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The Role of an Opposition Party in India

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the article should not be released to any English
journal but should be solely for Marathi papers Loksatta.

The Role of Opposition Party in India

by

M.R. Masani, M.P.

Since in society there are bound to be various individuals and groups pursuing ideas and having interests which are not necessarily identical or even compatible with one another it is natural that those who do not succeed in having their point of view accepted by the Government of the day, persuade others to their point of view and ultimately having the government which would implement their point of view. It follows that the opposition in a democracy has a role to play almost as important as that of the ruling party. In a sense both the ruling party and the opposition represent the hopes and aspirations of living human beings and the mere difference in numbers they represent at any given point of time does not make any difference to their importance. Indeed opposition is the sine qua non of a democracy. The British author E.F.M. Durbin in his book on socialism and democracy makes the existence of an opposition the acid test of the genuineness of a democracy. Neither the written constitution, nor fundamental rights on paper, nor the secret ballot, he rightly points out, make the democracy genuine unless opposition parties are not only tolerated but actually function. The Soviet Union is a good example of the truth of Durbin's thesis.

The democratic process has two characteristics. First, in the absence of unanimity it recognises that for the time being the view of the majority would prevail since obviously some decisions have to be taken. At the same time, since human judgement is fallible, it should be open for mistakes to be rectified in the light of new facts

and experience and opportunity should be there for the minority today to become in course of time the majority.

It is necessary then that the opposition party functions as a watch dog of the interest of the minority and the critic of the majority. It also functions as the watch dog of the observers of the constitution and the fundamental principle of the free society. In discharging these functions it helps in focusing attention on the issues with which a country is faced and provide alternative solution. Its role is partly negative, partly constructive.

In India, thanks to the ignoring of Mahatma Gandhi's advice that the Indian National Congress should withdraw from the political scene and allow its members to form two political parties functioning in the Parliamentary sphere, it has not been able to evolve a satisfactory two-party system. While a two-party system is not feasible so long as the Soviet dictatorship exists in Moscow and insists on having its fifth column in this country, a three-party system can and should be achieved. So long as this does not happen, one will have to accept the fact that while the constitution permits of an opposition, no opposition in fact exists in the sense of an alternative Government, capable and ready to take office the moment it received the mandate of the electorate. How is this lacuna in our democracy to be filled?

Obviously, if the democratic opposition parties in the country were to merge in one big "National Democratic Party" the problem could be solved overnight. Unfortunately, the relevancy of the situation rule it out as the immediate solution though it should remain the

objective. ¹² The second alternative is that which Acharya Kripalani has advocated, namely, that of common functioning on the basis of an agreed minimum programme. Unfortunately, the response from two of the parties concerned has been so negative that here again immediate success appears to be elusive.

¹³ The third alternative is that of democratic opposition parties working together on specific issues on which they find themselves in agreement while going their own ways and pursuing the policy of "live and let live" in regard to other matters. This path has in fact been followed with increasing success since 1960. It was the spontaneous working together of democratic opposition parties that enabled opposition candidates to defeat ^{the} Congress supported by the Communists in Dohad, Amroha, Farrokbabad and Rajkot. Pursuing this path promises results. One is encouraged in this view by the fact that the opponents of democratic unity in India recognise it as the main threat to their position. ^{of Delhi.} Mainstream, a Communist journal, said in its issue of June 8 ^{of the 1st August by election.} "In this respect, the Right has a lesson to impart to the Left today. It did not go in for summit negotiations among its different components but preferred unity in action, and that has paid it rich dividends."

As this unity in action develops, it ^{should} will lead to a generalisation of the experience of the recent by-elections. Now that ^{the} people have ^{been shown} at Amroha and Rajkot how the opposition can win, both the wisdom of the political parties and the pressure of ^{the} public opinion will impel them towards an electoral understanding in the next ^{general} elections of 1967, to ensure that there should be only one opposition candidate against the ruling party or the Communist Party. This is the objective towards which serious political workers in all the democratic parties should strive in the coming months.

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The democratic process has two characteristics. First, in the absence of unanimity it recognises that for the time being the view of the majority would ^{must} prevail since obviously some decisions have to be taken. At the same time, since human judgement is fallible, it should be open for mistakes to be rectified in the light of new facts

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It is necessary then that the ^{an} opposition party functions as a watch dog of the interest of the minority and the critic of the majority. It also functions as the watch dog of the observance of the Constitution and the fundamental principle of the ^a free society. In discharging these functions it helps in focusing attention on the issues with which a country is faced and provides alternative solutions. Its role is partly negative, partly constructive.

In India thanks to the ignoring of Mahatma Gandhi's advice that, ^{on the achievement of national independence,} the Indian National Congress should withdraw from the political scene and allow its members to form two political parties functioning in the Parliamentary sphere, it has not been able to evolve a satisfactory two-party system. While a two-party system is not feasible so long as the Soviet dictatorship exists in Moscow and insists on having its fifth column in this country, a three-party ^{system} can and should be achieved. So long as this does not happen, one will have to accept the fact that, while the Constitution permits of an opposition, no opposition in fact exists in the sense of an alternative Government, capable and ready to take office the moment it received the mandate of the electorate. How is this lacuna in our democracy to be filled?

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Opposition