

HUMANIST PARTY

Participation in the Elections to Uttar Pradesh State Assembly Elections 2007

While this is a brief report, an even more detailed report with photos would soon be on the website www.humanistparty.org

Uttar Pradesh (short name is U.P.) is the name of the largest Indian state. These elections are held every 5 years (normally) to elect the State Government. The Assembly of UP has 403 seats and a party with the majority of 202 seats can form a Government on its own.

UP has some special characteristics. It is the largest state in India. It has given 7 Prime Ministers so far since the freedom. It affects the national politics, inspite of being among the poorest, most-uneducated, and under-developed of the states in India.

The results of the state assemble of UP affect the national politics at all times.

There are 4 major parties in UP : Congress Party (now at No. 4 for over 16 years), Samajwadi Party (Socialist ideology) (ruling the state till these elections), BJP (Bhartiya Janata Party) (the right wing Hindu party) and the BSP (Bahujan Samaj Party) working in the name of lower castes so far. This time BSP brought all castes to their fold and won the elections handsomely.

Our interest in participating in these elections : We had multiple aims :

- To re-activate HP in India;
- To Orient our Council towards Political activity (we have been doing it gradually over the last 3 years)and make them come out of the general dislike of Politics, and hence, enhance the level of Humanist Political activity;
- To announce the arrival of HP on the Political scenario of the country;
- To test waters for an enlarged Political activity in the future;
- Try to get the attention of Media;

With these aims, we have been talking Politics in our Council and spreading (explaining/clarifying) the view that Political activity can result into Power which can help speed-up the social-transformation process.

Once the elections came within people's (& members') view as an activity that would happen in the next 3 to 6 months, we started concretising things in terms of :

Where are we going to field our Candidates from ?

Who will be the Candidates ?

What is going to be our Manifesto for the elections ?

Can we take-along other NGOs, asking them to join the HP platform and propose Candidates form among those social workers who are known to be good people ?

3 years ago on the Birth Anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi in a meeting of "Honest NGOs" of UP, I had convoked them to enter Politics and take charge of the country and show to the country what "good people" can actually do to transform the country. This had produced serious ripples in those circles and

discussions were provoked on this topic. We did make some friends, though all of them were anyway known to Kushwaha (Our Coordinator in UP and now also the State Organizing Secretary of HP).

Taking the lead from there, we started talking to these NGOs, reminding them of their commitment towards their work and the urgent need of good people taking charge of the state (& hence the country).

Good discussions took place; there was good interest; but they realized that their projects (funding sponsored by the Government) would stop if they were to be seen as supporting anyone other than the winning party. Most of them did not come forward for this reason.

We are aware that for many of them, this was an excuse, but, then, we were trying to make friends and supporters, so we kept the matter pending for future possibilities.

While the above was happening, the elections were announced. Being a very large state and shortage of spare para-military forces for security during elections (there is a lot of mafia that controls the elections, if the administration is not strict), the elections were divided into 7 phases over a period of over 2 months.

We found 2 candidates from among our groups in Kanpur district and the preparations started.

Just before the elections, there was a lot of pressure on these candidates due to "caste" and "relations" pressures and we could not help keep them in fray. We lost both the candidates even before the elections.

This gave a very good learning to the group there : That we need to strengthen our Internal-work activity so that our people can take "strong and firm" decisions and can stand-by the decisions taken, come what may.

While this happened, the group has become more interested in HP activities and we foresee regular HP activity in these areas after the elections. This would be a win for us.

We finalized one Candidate (from among adherents) in Salempur area. We had to select an adherent because his profile and way of communicating (strongly) was much better than any other possibility in the area. This is Ram Prakash Mishra.

The process of meeting other NGOs and social-workers produced 8 more candidates. This was announced in the media also. Out of these, 6 received threats from mafia groups and since they did not have strong base in their areas, they found it was not right for them to stand-up to the Mafia and be harmed/killed. We lost 6 candidates out of the 8.

Finally, we had 2 Candidates :

Ram Prakash Mishra from Salempur constituency;

Subhash Singh from Pipraich constituency.

Our explanation/convocation to the NGOs and social-workers was like this :

People of the state have seen the rule of each of the 4 main parties and people are completely frustrated with all of them.

That people want an alternative.

That, we can show them an alternative-in-formation only if we field more than 50% of the candidates (202 as a minimal to be won to rule the state). We should field 250 to 300 candidates.

That, if we can show an alternative by fielding this number from among known good social-workers, we stand a chance of winning and forming the next Government.

People will see us as a clear feasible (in number) alternative and could agree to try us.

We conducted a total of 4 Press Conferences in which a total of 33 Journalists came. This included 2 from TV-media also. There was a small news in Gorakhpur, but we could not get its copy.

We have with us one copy of Newspaper publication only.

We published 10,000 copies of a Newsletter-shaped brochure material. In that we explained the basics of HP, how we do activities, how we raise funds, our manifesto for the elections, membership form, how to form the structure of the HP and explanation of all the secretariats was included. All this in Hindi which is the main language understood there apart from Urdu (2nd language of the state).

We published 5000 small size handy calenders with details of Salempur candidate and used it in the election.

We bought 5,200 plastic whistles as the symbol allotted to Salempur candidate was whistle. This helped spread the symbol and party name in the area.

We hired a Jeep and used 10 Motor cycles of members/supporters for the campaign in the 2 constituencies.

In Salempur, we concentrated on the qualification of members by making them spread the word, whereas in Pipraich, Subhash Singh traveled the constituency alone as well as with a small team, explaining the need of people joining active politics and taking charge of the state (& hence the nation).

The total expense done was a little less than Rs. 50,000/= (approx. US\$ 1150).

But the noise that we could make was enough to make people and the 4 main parties notice us. There were requests and subtle pressures that we take money from them and withdraw from race, as they felt their chances getting endangered because of us in the fray.

Election Commission came down very heavily against the Mafia (though they were ineffective in many crucial aspects), and created an impression among the people that Mafia cannot bend the election process. They also banned wall-writing, posters, hoardings and door-to-door working and public meetings were the main ways of canvassing.

This was seen as an advantage for us, because in the normal situation, we would not even be visible at the level of the small budget we had.

We got 1445 votes (No. 12 out of 21 candidates) in Salempur and 982 votes (No. 10 out of 20 candidates). Detailed votes received by all is attached in a separate file. The votes received were less

than what the members expected. General feeling of being with the perceived winner seems to be a very important reason of common people voting for one or the other party.

It is clear that we need to strengthen our structures and their Political activity, and with these elections, we have made a beginning. Members have promised themselves to work from now itself to participate in the next assembly elections from all the 403 seats of the state.

The atmosphere in the structure is better than before and there is confidence that we can participate in the elections also.

The way the BSP won the election this time, was clearly seen by our supporters as a confirmation of what we told everyone to work for. BSP, that has been working only for the downtrodden-exploited castes (called Scheduled castes and Scheduled tribes and Backward classes) so far, brought the forward castes also into their party and fielded candidates from all the castes and they were successful in breaking the jinx of coalition rule and won majority on their own and formed the Government on their own.

They were successful in projecting themselves as an alternative and got the results.

We had invited all Councils operating in India to come to the election. We are happy that 2 members from Council 244 came to Salempur and went back fully enthusiastic about the elections with the decision of forming the state committee and participating in the next state-elections.

An even more detailed report with photos would soon be on the website www.humanistparty.org