

OFFICE OF THE LEADER OF OPPOSITION

Gujarat Vidhansabha, Gandhinagar.

Press Note

28th February, 2011

- Congress has supported the provision of 50 per cent reservation for women in local self governments because it was in accordance of its policies.
- Compulsory voting is against fundamental constitutional freedom.
- Chief Minister himself rarely remains present during voting in the House. How can he impose compulsory voting on others?
- Late Rajiv Gandhi had initiated reservation for women by making constitutional amendments.
- Even the countries which have experimented with the idea of compulsory voting are now scrapping it.
- Ruling BJP is doing injustice to women by clubbing reservation with compulsory voting in the Bill.
- The state government has squandered Rs 500 lakh, the centre had given to it for women welfare.

BJP ruled Gujarat government today passed a Bill having both reservation for women in local self government and compulsory voting in one despite clear instructions from the Governor that both should be separated. Earlier Governor had also asked the government to reconsider its proposal of compulsory voting while returning the Bill passed by the government. Despite this, government today passed the Bill on the basis of its majority. This is an insult of democratic system, said Leader of Opposition in the Assembly, Shri Shaktisinh Gohil.

He said that the Congress was in favour of 50 percent reservation for women in local self government. But, the government is attaching the proposal of compulsory voting in a very arbitrary manner. Congress is against compulsory voting because it is against the basic constitutional provision of freedom of individual. Gohil pointed out that even Dinesh Goswami committee appointed by Lok Sabha did not favour the idea of compulsory voting.

The law of compulsory voting proposed by the government will adversely affected villagers, dalits, poor and middle class. Rich and influential people can get exemption if they have to go abroad but not the poor who has to migrate for seasonal labour , Gohil pointed out. He is to be punished under the new law to be enacted.

Some countries have experimented with the idea of compulsory voting, but later retracted.

Gohil cited the case of Austria where compulsory voting was introduced in President's election in 1929 and in 1949 in the Parliament. However, Austria realized that the compulsory voting was undemocratic and it withdrew it in a phased manner ranging from 1982 to 2004. Netherlands introduced it in 1917, but scrapped it in 1970. Spain had a brief encounter with the idea from 1907 to 1923. There is a movement against compulsory voting in Australia.

A private member Bill for compulsory voting was rejected by the Parliament.

In the past Congress in Gujarat had made facilities for free education to women in all fields. But today education in Gujarat is totally being commercialized and the BJP government has eliminated the idea of free education to women.

Girl fetuses are being killed in large numbers in Gujarat and the government has no concrete plans for save the girl child campaign.

According to Article 19(1) (k) of the constitution every citizen has freedom of expression. As per this provision a voter has the right to express his unwillingness to vote in favour of someone. Compulsory voting violates this fundamental freedom of citizens.

The government is not able to provide voting slips to the voters with details like voters name, where he is registered and when and where he has to vote. If the administration cannot provide voting slips how can it implement compulsory voting, Gohil wondered.

The Bill does not specify the type of action to be initiated against person not casting vote. Legally, it is not right for the government or the administration to keep with itself the right to punish.

To,
The Editor,

Hon'ble Leader of Opposition has requested to kindly publish this press note in your esteemed newspaper.

(J. J. Rasanía)
Personal Assistant