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‘Dalits voted without fear in LS elections’

MADURAI: The ‘National Dalit election report’ based on the experience of the 2009 Lok Sabha elections states that compared to other States, Dalits in Tamil Nadu have not only exercised their right to vote without fear or favor but also defied political or casteist forces which tried to influence them against voting for the candidates of their choice. According to Sirivella Prasad, general secretary of the Delhi-based National Dalit Movement for Justice and National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights, as a result of the awareness created among the Dalit voters, they had not been able to sell their right to franchise for money or liquor but had exercised their right fully conscious of its value. Contrary to popular conception that Dalit voters could be influenced with money and liquor, the study showed that less than 10 per cent had fallen prey to it and not all of them were Dalits. On the other hand political and caste leaders had used threats against Dalit voters either to keep them out of polling or making them vote for a particular candidate. In many States the dominant communities had taken away the voter identity cards and ration books, to prevent the Dalits participating in the polls. This practice had been noticed on a large scale in many States, except in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. The study also revealed that the names deleted from voter’s lists in many constituencies were that of Dalits. In some constituencies in north, over 50 per cent of the Dalits found their names missing in the electoral rolls. The Dalits in TN had resisted attempts by politicians and leaders of high castes to deny them the right to vote and had turned up in large numbers to cast their votes, he added. Prasad said that poll violence were more in areas not prone to atrocities than in what were described as atrocity prone places. In mapping sensitive areas, emphasis had been given to political sensitivity than social sensitivity that had resulted in violence against the Dalits in some constituencies. This phenomenon was noticeable even in reserved constituencies where the violence was markedly low. The role that the Dalits in Tamil Nadu played in the Lok Sabha election showed that despite the continuing discrimination, untouchability and other forms of violence, they had come of age and were emerging as a force to reckon with. They had become assertive of their rights which were anathema to those who wanted to keep them as serfs and minions, he noted.

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