

Voter divided between head & heart

Written by Administrator

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By Sidharth Mishra



In a week's time, Bihar will begin the process of electing members to the new state assembly. Politicians and presspersons have variously reasoned to call this election historical, as it's going to make or mar the fortune of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. A victory for National Democratic Alliance (NDA) would strengthen Modi's position in New Delhi and further emaciate the principal opposition Congress and its beleaguered leader Rahul Gandhi. A defeat for the NDA in Bihar would mean the end of the road for Modi's agenda of social and economic reforms. It would also allow the Congress and other Opposition parties to sharpen their attacks against the Prime Minister on the floor of the house. It would mean bad news for India.

However, bad news for India need not necessarily be bad news for Bihar.

If incumbent Chief Minister Nitish Kumar manages to win what is being tipped as the battle of his lifetime, Bihar would have managed to break the image of a caste-driven state. Belonging to the other backward classes, Nitish Kumar has so far enjoyed the support of the upper castes, which in the realm of political science is termed as a case of social adjustment.

Academicians have defined social adjustment as an effort made by an individual to cope with standards, values and needs of society to be accepted. It can be defined as a psychological process. Kumar has used this psychological process as a social parameter to gain political acceptance. Social adjustment "involves coping with new standards and values". In the technical language of psychology, "getting along with the members of society as best as one can" is called adjustment.

Journalist Santosh Singh, a veteran reporter, who has covered Bihar for a long time for various newspapers, in his recent book "Bihar: Ruled or Misruled" wrote, "What brought Nitish close to his political bade bhai (elder brother) Lalu Prasad is pure, social arithmetic. It is not at all about

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ideology. It is true that they came from the same JP and Lohia school of thought. But they had been poles apart right from the beginning. If it is ideology, it is the ideology of convenience. Nitish's only agenda after his defeat is to trounce his bête noire Narendra Modi."

For those who have enjoyed the fruits of "sushashan" (good governance) during Nitish Kumar's 10-year rule with a brief interregnum of a few months of Jitan Ram Manjhi, today find it difficult to believe that a victorious Kumar would be able to deliver good governance and save the state from sinking back into Lalu Yadav-Rabri Devi era of "Jungle Raj".

This is what the head is dictating, but somewhere in their heart it's not easy to forget the turn around which Nitish Kumar has brought to the state. His biggest achievement has been on the law and order front, and it's on this count that people are most worried. The presence of Lalu Yadav as the principal campaigner of the Grand Alliance, campaigning in his inimitable style, has left the loyal Nitish voter befuddled.

On one hand, the voter has the option of the BJP, which has no leader in its ranks that can match the stature of Bihar Chief Minister. On the other hand, it's faced with an option of voting back forces that represent regressive politics back to a position of power. What's the guarantee that Lalu Yadav, from a position of strength, would not dictate terms to Kumar and ask for his pound of flesh in the matters of administration?

In a not too distant a past, an honest and internationally renowned economist Dr Manmohan Singh presided over a government that witnessed biggest scams, leading to ministers and bureaucrats going to jail. More than the ministers and secretaries going to jail, the nation suffered a humongous financial loss on account of revenue and profit by corporates. Nitish Kumar is faced with the same predicament.

Can Nitish Kumar, without the sinews of a huge social and political support base, manage to rein in the agenda of his political partner Lalu Prasad? On the face of it, it looks unlikely. The two leaders have also done little to clear the voter's mind on this issue. What Kumar is trying to achieve politically is best summarised in the phrase – run with the hare and hunt with the hound.

Nitish Kumar is trying to seek the vote of those who adore him for his success as Chief Minister. However, at the same time, Kumar is trying to get the support of those forces that are anathema for his admirers. Getting the two together to vote for him in unison is the challenge that Nitish Kumar faces, and it's going to be an insurmountable task for him.

The dilemma among voters is getting an enlarged projection because the BJP-led NDA other

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than raising the ghost of Lalu Yadav has not offered much to the voters in terms of providing a long-term social change. It has worked overtime to keep the fight in its leadership under wraps. It has offered freebies in its vision document as its financial package has failed to spur the campaign the way it should have. If the NDA manages to win, it would not be a victory of their leader or his programmes but a defeat of the social arithmetic that Nitish Kumar is trying to create.

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