

By Sidharth Mishra



Elections in India, and the associated campaigns have several repercussions. The poll curry in this country is made of several and many a times unusual condiments. Thus, Battle of Lok Sabha'2019 has thrown many interesting contests and their allegorical interpretation.

One such interesting battle is being fought in the northern Bihar town of Begusarai. The polling in Begusarai would be in the fourth phase on April 29. Thus, the month-long political fisticuff is in the offing.

Bihar is a political state, its often stated. This point gets reiterated further from the fact that of all the contests being held across the 40 seats in the state, its Begusarai which has come to garner all the attention. Despite the state capital's prestigious seat of Patna City having Bollywood star Shatrughan Sinha and Modi government's heavyweight minister Ravi Shankar Prasad being locked in a classic battle, it's Begusarai which is garnering all the attention.

Begusarai's script has an stimulating line-up. The motor-mouth Minister of Modi government, Giriraj Singh has "very reluctantly" entered the contest. While Giriraj belongs to a political party which claims to be largest not only in India but globally, his main opponent Kanhaiya Kumar, who is giving Giriraj a run for his money, belongs to Communist Party of India, which is on its deathbed having polled less than one percent votes nationally during the 2014 elections.

While Giriraj is the face of the conservative Hinduvta segment of the BJP, Kanhaiya, a former president of the students' union of Jawaharlal Nehru University, is symbol of resistance against the Modi government facing charges of sedition in a court of Delhi. The JNU sedition case proceedings in Delhi is closely followed in Bihar because it helps Kanhaiya position himself as victim of the "wrath of the state," and gives chance to the BJP to point at the 'anti-national' elements supporting their rivals.

Drawing room and university café discussions also veer around to the age-old Biblical story of David and Goliath. For a quick recall, Goliath was described in the Bible as a Philistine giant defeated by the young David in single combat. Since then the 'David and Goliath' phrase has come to mean a situation where the underdog overwhelms a much bigger and stronger opponent.

People point out that while, Kanhaiya is fighting polls on crowd funding, Giriraj Singh in his affidavit before the Election Commission has declared possession of several immovable property, jewelry and cash. People point to Kanhaiya having reaped Rs 70 lakh through crowd funding, in a cash poor state, to be a great achievement.

To buttress their point, people point to Atishi Marlana, the AAP's declared candidate from East Delhi, having failed to cross even Rs 50 lakh mark despite having undertaken the crowd funding campaign more than six months back. Between Atishi and Marlana, there is one thing common – the Marxist ideology.

While Atishi was born to Marxist parents, who named her after Marx and Lenin (Marlana), Kanhaiya could well be the last known Marxist warrior in the Indian poll battlefield. Begusarai too has a deep Communist connect, it was once called Moscow of Bihar. Though in 2014, the seat went to the BJP kitty, the party's candidate then Bholu Singh was originally a CPI cadre and certainly not a Hinduvta votary as Giriraj is.

The twists and turns in the Begusarai poll battle script, however, doesn't end here. There a great possibility that in the race between David and Goliath, a third-runner could come trumps. Former state chief minister, now incarcerated, Lalu Prasad Yadav's Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) has fielded a Muslim candidate Tanveer Hassan. The constituency has large presence of the Yadav and Muslim votes, who should vote solidly for Hassan. He was the runner-up here in 2014.

BJP stalwart is banking on usual party rhetoric, claiming the voters' faith "in the country's development, leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi" and not to forget "the valour of our armed forces."

The Minister's filing of the nomination papers was followed by the presence of prominent Bihar BJP leaders like state unit chief Nityanand Rai, Deputy CM Sushil Kumar Modi besides alliance partner JD(U)'s prominent face RCP Singh, a close aide of Chief Minister Nitish Kumar at a public rally. Presence of Singh was to allay the fears that Nitish Kumar is not favourably towards Giriraj and "would not be very unhappy" if Kanhaiya won.

Kanhaiya's campaign on the other hand is in the hands of old JNU hands including Dalit MLA from Gujarat Jignesh Mavani and the old CPI cadres of the district, who have survived fall of Soviet Union for more than 25 years now.

The Gujarat leader had emerged as face Dalit resistance to BJP forces during the assembly polls last year. His presence has forced Giriraj to sing parochial tune. He recently tweeted saying, "What is Jignesh doing in Begusarai? Didn't he thrash Biharis in Gujarat and troubled their sisters and mothers. Please ask this question to him (Jignesh), wherever you find him."

Kanhaiya sympathisers feel that Lalu Yadav in fielding Hassan, may have inadvertently helped Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Kanhaiya Kumar's victory would give impetus to anti-Modi forces especially in the ideological battle which is being fought between the BJP and its adversaries. Hassan, in his victory, may defeat BJP's candidate but save the saffron party the blushes of having to face somebody they pitched as 'anti-national' on the floors of Parliament.

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