

**By Sidharth Mishra**



In the lap of foothills of the Himalayas is a village called Purkal. About a thousand feet above Dehradun, this beautiful village virtually lies suspended between the Queen of Hills Mussoorie and the state capital. Purkal has been made famous in recent times for some great work being done by a non-government organisation working with local women, who have revived some of the traditional handicrafts and also brought education to the doorsteps of these villagers. The other famous destination of this village is a residential school founded about a decade back which, regarding ambience and upkeep, ranks best in the country. As the former headmaster of Doon School, Mr John Mason, had put it, “a school should be a happy place and there could not be a happier place than the Kasiga School.” This lovingly developed landscape of Kasiga School first shot into prominence when Karan Johar decided to shoot “Student of the Year” on its campus.

Other than its ambience and infrastructure, another great feature of the school is the annual dance drama which students present under the stewardship of danseuse Sharmila Bhartihari, a disciple of Protima Bedi and associate of film and theatre veteran Tom Alter. They conduct their annual show under an open sky a few days before Diwali each year, as the winter chill starts to

set into the Doon valley.

Your reporter has been lucky to watch these presentations year after year which have been on subjects as varied as Shakespeare's Macbeth to themes like pollution in the Ganga and the recalling of the nation's Bhakti traditions.

Last week they had a presentation about those great souls who charged with their opposition to the imperial tyranny decided to make the ultimate sacrifice for the freedom of the country. Following the Jatra folk theatre style, a troupe of about 150 children from the school held the audience spellbound as the narrative galloped from Bahadur Shah Zafar to Khudiram Bose to Udham Singh to Rani of Jhansi to Bhagat Singh to Subhash Chandra Bose and several other "Azadi Ke Deewane". The show finally concluded with Jawaharlal Nehru's "Tryst with destiny" address.

Watching the dance-drama after having filed my report on the loss of the BJP in Bihar, I could not help but see the reasons for the ruling party's massive loss in the politically sensitive state. Their dream of having a "Congress-mukht Bharat" lay in tatters, I thought as I watched the play.

To delineate the matter further, first a few words about the theatre form used at the school troupe: Jatra was started as a form of theatre sometime in the medieval period by Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. According to music scholar Alison Arnold, the survival of the (Jatra) form over such a vast period and a rapidly changing social milieu, while catering to heterogeneous audiences, has been credited to its innate malleability and ways of adapting to changing social dynamics. The Jatra's ability to adapt to changing social dynamics has not only kept it relevant and alive, but also thriving, unlike urban theatre which at some point gets plagued by its own puritanical intellectualism, and thus remains perpetually without a mass audience.

The BJP has to learn a key lesson from the freedom struggle and principles of Jatra theatre, where diverse ideologies manage to come together for a common cause. Pushing sectarian issues is becoming the biggest impediment for the party's progress. Coming to power for a term cannot be a defining indicator about a party's progress. A political party's progress is best evaluated by the deep social roots it's able to create for itself.

As the American scholar said about Jatra theatre, a political party too needs to have "malleability and have ways of adapting to changing social dynamics, and thus stay not just relevant and alive, but also thrive." The lack of deep social roots is the cause for the party's failure to progress beyond a certain percentage of the electorate. BJP veteran Arun Jaitley's quote on party's debacle in Bihar is very relevant in this context.

## Need to rise beyond divide

Written by Administrator

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“In the 2014 Lok Sabha polls, the three parties of the Grand Alliance fought separately. The NDA got 38.8% [of the vote share], and the three members of the Grand Alliance together accounted for 45.3%. In the Bihar (assembly) elections, we got 34.1% and the Grand Alliance got 41.9%. The difference is the same if they had fought independently. The size of their coalition arithmetically became more than us, which was the biggest reason [for the loss]. We miscalculated the seat share,” Jaitley told media persons after his party’s parliamentary board meeting to review Bihar polls.

The same was the story in the national capital. With the voter abandoning the Congress lock, stock and barrel and migrating to the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), BJP’s seat share in Delhi assembly came down from 32 to a mere three in one year, despite their vote share remaining intact. The party has to realise that “divisive” politics, that is dividing the opposition cannot take them very far.

The BJP has reached this far on its own volition and can go further only by including more social groups and classes into their fold. That’s an onerous task though as the party for now, isn’t blessed with strategists who would look for a contest with their political and ideological rivals beyond the electoral battles. The lack of social thinkers and scholars in its ranks continues to be the biggest weakness for the party which otherwise has the potential to implement the agenda of progress and development.

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