

THE HINDU

Friday, January 21st, 2011

Jain University: Launch of book 'Karnataka Politics: The road taken... the journey ahead' brought out by Jain University Press, Governor H.R. Bhardwaj chief guest, Dr. A.N. Krishna Rao Road, V.V. Puram, 11 a.m.

Tracing political narratives

Karnataka politics has been under the spotlight in recent months, often for the wrong reasons. At a time when the Bharatiya Janata Party's first government in south India appears to be lurching from one crisis to another comes a book that takes an academic look at the political scene, tracing the developments from 1994 to 2010.

Authored by political analyst and academic Sandeep Shastri, *Karnataka Politics: The Road Taken, the Journey Ahead*, was released on Thursday. At present a pro-chancellor of Jain University here, his work is the first research publication of the Jain University Press.

In a freewheeling chat with *The Hindu* on his book, his perspective on coalition politics, the current imbroglio and corruption, Dr. Shastri says that the uniqueness of the people's verdict in this State has been that it has never conformed to the "national route". "In every election since 1985, Karnataka has taken the opposite direction — from voting the Congress in big numbers in 1999 (when the NDA romped home at the Centre) to bringing BJP to power even as



Sandeep Shastri's book tracks the State's political trajectories in the past 15 years

Dr. Manmohan Singh was voted PM again. Here, the people's approach to politics seems to stem from purely local considerations; so much so I've wondered if a Lok Sabha election in our country can even be considered a single election or 28 separate ones."

Brave new 'brazenness'

On the recent scams and turmoil in the Legislative Assembly, Dr. Shastri says that while there is little new

TALKING POINT

about the corruption, the novelty lies in the "brazenness" of it all.

So is a new type of politics being played out in the State? "In one sense it is new. But the newness is what I call the brazenness with which you believe you can use power. People have always put on a facade of public service, but now there is no pretence of stating that there is no breach."

For instance, many politicians openly find nothing wrong with prioritising sites for MLAs; or have argued that there is nothing new about abuse of power. This brazenness — that boldly argues that one wrong rights another wrong — is a new twist to the old corruption story, he believes.

On the current political situation, he believes that with the divided Congress not asserting its opposition while a more ambitious JD(S) is unable to do so owing to its limited numbers, the BJP is able to stick on despite huge challenges. "But the future undoubtedly holds a two-party system," he says.

DEEPA KURUP