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Striving for A Nation that Safeguards Universal Franchise

PROCEEDINGS

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Striving for A Nation that Safeguards Universal Franchise

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Discourse Construction, Political Mobilization and Voting in Sri Lanka: A study on 2010 and 2015 Presidential Elections

Anjali Korala¹

The election campaign process in Sri Lanka's presidential election differs from others due to two main reasons i.e. (a) geographical distance between the candidate and voter and (b) the image distance between the candidate and the party. These reasons have forced candidates to take additional or novel modus operandi (modes of operation) to address individual voters and mobilize them as a collective. Thus, in the recent elections, it has become evident that during national level campaigns candidates use discourse construction as the mode of operation to mobilize the voters. In this context, this study aimed at uncovering the discourses constructed by the two main candidates, Mahinda Rajapaksa and Sarath Fonseka and Mahinda Rajapaksa and Maithripala Sirisena, during the 2010 and 2015 presidential elections, respectively. Towards this aim, a library research was conducted and both primary sources; election manifesto, election speeches, election campaign songs and secondary sources such as newspaper articles, reports, academic articles were used. The discourse theory (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985) was used to analyze the data. Research findings revealed that the context of that particular period of time had a greater impact on the power used by the candidate to hegemonize his discourse. In 2010 Mahinda Rajapaksa managed to hegemonize his discourse on 'War Victory and Development', by mobilizing the spirit of the people (volksgeist). In the 2015 election, the common candidate Maithripala Sirisena managed to hegemonize his discourse on 'Good Governance' by mobilizing the spirit of the time (zeitgeist). The study argues that the political mobilization process in the presidential elections have become distinct and complex due to this new modus operandi and the studies on presidential elections in Sri Lanka should not be limited only to the classical theories on voting.

Keywords: Discourse Theory, Political Mobilization, Presidential Elections, Sri Lanka, Voting

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