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The village Saroha witnesses such a moment when one of its residents, Bisesar, a Harijan, is found lying dead on a roadside culvert. With the by-election, just a month and a half away, a glitch like Bisesar's death snowballs into a grave issue. The ruling party, already blamed for its hasty closure of a fire incident that killed many from the lower castes, definitely couldn't afford more discontent among its voters.

Dr. Sahab, the current Chief Minister



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## **Review:**

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The village Saroha witnesses such a moment when one of its residents, Bisesar, a Harijan, is found lying dead on a roadside culvert. With the by-election, just a month and a half away, a glitch like Bisesar’s death snowballs into a grave issue. The ruling party, already blamed for its hasty closure of a fire incident that killed many from the lower castes, definitely couldn’t afford more discontent among its voters.

Da Saheb, the current Chief Minister, orders a thorough and fair investigation of Bisesar’s death. The local newspaper Mashaal turns into a party loudspeaker rather than throwing light on facts. The police kowtow to the party in power.

As the ruling party and an excessively eager opposition brandish Bisesar’s name like a weapon in their fight to deliver justice for the common man, we see a sordid (and familiar too) picture of Darwin’s 'survival of the fittest' unfold in Indian politics.

How did Bisesar die? Who wins the by-election? How Da Saheb maneuvers the findings related to the first question tackling the deceased man's close friend, an honest police officer, an ideology conscious party member stuns us into silence. The answer to the second question hardly matters as politicians only wait to feast upon people's despair.

Mannu Bhandari’s *The Great Feast* (Mahabhoj in Hindi), every bit brilliant and relatable, shows why ‘dirty’ is the de facto adjective used for politics. The prose is unembellished, taut and incisive and the characters meticulously crafted. The translation by Ruth Vanita makes me want to read her more.

“Writing is an extremely political act. Writers can rise above politics, but writing in itself is an extremely political act.” - Salma, author, in her interview. That *The Great Feast* stands for the above in letter and spirit is reason enough to read it.

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