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# Excellent News on Kannauj Kidnapping Kaand, Forward Please to unwrap the truth

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## Dimple's Dubious Electoral Marvel

Her Kannauj bypoll victory is historic. That is shamefully so

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BY *Dhirendra K Jha* EMAIL AUTHOR(S)

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DEBASEMENT



THANK YOU ALL Dimple Yadav with her husband, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav

Is Dimple Yadav's historic feat a blot on Indian democracy? She has won the Kannauj Lok Sabha seat in a 'byelection' without the casting of a single vote. At first sight, going by the media portrayal of this victory scored by the wife of UP Chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav, himself the son of Samajwadi Party supremo

Mulayam Singh Yadav, the question seems completely misplaced.

Didn't all major parties—the BSP, Congress and BJP—decide not to field candidates against Dimple? And didn't two independent candidates—Sanjay Katiyar and Dashrath Shankhwar—bow out of the fray by withdrawing their nominations, leaving Dimple the constituency's sole contestant?

Sure. But an entirely different story is revealed by a series of sordid election-related events that have been hushed up. Take, for example, the abduction of people trying to file nominations and the brazen use of force by UP's ruling party to keep the fray free of other candidates.

In the run-up to the election, the Kannauj Collectorate—where prospective candidates had to submit their papers—was practically under siege by SP workers who made it abundantly clear how anyone trying to get in would be dealt with. And such strong-arm tactics were not restricted just to this location. “At 9 pm on 5 June, nearly 40 goons of the SP surrounded our party office at Kannauj and started ransacking it,” says Shafqat Taqi, the prospective Peace Party candidate for this bypoll. At the time, Taqi and some of his party colleagues were busy in their party office preparing the nomination papers they had planned to file on 6 June, the last date for doing so. “They abducted seven of us at gunpoint and snatched my nomination papers. We were then forced to sit in their vehicles, which took us to a huge bungalow where a few more persons had been forcibly detained—two of whom had wanted to file nominations,” recounts Taqi, “Around midnight, they started taking us to assorted locations. Taking advantage of the darkness, I along with two of my friends managed to escape.”

The next morning, Taqi, who took care to stay at a friend's residence, sent some of his party workers to the Collector's office to fetch fresh sets of nomination papers. The deadline was nearing, but “SP goons had occupied each and every corner of the Collectorate that day. They identified our party workers, thrashed them, and forced them to flee. As the news spread, more Peace Party workers gathered at the Collectorate's gate, but they were kept out [well past the deadline]”.

All this happened despite Peace Party leaders' fervent appeals to the police and other local authorities. “The whole night of 5 June, our president Dr Ayub and other senior office-bearers kept calling the DGP, IGP, DM and SSP of Kannauj. But we did not get any help from them,” says Taqi, “The next day, we sent a written complaint to the Election Commission (EC). But even that did not work.”

There are others who were similarly intimidated. No better was the experience of Prabhat Kumar Pandey, a resident of Amethi and nominee of a small political outfit, the Voters Party, as he set out to file his nomination papers for the Kannauj bypoll on 5 June, a day before the deadline. “As soon as we reached Kannauj in the morning that day, my briefcase, containing nomination papers as well as Rs 25,000 in cash, which I had kept for my nomination fee, was forcibly taken away by some unknown persons,” says Pandey. “First we tried to lodge a complaint with the police. But when the police refused to register one, we decided to prepare another set of nomination papers. At 2.15 pm, even though SP goons tried stopping us, we managed to enter the room of the returning officer, Selva Kumari J. She spent the rest of the time available for work that day [till 3 pm, that is] just perusing my papers, and once work time was over, asked me to come the next day. It was clearly a delaying tactic.”

At 5.41 pm that day, Pandey sent a complaint to the EC via email, protesting the biased attitude of the returning officer, who is also the District Magistrate of Kannauj. The next day, Pandey along with his proposers made two more unsuccessful attempts at entering the electoral fray—at around 10.15 am and later at about 2 pm. Thus thwarted twice, he sent another complaint to the EC. He had to pay a price for his persistence. Like Shafqat Taqi of the Peace Party, he too was abducted by unidentified men strongly

suspected of acting on behalf of the SP.

“In front of the returning officer’s office, representatives of Dimple Yadav thrashed me brutally and shoved me into a Scorpio. I was held at gunpoint in a hotel room at Kannauj until the nomination deadline was over,” says Pandey. “Around 6 pm, I was taken to a faraway forest area near Billaur town and released there. The next morning, I reached Lucknow, from where I sent my third representation to the EC, detailing the entire event and manner in which the local administration openly helped my kidnappers.” Pandey also told the EC that at the place of his detention he saw several dozen people held in illegal captivity by Dimple Yadav’s representatives, as they, too, had wanted to fight the bypoll.

Dimple Yadav’s victory may well have made it to history books; an uncontested election is rare in any democracy, let alone one as crowded and noisy as India’s. But it is also true that the means deployed to achieve this victory should make nobody proud. In fact, what is no less historic is the fact that, despite several complaints to the EC by at least two prospective candidates, Dimple Yadav was declared ‘elected unopposed’ on 8 June within hours of the formal withdrawal of the only remaining candidates, a couple of independents, Katiyar and Shankhwar.

The constituency’s returning officer, Selva Kumari J, lost no time in confirming that Dimple Yadav was the only candidate for the seat. And neither did the SP—in breaking into celebrations across the state. Party activists danced with gay abandon at party offices in Lucknow and Kannauj, and merrily distributed sweets in honour of “Bhabhiji’s victory”. Chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav thanked the people of Kannauj for reposing their faith in him and ensuring a historic victory for Dimple Yadav. Not to be left out of the festivities, the UP Assembly used up some legislative time to formally congratulate their leader’s wife on her “historic victory”—without so much as waiting for a formal declaration of her election, which came a day later.

And so it was that the Kannauj seat, vacated earlier this year by Akhilesh Yadav when he resigned to take over as the state’s CM, remained within the family. Akhilesh had won the seat thrice. In the 2009 Lok Sabha polls, he had won Kannauj as well as Ferozabad. He had retained the Kannauj seat and fielded Dimple in the Ferozabad byelection, though only to be defeated by the erstwhile actor Raj Babbar, a Congress candidate who was once with the SP. This was seen as a loss of face for Mulayam. This time round, a big victory in Kannauj was thus a matter of personal prestige for the SP supremo. He has achieved what he wanted. It’s a pity that Indian democracy is left so much the worse for it.