

## RK NAGAR BY POLL

The Election Commission (EC) has cancelled the RK Nagar by poll in Chennai on April 9, 2017, ie. just two days before the date of polling. It promised to hold the by election when “the vitiating effect created by the distribution of money and gift items to allure the electors.. gets moved with the passage of time and atmosphere in the Constituency becomes conducive to the holding of free and fair election.”

This by election was necessitated by the demise of Ms. Jayalalitha, who was MLA from this Constituency.

The contest for the RK Nagar Constituency has become extremely contentious and prestigious for AIADMK and DMK and, more importantly so, for the ruling Shashikala faction as well as its dissident faction of AIADMK because they believe that their election will give them political legitimacy as the true inheritors of Ms. Jayalalitha. For T.T.V. Divakaran, the candidate of ruling faction, it was a life and death battle as he is said to be aspiring to ascend the seat of power in Tamil Nadu.

The Election Commission made fool – proof arrangements to monitor the entire electoral process in RK Nagar. It deployed an unprecedented number of Central Observers; flying teams; static surveillance teams and video surveillance teams. But nothing could deter the parties and candidates from pursuing their own methods. They proved to be hard nuts and unyielding. No complaints to EC, no amount of arrests, no identification of malpractices, no seizures of money and gifts could stop the candidates and parties. Milk tokens, mobile charge coupons, newspaper subscriptions, cash transfer to no – frills bank accounts and payments of mobile wallets etc., were liberally distributed. The candidates and parties have innovated and used new forms of allurements. The IT Department is reported to have found 89 crore rupees in the premises of State Health Minister C. Vijaya Kumar meant for distribution among the voters. The EC has expressed its anguish at this sordid state of affairs.

The point here is not that the electoral malpractices have begun just now in India or RK Nagar Constituency. It will be a monumental self-deception or deceiving others to say so. In its entire life, the EC might not have cancelled the elections in even 0.09 per cent of Constituencies for the reason of the electoral malpractices by the candidates and parties. Does this mean that the elections in rest of the places were free from malpractices, or were they at insignificant and condonable levels? Is it not a fact that each election – from Panchayat to Parliament – in the last few decades had gone from bad to worse in the malpractices? Is it not a fact that even the candidates with bulky money pockets and enjoying the prop of the ruling classes, sometimes are found expressing disgust and helplessness when they are confronted by more ‘powerful’ contenders from their own stock? Does we not know how the ugly nexus of money-muscle power and vested interests, are, in many cases, dictating the fate of elections through their foul methods? Does we not know that the MNCs, ICHs, big funding institutions and the monopoly controlled Media are using their resources to influence the outcome of elections? Is it not a fact that parties and candidates with meager financial resources but with a genuine urge to serve the people are losing hope or interest of contesting and winning the election as they find the election being reduced into a big business and a big gamble?

The EC, for that matter, the entire world know that the major parties in Tamil Nadu had already set a model in the electoral malpractices. It is no secret that these parties fought the last Assembly elections on the strength of money and gifts they could offer to the voters. They did not hesitate to openly parade and lend a legal status and sanctity to their gifts by including them as the electoral promises in their Manifestos. This is the extent to which the electoral process— a pillar of Indian Democracy was degenerated.

So, what happened in RK Nagar is a replay of the same methods and practices that this Constituency had seen earlier and this time, indeed, they were taken to the level of vulgarity. The

EC, which had given the certificate of “free and fair election” for many elections held in similar conditions, perhaps felt that its own credibility rather than anything else was in serious stake in RK Nagar as the forces indulging in malpractices have danced nakedly, laughed at and challenged the EC and electoral process.

What next? The EC said that the by poll for RK Nagar will be held when “the atmosphere in the constituency becomes conducive to a free and fair election”. Last year, the EC has cancelled elections for two Assembly constituencies in Tamil Nadu citing the same reasons of malpractices. But nothing more came out. The same candidates from AIADMK and DMK, contested the election when it was held later.

The steps like the cancellation of elections in one or two constituencies cannot wash out the dirt and rot accumulated in the body of electoral process. The cancellation of RK Nagar by poll can be an eye washing exercise. The token measures of this kind can at best sprinkle the perfume on the rotten and stinking state the democratic processes were taken in our Country. The parties of ruling classes in our Country lag behind none in shedding tears for this state of affairs. They condemn the electoral malpractices in high pitched voices. They roll out countless and beautiful suggestions to repair the situation. But, as the leaders and protectors of the exploitative system in India, they know it well that this system itself is a fertile soil for the growth and play of all evils including the degeneration of the democratic processes. The ruling classes know how to live with them, use them, white wash and make them appear clean without, of course, touching the roots of degeneration. They are happy that the present system as it exists and works will assuredly keep the parties and forces opposed to the present system far away from the democratic institutions and processes and power.

The task before the people and democratic forces is to carry forward the fight for a democratic economic and political system that dethrow the class forces which thrive on anti – democratic practices; that banishes all sorts of electoral malpractices and attacks on the democratic rights of people and that ensures equal rights to people in all spheres of life. The voters who are coming under the influence and pressure of perpetrators of electoral malpractices must realize that, by their act, they are harming their own fundamental interests and are being reduced into beggars and join the struggle for a genuine democracy.

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