

By Sidharth Mishra



It's seldom that western ideas get implemented in the Indian context in either spirit or text. For some time, Indian academics have been discussing the ideas of end of ideology and beginning of new politics. Given recent developments of the past week, today's Notebook seeks to discuss whether we have accepted New Politics as defined in the text books, although the end of ideology is for everybody to see. Daniel Bell a professor of sociology at Harvard in 1960 came out with his seminal book titled "The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties." Bell was writing of a time when following World War II, Imperialism had crumbled, making way for the dawn of freedom in the European colonies of Asia and Africa. Bell was of the opinion that older political ideologies would make way for more parochial ideas.

There are definitely tell-tale signs of end of ideology in Indian politics, where the upper-hand in electoral battles have come to

dominate the manifestos of even cadre-based outfits like the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Communist Party of India (Marxist). The latest illustration of the end of ideology was Delhi Chief Minister and AAP leader Arvind Kejriwal hugging Rashtriya Janata Dal chief Lalu Prasad at the swearing-in ceremony of Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar.

Kejriwal's party has defended the act saying the "friendly gesture" between the two was a case

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Written by Administrator

Friday, 27 November 2015 13:19

of “political courtesy”. Point taken, but if Kejriwal wants to be part of the anti-BJP political bandwagon he cannot escape the company of a politically rejuvenated Lalu Prasad, who is going to play a pivotal role in this political dispensation. The other point that was raised after the ceremony was the swearing-in of Lalu Prasad’s school drop-out sons Tejaswi Yadav and Tej Narayan Yadav as state Cabinet Ministers, with the former appointed as Deputy Chief Minister.

Television studios have gone through the rigmarole of ballistic debate on the inclusion of the duo and examined the “merits” of the Yadav heirs. But then what’s new about the inclusion of Tejaswi and Tej Narayan into the state cabinet? After all they are not the first heirs from political families in this country, who have ascended the throne thanks to the accident of their birth.

More than three years ago, a reader of the Notebook had complained about my article “Politics of Ram Lakhan”. “What special qualifications do you find in these scions of the dynasty that they come and get a ticket for contesting parliamentary elections as soon as they join the party, whereas many hardworking and intelligent workers do not get tickets for years on,” he had asked.

In his complaint, he had continued his whine saying, “In spite of these so-called scions being totally inept and inefficient, the media does not ask them tough questions because they don’t want to be hounded by the party in power. Take the case of Congress’s “Yuvraj” (prince) Rahul Gandhi. While he is talking loudly about Chief Minister Mayawati’s corruption in Uttar Pradesh, he cannot see the corruption in the Congress-led UPA, which is several times larger in magnitude. Why is he not speaking against corruption in his party and the Government that it leads?”

The Rahul Gandhi-led Congress campaign during the 2012 assembly polls in Uttar Pradesh had floundered. However, the person who came to replace Mayawati as Chief Minister is a “Yuvraj” too from a political family. Though not baptised into politics like his kin Tejaswai and Tej Narayan, it remains a fact that the most outstanding feature in the curriculum vitae of Akhilesh Yadav is the fact that he is son of political giant Mulayam Singh Yadav.

For my February 2012 Notebook, which was taken cognizance by even the Election Commission, I had taken a cue from Anand Bakshi’s famous lyrics, “Mere to do anmol ratan, Jjiyo Ram, Jiyo Lakhan”. Picturised in Subhash Ghai’s super grosser, “Ram Lakhan”, the lyrics were inspired by the story of India’s most popular folk hero Ram, the prince of Ayodhya and his brother Lakhan. Ideal sons to their parents, every Indian parent sees the image of Ram and his brothers in their children. Therefore, why should anyone make an exception for political parents?

However, the New Politics and end of ideology in our country today is about Dashrath, the King

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of Ayodhya, not sending his children to the forest to keep a promise but working overtime to ensure that his political legacy is passed onto his children. Across the “Jambudwipa” (the Vedic name for the Indian sub-continent), scions of political families have inherited their clan’s political legacy. Therefore, why should people hold a grudge against Lalu Prasad’s sons?

Moreover, at no point during the election campaign did Yadav issue a disclaimer that his sons on getting elected would not become ministers in the government. The point of discomfort could be that likes of Nitish Kumar and Arvind Kejriwal, the two better known mascots of New Politics, have decided to let the matter pass. Such a development does not only indicate the end of ideology but underlines the fact that electoral victories have emerged as the most important quotients in our nation’s politics.

Political rivalries and the discourse emanating out of them have in fact crossed the “Lakshman Rekha” with snide remarks being made about domestic adversaries even on the foreign soil. Thus, the definition of New Politics in India awaits the final word. Moreover, thanks to the rise of regional political parties, ideology, as Daniel Bell had defined it, for certain has ended in our politics. The onus is on the Congress and the BJP to overcome the demands of electoral politics to keep some space for ideology.

(The author is Consulting Editor,
[Millennium Post](#)
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