

CHAPTER XXXI

CONCLUSION

The second general elections constituted an important milestone on the path of democracy in India. The high standards set up in the first general elections were fully maintained and it can perhaps now be legitimately claimed that free and fair elections have come to stay and become part of the tradition of Indian political life.

If the first general elections served to teach the vast number of uneducated voters what the vote means, the second general elections familiarised them with the exercise thereof with discrimination and understanding. Another welcome and remarkable feature that has clearly emerged is the implicit and growing confidence which the Election Commission and the election machinery in the States have come to enjoy in the eyes of the political parties and the general public. Within the space of a few years, therefore, doubts which naturally existed as to the preparedness of the people for democratic self-government or the wisdom of extending universal adult franchise in a country with an overwhelmingly illiterate electorate have been completely dispelled. All observers agree now that an election is no longer a merely novel entertainment provided for the electorate in the cities or the countryside but has come to be a serious political struggle between the contending parties and candidates the outcome of which ultimately depends on the deliberate choice made by the electorate as between the contestants. The degree of political maturity displayed by the electorate even in many backward areas has indeed astonished many impartial observers and students of politics.

The task of organizing and carrying through the second general elections was a formidable one and could not obviously have been carried out satisfactorily without the whole-hearted cooperation of everybody concerned. Notwithstanding apprehensions that closer acquaintance with the electoral laws and their loopholes might breed a spirit of misadventure, the electorate as a whole went to the polls peacefully and displayed exemplary discipline and intelligent discrimination. Breaches of the law were extremely rare and the poll was uniformly smooth and efficient.

The political parties and the candidates contributed in no small measure to the success and smoothness of the polls.

The Government servants had an exacting and vital role to play. They displayed commendable public spirit and spared no pains, sometimes undertaking grave personal risk in order to ensure that the election programme went through duly according

to schedule. Their conduct during the elections helped in consolidating the healthy tradition that public servants must perform their duties in connection with elections in an entirely independent and non-partisan manner. As a result, they have not only earned the gratitude and admiration of the nation but have also made their own task easier for the future. The team spirit displayed by the polling parties, often isolated in far flung areas and composed of individuals drawn from different departments having markedly different fields of activities, was in itself a uniquely satisfying experience and went a long way in building up a general code of service morale.

A special mention is deserved by the Police Force. Although they had no direct part to play in the taking of the poll, they performed an onerous task and went through a severe test, often stretched to the limits of their resources, with admirable zeal and efficiency.

The Commission takes this opportunity to express its appreciation of the keenness and devotion displayed by the large number of officers and staff on whose efforts the organization and completion of the elections depended in a large measure. The burden was particularly heavy in the States affected by the States Reorganisation Act as the delimitation of constituencies had to be carried out afresh and implemented in record time. Considerations of space render it impracticable to mention by names all those who distinguished themselves in the States in organising and carrying through the work. Even then special mention must be made of the valuable work done by the Chief Electoral Officers of the States and the Returning and Assistant Returning Officers of most of the Constituencies. The officers of the Commission also deserve to be congratulated for their untiring contribution to the successful completion of the elections. The three Deputy Election Commissioners, Dr. B. K. Bhattacharya, Shri P. S. Subramanian and Shri P. K. Shunglu, I.A.S., toured constantly throughout the country inspecting the election offices in the States and tightening up the election machinery. Special mention is also deserved by Shri A. Krishnaswamy Aiyanger, I.A.S., who was the Secretary of the Commission during the period and had to put forth herculean efforts to keep things moving. Before and during the elections, the rush of work in the Commission called for a sustained and tremendous effort on the part of the entire staff of the Commission which involved long hours of hard work every day over many months. It is a matter for gratification that the staff proved equal to the task and discharged their duties throughout this period with cheerfulness and zeal.

The Commission is deeply grateful to the Press for its invaluable help and co-operation in creating and sustaining public

interest in the elections at all stages. The All India Radio extended every facility to the Election Commission and to the Chief Electoral Officers of the States for the publicity campaign which had to be undertaken to educate the electorate in the fundamentals of the election law and procedure and the correct standard of behaviour which should be demanded of all concerned during the elections. The All India Radio also broadcast the election results with the utmost promptness when they started pouring in.

The Security Press, Nasik Road, handled an overwhelmingly large volume of work with admirable promptness and efficiency and it was through their help that ballot papers and paper seals could be made available in time in large quantities at short notice. The Government Presses in the States also extended praiseworthy help to the Chief Electoral Officers. The Council of Scientific and Industrial Research made a valuable contribution by manufacturing and supplying indelible ink for use in the elections.

The Posts and Telegraphs Department, the Railways as well as the State Transport Services extended valuable and ungrudging co-operation in solving all problems of communication and the movement of election materials and personnel.

Indeed, the second general elections, like the first, turned out to be a co-operative national venture carried through to a successful conclusion by the enthusiasm and determination of the nation as a whole. Not only did everybody pull his weight but many strained themselves to the utmost and rose to magnificent heights of achievement.