

Keeping the Faith

There is understandable excitement over the defeat of fascist, communal forces. And, we can infer from the results an assertion of dignity and an expectation of well being – equity, justice and fraternity. Notwithstanding the election results, a certain cussedness in politics still remains. In the euphoria over victory and defeat, this might get lost.

Harish Khare's articles remind us of this cussedness. We need to dwell on the real issues to remind the victors of their promises, and to strengthen our own resolve for the long haul. Notwithstanding the results, a very long haul it is going to be.

Aijaz Ahmed warns us about the far right. It has never come to power on its own - it has always piggy-backed on other issues to fill the vacuum created by decay, conflict, disarray and lack of any other direction from the center-left liberal tradition.

Jayaprakash Narayan, like his illustrious namesake, pleads for us to shed our cynicism and work in the little spaces that are available around us, in the very system that gives us such high hopes, but often delivers little.

Non-party political processes need to take stock of their rigorous aversion for getting soiled in the hurly-burly of party and electoral politics. The People's Political Front is a small start in that direction.



But this needs to be a wider movement – a resurgent across-the-board involvement in the political process akin to what was obtained during the years preceding independence. Civil Society does not become uncivil by participating in this process with shirt sleeves rolled up.

This we need to do - keep the faith – and make the tide turn. And turn it will.



Winners and losers by *Harish Khare, The Hindu, Feb 04, 2004.*
<http://www.hindu.com/2004/02/04/stories/2004020401931000.htm>
[C.ELDOC1073380]



The Vision Deficiency Syndrome by *Harish Khare, The Hindu, March 03, 2004* <http://www.hindu.com/2004/03/03/stories/2004030301341000.htm>
[C.ELDOC1073513]

Indian Politics at the Crossroads: Towards Election 2004 by *Aijaz Ahmed*
. The Hindu , Feb 29, 2004.
<http://www.hindu.com/mag/2004/02/29/stories/2004022900020100.htm>
[C.ELDOC1073572]

We, the losers by *Dr. Jayaprakash Narayan, Humanscape, December 2003.*
<http://www.humanscapeindia.net/humanscape/new/dec03/wethelose.htm>
[C.ELDOC1072977]

Winners and Losers

Harish Khare

... So then will it make any difference whether we are nominally governed by an Atal Bihari Vajpayee-led regime or by a Sonia Gandhi-led coalition or by a Mulayam Singh Yadav-supported "third front" hotchpotch? Whichever way, the shots will continue to be called by the same business houses that have hijacked the growth agenda these last few years.

With a very meagre investment in the fortunes of this or that potential political "winner", the organised interests reap a disproportionately high harvest of policy breaks and tax concessions.

Business houses by themselves cannot fetch votes for any political party. It is at this point that the middle classes come in as the junior partner in the great development show.

Articulate members of the middle classes tend to appropriate the civil society sites and use their perch in the information sector to promote the market mantra. This middle class has been told that it is no more a tiny minority but a healthy 300-million strong and that it should stand up for "consumers' rights" which are perennially in danger from "populist" political leaders.

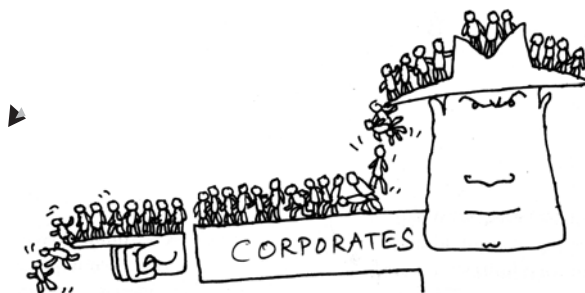


This *per se* need not be a cause for dismay. After all, politics has intrinsically to do with the unending struggle over allocation of collective resources and the crux of politics has always been defined as "who gains what at whose expense."

It is a different matter that political leaders argue that they are there to uphold the "*public interest*", thereby undertaking to ensure fairness in the allocation of collective resources.

In our country, this pretence has been the primary source of generating legitimacy for the political system that was put in place after we chose to become a republic. In fact, the Indian state could become the most successful post-colonial state only because its post-Independence leaders sought power for themselves in the name of the welfare of the masses. It was the egalitarian promise of a welfare state that garnered popular support and acceptability for the post-Independence leadership as it sought to do away with the vestiges of feudalism as well as with an inherently unequal social order.

That somewhere on the way this promise got botched, should not make us lose sight of democracy's bottom line: the legitimacy and acceptability of the political order depends upon its continued honest and sincere willingness to work for the welfare of the largest number of citizens. Lest we should get confused what the Indian democracy is all about, the Mahatma's talisman about "*the poorest and the weakest man*" has been inscribed in stone at the Rajghat.



The Vision Deficiency Syndrome

Harish Khare

A national election should be able to renew the polity's democratic capital and deepen the Indian state's legitimacy. Instead, we are content to be limited in our vision.

This search for vision is not a romantic quest. No nation has been able to become a great nation without a collective vision, a set of inspirations and sentiments that invites a society as a whole to rise above its narrow - internal and distracting - preoccupations and to create a holistic synergy.

A vision has to necessarily consist of morally defensible ideas, attitudes and values. This cannot, by definition, be a sectarian enterprise. Vision has to be a civilisational pursuit

A nation's vision does not necessarily have to depend upon the outcome of an election, though a morally-deficient regime can certainly deplete a polity's capacity to discover its wholesome impulses and traditional resilience.

It is not that in these six years Mr. Vajpayee has not changed the way the country has come to think about itself and about the rest of the world. As a country we seem more self-assured of ourselves than before, primarily because the saffron crowd itself has discovered that its fears about others' capacity to influence us against our will were exaggerated.

The much-talked-about accent on "*development*" of the election campaign, again, is devoid of any promise of collective joy and prosperity. But this vision-deficiency is not confined to matters economic; it has handicapped our capacity to deal with a world that stands dramatically re-configured.

What is worse, no political party or leader the moral courage to talk about great issues confronting the nation. Nor is any party willing to make an election issue of the collapse of the rule of law in Gujrat. It would have been wonderful if Mr. Vajpayee has used his newly manufactured personality cult to seek a

mandate to drain the swamp of official lawlessness in “*Modiland.*”

Silence, please: small minds at work. ▶