

## The Three Times Chief Minister

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Together with Narendra Modi and Raman Singh, Shivraj Singh Chouhan has also joined the rank of Chief Ministers who have been elected for the third consecutive term. Jyoti Basu, of course, was sui generis and no one can compare with him, but Shivraj's achievement is also most praiseworthy. There are many reasons why he has beaten the curse of anti incumbency, but we would err if we did not recognise that the way Shivraj exposed himself to the people and projected a pro-people persona, the manner in which he tackled the problem of power and of road communications, his outreach to the common man in all walks of life and all professions, his emphasis on justice for women and protection for the girl child and the manner in which the communal balance was positively held and the State, by and large, remained peaceful are all factors which make Shivraj Singh Chouhan a formidable political force..

At the Centre, unable to hold prices in check, incapable of formulating a dynamic development agenda which could result in greater industrial investment, creation of more meaningful and productive jobs and enlarging the employment base through education, training and economic expansion, the Congress has had to fall back on either abuse of Narendra Modi and BJP, or raising the spectre of militant Hinduism. Besides the formulation of schemes which are no better than doles but which would be paid for through deficit financing, the Congress has nothing positive to offer. What should, however, be remembered is that the negatives of the Congress do not collectively provide a positive for the BJP. This means that the BJP nationally and at the State level has to present to the people viable and doable programmes of development which project the country to a higher economic plane. How is this to be done in M.P.? A start should be made by reconstituting the State Planning Commission. The Deputy Chairman of the Commission (the Chief Minister is the Chairman) has to be a man of vision, who has the capacity both to understand the State's potential and the courage to think in a revolutionary manner by which the State can leapfrog many of the stages of economic development. To give a mythological analogy, the head of the State Planning Commission must be able to think like Hanuman who jumped across the Palk Straits without waiting for a bridge to be constructed. To return to Madhya Pradesh, the present low level of development is where one now stands, the chasm of poverty and unemployment constitutes our Palk Straits. The conquest of backwardness through strategic leapfrogging would be like Ram's victory over Ravan.

A State whose people are educated will always prosper because it is ignorance which holds us down. Madhya Pradesh should pioneer a school revolution whereby rural Madhya Pradesh is served by a network of schools built on the Navodaya model in terms of infrastructure, equipment, quality of teachers and the desire of the students to learn. In one cycle of education from entry point to the twelfth standard the State can transform itself through education alone because its students would be able to compete with the world. Madhya Pradesh is fortunate in hosting one central university, one IIT, two out of the four IITs set up by the Government of India, the IIM at Indore, the Indian Institute of Forest Management, the School of Planning and Architecture, the Maulana Azad National Institute of Technology, the National Law Institute University and the National Institute of Fashion Technology. These are all central institutions, but to provide education for the masses we need to take the existing government

engineering colleges such as the ones at Jabalpur and Ujjain, invest in them to raise their standards and thereafter, because the students would have studied in an institute which made them competitive, provide professionals who could man senior posts in the industrial sector. If the vocational training institutions like ITIs are also simultaneously strengthened Madhya Pradesh would develop a pool of trained manpower which alone would attract industry to Madhya Pradesh.

Because of its central location, because in the Satpura and Vindhya it has the oldest hill ranges in the world, because the Amarkantak watershed is undoubtedly the most important watershed in India because it is the source of the north flowing Son and Johilla, tributaries of the Ganga, the west flowing Narmada which is paralleled later in the middle reaches of the Satpura by the Tapi whose source is in Multai, the south flowing Mahanadi which sharply turns east and one of the major tributaries of the Godavari which flows south and also turns east. This means that this watershed contributes rivers which flow in all directions of the compass. The forests of this watershed keep the rivers supplied with water even in the dry season and their continued good health is vital to the survival of peninsular India.

Geographically and biologically Madhya Pradesh is very diverse and this diversity itself is a good reason to establish a major, world class research facility which promotes biotechnology, biomedicine, gene conservation, mining and the methods by which the adverse environmental impact of mining is either eliminated or at least minimised. We need to immediately invite experts in these fields and some progressive industrialists who can advise us on the areas of fundamental research, the infrastructure needed for setting up a world class research centre and suggestions on the location of this centre in Madhya Pradesh. The scientists and researchers can be drawn from all over the world, the facilities should be beyond our present imagination and we should be prepared to pay whatever the scientists want. Shivraj Singh has the opportunity to propel Madhya Pradesh into the twenty-second century if this sort of research becomes a part of his agenda.

Madhya Pradesh is agriculturally well placed because of its topography, soil conditions and water availability. The two agriculture universities at Jabalpur and Gwalior have been starved of funds and this is a great handicap. In the next five years the infrastructure of the universities must be built to a level where they can do meaningful agricultural research. A sufficient corpus should be built so that these universities become centres of learning, advanced agricultural research and extension centres which can help in application of research. This is the direction in which the State must move. If this results in a consistent improvement of agriculture, the setting up of downstream industries which process agricultural produce and add value, if the producer to market relationship is strengthened, agriculture can become a major engine of growth. With this in view the State must do holistic planning for the whole gamut of agriculture.

Madhya Pradesh is peaceful, it is richly endowed with natural resources, population density is still favourable, the climate is equable and there is enormous potential for growth if strategic planning and action for plan implementation are strengthened. That is the real challenge for Shivraj Singh Chouhan.

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