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Comment

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Jana Sangh and Muslim Politics

G. B. KANITKAR

V. K. SINHA's lengthy article, 'Jana Sangh: Expression of Hindu Militant Nationalism' (H.R. 4) no doubt makes interesting reading. However, the impression one gathers on reading the article is that it is, to put it in Kant's words 'a plea put forward to justify an already existing belief' rather than a dispassionate, objective analysis.

The theme which he wants to prove, the central core of which appears to have been borrowed from D. E. Smith's book, appears to be something as follows: 'The Jana Sangh, inheriting the legacy of the Hindu Maha Sabha and controlled by R.S.S. workers, is a communal party and though it pays lip service to democracy, it is really Fascist in its beliefs. The present situation in India is very similar to the situation in Germany between the two Wars, and hence, in opposition to the Communists, the Jana Sangh, like the Nazis in Germany at that time, is likely to get the support of many gullible people, who are really lovers of democracy and liberalism, but are likely to be taken in by the democratic façade of the Jana Sangh.'

I hope the readers who have read the article carefully, and perhaps the author himself, will agree that the central theme of the article is faithfully brought out by the above short gist.

The usual trouble with such arguments, which try to rationalize a cherished theme, is that they involve the use of many propagandist techniques such as the use of 'loaded' words and phrases, over-emphasis on one aspect of the phenomenon con-

cerned, total neglect of, or under-emphasis on, those aspects which do not fit into the lop-sided interpretation, etc.

One can quote instances of all these defects from Sinha's article.

On p. 395, for instance, explaining the sway of Mahatma Gandhi, he describes our society as 'tradition-haunted'—not 'tradition-loving' nor even 'tradition-bound'. Perhaps the latter words are not 'loaded' enough to *prove* his cherished theme.

On p. 401 he enumerates nine 'basic features of Bharatiya culture of Mookerjee's conception'. Of these nine *five* are as follows:

3. Equal rights to all.
4. Equal opportunities to all.
7. Right to live for all.
8. Freedom of thought—tolerance.
9. Emphasis on character.

Why is it that Sinha does not care to explain how these aspects fail to fit into 'liberalism' of his notion? Does he expect the readers to believe, with him, that these are all parts of the democratic facade of the Jana Sangh?

Again, Sinha finds no need to account for the fact, accepted by him, that Dr Shyama Prasad Mookerjee, the founder-president of the Jana Sangh, had resigned from the executive of the Hindu Maha Sabha on the issue of opening its membership to non-Hindus.

The same is the case about the relation between the R.S.S. and the Hindu Maha Sabha. Instead of leaning heavily on the analysis of foreign political observers he should have taken pains to know more about such matters from those who are supposed to know them. He would have then learnt that Nathuram Godse and a large extremist group in the Hindu Maha Sabha was extremely angry with the R.S.S. because, in their opinion, the R.S.S. had made a whole generation of Hindu young men 'sterile' by diluting their zeal for *Hindutva* and stamping all 'militancy' out of their hearts.

If Sinha had not been so intoxicated with his pet theme he would have realised the significance of the differences between the Jana Sangh and the Nazis with whom he tries to compare it.

In the first instance, if the Jana Sangh was not bent upon the honest democratic determination to convert the people to its way

of thinking by explaining its stand clearly, it could have easily resorted to the strategy of calling itself 'socialist' with some qualification, as the Nazis did. In spite of its advocacy of several notions which are part of the basic socialistic creed it has firmly withstood the temptation to use that slogan-word and has chosen the hard path of explaining its own, rather complex, doctrine of 'Integral Humanism' to the people.

In the second place, as Sinha admits, the Jana Sangh, unlike the Nazis, provides no place for worship of the state in its ideology.

Of course, Sinha, with his jaundiced eye, is not deterred. If there is no evidence he resorts to prophecy. 'The state would then (when Jana Sangh comes to power) be the representative of the "true" nation and therefore demand the same obedience and worship as the Rashtra' (p. 399).

Strange indeed are the ways of a reasoning distorted by prejudice!

However, to an objective interpreter of the Jana Sangh beliefs it is quite clear that it considers the state as 'important but not supreme'. (p. 410)

In the third place the Indian, or if you like, the Hindu tradition itself has such a strong element of 'tolerance of dissent', which is the *sine qua non* of the democratic spirit, that those who claim to adhere to that tradition cannot consistently accept totalitarianism.

Thus, the sweeping generalizations about the similarity between the Jana Sangh and the Nazis, the total identification of the Jana Sangh with the Hindu Maha Sabha ideology, and many other statements clearly show a lack of understanding of the real nature of the Jana Sangh beliefs and particularly its concept of Bharatiya nationalism.

It is not possible, in a short critical note, to attempt a more comprehensive interpretation of the Jana Sangh concept of Bharatiya nationalism. But some salient points may be brought out in brief.

The Jana Sangh, no doubt, lays great stress on our hoary tradition; but it emphasizes the aspect of basic values rather than the concrete beliefs held in the past. The tradition itself has the characteristics of flexibility and adaptability. Unlike the Western scene, where a more or less clear break with the past has

been attempted several times, in India, new ideas have always emerged out of the under-emphasized aspects of the old doctrines.

Even in the field of religion, movements which for some time appeared quite novel, e.g. Buddhism, were reabsorbed and assimilated with traditional patterns.

I think the same is true of the concept of nationalism. Nationalism in its modern form first arose in Europe. Patriots in India, including V. D. Savarkar, were very much influenced by Western writers, particularly Joseph Mazzini. But very soon this new idea began to be assimilated with the Bharatiya tradition. The founder of R.S.S., Dr Hedgewar and after him M. S. Golwalkar and others realized and made it clear that Bharatiya nationalism—the feeling of unity, devotion to the motherland—is intertwined in the fabric of cultural and religious ideas from times immemorial, though it was not always manifested in the outward form of a nation state. In fact, it was impossible, without the modern means of communication, that this huge sub-continent should remain under one central political authority for any considerable length of time at one stretch.

We must remember that social phenomena like nationhood are too complex and diverse to be amenable to the handy tools of the complacent rationalist; they defy facile analogies and crude classifications.

Because nationalism has resulted in the Balkanization of Europe and internecine wars, it need not be concluded that Bharatiya nationalism will inevitably lead to similar consequences. A proper interpretation and prediction of future trends would require an analysis of the Indian tradition in its historical perspective and an extrapolation to future possibilities on the basis of such analysis.

Unfortunately Sinha's article appears almost totally disappointing from this angle.

V. K. SINHA REPLIES

I SHALL BE BRIEF in replying to the comments made by Professor G. B. Kanitkar on my article on the Jana Sangh which appeared in *Humanist Review* 4.

First, Kanitkar seems to miss the main thesis of my article which was to bring out the dangers inherent in any ideology

that makes the nation an idol. I had tried to show in my article that the absence of a democratic tradition in our country and our natural propensity towards collectivization makes it natural for our people to follow totalitarian ideologies, whether of the communist or the Fascist variety.

Secondly, I am aware that there are some members in the Jana Sangh who are committed to democracy, but that does not imply that the policies as formulated by the Jana Sangh do not lead to totalitarian or Fascist goals. There were many liberals and even socialists in Western Europe and England who as late as 1938 saw nothing really wrong with the Nazi programmes.

I shall take up some of the specific points made by Kanitkar:

As to the use of 'loaded' words and phrases, the one illustration which Kanitkar gives seems to my mind totally irrelevant. He suggests that I should have used 'tradition-loving' or at least, 'tradition-bound' instead of 'tradition-haunted' to describe Indian society. I do not see any reason why I should have used 'tradition-loving' when I meant clearly 'tradition-bound' or 'tradition-haunted'. I do not see how Kanitkar sees in 'tradition-haunted' a greater value-orientation than in 'tradition-bound'. Surely, Kanitkar is aware that constant usage makes a term lose its earlier effectiveness and, therefore, to make my meaning more clear and emphatic I used the term 'tradition-haunted'. This is a matter of use of language, not of propaganda.

I did take into account Dr Shyama Prasad Mookerjee's differences with the Hindu Maha Sabha on the question of opening its membership to non-Hindus. But I also showed that Dr Mookerjee's differences with the Hindu Maha Sabha were not ideological but tactical. Professor Kanitkar, while giving five of the nine basic features of Bharatiya culture as formulated by Dr Mookerjee, rhetorically asks whether they do not fit into liberal philosophy. Of course, they do. So could one also find a few features in the Stalinist constitution which are not incompatible with the liberal features of the Indian constitution. Even in the manifestos of the Fascist and Nazi parties, there would be a few features to which no liberal could object!

I am afraid Kanitkar seems to have misunderstood the comparison I drew between the Nazi and Fascist doctrines and tactics on the one hand, and the doctrines and tactics of the Jana Sangh on the other. The basic similarity between the two as far as

economic policies are concerned is that both give economics a secondary place. The fact that one party made use of slogans and the other does not is a matter of tactical difference, not ideological.

Professor Kanitkar has totally misunderstood my reference to the place of the state in the Nazi ideology. I showed that in both Fascist and Nazi ideologies the state did *not* occupy a position of primacy. However, *in practice* the State did occupy such a position. My point about the Jana Sangh is similar; though it regards the state as 'important but not supreme', the logic of its ideology would lead it to give the state the same supreme importance as the Nazis did, notwithstanding its earlier disclaimers.

My principal criticism against the Jana Sangh was that it has given 'Nation' a mystical aura and therefore has made it into an idol. An ideology which makes nation an idol, inevitably leads to totalitarian and fascist goals. The moment one asserts, as Kanitkar does, that 'social phenomena like nationhood are too complex and diverse to be amenable to the handy tools of the complacent rationalist', he leaves others with the impression that any discussion of the concept of nation is outside the discourse of reason. And liberalism is basically rooted in Reason.

M. R. A. BAIG

THOUGH MOIN SHAKIR's article is confined to a narrower area than that of V. K. Sinha, both bring out vividly the characteristic features of Hindu and Muslim communalism. There is one great difference, and several similarities. There being no heresy in Hinduism, Hindus enjoy the maximum intellectual flexibility. But not so the Muslims. They being people of the Book with a central doctrine and dogma must, by the very nature of things, be more rigid. To liberalise Hindus is therefore a question of liberalising individuals. To liberalise Muslims necessitates liberalising Islam. Hindus need social legislation and progressive education; Muslims a Martin Luther.

There is a striking similarity between their two concepts of identity. Those who believe in the Hindu *Rashtra* cannot object to the Muslim *Millat*, and vice-versa. But in any polarisation it

is the smaller group that stands to suffer. This is a point Muslims should always remember.

Though both concepts are *sui generis*, they feed on each other. In actual fact both religious groups are so sub-divided into sectarian, ethnic, and linguistic sub-groups that neither the Hindu majority nor the Muslim minority are entities in themselves. But they become so in relation to one another, and each is what the other makes it. Superimposed upon this are communal revivalism and emotional stimulation which make *rapprochement* almost impossible.

This *Rashtra-Millat* mentality has grave implications. If each religious group develops its own peculiar sense of identity, the two add up to a two-community confrontation. This is virtually indistinguishable from the two-nation theory. Where will it lead to? Since further partition is out of the question, the alternative for the Muslims would seem to be either voluntary assimilation or compulsory absorption.

A majority does not need to be communal for, in a heterogeneous religion-oriented country democracy is usually little other than the communalism of the major religious community. A minority should not be communal, since in tolerance alone lies their hope of leading normal lives, free and secure.

Needless to say, obscurantists in both groups oppose secularism, and it is instructive to compare the criticisms of the un-Hindu character of secularism on page 407, and of the un-Muslim character on page 431. The attitude of the *Jana Sangh* towards economic activities, V. K. Sinha points out on pages 414 and 415, are basically in conformity with traditional Hinduism, whereas the *Jammat-e-Islami*, as brought out on pages 430 and 431, considers that democracy, nationalism and secularism all run counter to Islamic ideals and principles.

The effects of foreign rule are far-reaching. The impact of the Moghul period on Hindus and Hinduism has been variously assessed. It certainly generated monotheistic reform movements and brought about, in the upper levels of society, a composite culture. Why had the nearly 200 years of British rule so little effect that a kind of cold confrontation of Hindus and Muslims exists today? To say it was due to a "divide and rule" policy is an oversimplification and an escape. In any case this policy operated mostly in the political sphere, and politics touched only

the few. Besides, separate electorates were not the cause of Hindu-Muslim differences but the effect of Hindu-Muslim differences. That they widened the differences is of course true. But there must be other and deeper reasons.

After the Mutiny, British scholars, administrators and politicians put their heads together to find out its basic causes. They concluded that one of the reasons for the outbreak was reforming zeal such as the abolition of *Sati*. They inferred from this that the "natives" preferred their old traditional way of life, and that the social customs of the people should not be interfered with. The British administration therefore forsook its role of a socially progressive force and became neutral in all religious matters. In the result, with the exception of Sarda Act, a non-official move, the British never introduced any reform that could be said to interfere with religion. Thus, when they left, in spite of the efforts of Gandhiji and others, obscurantism had not been modified and was the strongest force among the people. It was on this foundation that adult franchise was based, and if democracy is the will of the people, it is the obscurantist majority that is expressing its will.

Partition worsened the position of Muslim Indians. The Hindus came out of it with their liberal and progressive leadership intact. But practically all such elements among the Muslims emigrated. In the result, notwithstanding that Pakistan is an Islamic State, and that India has a secular Constitution, Pakistan is more socially progressive than the Muslims of India.

Humanist Review by publishing the two articles side by side has put into its debt all Indians who are bewildered by the deep-seated obscurantism that still exists in spite of all the pressures of the eighth decade of the 20th century, and the workings of a democratic and secular Constitution. Though neither suggest remedies, diagnosis precedes cure, and by exposing the national disease to examination, they have made significant contributions towards a possible, if distant, solution of the problem.