

Setback to Congress(I)

ONE feature of the results of the elections to the Assam assembly that deserves notice is the very poor showing of the Indira Gandhi Congress, in sharp contrast to its triumphs in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. Contesting as many as 118 of the 126 seats, the party has been able to win in only eight constituencies, trailing well behind the Janata (53), the Congress (26) and the CPI(M) (11). Even more noteworthy has been the fact that the party has fared very poorly in the various reserved constituencies it contested, winning one of the seven seats reserved for the scheduled castes and none of the 16 seats reserved for the scheduled tribes. The party has fared equally poorly in the various areas where the Muslim population is concentrated, and of the 27 Muslim candidates who have won, only three belong to the Indira Gandhi Congress.

Even after the dismemberment of the composite state of Assam — a task accomplished by Indira Gandhi herself — the scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes constitute about 16 per cent of the total population; and with the Muslims (25 per cent of the population), they constitute a significant political force — a real, massive constituency of the 'poor' — and unlike in Andhra Pradesh or Karnataka, they can tilt the electoral balance one way or another. The Congress has been able to win election after election only because of the assured support of these 'traditional' vote banks and, even in the present elections, the Congress has done fairly in these 'traditional' Congress seats. However, the Congress headed by Indira Gandhi has been almost completely rejected by the very 'poor' whose interests she so noisily claims to champion; and even the three Muslim candidates who have

won on the Indira Gandhi Congress ticket have all won in heavily Muslim constituencies where virtually all the other candidates were also Muslims.

There is no doubt that Indira Gandhi has a constituency; but at least in Assam, that constituency does not comprise the scheduled castes, the scheduled tribes and the Muslims. Even in Karnataka where the Indira Gandhi Congress has fared so well, such a clear-cut division between what Devraj Urs glibly describes as 'the haves and the have-nots' has not taken place. The country's politics would have been much less complicated if the divisions had been so clear-cut and sharp. With over 47 lakh people — nearly 38 per cent of the total votes cast, and not all of them belonging to the propertied classes — voting for the Janata party, it can hardly be claimed that even in Karnataka the barricades are up.

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