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Madhya Pradesh Muddle: The Assembly Verdict 2023

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Abstract

Conglomerate State: Madhya Pradesh (M.P.) is a state of states "a collection of left out portions of different states combined into one", said Wayne Wilcox and he further added "No state in India has fewer bonds underlying its unity". (Ali, 2023) This is true, because until its division into Madhya Pradesh and Chhatisgarh in 2000, the state had several regions overlapping one another. There was, "one centre-west Madhya Bharat region overlooking the Malwa plateau. Two, the north-eastern Vindhya Pradesh region, bordering UP and abutting the Vindhya mountains. Three, the southern. Mahakaushal region, a mineral belt neighbouring Maharashtra. And, fourth, the south-eastern Chhatisgarh region, which was later carved out into a separate state", explains Asim Ali.

Keywords: Demography, Mandal Commission, caste politics.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is a hermeneutic study based upon the nuances of the contemporary politics of the state of Madhya Pradesh. The manuscript encompasses several interviews and political discussions revolving around the elections of the state so as to generate insightful conclusions regarding the state politics. In addition, the data has been extracted from certain secondary sources such as: magazines, newspapers, newsletters, etc. to compile this manuscript into its present form. The manuscript is a combined result of a systematic literature review (SLR) employed to decode certain articles and monographs to come out with nuanced and fact-based conclusions.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

AMAZING NARRATIVE: In an exquisite narrative, Asim Ali, raises three preliminary but vital points. When the state came into existence in 1956 (during British period, it was called Central Pradesh and Berar). Two-thirds of its territory was comprised of princely states and the Congress party, joined hands with the princes and traditional landed castes to form the government. This was the direct opposite of another former princely state of Rajasthan, where

the Congress was in direct contest and confrontation with the princely elites and erstwhile Jagirdars.

The second point Asim Ali makes is that on account of co-option of traditional elites into Congress, the latter became factionalised and witnessed the emergence of factional chieftains such as D.P. Misra and S.C. Shukla who had carved out their own political fiefdoms and began lording over Congress sub-units and held them in the complete control. The duo maintained a rival, precarious balance in the organizational matrix of the party. Their continuum was broken and torn asunder only twice – once in the years 1977-80, called the quaint Janata experiment and two, a short-lived B.J.P. period of 1990-92.

The third point Asim Ali makes is that upper castes were more deeply entrenched in M.P than in U.P. and other states and this entrenchment was not followed by any political mobilisation in erstwhile princely states. Till 1967, the upper castes maintained their vice-like grip on the state and between 66 to 86 per cent of state level ministers belonged to the upper castes, thus making their hegemony complete and comprehensive. (Malpani, 2023)

An important fact to be noted is that the Mandal Commission which shook the state of U.P. and Bihar, left relatively little impact on M.P. This was because of two factors. The OBCs who constituted nearly 40 per cent of M.P.'s population, lacked a strong agrarian base such as the Yadavs, Kurmis and Jats had in the states of U.P. and Bihar. The year after 2000, when the state was bifurcated, the Yadav, Kurmis and Jats comprised only 4%, 2.5% and 0.3% of population respectively. Such small blocs, dispersed territorially, did not form a compact cohesive bloc.

The second factor is the politics of Digvijai Singh in 1990s. He created a coalition of extremes. He bypassed the OBCs and created a coalition of Rajputs, Dalits (14%) and tribals (22%). Together with Rajputs, they constituted nearly one-third of state's population and formed a solid phalanx which was strong enough to dominate the state. Small wonder, in the tumultuous period of 1990s, when other states were embroiled in Mandal and Mandir politics, Digvijay Singh could lead the Congress to dominance and formed two consecutive governments. But after this ten years hegemony, Digvijai Singh was in the docks and gave way to another BJP strategist Shivraj Singh Chouhan – an OBC satrap.

The failure of Digvijai Singh to continue to remain in a domineering position was nearly self-invited. He succeeded in raising the educational level and health conditions of tribals and dalits but ignored the infrastructure resting on roads and electricity. The BJP was quick to take advantage of this vital deficit and roamped home on the plank of Bijli, Sarak and Pani (electricity, roads and water). In this quest and eventual victory, the BJP wooed OBCs. This was a big failure of Digvijai Singh, owing to which, there was a sudden backlash of OBCs in the electoral politics of the state. The renowned political scientists James Manor pointed out the extent of OBC resentment against Congress because of its tilt towards dalits and tribals. Led by fire-brand Uma Bharati and a seasoned and sedate Shirvraj Singh Chouhan, the BJP accosted a big win in election in 2013. It accounted for about 50 per cent of OBC votes. The Congress got a small slice of 26 per cent OBC votes in 2003 and that was the beginning of the end of Congress supremacy in M.P.

It may be noted that the OBCs in M.P. constituted a big agricultural bloc which covered nearly half of the population of state and hence was important electorally speaking. Shivraj Singh Chouhan went wholehog to increase and expand irrigation, raised power supply to increase

ground water, invested in the construction of rural roads, improved procurement system which created agricultural miracle in M.P. Between 2007 and 2015, agriculture output increased by 10.9 per cent, the highest in India. It was substantially higher than the Indian average of 4.3 per cent. But post 2018 period was an era of competitive dominance of both BJP and a revived Congress and BJP failed to check the drift and decline in agriculture. Agriculture growth slowed and farmer's income stagnated. In the field of health care, M.P. touched its nadir and became one of the worst effected states in India.

A new development took place in M.P. politics. The Congress under Kamal Nath began aggressively wooing the OBCs by promising increased reservation for them. The BJP faced a backless of dalits and tribals in 2018 election and its loss among the dalits and tribals was to the tune of 10 and 16 percentage points (Malpani, 2023), which proved fatal.

The 2023 contest was tight. Under the RSS, there was a saffron surge, which was further cemented by the influence of charismatic and popular leadership of Narendra Modi. The Gandhi scions Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka, ably assisted by Kamal Nath were highly optimistic but December 3, 2023, dashed their hopes of revival. Sanjay Kumar et.al. talks about the tactics such as caste nexus, holding massive campaigns thereby reaching even those sections who are situated at the bottom of the pyramid and this is where the Bhartiya janata Party got an edge over its so called opponents and this became evident from the electoral results of the state of Madhya Pradesh.

CLOSE SHAVE: As stated earlier, on all account, the contest appeared close for 230 seats of M.P. The two parties, ever since the announcement of candidates were caught in a turmoil of protests and angry demonstrations. Many hopefuls were denied tickets, and quite in few were replaced and displaced and this triggered a mini-revolt in both parties. The Congress formed the government in 2018 but Jyotriraditya's revolt in 2020 reduced it to a minority and paved the way for the ascendency of Shivraj Singh Chouhan. It was a lucky return of the prodigal, with the rival Congress was left simmering. However, the party which used to be faction-ridden in good old days, appeared united under Kamal Nath who was backed by Digvijay Singh, Kantilal Bhuria, Ajay Singh and Arun Yadav. The party also announced the Chief Ministerial face – Kamal Nath.

The BJP which ruled M.P. for 18 years during the last 20 years was banking on a formula of collective leadership of Shivraj Singh Chouhan, union ministers Narendra Singh Tomar, Faggan Singh Kulaste and Prahlad Patel. Shivraj Singh, though piqued by the presence of rival stalwarts, was still at the centre of the narrative as a survivalist.

DISTRIBUTION OF LARGESES: The Congress, encouraged by its massive triumph in Karnataka, was dreaming of a repeat performance in M.P. It announced many populist schemes such as "Rs 1500/- a month to women, Rs. 500-1500 to school students', increased price of wheat and rice crop, health insurance on the lines of government in Rajasthan; 27% reservation to Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in government jobs and the implementation of old pension scheme (OPS). (Chunav Bhaskar, Bhopal, 2023)

This was matched by BJP's alluring list of Ladli Behna Yojana of Rs 1000 to Rs 1200, which Shivraj Singh raised further to Rs. 3,000/- eventually. (Sanjay Kumar, 2023) The Congress announced a caste-based survey to disrobe the BJP of its slogan Sab Ka Sath, Sab ka Vikas. The BJP accused the Congress of dividing society on caste basis. The Congress bet of caste census did not gain much momentum and proved futile. The Congress, hopes to improve on its

2018 position when it won 114 seats with a vote share of 40.38% did not materialise. The total number of seats was 230, out of which 35 were for SCs and 47 for STs. The total number of electors was 5, 61, 36,229 and those between 18-19 age bracket was 11, 29,513.

The campaigning was high voltage. The Gandhi scions accused Jyotiraditya Scindia of treachery in 2020 to bring down the fifteen months Congress government. The BJP fielded 18 Scindia loyalists in the field. Scindia retorted by calling Priyanka Vadra a part time politician. Prime Minister Narendra Modi was confident of final outcome. He said, "In the rallies, I also saw how angry the people of Madhya Pradesh are with the dynastic politics of and negativity of Congress. Congress has no vision, no roadmap for the development of Madhya Pradesh". (Jyoti Mishra, 2023)

That criticism apart, Congress was still hopeful of doing well. Both BJP and Congress pinned their hopes on women and announced largesse for them, because women nearly matched men in numbers in many seats. This can be shown in Table No. 1 below:

Table No.-1

Increase in the Turn Out of Men and Women in Election				
Election Year	Electors in Crores		Voters Turn Out (in %)	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
2023	2.88	2.72	-	-
2018	2.64	2.41	75.8	74
2013	2.46	2.21	73.9	70.1
2008	1.91	1.71	72.3	65.9
2003	1.98	1.81	71.9	62
1998	2.32	2.16	66.4	53.5
1993	2.07	1.95	68.2	52.3
1990	1.94	1.85	61.2	46.8

Source: Adopted from the Hindu, November 5, 2023 from an article by Mehul Malpani and Nistula Hebber, (Bhopal-Shivpuri) titled In Madhya Pradesh, Congress and BJP pin their hopes on women voters, P.7.

THE D DAY: On November 17, 2023, Madhya Pradesh voted for 230 assembly segments. The voter's turnout was 74.31%. Constituency-wise Sailana in Ratlam registered a voting percentage of 85.49%. In Khilchipur Rajgarh constituency, the voting percentage was 84.17%, followed by 84.16% in Seoni's Barghat constituency. In Bhind, voting percentage was 58.41%, in Gwalior south, it was 51.05% and Jabalpur cantonment recorded 52.5% voting.

In Neemuch, it was 81.19%, in Shahjapur 80.95%, in Alirajpur 56.24% and in Bhopal, it was 59.19%. The election was to decide the fate of 2533 candidates by nearly 5.59 crore eligible voters. This figure included 2.87 male voters and 2.71 female voters. A record number of 5000 booths were managed by women and 183 booths were run by disabled officers.

One can now look at the trend in voting turnover of BJP and Congress. In 2003, BJP got 42.60% vote share and Congress received 31.70% votes. BSP got 10.61 percent vote. In 2008, BJP got 38.09% vote share and Congress got 32.85. The BSP share was 9.08%. In 2013, BJP got 45.15%, Congress 36.79% and BSP 6.42%. In 2018, the BJP's shares was 41.02, followed by Congress share of 40.89% and others including BSP got 10.83 votes. In 2020, the Congress split owing to the rebellion of Jyotiriditya Scindia and 22 MLAs went over to BJP. They were given tickets by BJP. Out of these 22, 14 received less votes now. Total votes were 2.72 crore

and votes cast were 1.93 crore.[1] The Dimiri seat of Narendra Singh Tomar, witnessed scuffle between Thakurs and Brahmins.

Ten seats in M.P. were considered hot. They were Indore one (69.8%), Dimini (66.1%), Churhat (69%) Jabbalpur West (71.6%), Narsinghpur (82%), Niwas (82%) Chhindwara (81.59%), Budni (81.5%), Dantia (79.2%) and Lahar (67.4). The top contenders in these seats were Kailash Vijaivargi (BJP – Indore), Narendra Singh Tomar of BJP (Dimini), Ajay Singh of Congress Churhat, Rakesh Singh BJP (Jabbalpur West), Poahlad Singh Patel of BJP (Narsinghpur), Faggan Singh Kulaste of BJP (Niwas), Kamal Nath of Congress (Chhindwara), Shivraj Singh Chouhan of BJP (Budni), Narottam Misra of BJP (Datia) and Govind Singh of Congress (Lahar).

INTERESTING FACTS: Bhopal's Sania Sheikh, aged 23 was set for delivery on November 17, 2023. She voted and then went to hospital and delivered a child after some time. In Shivani, a disabled first time voter went and cast her vote in Tusinagar booth with her father. Kailash Thakur, a first time voter was a pigmy of 30 inch height. Eighty years old Kapana Parekh went to polling both with oxygen support. Vikram Agnihotri's both hands were cut off, so he used his foot to cast vote and indelible ink too was put on his foot. In Char Imli situated polling booth, ninety five years Vidya Devi cast her vote. In the Gwalior-Chambal region, fearing scuffle, minister Bhadoria and leader of opposition Dr. Govind Singh were detained in their respective houses. In Sailana, the tribals showed exemplary enthusiasm and their voting percentage went upto more than 90%.

WHAT WORKED IN BJP'S FAVOUR: The foursome Sanjay Kumar, Suhas Palasisar, Yatindra Singh Sisodia and Sandip Shastri opined, "In Madhya Pradesh, the BJP was able to stave off the fatigue factor and seize the initiative from a combatant Congress on account of a carefully curated strategy … in its choice of candidates, projection of leadership and projecting the welfare schemes of both the central and state governments. If the 'double engine' sarkar advantage was evident in any state, it was visibly on display in Madhya Pradesh".

There was a 7.5% increase in vote share, which enabled BJP to annex over 70% of seats. The Congress, on the other hand, suffered a decline of 0.5% vote share and lost over 40% seats. This can be shown in Table No. 2 below:

Table No.-2

Performance of Parties				
Party	Seats won in 2023	Seats change over in 2018	Vote % in 2023	Voter change over
Congress	66	-48	40.4	-0.49
BJP	163	54	48.55	7.53
BSP	0	-2	3.4	-1.61
Others				

Source: Adopted from The Hindu, December 7, 2023, P.7.

There is evidence that voters were happy with the performance of both state and the centre. The Lok-niti CSDS survey points out that seven out of every ten voters were satisfied with the performance of central government. The corresponding figures for state was six out of every ten. The BJP did not display the name of Chief Ministerial candidate. Instead it fought in the

name of Prime Minister and collective leadership in the state, though, of course, Shivraj Singh Chouhan's name was evident as first among equals.

The Congress fought in the name of Kamal Nath as the Chief Ministerial face but peaked too early in the campaign. It had released its electoral promises far too early, which enabled the combative BJP to come out with counter promises to match them. The survey records that about one-fourth of respondents decided to whom to vote for in the last few days and four out of every ten decided to make their choice after the announcement of names of candidates. The welfare schemes, for farmers and those for women such as Ladli Behna and Ladli Laxmi became instantly popular and vote catching and did the trick. There was a groundswell of support for the BJP because of these carefully crafted schemes.

The Lok-niti-CSDS survey of demographics points out that BJP was extremely popular among those who were below the age of 25 and gave a 14 percentage advantage to BJP in this age group of about 25 years. Six out of every ten voters who had to higher education voted for BJP, thereby giving her a twenty-six percentage points lead to BJP. In urban areas, the BJP had an edge over Congress to the extent of fourteen percentage points over two-thirds of rich and half of middle class voters voted for BJP. This can be shown in Table No. 3:

Table No.-3

Vote by Demographics		
	Voted for	
	Congress	BJP
Upto 25 years	41	48
26-35 years	38	52
36-45 years	42	49
46-55 years	39	47
56 and above	40	47
Rural	41	46
Urban	37	55
Non-literate	44	40
Upto Primary	45	45
Upto Matric	38	52
Intermediate	38	50
Graduates and above	34	59
Poor	47	41
Lower	42	46
Middle	36	53
Rich	30	64

Source: Adopted from The Hindu, op.cit., P.7.

This table shown that while the Congress had a marginal advantage in the case of poor, the BJP enjoyed a higher level of support among high caste groups. One can now see the support of castes and communities for both parties in Table No. 4 below:

Table No.-4

Castes and Communities	Voted for	
	Congress	BJP
Upper castes	21	74
OBCs	35	55
Dalits	45	33
Adivasis	51	39
Muslims	85	8

Source: Adopted from The Hindu, op.cit., P.7.

The BJP focussed on right issues at key moments and that did the trick for her and proved advantageous.

THE ROLE OF CASTES/COMMUNITIES AND THEIR VOTE SHARE: Aadyat Prakash and Sanjay Kumar maintain that "Despite its rhetoric over the question of caste census, Congress failed to make a dent in the OBC vote".

Thus consolidating its upper caste vote base with OBCs, and advasis, BJP got a landslide victory. The Congress was ahead of BJP among the SC voters with 16% support and BSP got 19% of their vote share. The Jatavs voted heavily in favour of BSP and the Congress too secured about half of their voter. Thus the Congress maintained a lead among Adivasis. "The vote share was the closed among the Bhil community with a difference of only 4% between Congress and BJP. The Congress secured half or more of the votes of other tribal communities; while the BJP managed more than a third of votes", said Aadyat Kumar and Sanjay Kumar. The bulk of Muslims voted for Congress though their population is barely 7% of M.P.s total population. Among the upper castes, the Congress got little support, including Rajputs.

REIGN OF SHIVRAJ SINGH CHOUHAN AND MODI'S INFLUENCE: Shivraj Singh Chouhan was the Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh since 2005, minus a two years hiccup when Kamal Nath replaced him. The Lok-niti-CSDS survey points out some interesting facts. First, it says that though they liked Shivraj Singh Chouhan, even if he was not campaigning, it would have made no effect in their voting pattern. This is shown in Table No. 5 below:

Table No.-5

Lack of Chouhan's Face and Its Impact			
If Shivraj Singh Chouhan has been declared a CM's face, would it have impacted your voting decision?			
	Yes	No	Can't Say
Over all	22	57	21
Among BJP voters	29	54	17

Source: The Hindu, op.cit., P.7.

One can now see what would have been the impact of CM's face:

Table No.-6

Lack of Chief Minister's Face and Its Impact			
Had BJP declared the CM's face, would it have impacted your voting decision?			
	Yes	No	Can't Say
Over all	25	53	22
Among BJP voters (%)	33	49	18

Source: The Hindu, op.cit., P.7.

One can see the popularity Test in Table No. 7:

Table No.-7

Has Shivraj Singh Chouhan's popularity	(%)
Increased	35
Same as Before	30
Decreased	28

Source: The Hindu, op.cit., P.7.

One may look at Modi effect in Table No. 8:

Table No.-8

If Modi was not declared the face in election, would you vote for BJP?			
	Yes	No	Can't Say
Among BJP voters	56	19	25

Source: The Hindu, op.cit., P.7.

One may now see the impact of Rahul's campaigning among the Congress voters, in Table No. 9 below:

Table No.-9

Would Rahul's campaigning your voting decision			
	Yes	No	No response
Among Congress voters	54	30	16

Source: The Hindu, op.cit., P.7.

One may now see people's choice of CM in Table No. 10:

Table No.-10

Voter Performance	Kamal Nath	Shivraj Singh Chouhan	Jyotiradhitya Sciendia	Narendra Singh Tomar
Overall	34	39	4	2
Among Congress Voters (%)	79	4	1	1
Among BJP Voters (%)	2	77	6	4

Source: The Hindu, op.cit., P.7.

One may now judge, performance based voting trend.

Suhas Palshikar maintains, "Voter assessment of a government is a mixed bag. However popular a government may be, voters will have some disappointment with it. Such disappointments sometime culminate in an overall negative assessment and sometimes voters offer a positive assessment inspite of some disappointments". This is true of Madhya Pradesh where Shivraj Singh Chouhan's performance was modest, not outstanding, yet the voters reposed faith in him. The voters could not specify any outstanding achievement of Shivraj Singh Chouhan's government, and when asked, what they liked most about him, the response was niggardly and meagre. This is shown in Table No. 11 below:

Table No.-11

Which work done by state government the voters most?	Overall	Congress	BJP	Other
Development work of state government	18	23	71	6
Work for the benefit of poor	11	25	64	11
Reduced power cut	7	52	33	15
Solved drinking water problem	5	52	36	12
Reduced prices	4	34	51	15

Source: The Hindu, op.cit., P.7.

The voters felt, there was not much progress on the industrial front. Hence one can see the co-relation between performance and perception in Table No. 12 below:

Table No.-12

Performance Vs Public Perception			
In the past 5 years in MP	Inflation	Unemployment	Establishment of new industries
Increased	79	49	28
Same as before	9	17	20
Decreased	8	24	40

Source: The Hindu, op.cit., P.7.

The most surprising thing about this election was that despite a large number of people, not being very satisfied with the performance of state government, chose not to punish it. This can be seen in Table No. 13 below:

Table No.-13

Disappointment Vs Vote Share				
Work of government disliked by voters	Overall	Congress	BJP	Others
Price Rise	37	40	48	12
Increasing unemployment	24	42	48	10
Corruption	7	51	36	13
Insufficient initiatives for development	5	52	35	13
Did not work for the poor	4	56	18	26

Source: The Hindu, op.cit., P.7.

One can now see voter's satisfaction in Table No. 14:

Table No.-14

Voters Satisfaction Vs Vote Share				
Work of government disliked by voters	Overall	Congress	BJP	Others
Fully satisfied	32	6	90	4
Somewhat satisfied	30	35	53	12
Somewhat dissatisfied	16	68	5	17
Fully dissatisfied	19	79	6	15

Source: The Hindu, op.cit., P.7.

Finally, one can assess, people's satisfaction with the work of union government in Table No. 15:

Table No.-15

Satisfaction with Central Government	Overall	Congress	BJP	Others
Fully satisfied	39	15	77	8
Somewhat satisfied	32	47	38	15
Somewhat dissatisfied	12	59	29	12
Fully dissatisfied	14	76	10	14

Source: The Hindu, op.cit., P.7.

What really pushed BJP to victory were the numerous welfare schemes rolled out by state and union government. Any scheme if properly executed contributes to voter satisfaction while leakages and gaps generate discontentment and desbair.

Whereas the total poll percentage for BJP in MP was 48.5, the actual votes polled were larger than this. The beneficiaries of central government schemes such as Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana which even though benefited only less than 3 in 10 respondents, proved a big vote-garnering device. The Ujjawala Yojana too benefited people extensively and six out 10 respondents said they were its recipients. About half the voters were those who were benefited by Ayushman Bharat Yojana. Their percentage was 49. This can be shown by drawing yet another table, table No 16 below:

Table No.-16

Influence of Central Government Schemes over voters				
Central Government Schemes	Benefited (%)	Voted for		
		Congress	BJP	Others
Prime Minister Matri Vandana Yojana	22	37	54	9
Ayushman Bharat Yojana	49	39	50	11
Prime Minister Awas Yojana	28	35	57	8
Ujjwala Yojana	59	41	51	8

Source: The Hindu, op.cit., P.10.

Beneficiaries of state government schemes too voted for BJP. There was Mukhyamantri Kaushal Samvardhan Yojana and 58% benefited from it. One can see it in table no. 17 below:

Table No.-17

Beneficiaries of state government schemes and vote choice (%)				
State Government Schemes	Benefited (%)	Voted for		
		Congress	BJP	Others
Mukhyamantri Avas Yojana	23	34	57	9
Mukhyamantri Kaushal Samvardhan Yojana	12	33	58	9

Source: The Hindu, Ibid.

While this was the position of those who were the actual beneficiaries, one can now see how the non-beneficiaries voted for in Table No. 18 below:

Table No.-18

How did non-beneficiaries vote for?		
Schemes	Voted for	
	Congress	BJP
Prime Minister Matri Vandana Yojana	41	47
Ayushman Bharat Yojana	43	46
Prime Minister Avas Yojana	43	45
Ujjwala Yojana	40	44
Mukhyamantri Avas Yojana	43	46
Mukhyamantri Kaushal Samvardhan Yojana	42	47

Source: The Hindu, op.cit., P.7.

WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTION: One reason behind the major success of BJP was the support extended by womenfolk to it. From the day one, Narendra Modi was launching a number of women-centric schemes. Shivraj Singh Chouhan too followed in the footsteps of his leader and launched schemes that were dear to women such as Ladli Behna Yojana and Ladli Lakshmi Yojana. In the lead up to the election, the BJP also announced subsidised cooking gas and increased reservation in government jobs through its Rakshabandhan gift scheme.

The Congress too did not lag behind and promised Rs. 1500/- per month to women if it came to power. But people did not respond to this offer and showed no enthusiasm for it.

Post-election, there was a breezy discussion on the effects of higher women voter turnout in 34 constituencies where women voters outnumbered male voters. Hence it becomes necessary to delve into the voter patterns of women in this election.

Whereas in 34 constituencies, the women turnout was higher than that of males, the overall picture was a little different. As against 78.2% turnout among men, the women turnout was 76.03. In 2018 too, the women turnout was about 2% less.

If one were to look at the gender performance, both men and women together showed a greater inclination to vote for BJP than Congress. Where the support to women to BJP was 47%, it was 43% for Congress. There was a strange irony to which Jyoti Mishra and Saloni Kumari draws our attention. They say, "Ironically, Congress polled more among women than it did

among men voters and the BJP polled more among men than among women". But immediately after this statement, the learned writers come out with a statement that runs counter to their earlier assertion. They say "Delving into urban and rural trends, urban women displayed a stronger inclination towards the BJP (53%) as compared to women in rural areas (45%)".What is more, even the table they draw confirms higher vote of women in the polls. This can be shown in Table No. 19 below, given by these writers:

Table No.-19

Both men and women preferred BJP over Congress. BJP was preferred more among urban women compared to rural women (%)		
Party Voted for	Congress	BJP
Men	38	50
Women	43	47
Rural Women	43	45
Urban Women	42	53

Source: Adopted from The Hindu, op.cit., P.10.

One can now look into another interesting facture relating to the women's voting behaviour. This is also related to the campaign impact on voting trend of women. The data furnished by these learned writers reveal that more women than men arrived at last minute decisions with 29% of women and 22% of men deciding to vote in favour of their preferred party on the eleventh hour. This is shown in Table No 20 below:

Table No.-20

More women than men were last minute deciders			
Gender	Last minute	During campaign trail	Early deciders
Men	22	44	34
Women	29	42	36

Source: Adopted from The Hindu, op.cit., P.10.

Jyoti Mishra and Saloni Kumari point out to one more fact. They say "Further analysis indicated a slight edge for the BJP among women deciding late (48%) compared to those deciding during the campaign (46%) underlying the significance of campaign dynamics in shaping electoral outcomes". This is shown in Table No. 21 below:

Table No.-21

BJP has slight edge among women who decided late (%)		
Time of Vote Choice	Party voted for	
	Congress	BJP
Women who decided on last minute	42	48
Women who decided during campaign	45	46
Women who decided early	42	47

Source: Adopted from The Hindu, op.cit., P.10.

One can focus attention on women-centric welfare schemes such as Ladli Behna and Ladli Lakshmi Yojanas. Here too the beneficiaries generally favoured the BJP. But in contrast, that segment of women who did not derive any benefit from these schemes, turned towards Congress in some cases, though the entire picture presents a mixed trend. This is apparent in Table No 22, given below:

Table No.-22

Women beneficiaries preferred BJP			
Women beneficiaries of state schemes	Overall	Congress	BJP
Ladli Lakshmi Yojana			
# Beneficiaries	48	44	49
# Non-beneficiaries	41	44	43
Ladli Behna Yojana			
# Beneficiaries	81	42	48
# Non-beneficiaries	12	53	36

Source: The Hindu, op.cit., P.10.

From this table it becomes apparent that the advantages that BJP got from state sponsored schemes was not huge and could make only a marginal impact on its victory. The same is true of Ladli Behna Yojana which did not result in an extraordinarily large accretion of votes to BJP and the impact was only marginal. There was more of hype concerning these schemes.

WHAT TILTED THE BALANCE: It was deft game plan of BJP. It put seven MPs, including three Union ministers and one national general secretary in the ongoing contest. The goal was not only to secure a win in their respective constituencies but also to influence surrounding seats. The strategy paid off. Narendra Singh Tomar, Rao Udai Pratap Singh, Kailash Vijaivargiya, Prahlad Patel, Riti Pathak and Rakesh Singh not only won their seats but helped the party to win in adjoining seats. The loss to BJP was just two seats – one of Faggan Singh Kulaste in Madla and Ganesh Singh in Satna.

BJP also undertook a booth strengthening exercise in almost all the 65000 booths which were digitised. A feedback system at BJP office in Bhopal was set up wherein the booth in-charges and Panna Pramukhs could be contacted and their work cross checked. They were also asked to spread awareness among voters about government's welfare schemes and how to apply for them. "This ensured last mile connectivity and delivery of schemes", says Rahul Noronha.

The BJP also made an early start in announcing 39 candidates. It helped and 24 of these won. The Congress, on the other hand, delayed in this and when the names were announced, there were intense protests. The party capitulated and changed candidates at Gotegaon and Sumaoli and lost both as their original candidates fought as independents. Of the 22 seats where the Congress rebels contested, BJP won 19 seats. By contrast, the 22 seats where the BJP rebels contested, the Congress could win only eight.

The Congress relied on old faces and in the exercise, it failed miserably. It repeated 85 candidates and 60 of them lost. Even in the case 13 new candidates, the Congress could win only 8 seats.

Among the communities, the BJP won 59 per cent general seats and the Congress could win only 31 percent of these. The BJP also gained a bulk of Brahmin and Thakur votes to the tune of 60 and 58 per cent respectively, compared to 29 and 32% share of Congress in these communities. The reason why BJP won these communities was because it appointed a Brahman as state chief and Tomar ensured it the Thakur votes in general.

The BJP relied heavily on Modi and did not allow the contest to turn between Chouhan and Kamal Nath. It made it one between Modi and Nath and the contrast between the two faces was immense and unending. Kamal Nath was a poor face compared to Modi. The latter gave the slogan Modi ke man me MP and MP ke man me Modi, i.e. MP resides in Modi's heart and vice versa. In Indore, Modi had a road show and its appeal was that it won all nine seats. The BJP also took a lion's share among STs and SCs, winning 24 out of 49 reserved seats. The Congress had the vicarious satisfaction of annexing a sizeable number of Gond seats but that did not automatically ensure overall win.

The BJP had a pan-India plan and the Congress was hamstrung in a state level election. Its campaign was lack-lustre. It had appointed Sunil Kanugolu, the election strategist who was the key strategist of the party's win in Karnataka but in MP, he found the going difficult owing to the intemperate leadership of Kamal Nath who relied mostly on his own inept strategy and brooked no interference by an outsider. He would bypass even the directives of Congress High Command. The party failed to execute a smooth plan as it did in Karnataka. The result was that BJP, whose vote share in 2018 was 41.02 per cent, rose up to 48.55 percent.

This is not to say that it was all roses for BJP. It had its own anxious moments and setbacks. Twelve of Shivraj Singh Chouhan's, thirty three ministers failed to win. But the party's resounding win overall made the difference and compensated for this loss. It secured 163 seats, compared to 66 of Congress which was indeed a dismal show. The BJP converted its eighteen years old anti-incumbency into a robust pre-incumbency and this is what made the difference between the two rival parties. This victory was carefully crafted and executed by the BJP's formidable duo – Modi and Amit Shah. There was none to match them in the Congress and the final outcome was a foregone conclusion.

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