

## CHAPTER XXIX

### INTERESTING INCIDENTS

In a vast undertaking like a general election in India where the percentage of literacy among the voters is still very low, it would naturally be interesting and at times even diverting to watch the behaviour of some of the voters at the poll. It is not surprising that on the polling day some unusual incidents take place which go to add an element of humour to an otherwise prosaic and serious proceeding. The poll taken during the general elections in 1957 was not, therefore, always as drab and uninteresting an affair as it may sound and did not fail to be relieved by a few humorous incidents here and there.

It would be appreciated, however, that such incidents are by no means typical and occur only once out of a million cases or so. They make news all the same and the Press naturally take delight in publicising and high-lighting such incidents whenever they come to light. It is not surprising therefore, that the public are at times left with an exaggerated idea of the incidence of such cases.

Some of the incidents reported to the Commission are recounted below :—

1. A superstitious voter in a backward district apparently regarded the ballot boxes almost as objects of veneration and was found offering prayers before them before casting his vote.

2. Petals of flowers dusted with vermilion were left upon a few ballot boxes which indicated that some voters had regarded the ballot boxes as objects of worship.

3. In Madras, an old woman voter was actually heard to say aloud inside the polling compartment "In these days you are the King-maker and the Minister-maker. Do grant us more and cheaper rice as in the old days".

4. Some ballot boxes opened at counting were found to contain diverse objects besides ballot papers such as (a) chits wishing success to particular candidates or containing abusive language addressed to them, (b) photographs including a miniature photograph of a Hollywood star, (c) coins, (d) currency notes, etc.

Any cash found in a ballot box was, of course, credited to the Treasury.

5. Madras, Mysore and Orissa reported that a few voters had apparently tried to oblige all the contesting candidates and

proceeded to do so by tearing their ballot papers into pieces and inserting a piece into the ballot box of each of the candidates.

6. Even wild animals appear to have taken an active interest in the novel and unusual activities going on in connection with the poll. At some out of the way polling stations, they were apparently driven by curiosity to approach the scene of these activities and watch the fun.

- (a) In Andhra Pradesh, a panther visited a polling station at about midnight on the night before the poll. Next day, when the polling party was returning to headquarters after the poll at about dusk, a tiger said to be about ten feet in length, stood barring their way and staring hard at the party barely ten yards from their jeep. After an uncomfortable five minutes or so, the party was relieved to see the tiger move away.
- (b) A tiger entered one of the polling stations in Madhya Pradesh the night before the poll and tried to carry away a man sleeping there by his leg. The man's screams aroused the other persons asleep by his side and they raised such a terrific alarm that the tiger was scared away.
- (c) In another polling station in Madhya Pradesh, a panther suddenly appeared on the forest path near the polling station during the progress of the poll and started roaring. The voters present were naturally scared away. It is reported that the visit of the panther prevented more than half the voters of the polling station from exercising their franchise.

7. In a polling station in Bihar, an old woman voter demanded to see "Pandit Nehru" before she would vote. After a good deal of persuasion she was made to accept the fact that the Prime Minister was not present there in person. It was only thereafter that she voted.

8. Uttar Pradesh reports the case of a polling station where a few voters at first demanded to be allowed to vote for "Gandhiji" and "Nehruji".

9. In Madras, a voter refused to exercise his franchise in favour of any person other than "Shri Sukumar Sen", the Chief Election Commissioner. The voter is said to have remarked "I want to vote for Shri Sukumar Sen only and not for the candidate of any of the parties. All these parties have been harassing me with their election propaganda for over a month".

10. For a few voters, the symbol appeared to be all that mattered, the candidate being relegated to the background.

(a) An old illiterate mason turned up at a polling station in Mysore and told the Presiding Officer that the ladder had always been associated with him in his profession since his youth and he wanted, therefore, to vote for the symbol "Ladder". There happened to be a candidate in the Assembly election who had the ladder as his symbol and presumably the mason voted for him. The particular symbol had, however, not unfortunately been allotted to any candidate in the Parliamentary constituency. The voter duly entered the polling compartment for the Parliamentary election after he had voted for the Assembly election but he promptly came out of the compartment with the ballot paper in his hand. He refused to vote in favour of any other symbol than the "Ladder". The Presiding Officer had then to explain the matter fully to him. He was at last persuaded to return to the polling compartment and vote.

(b) In a remote hill constituency in Uttar Pradesh, a candidate had the "Standing Lion" for his symbol. His agent visited a village during the election campaign and canvassed the villagers in favour of the candidate. It happened that he had to spend the night in the village. Unfortunately for the candidate, a leopard attacked a flock of goats in the village that very night and killed a few of them. The villagers decided that the symbol "Standing Lion" was an inauspicious one and had occasioned the leopard's depredations. They sent away the agent next morning telling him that they would never vote for his candidate as he had that inauspicious symbol.

(c) In the same State some boatmen came to vote at a polling station. The first of them who went in to vote apparently looked for the symbol "Boat". When he did not find that symbol on any of the ballot boxes in the polling compartment, he came out very excited and annoyed and demanded the explanation of the Presiding Officer as to why that symbol was not there. The latter explained that no candidate happened to have the "Boat" as his symbol. The boatmen were not convinced by this explanation and left the polling station in a huff without voting after they had taken the Presiding Officer to task for not including the "Boat" as one of the symbols although it had been "sanctioned" from Delhi.

(d) In a polling station in Rajasthan, a blind woman voter asked the Presiding Officer to put her ballot paper in the ballot box which carried the symbol "Buffalo". She explained that her husband had already voted for the symbol "Camel" and that she wanted to vote for the "Buffalo" as they had only these two domestic animals at home. Unfortunately, the "Buffalo" is not an approved symbol and there was no candidate who had that symbol. The Presiding Officer explained the position to the

woman but she refused to vote for any other symbol and left the polling station disappointed.

11. In Rajasthan a man insisted that the Presiding Officer should permit his wife who was not a voter to vote in place of his mother who had not come. He explained that it was his wife who managed his household affairs and not the mother.

12. While inserting her ballot paper into a ballot box, a woman voter in a polling station in Uttar Pradesh cried aloud from inside the polling compartment to the Presiding Officer that eight other women of her village had requested her to cast votes on their behalf as well and that her vote should, therefore, be taken to "represent" their votes also.

13. A dwarf, only two and half feet tall, came to vote at a polling station in Orissa. He insisted on carrying a stool with him inside the polling compartment so that he might stand up on it in order to distinguish the ballot boxes from one another and then to insert his ballot paper unaided into the ballot box of his favourite candidate.

14. One of the candidates in a constituency in Uttar Pradesh had two wives. During canvassing, he was treated with scant courtesy by the women voters who openly jeered him by saying that a person who could not be loyal to his first wife could not be trusted to be loyal to the party which had sponsored him. Presumably this candidate got little support from the women voters at the poll.

15. In Uttar Pradesh, a petition writer who had no reasonable prospect of coming out successful in the contest nevertheless stood as a candidate and held on to the contest to the last. The public wondered at his folly but he appeared to be dead serious. He was eventually routed at the poll so much so that he even lost his deposit. He was not the least perturbed, however, by the result and cheerfully declared at the end of it all that he had succeeded in achieving his real objective, viz., in extensively advertising his name before the public. He added that all this excellent publicity had cost him the small sum of Rs. 250 only (the amount of his deposit) and he expressed the hope that the added custom that such publicity would bring him in his profession in the future would be sure to make this outlay a good enough bargain.

16. A candidate filed his nomination paper in the New Delhi Parliamentary constituency and he described himself therein by the name of "Lord Jesus Christ". He failed to deposit any security, however. The nomination paper was naturally rejected by the Returning Officer at the time of scrutiny

17. There was a case in the Chamba Parliamentary constituency in the Union territory of Himachal Pradesh in which a family had deputed one of their members to vote on behalf of all the voters in the family. He could of course be allowed to vote for himself only.

18. In Uttar Pradesh, an old Muslim couple who had reached the ripe old age of 115 and 112 years respectively and were unable to move about themselves were so keen on exercising their franchise that their sons and grandsons carried them on their shoulders to the polling station where they voted.

19. In Madras, a woman voter who was in an advanced stage of pregnancy insisted on going to the polling station and exercising her franchise. She was barely able to vote for she was delivered of a child almost immediately thereafter.