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Mass poaching has started in Karnataka

Democracy Takes A Hit As Party-Hoppers Circumvent Anti-Defection Law: Analyst

Prashanth G N | TNN

Bangalore: Is there a deep-rooted problem with our democratic system, by which candidates are selected by political parties to be voted as MLAs, and then move from one party to another in political self-interest? Political analyst and pro-vice chancellor of Jain University Sandeep Shastri shares his views on the churning in Karnataka's politics:

Your perspective on poaching politics in Karnataka...

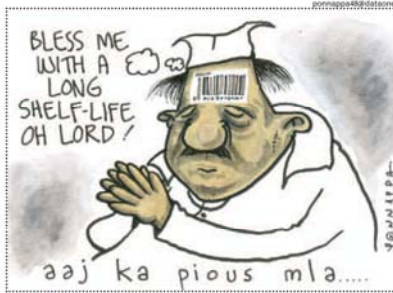
Poaching began in the 60s, I believe, in Haryana. It was called Aya Ram Gaya Ram politics. In the late 60s, the Congress collapsed and opposition, splinter groups emerged in North India, and defections began between Congress and Janata parties. So in 1985, Rajiv Gandhi was very keen on the anti-defection law. The challenge was its practical implementation. Poaching in Karnataka became visible in the 1990s though it was first seen after 1983 when the Janata Party emerged victorious. In the late 1990s, BJP emerged strong and consequently, Karnataka politics became competitive between the Congress, Janata Dal and BJP. Poaching worsened after 2005, with the BJP trying to stay in power and coming up with Operation Lotus. Wholesale, mass poaching, including resigning and joining other parties in Karnataka is a recent phenomenon and it is sad that we may be the first state to have introduced it.

This strategy circumvents the anti-defection law.

Yes, it does. Under the law, an individual legislator cannot move to another party. He has to garner one-third support to do so. When he can't, the best option is to resign and join the other party. Law alone is not enough to preserve ethics in politics.

How does the defecting legislator relate to his voters after changing parties?

If you're a disqualified MLA, you won't be able to contest for a certain number of years. But



Sandeep Shastri

For a citizen, there is no great difference between parties. It is convenient for candidates to hop parties as there are no differences in principles, priorities and ideologies. Politics is personality-based, not issue-based, and pushes issues to the background.

if you are resigning, you can. Now, if the resignation is on an important principle, you can go back to your constituency. V P Singh resigned from Rajiv Gandhi's Congress and formed the Jan Morcha, Bahuguna also did it.

What is the confidence they will be voted in again?

The party structure in India is largely personality-based. If the personality of an individual is overwhelming, he can win, irrespective of the party he belongs to. Until a few years ago, Bangarappa was winning from Sorab regardless of whether he was in the Congress, Kranti Ranga or SP. It is a sign of a weak party system. Today's top BJP, Congress and JD leaders have moved from one party to another and yet won. While the party label is important, politics allows candidates to change their coats.

What is the solution to defection?

Ultimately, the solution lies

with the voter. Just as candidates have won, they have lost too. After Operation Lotus, Somanna lost the bye-election, Yogeshwar, who moved from Congress to the BJP, lost in Channapatna.

What does it say about our political parties?

For a citizen, there is no great difference between parties. It is convenient for candidates to hop parties as there are no differences in principles, priorities and ideologies. Politics is personality-based, not issue-based, and pushes issues to the background. Governance, democracy and development will be hit.

What is the solution?

The internal structure of political parties has to be democratized very urgently. Grass-root workers must have a say in choosing candidates, not merely the high command of parties. A law and popular pressure to regulate functioning of political parties is also crucial.