

Vast resources of the BJP could not turn right into wrong



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THE OUTCOME OF the Gujarat Rajya Sabha elections, last week, is a fitting tribute to the 75th anniversary of the Quit India Movement. It came at the end of a month where an imperious ruling party, displaying a historically unprecedented level of arrogance and disregard for the law, sought once again to “manage” an election in its favour. It used intimidation tactics involving raids and last-minute attempts to derail the voting process. Despite those efforts, the Constitution and the rule of law was upheld. The Congress party stood vindicated.

No election to the Rajya Sabha has been as bitterly fought or as fraught with attempts at manipulation as the one this time in Gujarat. The Congress had to be cautious because it was dealing with a rival who does not comprehend the meaning of fair play. Our legislators in Gujarat, demonstrating the courage of their convictions, had actually gone before the media and made public, their allegations against the BJP’s agent. These allegations were not probed and the BJP, instead of behaving in a manner befitting a ruling party, tried to dismiss the allegations. However, the BJP’s pride came to a fall. The party made a crucial mistake. The two Congress MLAs who the BJP sought to break away, in their eagerness to please their new masters, showed their votes to their new masters in the BJP. Our authorised representative noticed this and the Congress filed a complaint before the Election Commission.

The Congress’ request was simple: Examine the video footage to determine if the offending MLAs had shown their ballots to anyone other than the authorised agent. A matter that could have been resolved in minutes was stretched to hours by the unnecessary bickering of the BJP.

The Congress held fast to the principles of law and the Constitution: If there was a violation, the Election Commission had to take action. The BJP spread false and irrelevant narratives. These ranged from the absurd — “the Congress didn’t file its complaint in the morning, so it shouldn’t be allowed to do so now” — to the desperate — “the Congress is attempting to manipulate the ECI”. The spurious objections were rightly rejected.

This, above all, was Amit Shah’s defeat. His reach far exceeded his grasp as he and his colleagues tried to subvert, first, the vot-

ing process and, then, the appellate mechanism. Blinded by hubris and political heft, the BJP leadership sought to turn this election into a referendum on their control over Gujarat. They were reminded that not all men and women have a price. The Congress rank and file rallied behind Ahmed Patel while the BJP sought to plant stories of factions and separations. The Congress stood together while the BJP propaganda machine did what it does best, spread vicious lies.

In this din, the Election Commission stood out as a beacon of hope for upholding the Constitution and the law. Despite six senior cabinet ministers attempting to “convince” the officers of the futility of the Congress cause, they acted as per the law. The entire country was witness as the Union Finance Minister and Union Law Minister abdicated their constitutional functions and acted as party pracharakas. The end result is that they stand exposed. The vast resources and influence at the BJP’s disposal could not turn right into wrong. In the conflict between truth and state power, truth and democracy prevailed.

These events are important for another reason. A section of the media was peddling a narrative that the BJP had pulled off canny political stratagems and the Congress should have been more careful. This was a disappointing display of attempting to be more loyal than the king. Their reluctance to highlight the series of electoral malpractices by the BJP shows a deeper, and a more worrying, bias. It was akin to congratulating a thief for a well-executed theft and blaming the victim for not having installed sufficient alarms. Some news channels had even begun to write obituaries by early evening. But finally, none of that mattered.

This is also a reminder to the BJP. It has spent three years desperately usurping power, controlling the media and persecuting opponents by unbridled misuse of state power. Raids, false criminal cases and hounding everyone who disagrees with the government, appear to have become the new normal. This drama has also exposed where the BJP’s priorities lie. Their ministers run to the Election Commission to display their loyalty to their leaders, instead of performing the functions for which they have been elected. The government and the party apparatus is used only to subjugate, suppress and persecute. In one single night, the BJP crumbled unto itself when it found that it couldn’t bend the democratic institutions to its perverse will.

It would be too much to expect statesmanship from the BJP and for it to congratulate those who have won. But it would be appreciated if its leaders also find the time to govern a country growing increasingly tired of their brand of politics.

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