

6 DECISION 2019



Kerala: BJP doesn't gain much as UDF reaps Sabarimala dividend

SHAJU PHILIP
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MAY 24

DESPITE ITS efforts to exploit the Sabarimala issue for political mileage, the BJP-led NDA gained only 0.63 per cent vote share in Kerala as compared to the last Assembly election, indicating that it is the Congress-led UDF that gained from the temple controversy.

Last year, the BJP and other Hindu outfits led a movement against the Supreme Court's order lifting age restrictions on entry of women to the Sabarimala Temple. The issue snowballed into a face-off between those opposing the judgment and the LDF-led state government that tried to implement it.

In this parliamentary election, the BJP failed to win any seat in the southern state. The party led in the Nedom Assembly segment and finished a runner-up in six other Assembly segments where it pushed the CPM to the third slot. Of these six seats, bypolls are to be held in two seats soon.

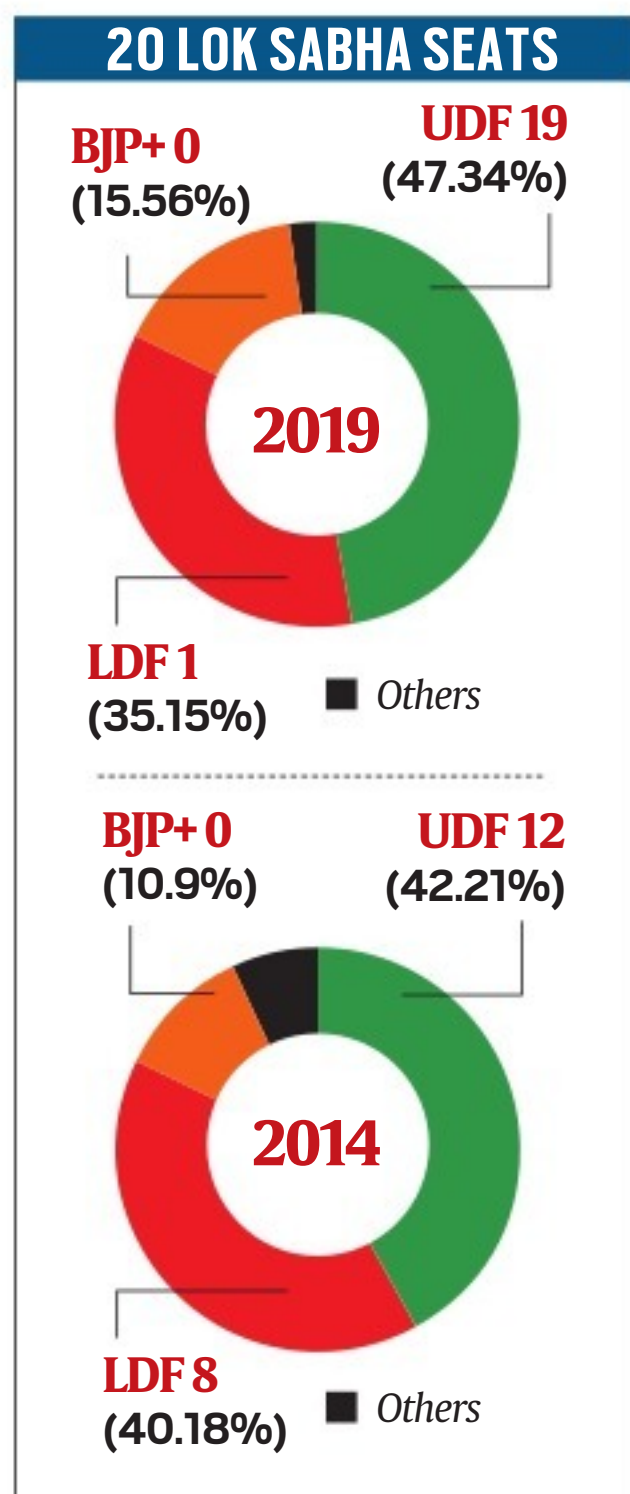
The NDA's vote share was 10.09 per cent in the 2014 Lok Sabha polls.

The BJP-led NDA got 14.93 per cent votes in the 2016 Assembly elections. The vote share went up by 0.63 per cent this time to 15.56 per cent. So despite its agitation on the Sabarimala issue, it is the UDF that benefited from the Left's dismal show.

BJP state president P Sreedharan Pillai said, "We have increased our vote share to around 16 per cent, which is the highest in the history of the party in Kerala. We have not done a ground analysis of why the Sabarimala issue did not benefit the BJP in terms of votes...We would also analyse whether the entry of Christian leader P C George (an independent legislator) to NDA fold benefited or backfired in Pathanamthitta," said Pillai.

BJP sources said the party had mobilised maximum votes in constituencies such as Thiruvananthapuram and Pathanamthitta, which it hoped to win. "But in other constituencies, where we did not have a winning chance, if the Hindu votes were polled for BJP, the winner would have been LDF. We wanted to defeat CPM mainly on account of that party's stand on Sabarimala. Hence, a section of BJP votes would have gone to Congress in some constituencies. Otherwise, our vote share would have been much higher," a source said.

According to party sources, in Vatakara and Kannur constituencies in north Kerala,



BJP did not get votes as per party expectations. "We have a vote bank of 80,000 in Kannur, but only 68,500 polled for the party," a source said.

In Pathanamthitta, the ground zero of Sabarimala agitation, the BJP made considerable gains in vote share. From 1,38,954 votes in the 2014 election, the party got 2,97,396 votes in 2019. In Attingal, where Sabarimala was a key issue, BJP votes went up from 90,528 in 2014 to 2,46,502 in 2019.

In Kasaragod, the BJP finished second in two assembly segments, pushing CPM to the third slot in both places. In Thrissur, the BJP got 1,02,681 votes in 2014. This time party candidate and Rajya Sabha MP Suresh Gopi bagged 2,93,822 votes. Gopi finished second in the Thrissur assembly segment.

In Kerala, CPM admits Sabarimala impact in voting

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MAY 24

A DAY after it suffered a severe drubbing in the Lok Sabha elections, winning only one out of 20 Lok Sabha seats in the state, the CPI(M) in Kerala on Friday said that a section of party loyalists were "misled" by right-wing parties and groups.

This is the first time the CPI(M), which leads the governing LDF in the state, has conceded that the state government's decision to facilitate entry of women of all ages into Sabarimala temple, in keeping with a Supreme Court order, had led to alienating a section of Hindu voters.

During electioneering, while the BJP had played up the Sabarimala issue, the CPI(M) had swept the topic under the rug.

After Friday's state secretariat meeting, the party, in a statement, said: "(The) party would seriously study the reasons that led

to this situation. The party will rectify the lapses through serious introspection at all levels and regain the lost public support. Prima facie evaluation shows that there had been depletion of votes from segments which traditionally stood with the Left."

The CPI(M) has called the election debacle a temporary setback. According to the statement, the CPI(M) had approached this General Election with the agenda to defeat the BJP, increase the Left's strength in Parliament, and help form a secular government at the Centre. The party claimed that the Left succeeded in spreading the message in Kerala about the dangers of Narendra Modi returning to power. However, the CPI(M) maintained, the Congress benefited from this campaign, as people thought only the Congress can form a secular government at the Centre.

This, the party stated, is the major factor that impacted voting in the state.

The Congress-led UDF won 19 of 20 Lok Sabha seats in Kerala.

Rivals call BJP's Odisha growth 'one-time benefit of Congress votes'

SAMPAD PATNAIK
BHUBANESWAR, MAY 24

WITH THE BJP having won eight out of 21 Lok Sabha seats and 23 of 146 Assembly seats in Odisha, and becoming the main Opposition to the governing Biju Janata Dal (BJD), the Congress, now relegated to a distant third spot in the state, claims that the saffron party's rise is "unsustainable over the long term".

While some BJD leaders agree with this observation, BJP national vice-president Baijayant Panda, who was a former Lok Sabha MP from BJD, argued that the BJP is here to stay, and that the party's growth is "not a flash in the pan".

The BJP's vote-share in Lok Sabha elections increased from 21.5 per cent in 2014 to 38.4 per cent this time, while its share in Assembly polls went up from 18 per cent to 32.5 per cent. The BJD's share in both Lok Sabha and Assembly was largely intact — between 42 and 44 per cent.

That the Congress share has seen a near-meltdown is not in contention — from nearly 26 per cent in both elections in 2014 to 16 and 13.8 per cent, respectively, in the state and Parliamentary polls this time — but the parties disagree on where those votes went. Congress leader Panchanan Kanungo said

the BJP benefited from the collapse in Congress vote. "Our party's vote-share halved from 26 per cent in 2014, and the BJP picked up those votes." Calling the nature of BJP's rise in Odisha "unsustainable", Kanungo said, "Most of these votes the BJP received are traditional Congress votes — they are floating and unstable. If the Congress works a little hard, we can get these votes back."

Several BJD leaders agreed with the Congress argument. One leader said: "Since 2014, we have maintained a vote-share in excess of 40 per cent through every election — Assembly, local bodies, bypolls and now. The BJP received a one-time benefit and does not have a core vote of any significance in Odisha."

BJP's Panda disagreed: "The largest chunk of Congress votes has gone to BJD, not the BJP. This has empirical evidence."

He asserted that "original BJD votes" went to the BJP. "This is natural because many BJD leaders have come to BJP, and each of them (including Panda himself) has a base. Overall, the BJD benefited from the Congress vote that collapsed."

Panda called it a "steady build-up" for BJP in the state. "In 2009, BJP had no Lok Sabha seats from Odisha and got one in 2014. In the panchayat elections, we saw a 10-fold rise in BJP's zilla parishad seats. This indicates the BJP is growing steadily," he said.

Margins, vote-share indicate alliance's arithmetic fell flat

DEEPTIMANTIWARY
NEW DELHI, MAY 24

THE SP-BSP-RLD Gathbandhan did not just fail to rein in the Narendra Modi charge in the Lok Sabha polls in Uttar Pradesh, it suffered a complete rout of the alliance's arithmetic.

Ostensibly, the Gathbandhan has a face-saver — it reduced the BJP's tally in the state from 71 to 62. However, the vote shares of the two sides and victory margins and their comparison with 2014 show that Gathbandhan actually lost a large number of votes this election.

The Gathbandhan's rout is most prominently reflected in victory margins. If the SP and BSP are deemed to have fought the 2014 elections together, based on the number of votes garnered in each constituency, the alliance would have won 41 seats. As many as 18 of these seats would have had winning margins of more than 1 lakh votes.

In 2019, this alliance, with the added votes of RLD, won just 15 seats, of which seven were won with margins of over 1 lakh votes. Conversely, the BJP has won 62 seats, of which 44 have victory margins of over 1 lakh votes. Among these seats, 23 had a winning margin of over 2 lakh.

The situation is also reflected in the total vote shares of the two sides in UP. In 2014, when the SP, BSP and RLD fought separately, their combined vote share was 42.63 per cent. It slipped to 38.92 per cent in 2019. The BJP's vote share increased from 42.63 per cent to 49.55 per cent.

A look at key constituencies, from where top leaders like SP's Mulayam Singh Yadav fought, makes this gap even more stark. In 2014, Mulayam's nephew Tej Pratap Singh Yadav got 5.95 lakh votes as an SP candidate from Mainpuri and won the seat. If the BSP's votes (1.43 lakh) in the seat are added, his victory margin swells to over 5 lakh votes.

This time, Mulayam contested the seat and won by a margin of just over 94,000 votes. It translates to a loss of over 4 lakh votes by the Gathbandhan.

In Azamgarh, which Mulayam vacated for his son Akhilesh this year, the Gathbandhan's victory margin dropped by over 90,000 compared to 2014.

In Badaun, represented by Mulayam's nephew Dharmendra Yadav for the past two terms, the Gathbandhan got a shock with Dharmendra's defeat. He garnered fewer votes in 2019 than he got as SP candidate in 2014.

The results indicate that the political



Akhilesh Yadav, Mulayam Singh Yadav and Mayawati in April. Vishal Srivastava

THE CHANGE IN KEY SEATS

CONSTITUENCY *	2014 MARGIN	2019 VICTOR	2019 MARGIN
Mainpuri	5,07,499	Gathbandhan	94,389
Azamgarh	3,29,732	Gathbandhan	2,59,874
Badaun	3,23,320	BJP	18,454
Basti	2,50,185	BJP	30,354
Firozabad	2,32,968	BJP	28,781
Fatehpur Sikri	40,291	BJP	4,95,065

* SP, BSP seats where its victory margins were high in 2014

affinity of various castes in Uttar Pradesh witnessed a sea change between 2014 and 2019. Both the SP and BSP have historically won elections by combining their core votes with those of non-Yadav OBCs. While Yadavs account for about 10 per cent of UP's population, Muslims make up 20 per cent, Dalits 20 per cent, upper castes 20 per cent and non-Yadav OBCs 30 per cent.

The idea behind the Gathbandhan was that with Yadavs, Dalits and Muslims making up 50 per cent and part of non-Yadav OBCs being attracted to it due to its formidable numbers, the BJP would stand little chance. However, as the results show, the Gathbandhan had only arithmetic in its favour while the public sentiment was with Narendra Modi.

The results also suggest the Gathbandhan could secure only its core votes of Yadavs, Muslims and Jatav-Dalits (13 per cent of UP's population). Non-Yadav OBCs, who had already migrated towards the BJP in 2017, did

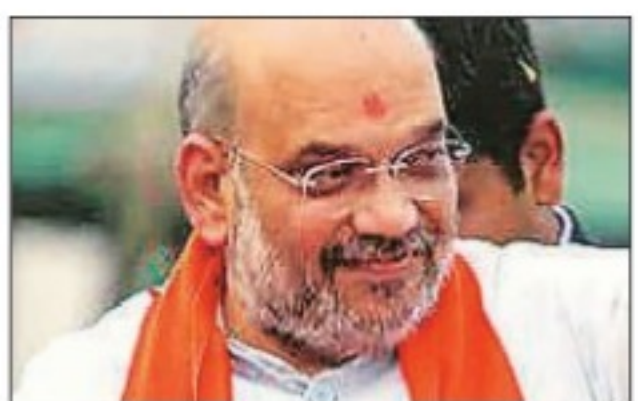
not buy into Gathbandhan's numbers. Non-Jatav Dalits too saw Modi as a better bet.

An example of this is Fatehpur Sikri. The SP-BSP combined vote share in 2014 would have given it a victory over the BJP by 40,000 votes. Yet, it lost the seat in 2019 by close to 5 lakh votes to the BJP.

In Gorakhpur, Phulpur and Kairana, where the Gathbandhan experiment was first tested successfully in 2018, the story was no different. BJP lost Gorakhpur to Gathbandhan by over 21,000 votes in 2018. In 2019, the BJP was ahead by over 3 lakh votes. In Phulpur and Kairana, both won by Gathbandhan in 2018 bypolls, the BJP won in 2019 by 1.7 lakh and 90,000 votes, respectively.

The Gathbandhan was supposed to give BJP a close fight in many seats. However, the victory margins were less than 20,000 in only 10 constituencies. Nine of these were won by BJP: — **WITH INPUTS FROM LALMANI VERMA AND KARISHMA MEHROTRA**

Talk in BJP: If Shah joins Govt, who will head party?



Amit Shah

igated the BJP to make it the largest political party in the world and led it to a historic electoral victory, may not be taking instructions from the Sangh, pointed out a senior party leader. "But they will definitely seek blessings from the RSS leadership for their decisions," the leader said.

Shah took over as BJP president in July 2015 after predecessor Rajnath Singh joined the government as Union Home Minister. Shah was re-elected unanimously as president in January 2016 and his three-year term ended this January, but he was asked to con-

tinue till completion of the Lok Sabha elections.

Although names have not been suggested so far for the post, the criteria is more or less clear, a party leader said. With Shah and Modi emerging as an extremely successful partnership, the new party president will have to be able to work with Modi and his style of functioning. Shah successfully built a robust organisation and brought in a new working style, and kept the focus on the party's expansion and electoral victories.

For Shah, the BJP's growth plan is still incomplete despite its stellar performance in the north, east and west of the country. It is still to come up as a formidable political force in the southern states, Karnataka being the only exception.

The impressive win in the election seems to be ironing out differences within. Modi and Shah Friday paid visits to two party veterans, L K Advani and Murli Manohar Joshi, who were denied tickets this election. After the meeting, news agency ANI quoted Joshi saying, "It is our party culture to meet and take blessings of senior leaders to work more effectively in the future. Both of them did a good

Gandhi's ideology lost, ideology that killed him won, says Digvijaya

MILIND GHATWAI
BHOPAL, MAY 24

CONGRESS LEADER Digvijaya Singh, who lost to Pragna Singh Thakur in Bhopal, said on Friday that it was a matter of concern that the ideology of Mahatma Gandhi was defeated and the "ideology that killed him" won.

"Aaj is desh mein Mahatma Gandhi ke hatya karne wali vichardhara jeet gaya aur desh ke shantidoot Mahatma Gandhi ki vichar dhara haar gayi. Yeh mere liye chinta ki baat hai (Today, the ideology that killed Mahatma Gandhi has won and the ideology of the apostle of peace Gandhi has lost. It's a matter of concern for me," he told reporters.

The former Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister was defeated by the BJP candidate by a margin of more than 3.64 lakh votes.

Thakur had triggered a controversy in the

run-up to the elections when she described Gandhi's assassin Nathuram Godse as a patriot. She later apologised, but was reprimanded by the Prime Minister who said he will never be able to forgive her from his heart.

Singh said the Congress never followed the path of violence, adding that it was "wrong to say that only Modi can save the country. More soldiers became martyr during his rule than before."

Singh told reporters that he believes in democracy and has accepted the verdict. He refused to get drawn into controversy over EVM machines but said it was surprising that in 2014, the BJP spoke about winning more than 280 seats and in 2019, they spoke of winning more than 300 seats before counting and succeeded on both occasions. "I don't know what magic wand it has," he said.

He congratulated the PM for the victory and said he had congratulated his Bhopal rival when they met at the counting centre on Thursday. The Congress leader said the BJP has not been able to digest its loss in the Assembly elections and alleged that money had been offered to Congress MLAs but no one accepted.

Thakur described her victory as "rashtira dharna ki jeet" and said the win has proved that people have accepted the PM's vision.



Digvijaya Singh

LIZ MATHEW
NEW DELHI, MAY 24

WITH THE BJP making a stunning return to power winning 303 seats on its own, the future role of its president Amit Shah, who strategised and delivered a second wave in favour of Narendra Modi, has become the talking point in political circles.

Speculation is rife that he will join the next Modi cabinet and could be the second in command. Senior BJP leaders say they have no clue about Shah's future plans, that he and Modi have not dropped any hint. But at least three leaders *The Indian Express* spoke to said Shah could join the government because "he has delivered the maximum" as party chief.

If Shah joins the government, he is likely to get a key portfolio, one that will ensure he is part of the Cabinet Committee on Security, the most elite club of the government.

But this will leave the post of party president open.

Contrary to the earlier practice of the BJP awaiting signals from its ideological parent RSS, the current party leadership, which nav-

ARUN JANARDHANAN
CHENNAI, MAY 24

THE SMALLER, high-profile parties led by AIADMK rebel T T V Dhinakaran and actor Kamal Haasan managed to garner votes across pockets of Tamil Nadu but were unable to win any seats to the Lok Sabha on Thursday.

While Dhinakaran's Amma Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam (AMMK) managed to garner a roughly 5 per cent vote share, the spread of the votes showed that the party had fared well in rural pockets, while being completely obliterated in the urban ones. The vote share of AMMK in the Lok Sabha polls was 5.27 per cent in Lok Sabha and about 7 per cent in the Assembly bypolls.

On the other hand, Kamal Haasan's Makkal Needhi Maiam (MNM) performed much better in urban seats while Seeman's Naam Tamilar Katchi, which garnered only about 3.86 per cent of the votes, performed consistently across all constituencies.

A look at the voting pattern confirms the spread. While the AMMK had relatively higher vote shares in rural regions like Ramanathapuram (13.30 per cent), Theni



TTV Dhinakaran

(11.8 per cent) and Sivaganga (11.3 per cent), Haasan's party did well in the Chennai South, Central and North constituencies (10 to 12 per cent), Coimbatore (11.60 per cent) and Sriperumbudur (9.50 per cent).

Dhinakaran's political journey has made him the subject of immense speculation. After V K Sasikala, Dhinakaran's aunt — currently serving time in a Bangalore prison after being convicted in a disproportionate assets case — and he were ousted from the AIADMK shortly after former chief minister and party chief J Jayalalithaa's death in 2016, Dhinakaran put together the AMMK despite the negative spec-



Kamal Haasan

ulation surrounding the Mannargudi family, as Sasikala's family is widely known.

Dhinakaran then contested the high profile RK Nagar bypoll in 2017, which was necessitated by Jayalalithaa's death. He won by a large margin and the DMK candidate had to forfeit his deposit. However, that victory remains the party's only triumph so far. Even in the bypolls for 22 seats in the state which were conducted along with the Lok Sabha polls, AMMK did not win any seats.

With the support of three AIADMK MLAs and the RK Nagar seat, Dhinakaran seems to be poised for challenges ahead as the ruling

AIADMK strengthens its base with local body polls turning the corner. A close associate of Dhinakaran had said the party was confident of getting a double digit vote share in the Lok Sabha polls even if they couldn't win seats. "We didn't even touch 10 per cent," he said.

Moreover, Thangamailsavan in Theni and Palaniappan in Dharmapuri — two star candidates of the AMMK — failed to make it big even though the party was able to pull away AIADMK votes in few Assembly seats.

According to a senior AMMK leader, there may be two key reasons for the party's misfortune. "People may have feared that voting for the AMMK will help the AIADMK and the BJP gain more seats. When they voted for DMK fearing an invasion of BJP, like Kerala voted for the Congress en masse, they may have also had a feeling that AMMK has nothing much to do in Delhi at this stage. And the party symbol was another detrimental factor. When we had a cooker symbol in a single bypoll in RK Nagar, we managed to popularise it quickly. But when they denied us the symbol this time and allotted a gift box as a symbol, we knew that there were challenges in making it popular in electorates across the state," he said.