Raja Bundela – From Reel Life to Real Life

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–Manohar Khushalani

The Indian democracy is replete with examples of film actors and actresses making it big in politics. Shatrughan Sinha, Vinod Khanna, Rajesh Khanna, Shabana Azmi, M.G. Ramachandran, M. Karunanidhi, Jaya Pradha, N.T. Rama Rao, Nargis and Sunil Dutt are just a few examples. The ready-made vehicle of mass media gives them instant visibility. The attributes that the performers recreate, for the characters they represent on stage or screen are taken to be their own rather than of the person they portray. This also gives them a popularity that a politician would take ears to garner. The latest to cross the threshold from theatrics to politics is NSD pass-out Raja Bundela, actor, director, producer of the small screen and recently of the big screen as well. **Bundela is now contesting the Lok Sabha elections on a Congress ticket from Jhansi.**



The two films that Bundela has produced, Pratha and Kisne Bharmaya Mere Lakhan Ko, were shot in an area of UP/MP known as Bundelkhand – even the stories were of this land. The fifty episode TV serial, Mujhe Chand Chahiye, which he made for Zee TV, was also made totally in the same belt – Jhansi, Lalitpur,

Urjha. Although his name is Raja he is not the Raja of Bundelkhand as some people confuse him to be. However he derives his name from the region that he hails from. The fact that he chooses themes of this region demonstrate his love for his roots, despite the fact that he left for Mumbai years ago. Bundela was recently also elected the president of **Bundelkhand Mukti Morcha**, a post he took over from Shanker Lal Mehrotra. The main grouse of the Morcha is that even though a State reorganisation committee, constituted in 1955 recommended the formation of an Independent Bundelkhand State it was never formed due to electoral calculations of the then ruling party. If constituted the state would have an area of 1,60,000 square kilometres and would boast of a population of over three crores. According to Bundela both UP and MP admit that the region is most backward but because the linguistic region has been broken up between two states, insufficient funds were being invested in the region.Raja denies that he has political aspirations. It was Shanker Lal Mehrotra who asked him to visit Bundelkhand and see what they were doing. He went for fun sake, out of curiosity. But after reaching there he realised that there was a need to create awareness amongst people. He claims that he was very reluctant to take on a post but told them that he was willing to do any work assigned to him. His commitment was for the cause, not for any organization. In any case he had been going there every month over the last seven to eight years. But the Morcha felt that he would be even more involved if he took on some responsibility. That made sense to him. Back in Mumbai he has been garnering support from other artists such as Ashutosh Rana and Jaininder Jain who hail from the region. According to him even Amitabh Bachhan belongs to Bundelkhand. The Republic Day parade held just two days ago, perhaps for the first time, showed young dancers and danseuses in red green dhotis and lahengas pirouetting to the beats of mridang and manjira, demonstrating the steps of the vibrant Raee dance, a folk form of Bundelkhand. An acknowledgement of the fact that the region is coming into focus and the hoarse cries of the people of

that belt are perhaps getting noticed.