GOOD governance is unpopular, this spoke Mr. L.K. Advani. Does good governance mean making the state without? The answer is no. The state has to have adequate emphasis on issues relating to unemployment, social justice, etc. The sole aim of this resource mobilisation is to come out of the debt trap. The state of Madurai is a prime example. The real purpose of governance gets defeated – to provide social justice to the people. This kind of politics enriches the state and makes people poorer. That is why the President of Brazil, in response to a question on how his state was doing, said his state was doing very well but people were not.

The BJP government in Hamichal Pradesh religiously followed the dictates of the new economic policy, which even Mr. Manmohan Singh is following. It was well known to politicians which had a bearing on the recent elections along with the other factors like the increasing dominance of the organised interest groups on electoral politics, autocratic functioning of a leader, caste polarisation, etc. In other words, the hope that the Ram Mandir slogan and preliments were going to make the government do what it would be able to neutralise the caste differentiation, the autocratic functioning of a leader and the harsh economic measures initiated, was belied.

The 1993 election results have shown that the legitimacy of the government in power declines faster due to the mismatch between the electoral promises and stark realities of the new economic policies. In the 1990 poll the BJP secured 44 seats with 41.2 per cent of the votes and the Congress 59 seats with 37.0 per cent of the votes polled in Hamichal Pradesh. The total votes polled were 67.62 per cent. In the 1993 elections the BJP got eight seats and there was a swing of 6.78 per cent votes against it. Besides this there was a decline in the percentage of votes polled in the constituencies the BJP contested in 1990 was around 70 per cent, whereas in 1993 it was 67 per cent, which is symptomatic of the discourse initiated by the new economic policy and electoral promises made by the competing political parties.

With the changes in the global economy and the shift in the national priorities, a new role is being attributed to the state. In the recent elections this was witnessed as a competition between the forces of neo-statism represented by the BJP, the status-quoism or populism articulated by the Congress and transformational politics going by.

The 1993 elections in Hamichal Pradesh were a watershed. The election results have resolved the BJP’s paradox between the denial of democratic rights and seeking a democratic mandate for the same. The populist or status-quoist thrust of politics represented by Congress could sweep the elections. This thrust occupied a large space in the political campaign of the Congress. It promised people to make Hamichal the “fruit bowl of India and Switzerland of the Himalayas…” All those daily wage employees/casual labourers retrenched by the BJP government would be re-employed. The rights of employees as per trade union practices and the Industrial Disputes Act should be protected... The distinguished employees who became victims of the BJP apathy and discrimination would be reinstated immediately.

These policies provide a continuity to the politics of populism but with a difference. Until the eighties slogans like “Garibi Hatao”, “Land to the tillers” and “Social justice for all” had been raised from time to time. All these slogans, along with the promise of building up a socialist society remained the hallmark of Indian politics.

However, after mid-eighties the slogans of “Justice for all” was replaced by “Justice for the backward castes”. In the Hamichal elections, this acquired an interesting dimension. The rejection of the Mandal Commission report by the BJP government provided the Congress an opportunity to use this as a strategy in contest a sizable section of the OBC’s. This became easier in the absence of the Janata Dal from the scene. The Congress’s election campaign emphasised that it would reverse the policies of the BJP. This was more a negative campaign and the issues relating to social justice found articulation in an indirect manner. This, in a limited way, provided expression to the populist rhetoric of the pre-1966 phase.

Both the BJP and the Congress reinforced the Hamichal Pradesh identity. The emphasis of the BJP campaign was not on issues relating to social justice, but on “self-reliant Hamichal Pradesh” and Hindutva. Even sants and sadhus were pushed into the election campaign of course with no success. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad mobilised sants and sadhus to hold congregations at about 800 places. Moving away from people’s politics inevitably pushed the BJP into the lap of Hinduva and regional chauvinism.

The politics of religious revivalism was brought to the level of gimmickry to garner votes of women. In Hamichal Pradesh, the number of women voters is higher than that of men voters.

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