

## Vote As Reason

The age of a political party doesn't matter when it comes to the bankruptcy issue. That the Indian National Congress is increasingly losing its national character is a fact of life. At one stage it was mainly a South Indian Party. Now it is partly South Indian and partly North Indian. It has lost its relevance without a dynastic culture. Then the manipulation of dynastic concepts among Bihar electorates didn't click. Maybe, Bihar, otherwise continually projected as a symbol of backwardness, shows the way. Harried at home and abroad by multiple scams and ineffective diplomacy Congress prime minister Manmohan Singh has no idea as to how to put a brave face at this critical juncture. The Opposition has a point to score over the Telecom Scam involving a colossal sum that simply sends shivers down the spines of ordinary people. The sheer scale of corruption is frightening, even by Indian standards. After all India is not Japan—it is still a very poor third world country with millions living below the official poverty line. Money involved in black deals with active connivance of politicians, government functionaries, business tycoons, corporate lobbyists and some media persons, is big enough to cover some small state budgets. Now Congress and the main Opposition—Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)—are trading charges as both the parties are getting exposed in states and at the centre over how they serve the corporate world at the expense of national interest while playing with the gallery in parliament and in the streets.

The Bihar syndrome is unlikely to remain a local phenomenon. The total rout of the party with two members from the Nehru dynasty at the helms, in the recently held Bihar assembly polls is bound to have impact on their fluctuating electoral fortunes in North India. In Bihar Rahul Gandhi's *charisma* didn't sell. Nor did usual caste and communal equations work wonder. The eclipse of Lalu Yadav dynasty was so complete that the advocates of dynastic democracy elsewhere in the country might think twice before pinning too much hope on an obnoxious practice, promoting feudal niceties. BJP's spectacular success in Bihar where minority community voters declined to subscribe to business-as-usual 'secular propaganda' by so many secularists, is now an area of postmortem analysis. For good or worse, BJP played it safe in Bihar by withholding its aggressive hindutva posture which it does without any second thoughts in Gujarat and Orissa. Also, Nitish Kumar, the Janata Dal (United) chief, did not allow himself to be dictated by the saffron bosses in articulating the aspirations of the poor and it paid him dividends.

Mr Kumar was lucky in the sense that global players didn't flock to Bihar en masse to plunder Bihar's natural resources and grab fertile agricultural land in the name of industrialisation. After separation of Jharkhand, Bihar is basically a poor agricultural state lacking vital mineral resources necessary for industrial drive. Mining giants have no interest in Bihar's alluvial soil, they want hard rock impregnated with minerals and ores. For one thing Bihar didn't witness many an anti-land acquisition agitation in recent years. How much Nitish Kumar's development plank succeeded in garnering the landslide victory in one of the most heavily contested elections, is open to question. But his soft image and balancing acts produced the so-called miracle. Practising for peace is the best option for any political outfit to remain longer in the race.

It seems to be a deliberate ploy for the media controlled by big business to ignore the maoist factor in Bihar's parliamentary politics otherwise dominated by caste conflicts, albeit maoists do not participate in elections. Nitish Kumar unlike his marxist counterpart of Bengal, refused to toe Mr Chidambaram's tough line of action against naxals and his stance didn't go in vain as the maoists appreciated his stand in no uncertain terms. Mr Kumar repeatedly urged the centre to view the maoist movement as a manifestation of glaring socio-economic inequities at the grassroots level and not to treat it solely as a law and order problem. Not that the Bihar security establishment is benevolent towards naxalities. Not at all. But joint forces under a unified command with enormous fire-power and unlimited central backing are yet to appear on the scene. Despite maoist violence the ground realities is not as bad as in Bengal's Junglemahal where joint forces and CPM-sponsored goons are terrorising and brutalising every segment of tribal and non-tribal population in a planned manner. Crimes are crimes. Junglemahal stands for police brutality, crime and systematic oppression. At one stage even Lalu Yadav tried to cultivate maoist favour to win elections but perhaps it was too late to make his voice heard. Whether the maoists can have more breathing space under the second Nitish dispensation is a different matter but they are certainly not going to gain by disturbing the status quo at this point.

Parliamentary left has no appeal to the people of Bihar though once upon a time communists had a substantial presence among peasants. And it is the peasant question that urgently begs redressal in predominantly feudal Bihar. □□□