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A detailed analysis of the 16th general elections will have to necessarily wait for the final figures that will be released by the Election Commission shortly and after all major political parties conclude their internal assessments and analysis. The CPI(M)'s Polit Bureau is meeting on May 18 for a preliminary review and its Central Committee will meet on June 7 and 8 by when the respective state committee would have conducted their preliminary reviews. However, it is clear by the time this column is filed that the BJP is marching towards scoring a single party majority in the Lok Sabha. This is happening, for the first time after 30 years, since Rajiv Gandhi rode on a sympathy wave following Mrs. Indira Gandhi's assassination in 1984 securing 405 out of the 542 Lok Sabha seats then. The BJP, therefore, is in a position to form a single party government jettisoning its NDA partners if it so feels.

During the course of the campaign, it was clear that the people, across the board, were looking forward to a government that can provide them relief from the continuous onslaughts on their day-to-day life. The track record of the Congress-led UPA government, particularly during the last two years, was one of imposing unprecedented economic burdens through relentless price rise, economic slowdown and consequent unemployment on the one hand, and large-scale mega corruption leading to the loot of people's resources, on the other. The resultant people's discontent was successfully exploited by the BJP to gain this electoral victory.

In this background, the BJP mounted an effective campaign backed by an unprecedented display of money power and the building up of a media hype. The successful projection of its Prime Ministerial candidate, Narendra Modi, was forged through a combination of Hindutva agenda and the promises of 'development' and 'good governance'. On the first count, Narendra Modi, since the 2002 Gujarat communal pogrom, has always remained the mascot of Hindutva communal polarization. On this score, therefore, the RSS and the BJP found it unnecessary to mount any further public campaign as his projection as the future Prime Minister in itself was sufficient. This continued to be the strongest undercurrent of the BJP campaign.

The second count was aimed at a larger audience, as past experience confirms that Hindutva appeal alone remained unsuccessful in garnering a majority. This time around, the BJP succeeded in building a myth of the Gujarat development model which can be replicated all

over India if only Narendra Modi became the Prime Minister. Gujarat was depicted as the *El dorado*, a land of flowing milk and honey. As the *Washington Post* correspondent Rama Lakshmi points out in the 'Making of the Modi Mythology', BJP's campaign managers brilliantly mobilized Indians around the belief in a piece of land and a deity, i.e., Gujarat and its presiding deity Modi – not unlike Ayodhya and Ram". By mounting such a spectacular and untiring mythology of Narendra Modi, the people's 'bijali, sadak and paani (electricity, roads and water) concerns were mythologised and projected in the voter's mind as Gujarat – "the land of milk and honey, an earthly paradise, a Shangri-la of sorts where there are jobs and electricity for everybody, farmers live blissfully in a subsidy less existence, highways that match the best in the world, and a place that is untouched by the epidemic of corruption".

The Congress campaign, on the other hand, was utterly ineffective and unable to take on this challenge of myth building. Though it tried to counter by doling out statistics showing the real picture of Gujarat 'development model', the sheer fact of its track record robbed the Congress of any claim to credibility. The story of the current Congress electoral rout, therefore, begins some years earlier when the UPA government that it led pursued such policies of imposition of miseries and economic burdens on the people.

Further, the Congress leadership failed to enthuse its own cadre and following in even communicating to the people the extension of Constitutional rights – right to education; the right to information, the right to tribals to forest land and produce, the right to rural employment etc, - however halting and inadequate they may have been. In the first instance, all these measures were initiated by the UPA-I government under the influence of the Left parties. Their implementation spilled over into the UPA-II government. Nevertheless, loath to give the Left any credit, the Congress could have claimed some for itself. The fact that it could not do so once again reconfirms that these measures only saw the light of the day due to the Left parties insistence. It's insincerity on these measures having thus been re-established, this combined with its pursuit of neo-liberal economic policies and mega corruption scams to lay the grounds for an unchallenged run of the BJP campaign blitz to the finish line.

These elections, however, throw up some important issues that merit serious consideration for the future of Indian parliamentary democracy. The display of money power has been unprecedented. This permitted the mounting of the BJP campaign as an 'event

management' exercise (to borrow L. K. Advani's description). On the other hand, such monetary resources were used for unethical ways of enticing voters including direct monetary payment for votes by some other parties as well. The Election Commission had seized an unprecedented amount of cash, apart from liquor and other enticements, during these elections.

Additionally, the use of terror and intimidation as weapons of political mobilization were in full display in states like West Bengal. The consequent widespread rigging and violence targeting the Left parties led to a distorted result betraying true reflection of popular support of the Left parties. Unfortunately, despite a plethora of complaints to the Election Commission, these distortions could not be rectified. Despite large-scale popular mobilizations against the economic miseries of the people due to price rise etc and against massive corruption, the Left could not translate these into electoral gains. While the Left retained its position in Tripura with larger victory margins and registered major gains in Kerala, these elections highlight the need to identify and overcome its weaknesses.

There is an urgent need for the country to seriously correct such distortions through proper electoral reforms. For instance, issues like corporate funding of political parties and restrictions on expenditures by political parties (confined only to candidates today), must be seriously addressed. The CPI(M) is the only political party that had proposed an outright banning of corporate donations to political parties. Instead, it was suggested that the corporates must be encouraged to contribute to India's democratic processes financially but these funds must find their way into a corpus to be maintained by the Election Commission or some other government agencies to be used to finance a scheme of State funding of elections like it exists today in many western democracies.

Importantly, the CPI(M) alone has been arguing for introducing a system of partial proportional representation in our electoral system. Even after such a major victory, the BJP's vote share will be much below 50 per cent of all votes that have been cast in these elections. This means that there are more voters who voted against the BJP than for. Such anomalies arise due to the 'first past the post' system where a candidate polling the highest vote amongst all contesting candidates is declared elected. In many mature democracies only those who secure more than 50 per cent of the polled vote in an election where more than 50 per cent of the electorate has cast its vote are eligible to be elected. A partial proportional representation

system can also limit and thereby help in trying to eliminate the influence of money and muscle power, whose influence is currently growing, in distorting the democratic opinion of the people. Two Lok Sabha constituencies can be combined into one and every voter be given two votes, one for a specific candidate and another to a political party on the basis of its policies and programme. Political parties, in turn, will submit a priority list to the Election Commission beforehand. Depending on the percentage of their vote share nationally, each party is allotted a number of seats which are filled on the basis of the priority list that has been submitted earlier. The time has come to seriously consider such suggestions and reforms.

Further, these elections have also thrown up many lacunae in existing laws that need to be corrected. For instance, the country saw Narendra Modi file his nomination while polling was on in some other constituencies. The BJP released its Manifesto in Delhi when the first phase of polling was on in some constituencies. While polling was on in Varanasi, Narendra Modi released a video speech from Gujarat as there was no polling there. This, however, was nationally telecast. All such and many more such instances were possible because of loopholes in existing laws.

The myths leading up to the BJP victory are bound to explode sooner than later. This throws up the challenges for the future. We are on the morrow of the pay back time to those who financed this election campaign. This can only mean further impositions of burdens on the people, forget providing them any relief. The subterranean campaign of Hindutva undercurrent will only sharpen communal polarization threatening our secular democratic foundations. How effectively both these are met will define the contours of the future for our people and the country.

The CPI(M) is committed to strengthen popular people's struggles on both these counts to work for social harmony strengthening our country's unity, integrity and secular democratic foundations, on the one hand, and opposing the anti-people economic policies while working for an alternative pro-people policy direction in our country. After these elections, all of us have to brace ourselves for bigger struggles in the future on both these counts while resolutely resisting the anti-Communist attacks in the Left's stronghold across the country.