

Hoping democracy plays enabler

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A stick supporting his right leg, Marwaha walks briskly on his campaign trail and claims to have 20,000 votes in his pocket.

"When Manpreet Badal came here soon after launching his outfit (the People's Party of Punjab), I told him I deserved a chance. But he did not go beyond promising the ticket," says Burewala native Marwaha, 35, who co-founded the Punjab Angheen Sabha in 2007 and is now its chairman.

Marwaha's plans fell into place when the Sabha invited RVP national president KK Dixit for an awareness programme in Kapurthala on December 30. Dixit, who established the party in 2005 and has fielded 50 candidates in the UP elections, tells HT, "I had no immediate plans for Punjab, but I was so thrilled to see hundreds of challenged people gathered there, that I constituted a state body and offered tickets. Four-five people came forward. A couple of our candidates have had their nomination papers rejected due to technicalities, but two have stood against all odds."

Marwaha, whose leg was hit by polio when he was four, is now crisscrossing the segment on a Sumo, acquainting people with his poll symbol, a cricket batsman. He is facing SAD veteran Upinderjit Kaur and Congress' Navtej Cheema.

For poll managers, both Sabharwal and Marwaha have friends and family who have stood by them. For expenditure,



■ RVP's Sultanpur Lodhi candidate Harwinder Singh Marwaha. HT PHOTO

Marwaha depends on his land and family income from the construction trade, while Sabharwal, pitted against Congress' CD Kamboj and SAD nominee Ajit Singh Kohar, has built it all from the ground up.

Both cite the same motivation. "When I started moving out for work, I figured that even getting into an office is impossible. My confidence helped me, but not all our brethren are like that. So, I learnt all about procedures and pensions, and then got active in the Angheen Sabha," says Sabharwal. Marwaha says that's why he co-founded the Sabha in the first place.

KK Dixit, whose both legs and an arm are polio-hit, explains in a brief telephonic conversation, "I was part of an NGO in UP that

worked for the disabled. But even when we had huge numbers, no party agreed to our proposal to give tickets to the disabled. I founded the RVP as a logical next step. Nothing is possible in our country without political power."

But isn't their agenda well-meaning yet narrow? "When my father first sought money for my treatment, the landlord had refused saying it did not make a difference if a Balmiki crawls or walks," says Sabharwal, "but I have never mentioned it to garner votes. We will work for all kinds of disabled, the poor, the physically challenged, the socially backward, and the aged." Dixit mentions the eunuchs too, and has declared that his CM candidate is a eunuch in Uttar Pradesh. "The kinnars (eunuchs) are with us, but open support could hurt their shagun prospects from those who support other parties," says Sabharwal, who hopes to get at least 10,000 votes.

Marwaha explains the manifesto. "The pensions for the aged and disabled in Punjab are less than Rs 500 a month in most cases. Taking that up to Rs 5,000 depending on the level of disability will remain our first concern. But we are well-meaning people and will go beyond that too. Or else, we would not have refused the lakhs all parties offered us to withdraw from the contest. The voter must see that."

Dixit is more optimistic, "We will put up candidates on all seats in Punjab next time, and eventually a so-called disabled person will run the state."

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