have brought back the nightmares of "

Bahari versus Bihari

" theme of the 2015 Bihar Assembly polls. This frustration is getting reflected in controversial BJP MLA Sangeet Som showing video clips of Muzaffarnagar riots and Amit Shah trying to mollify the Jat voters at the last minute. The Jats, who voted for the BJP in large number in 2014, could have gone back to Chowdhary Ajit Singh's Rashtriya Lok Dal this time around. Prime Minister Modi and his close aide Amit Shah, the party president, should realise that they are leaving their flanks unguarded in going aggressive against a resurgent Samajwadi Party-Congress combine and the third aspirant – the Mayawati-led Bahujan Samaj Party. The BJP leaders were imprudent enough to allow themselves to be engaged in beef controversy ahead of the Bihar polls. They could be committing a similar error by engaging themselves in dialogue causing personal abrasions than pushing forward an agenda of governance. BJP has its best bet in talking development and it is done better with the protagonist wearing the local hue. (Sidharth Mishra is Consulting Editor,

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