

Muslims unhappy over decline in representation

Muslims in Madhya Pradesh are up in arms against the Congress, saying it has not picked enough community members to contest the assembly elections. And they say they can't take it any more.

The decline in Muslim representation in the Madhya Pradesh assembly has become a major cause of concern for the community that accounts for over four million in the state's 60 million population.

'Muslims understand everything. If we don't get our due share, we will fight for it,' asserted Madhya Pradesh Youth Congress vice president Asif Zaqvi, who has vowed to contest as an independent after the party failed to field him.

Muslims number some 140 million across India and are its largest minority. The Congress has put up only five Muslim candidates while Muslims had no hope of being fielded by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The Congress and the BJP are the two dominant parties in the sprawling state.

Parties like the Bahujan Samaj Party, the Samajwadi Party and the Left have little or no presence in the 230-member Madhya Pradesh assembly.

'There is undoubtedly a sense of alienation among Muslims as they feel the Congress has exploited them without giving them ample representation,' eminent Urdu poet Manzar Bhopali told IANS.

The outgoing assembly has just two Muslim members -- Arif Aqueel of the Congress, representing [Bhopal](#) North, and the Nationalist Congress Party's Hameed Qazi (Burhanpur).

'Muslims are not satisfied with their representation. The Congress didn't allow Muslim leaders to develop even in places like Indore and Jabalpur that have a large Muslim population,' said Madhya Pradesh Muslim Vikas Parishad (MPMVP) president Mohammad Mihir.

'We are worried because our civil liberties are being restricted across the country. We are often looked at with suspicion, but the Congress isn't bothered about our uplift,' said Mihir.

There was a time when Muslims used to win from constituencies spread across the state. These included Ratlam, Ujjain, Jabalpur, Katni, Sagar, Satna, Sehore, Indore and Khandwa.

That was before the campaign to build a Ram temple at the site of the Babri mosque in Ayodhya. And the mosque's destruction in 1992 created unprecedented Hindu-Muslim tensions.

Things reached such a pass that there was not a single Muslim in the state assembly post the 1993 elections. Then Congress chief minister Digvijay Singh subsequently inducted Ibrahim Qureshi in his cabinet.

The representation did increase marginally in the next assembly when three Muslim candidates won in 1998. Again it dropped to two in 2003.

'For us there is no difference between the BJP and the Congress. If the former is against us because of its basic ideology, the latter sidelined us in a planned manner,' complained Ishrat Patel, a political analyst.

'There are about a dozen constituencies including Indore, Mhow, Jaora, Sironj, Shajapur, Agar, Burhanpur, Khandwa, Shujalpur, Neemuch and Mandsaur where the percentage of Muslim voters is above 30 percent but the Congress doesn't field candidates of the community in these places,' he said.

Congress leader Gufran-e-Azam, a former MP, felt that Muslims were not fielded even if they were ready to fight the polls. 'There is no dearth of winnable Muslim candidates but rarely do they get the ticket,' he said.

'Other than the constituencies where the Congress candidate is a Muslim, we are going to vote for the BSP and the Samajwadi Party,' said Mohammad Zafar Hussain, national secretary of Unani-Tibbet Congress.

The Congress, India's oldest political party which at one time counted Muslims among its core supporters, denied it is cold-shouldering the community.

'There is no specific reason behind the decrease in representation to Muslims. Winnability is an important factor while deciding candidates,' explained state Congress spokesman Manak Agrawal.

'Last time, there were only two Muslim faces in the assembly. This time there would be five as all of them are Congress candidates and will surely win.'

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