

THE election in Andhra Pradesh is not a litmus test for only Pamulapurthi Venkata Narasimha Rao and Nandamuri Taraka Rama Rao. There is a third Rao whose credibility is as much at stake as PVN's and NTR's — **NAGULAPALLI BHASKARA RAO.**

The 54-year-old doyen of psephologists who heads the New Delhi-based Centre for Media Studies and who, in 1976, told Indira Gandhi that she was on her way out (only to be brushed aside by a brusque V C Shukla) has risked his all this time round by predicting a Telugu Desam sweep in his home-state — a prophecy which has been hotly contested by the ruling Congress party. He told **KRISHNA PRASAD** why he had no need to change his prediction. Excerpts:

Is the anger in Andhra against Rao or Kotla Vijayabhaskara Reddy?

Reddy. Tomorrow, if there's a general election, Narasimha Rao

'Seshan is the real hero He is like Krishna

tion Commissioner T N Seshan made to these polls?

Seshan is the real hero of this election. He is like Krishna in the Mahabharat. Never before have I seen such a disciplined election, not just in the urban pockets but in every nook and corner. He has saved at least Rs 100 crore this time in election expenditure. The figure could go up to Rs 1,000 crore by the next general election. What is interesting is that I found both candidates and voters happy with what he has done. The only people unhappy are taxiwallahs and printing press owners.

Have his measures made predicting the outcome any easier?

Yes. You now know that the last-minute stimulants that parties

MANDATE '94

will win from Andhra and Karnataka, there's no doubt about it. The present scenario is mainly because of Reddy's image and maladministration. He is seen as someone who sneaked into the Congress (he wasn't with Indira Gandhi during the Emergency) and as someone who is close to liquor barons. Even though the prime minister has made three visits, he has failed to enthuse voters.

Will your survey influence actual voting?

Not so much the voters as party workers. Our Goa survey predicts the MGP-BJP-Shiv Sena combine will get 22-23 seats, up from 18, and that the margin of victory could be between just 50 and 100 votes in five constituencies. It can have a demoralising effect on the workers. They may not go out to woo voters. That may affect voter turnout and the outcome. That's why the Congress is as quick to react to our predictions. The Election Commission done well not to announce its till voting is complete in the states.

What difference has Chief Elec-

tion Commissioner T N Seshan made to these polls?

inject are no longer there. Normally, there's a sizable segment which does not decide till the last minute whom to vote for. I've seen parties supply liquor all night before the day of polling to see that they don't go and out, or go out and vote for them. Seshan has not completely made it impossible, but yes, he has made it very, very difficult.

What is the percentage of such fencesitters this time?

Respondents who have not decided whom to vote and those who do not respond to questionnaires are a psephologist's nightmare. Fortunately, this time that figure was very low in Andhra Pradesh, just 5 to 7 per cent. There, the polarisation is very clear. But in Karnataka, the percentage of undecideds was higher, between 13 and 15 per cent. If you don't take them into account, then your predictions can go completely haywire.

The BJP comes out rather poorly in your survey.

The party seems to have lost steam not just in these two states but nationwide. The thrust is just not there. After claiming from the



NAGULAPALLI BHASKARA RAO: The psephologists see

rooftops that Karnataka would be its launchpad in the south, L K Advani is now saying that they contested so many seats only to be recognised as a national party! A B Vajpayee is seen to be more pro-PVN than pro-BJP. What does the party stand for today? The workers are confused, the voters are confused.

How did you select the sampling

for the survey?
Earlier householders, ask them for, that is, call, that of the voters the information wrong. No.

How? We select

NEWS

Real hero of this poll. in the Mahabharat'



a sweep for the Telugu Desam Party

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ate to the size of the electorate
from the voters' list. We pick the
tenth, 20th, 30th, 40th, households
and so on and so forth. We speak
to a male in the first and a
female in the second, etc. Then
from the same sample, we select
subsamples. If I interview 400
people, I'd like to talk to ten
loyal Congress voters, or ten Telugu
Desam voters, or ten Janata Dal

voters, and plot their voting pat-
terns in previous elections.

In another subsample, we try to
find out if the women in the
household vote independently of
the men and so on. For example,
in Karnataka and Andhra this
time, 20 per cent of the women
said they would vote regardless of
how their husbands voted. The
figure was ten per cent last time!

**How does it feel when a prediction
goes wrong?**

It means a loss of credibility.
There's nothing we can do except
to accept the humiliation humbly.
Mistakes do happen, but we're
getting better. The confidence level
is increasing because of the advent
of computers and better field
work. In 1983, we did a sampling
of 40 constituencies to say NTR
would win. This time, we needed
to do just 16 constituencies.

**Is psephology like astrology, is
hit or miss?**

More scientific. But just like
people go to astrologers despite
being proved wrong sometimes,
people will come to us. In 1987, I
predicted that the Congress was
in for a big shock in Haryana.
Girilal J., then editor of the
Times of India, refused to believe
it or publish it. Finally, when I
told him it was a question of my
credibility, not his, he relented. I
was proved right. The Congress
got just two seats.

How often have you gone wrong?

Oh, in 1983, I predicted that
NTR would lose in Gudivada, my
own constituency! He won! I was
passing through the constituency
and the impression I got was that
with NTR, concentrating on the
rest of the state and not cam-
paigning in Gudivada, didn't stand
a chance. TDP workers in the
constituency seemed to be working
only for money and the TDP
election offices wore a empty look
all the time. I completely missed
the undercurrent. NTR not only
won from Gudivada but from
Tirupati as well.

Just one mistake?

We went wrong, again in Uttar

Pradesh last year. We were very
precise in the other formerly BJP-
ruled states going to the polls —
Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan,
Himachal Pradesh and Delhi. But
in UP we tried a new method.
Instead of preparing question-
naires, we printed actual ballot
papers for the field workers. The
papers were printed in Delhi and
by the time the elections were
held, some of the symbols were
no longer valid. So we were
completely off-target.

**What kind of pressure do political
parties exert on pollsters?**

There are people calling up and
asking that their names be included
in surveys, that they be ranked
the most popular leader after
Rajiv Gandhi, that kind of thing.

**Don't they try to bribe you to
seek a favourable prediction?**

Not in our case, but I've heard
of some cases including in this
election itself. There've been pol-
lsters who have tried to project an
image of the ruling party not
commensurate with its image at
the ground. Politicians may be
different, but their tribe is the
same.

How do you rate Prannoy Roy?

Prannoy's good. He's given pse-
phology a new profile through
television and graphics, though he
has not always been accurate and
though the model he works on
was not developed by him but by
two Delhi School of Economics
dons now no longer with him.

**The Intelligence Bureau is also
known to do surveys.**

Yes. It has a man in every
district who goes out into the
field and see the straws in the
wind. The point is, anybody can
do a survey. A newspaper reporter
going to a constituency and talking
to people is doing a survey. A
politician in a car is also doing
the same thing. There is no hard
and fast rule as yet.

Would you recommend one?

Not quite, but yes, some sort of
guidelines for carrying out and
publishing pre-election surveys is
called for so that readers and
voters are not taken for a ride.
Namely, when the poll was con-
ducted, by whom, how big the
sample was, how many were unde-
cided, how many did not respond,
and such like. Or else, it becomes
very easy for what the Congress
did this time. To announce that
they had done a survey of their
own and that its verdict was
different from ours.