

The Third General Elections

Studies in Voting Behaviour

I Introduction

Myron Weiner

We begin in this issue a series of first hand studies of individual constituencies analysing some of the important factors which influenced voting behaviour in the third general elections.

The series has been planned and organised by Myron Weiner and Rajni Kothari and will run as follows :

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II An Industrial Labour Constituency : Kanpur	PAEL BRASS
III Religion and Caste in the Punjab : Sidhwan Bet Constituency	BALDEV RAJ NAYAK
IV Voting Behaviour in Poona	V M SIRSIKAR
V Traditionalism and Modernism in U P : Faizabad Constituency	HAROLD A GOULD
VI The Decline of the Left in Calcutta : Muchipara Constituency	ROBI CHAKRAVORTI
VII The Decline of the Left, in a Calcutta Suburb : Behala Constituency	S N ROY
VIII Community Loyalties in Baroda East	RAJNI KOTHARI AND TARUN SHETH
IX Village and Party Factionalism in Andhra : Ponnur Constituency	MYRON WEINER

The study of Kanpur by Paul Brass follows Myron Weiner's Introduction. The other studies will appear in subsequent issues in the above order. — Ed.

THE Indian general elections provide a rare opportunity to systematically examine voting behaviour, one very important aspect of political behaviour, in a developing country. In the articles which follow, the authors explore in some detail the voting patterns which they observed, each in a single Parliamentary or Assembly constituency in the 1962 general elections. Though in no sense an exhaustive study of India's complex voting patterns, these reports provide us with valuable information on how particular groups in rural and urban India voted and what role political, social and economic issues, ethnic and occupational loyalties, party affiliations, the local power structure, and other factors played in the elections.

In his study of the Parliamentary constituency in the industrial city of Kanpur, Paul Brass traces the strength of the successful Communist-supported candidate within each of the major occupational and ethnic divisions within the city. He reports that the failure of the Congress party to nominate Congress labour candidates for either Assembly or Parliamentary seats proved to be an important factor in the voting of the industrial labour force for the Communist-supported candidate. He re-

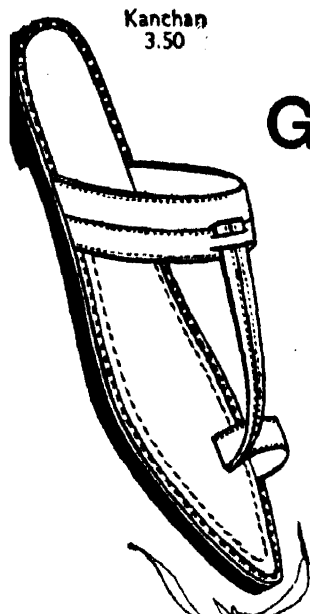
ports too that the major minorities within the constituency, the Scheduled Castes and Muslims, are gradually shifting away from the Congress party. Finally, Brass argues that voters of all communities were strongly influenced by the candidate's attacks against the Government administration. The performance or rather lack of performance of administration seemed to influence voters more decisively than any abstract consideration of public policy. Brass's article on Kanpur thus throws light not only on the problems encountered by the Congress party in industrial areas generally, but also suggests why the position of the Congress party among the voters in U P has been continuously declining since 1952.

Changing Loyalties

Baldev Raj Nayar writes on the victory of an Akali Dal-supported Scheduled Caste candidate in a rural constituency in the Punjab. He shows the powerful influence of religious loyalties in the voting behaviour of both Hindus and Sikhs and the important role played by the gurdwaras for the Akali Dal candidate. But he suggests too that many other factors cut into religious loyalties. Conflicts among Jat-Sikh faction?

within the villages and kinship ties were among the more important factors which led a number of Sikhs to vote for the Congress rather than for the Akali candidate. And loyalty to the Republican party, which in this constituency worked closely with the Akali Dal, led many Scheduled Caste voters to support the Akali Dal rather than vote for Congress as they did in many other constituencies. Loyalties to caste, religion, faction, kinsmen and party were thus all present; the voter had to make a choice among his conflicting loyalties, and the skill of the successful candidate lay in his ability to build a coalition of diverse loyalties.

The changing pattern of loyalties is well demonstrated by V M Sirsikal's study of the elections in Poona where the Congress Parliamentary and Assembly candidates easily defeated the Samyukta Maharashtra Samiti. Sirsikal shows that with the creation of a unilingual Maharashtra, voters are now influenced by caste, religious and party loyalties, not by language. He shows too that Brahmin and non-Brahmin sentiments, which have played such an important role in Maharashtra's political past, continue to be important in voting behaviour in parts of Poona city.



Go lightfoot before the Sun

Feel free as all outdoors.

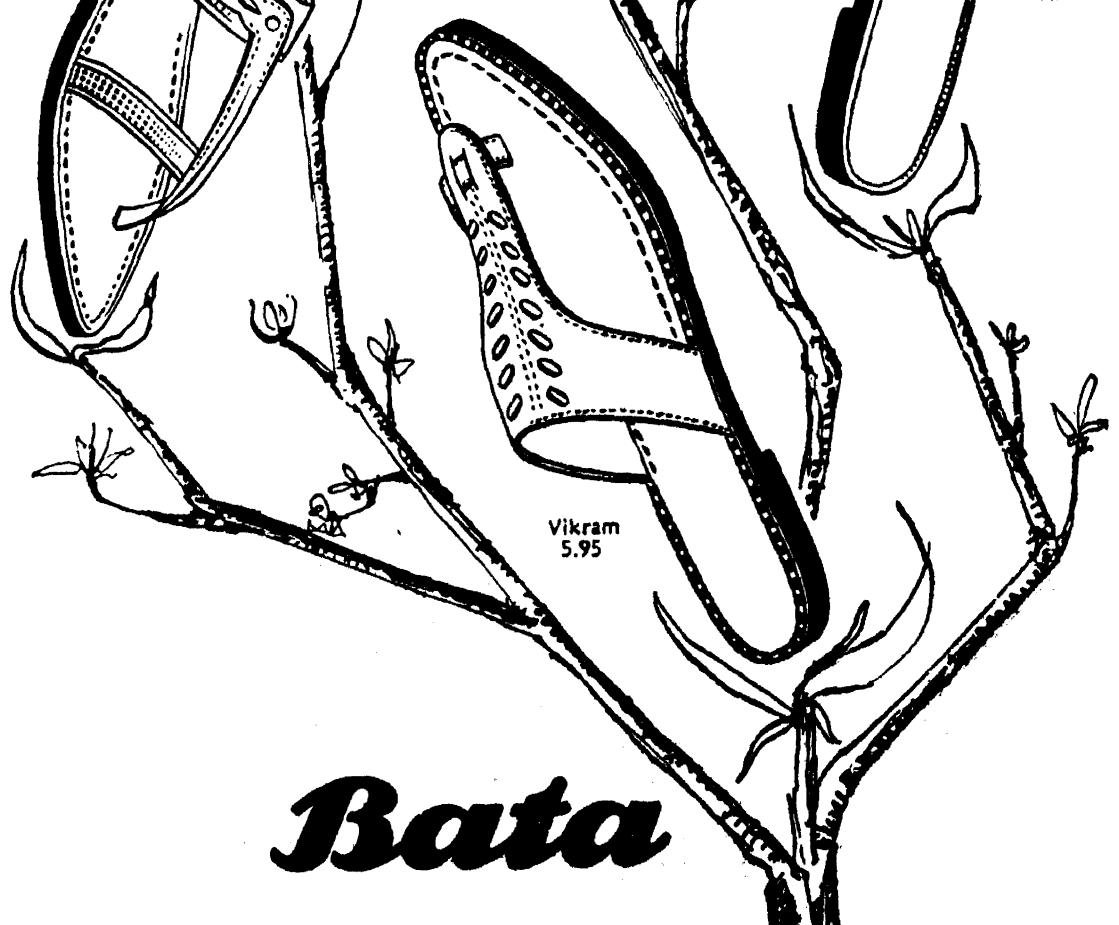
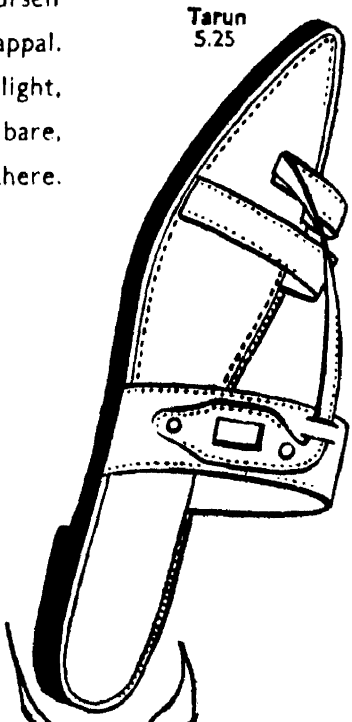
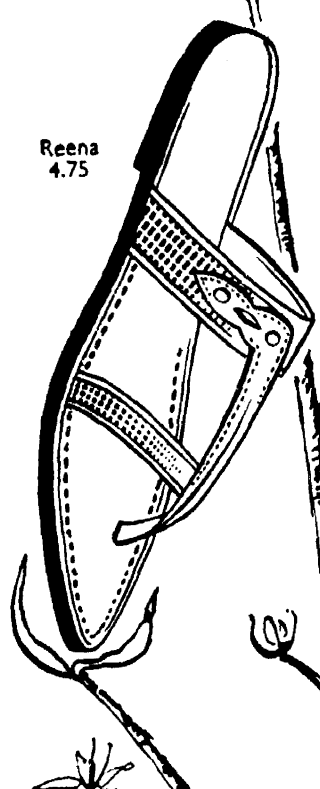
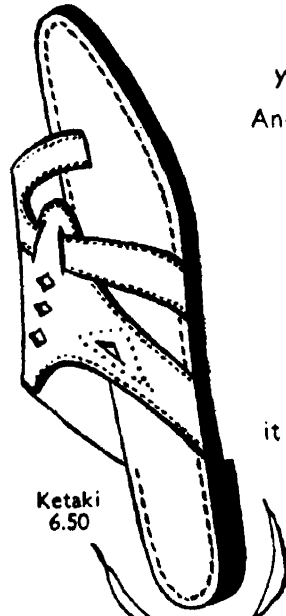
Feel light afoot.

Feel foot-happy as
you follow the Sun.

And you can, without
wasting a precious
summer minute.

Buy yourself
a Bata chappal.

It is so light,
so open, so bare,
it almost isn't there.



Bata

Faizabad constituency in U P provides a dramatic picture of the changing distribution of power in rural India. Harold Gould describes the unsuccessful efforts of a traditional Kayastha leader, an ex-zamin-dar, to defeat the Sitting Congress Assembly candidate. He shows how the Kayastha leader, turning to local Rajputs and landless labourers, was able to provide Jan Sangh with a sizeable urban vote but was unable to prevent Congress from winning the support of the smaller cultivating land-owning classes which have been rising politically and economically in recent years.

Improved Congress Organisation

Robi Chakravorty, in his report on a Calcutta constituency, is particularly impressed with the part played by an improved Congress organisation in defeating the sitting Communist-supported candidates. He shows that the local Congress party organisation was able to bring out a larger proportion of the pro-Congress vote — particularly among the non-Bengalis in the constituency — than ever before. He concludes that the Congress victory came primarily by obtaining the votes of those who had not voted in 1957.

The importance of local party organisation is also stressed, by S N Roy in his report on an Assembly election in a south suburb of Calcutta. Although Congress again lost the seat, it increased its vote in a predominantly middle-class Bengali constituency. The Communist vote declined considerably among the Bengali middle-classes but continued to be high in the working-class areas. Roy believes that leftist control over the municipal corporation was an important factor in the size of the vote the Communists received in the general elections.

In another urban area, Baroda, Rajni Kothari and Tarun Sheth weigh the relative impact of ethnic loyalties, organisational factors, the candidates' personalities, ideology and money on voting behaviour. Though they stress the importance of ethnic factors they, note that few communities vote as a bloc and that the Congress party, which won the Assembly seat, was able to take advantage of leadership and factional conflicts within ethnic groups. Moreover the Congress party was able to use its access to patronage as a means of in-

fluencing important leaders within various ethnic communities,

A report from Ponnur, a rural constituency in the delta of Andhra, notes the way in which village factions bargain with candidates of various parties and with factions within the Congress party to improve their own power position within the village and their contact with those who have power in Government and local administration. It is possible to so bargain because factional loyalties within the Congress proved to be greater than party loyalties. It is only through a close examination of this bargaining process, both by groups within the village and by groups within the Congress, that one can understand why split voting was so prevalent that Congress overwhelmingly won the Assembly seat, while a Communist overwhelmingly won the Parliamentary vote. Village castes and factions are thus not passive agents of outside political leadership but are closely related to struggles within and between the political parties.

Role of Public Issues Negligible

It would be unwise to make any all-India generalisations on the basis of studies in only a handful of constituencies. These studies do, however, mirror reports from other parts of the country — that in the main Congress does better in the rural than urban areas that the Communist hold on the working-class? continues, that factionalism within the Congress often leads the party to select tactically poor candidates, and that skill in organisation and financial resources play an increasingly important role in the elections. In the realm of voting behaviour, these studies raise more questions than they answer. In general, they suggest that debate over issues of public policy play a negligible role in the election campaign and presumably in affecting the way in which individuals vote. The 'public' does, however, seem to be more influenced by the character of the local administration than by policies being pursued by Government. In the main, Indian voters are still more oriented towards administration than to broad policy.

All the reports dwell at length on the role of caste, religious, linguistic kinship and factional ties in de-

termining the way in which individuals vote. Some of these loyalties do, of course, play a role in other ethnically divided societies, not only in Asia and Africa, but in Belgium, the United States, Canada and other western countries as well. But it would be a mistake to assume that such loyalties merely constitute sentiment. There are often practical, hard-headed reasons for a linguistic group to want a State of its own, or a village faction or caste to ally itself to a faction within the Congress party, or for a particular community or kin group to associate itself with Jan Sangh. As in any hierarchical society, considerations of status and prestige are politically important. But the growing power of panchayats, municipal bodies and Legislative Assemblies also means that those who control representatives to these bodies have access to things of material importance: licences, permits, contracts, registration of land rights, enforcement of taxation, development projects, etc. While, of course, it is possible and common for parties and candidates to make emotional and irrational appeals to voters on the basis of primordial attachments to caste and religion, one should not always assume that voters are merely passive instruments of others.

Floating Vote

In this connection, it is striking that voters have changed their party from one election to another and in doing so have often changed their ethnic identification. In Poona for example, caste and party loyalties replaced language loyalties which were so intense in 1957. In Faizabad kinship and caste differences were also manifestations of fundamentally divergent attitudes toward political authority. And in Ponnur village multi-caste factions were often the "nuclear" voting unit and a complicated number of factors, not merely ethnic loyalties, determined how a village faction allied itself in the general elections.

Almost all the reports suggest that many factors cut into ethnic loyalties. In none of the election? described here does one find that a candidate won merely because he had the support of members of his own community. In some constituencies the political cohesion of ethnic groups was high, but in others

factional and leadership conflicts within the community made it possible for candidates of many parties to win some support. Virtually all the reports, but particularly those from the Punjab, Andhra, Faizabad constituency in U P and Baroda, note that voters, as individuals or as members of groups, simultaneously have attachments to parties, kin groups, factions, castes and individual leaders, and that rather than be burdened by traditional attachments, the individual has many loyalties to choose from. Under these circumstances, it is very difficult for parties or community leaders to simply "herd" their voters to the polls. Indeed, the bargaining, bribery, intimidation and the promises must continue until the eve of the elections. It is this complexity of social loyalties in which both sentiment and material considerations play a role that makes it difficult for any party to consider any seat "safe" and which added a strong note of uncertainty to virtually all the constituencies reported here.

New Power Group in Villages

Reports from the rural areas suggest that neither the large land-owners nor the landless labourers play a decisive role in the outcome of the elections, the former because their power has been limited by recent legislation and the latter because they are often economically dependent upon others. The reports from the rural constituencies in U P, the Punjab and Andhra, all suggest that the self-cultivating land-owners, who have a great personal stake in local administration and local development activities, have a keen and often decisive interest in the elections. But while economic independence makes it possible for some groups to play a particularly important role in the elections, it is also true that even low caste and economically backward voters cannot be ignored if only because their numbers are large. The introduction of universal adult suffrage along with the expansion of local Government has often brought about a change in the local distribution of power.

Finally, all these election reports suggest that the dispersion of power in India has made control of local bodies an important factor in deciding who wins Assembly and Parliamentary seats. In Ponnur, Swatantra rarely carried a village if it failed to have the support of the panchayat president. In Faizabad, Jan Sangh was able to make a substantial dent in the Congress vote because until recently it controlled the Municipal Board. Control over other local institutions of power, such as the gurudwaras in the Punjab and trade unions in Kanpur, was also an important element in the outcome.

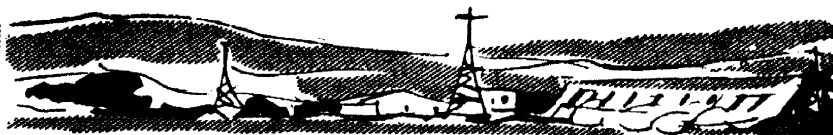
Many more detailed studies of the elections in particular constituencies around the country will be necessary before many of the hypotheses suggested here can be verified. Moreover, there are many questions — such as the precise effect of development activities on voting behaviour — which have scarcely been touched in these reports. The need and the opportunities for further field investigations directed at a precise exploration of the factors which affect particular groups of voters are very great indeed.

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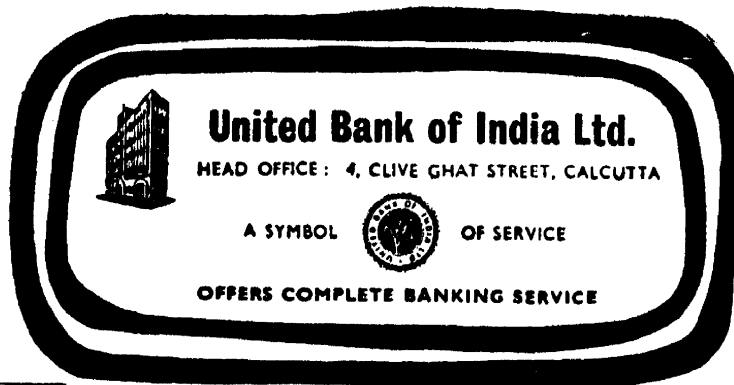
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