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La Viva Democracy

Installation of Hemant Soren as the new chief minister of Jharkhand has been welcomed by all non-BJP parties and hailed as a victory of democratic forces. Spectacular electoral victory registered by the JMM-led alliance in partnership with Congress and Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) served an electoral blow to the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) which had been in power in the state until recently. Undoubtedly, the BJP had registered a stunning electoral victory in the Lok Sabha general election, including its number of seats won in Jharkhand, held in the recent past; nevertheless, it literally conceded defeat in the state assembly elections in Maharashtra and could save its government by aligning with JJP in Haryana. However, the outcome of the Jharkhand assembly polls is a different story altogether for almost all the parties that contested the polls.

Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) had contested 43 of the 81 seats and managed to win 30 seats with vote share of 18.72%, the Congress had fielded its candidates in 31 constituencies and could win 16 seats with a vote share of 13.88%. The RJD, also an ally of JMM-led alliance, contested seven seats and could win one seat, with vote share of 2.75%. On the other hand, the BJP had contested 79 seats but could win only 25 seats with a vote share of 33.37%. All Jharkhand Students Union (AJSU), once an ally of the BJP, this time contested independently by fielding candidates on 52 seats but could win only two seats with a vote share of 8.10%. Interestingly, the Jharkhand Vikas Morcha contested all 81 assembly seats and managed to win three seats with a vote share of 5.45%. 5 seats were won by others with a vote share of 17.30%.

JMM-led alliance cobbling up 47 seats has been at the helm in Jharkhand with Hemant Soren as chief minister. The Mahagathbandhan in Jharkhand, comprising JMM, Congress and RJD is reminiscent of similar grand alliance in Bihar in 2015 where the RJD supremo Laloo Prasad Yadav succeeded in cobbling up the grand alliance of RJD, Congress, Nitish-led JD (U) and other parties against the BJP and came with flying colours in the 2015 state assembly elections. The hallmark of Jharkhand polls has been the contest between so-called national issues pioneered by the BJP's national leadership to woo the electorate and local issues of Jal, Jungle & Jameen (Water, forests and land) as advocated by JMM-led alliance. A remarkable aspect of the election campaign of the alliance was hectically active role of the JMM chief in most of the election rallies addressed either by the JMM or the Congress. Hemant Soren was present in all the rallies addressed by former Congress president Rahul Gandhi and his sister, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra.

Deciding not to split the tribal vote, even in some of its strongholds, Congress conceded these seats to the JMM and took the BJP head on in seats where tribals were in minority, and in urban constituencies. In comparison to the BJP's sustained focus on the scrapping of Article 370, Ram Mandir and CAA, Congress kept the spotlight on local issues, economy and jobs. Similar focus was maintained by other alliance partners – JMM and the RJD. While attributing BJP's defeat in assembly poll to strong anti-incumbency against the BJP chief minister and his arrogance as the two main reasons for the BJP's defeat, one political analyst from Jharkhand has stated that Hemant Soren, Congress and RJD for the first time changed their mindset of outdoing each other and sincerely worked for the victory of the alliance and their message percolated down to the grassroots.

Outcome of Jharkhand polls has lessons for all parties. For the BJP, it is no more invincible but now has become vulnerable when the Opposition gets united. And that the best aspect of Indian democracy is that it self-corrects runaway ambitions and restores the representative nature of Indian polity. For the Congress party has done well by adapting itself to local requirements and by aligning with state level parties it is going to be a net gainer. Mantra of grand alliance that worked in 2015 in Bihar and in 2019 in Jharkhand should further be strengthened to safeguard the democratic and secular values. Jharkhand has demonstrated La Viva democracy.

— BK