The recent election results have shown a paradigm shift in Kerala politics. The initial impression is that the performance of regional parties has cost the fortunes of both fronts, forcing them to move to Cantonment House; a probable turning point for Kerala’s politics. During the last two elections, the CPI (M) took initiatives to check untested claims of regional grouping, and they fairly succeeded in quantifying and assessing the vote base of those parties involved. This time around, the Congress failed to take a cue from these learnings to assess the potential of splinter groups in the UDF. At the end, both fronts lost the race.

Kerala is one of the earliest states to have embraced coalition politics. It saw ups and down in the 70s, crashing at times due to the underpinning of democratic processes. There was stability in the 80s and 90s, but at the cost of consolidation of religious groupings, with the latter being allowed to handle major portfolios, like education and industry. At times, it was justified. However, these parties took pride mostly in the consolidation of regional and religious grouping, most often forgetting the basic principles of democracy. This election may be called a quarterfinal (I expect another election before the end of five years) where smaller parties are tested.

The JSS, the Congress (S), the Kerala Congress (Anti-merger Group), and the CMP are the major small parties that spoiled the winning chances of both the dominating fronts. None of them won any seats, but altogether they contested 11 seats. If these seats were given to any of the dominant parties, it would have tilted in any one’s favour, thus securing a comfort zone for the ruling front. These splinter groups may have to assess and revisit their strategies, if they have to survive threats to their roots.

Fielding young candidates is always a welcome measure. However, the youth brigade should also understand that for assembly elections, voters will look at someone who has been around for a while and who has proved his/her candidature. It cannot be someone brought into the fray by Rahul Gandhi, unlike in elections to the Parliament. While the Congress fielded many from the so-called Young Turks, the Left parties chose their young candidates from their cadre, eventually stealing the show. Voters are choosy when seek to they select their representative for Delhi and Trivandrum.

Panchayat elections in Kerala had forecasted that the UDF would go win a brutal and sizeable majority in the assembly elections. The PR management of the LDF government in the last round turned it upside down. The ‘VS’ factor had a decisive role in the poll outcome. The PR tool of VS politics had negative outcomes and vicissitudes at times (like the Kunjalikutty and Balakrishna Pillai issues), but it turned positive for the LDF in the run up to the elections. For those that were attacked, their parties fared well, but the front lost their plot in the end; the damage was more on the allies’ side.

The result is also a victory of leadership, as the Congress did not have a leader of national stature. A higher percentage of voter turnout and LDF’s extraordinary show against the anti-incumbency has concluded that we are caught up in stereotypical melodramas and talk shows. We are running from real time issues and do not want to solve it.

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