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Review Article

## Hindu Chauvinism: Study in Growth

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CRAIG BAXTER'S book\* is the first full-length study of the Jana Sangh by a non-Indian author. This is important, for in the case of the Jana Sangh most Indian scholars are likely to find it difficult to keep personal bias from influencing their approach. However, Dr Baxter's book also does not fulfil the expectations that its size and title at first sight arouse. This is not to suggest that the book is useless. On the contrary, it contains useful information on the steady growth of the Jana Sangh in terms of electoral support, its early background and its relationship with the RSS. But the author interprets 'biography' as essentially a chronological narrative. He gives practically no analysis either of the Hindu and Muslim traditions or of the overall context in which they are operative in India today. As will be seen below, this is responsible for some misleading conclusions.

Baxter's purpose in writing the book is 'to determine its (Jana Sangh's) place within the Indian political system'. To this end he studies three main issues: (1) north-south question, (2) the Hindu-Muslim conflict, and (3) the conflict between modernism and traditionalism in India. This is attempted through twelve chapters, of which two deal with the Hindu Maha Sabha and the R.S.S., political and ideological ancestors of the Jana Sangh, four with the four general elections that have taken place since the founding of the party, and one with the post-1967 perspective on the Jana Sangh. The remaining chapters provide continuity in time. The study ends with the results of the 1967 general election.

\* Craig Baxter, *Jana Sangh, A Biography of an Indian Political Party*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia 1969, pp. 352, \$12.50 (Distributed in India by Oxford University Press).

The main facts that emerge from the book are fairly well known. The Jana Sangh is primarily strong in the Hindi-speaking areas—80% of the votes it got in 1962 and 1967 come from this region. But while it is generally known that the Jana Sangh has been steadily gaining in strength in this area at the expense of the Congress and other parties, the book provides a quantitative measure of the rate at which this is happening. For instance, in 1957 the Jana Sangh polled 25 votes for every 100 polled by the Congress in this region. In 1962 and 1967, the figures were respectively 35 and 50 for every 100 of the Congress. Partly this would be accounted for by the general decline in Congress strength all over India. But what is significant here is that it is not the Hindu Maha Sabha or the Rama Rajya Parishad that have benefited from the weakening of the Congress. Their programmes were too narrowly conceived even for the Hindus of the North. Both have gradually yielded place to the Jana Sangh.

Another interesting fact that Dr Baxter brings out is that, contrary to popular belief, the Jana Sangh does not yet have a special appeal for the Hindu voter in areas of high Muslim concentration. Madhya Pradesh, one of the strongholds of the party, had—according to the 1961 census—only 4.07% Muslims in its population, whereas Kerala had 17.91%. Bengal, Assam and Kashmir are other high Muslim concentration States outside the Hindi-speaking area. Yet in all these four States, the Jana Sangh is weak, if not non-existent as a political force. Even in Bihar, which belongs to the U.P.-M.P. complex, the party is not particularly strong. But the most interesting piece of evidence is provided by the votes the Jana Sangh received in ten districts of U.P. which have the highest concentration of Muslims, varying from 20.89% to 45.01%. The support that it received in these districts shows no recognisable pattern (p. 235).

Dr Baxter also brings out another interesting feature of Jana Sangh support. Like the Congress, the Jana Sangh too has benefited from multi-cornered contests. 'Jana Sangh candidates who won', he finds, 'tended to face two to five opponents' (p. 237). But contests between the Jana Sangh and the Swatantra Party or the Hindu Maha Sabha had more disastrous results for the Jana Sangh than for either of these parties (pp. 239-240, 285-87). This fact may play a part in determining the outcome of Swa-

tantra attempts to arrive at a comprehensive understanding with the Jana Sangh in the next general election.

As mentioned in the beginning, Dr Baxter's study is useful from the purely factual standpoint and is an important contribution to the growing body of empirical work on Indian politics. But it is extremely weak, and sometimes misleading, in its conclusions. There is also an undercurrent of prejudice against, as distinct from reasoned opposition to, the Jana Sangh. Let me give some illustrations.

Discussing the charge of communalism levelled against the Jana Sangh, Baxter points out that 'Webster and his colleagues provide no answer which fits the peculiar circumstances of the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent' (p. 309). This is not surprising, for Webster's dictionary was not prepared with the object of helping American students to classify political parties in India. Dr Baxter therefore adopts 'the usual meaning of the term in the subcontinent'—without specifying what it is—and says: 'There is a fine line between a communal party and a nationalist party. The Jana Sangh appears to straddle this line' (p. 312).

This would imply that there is a fairly good chance, say, about 50%, of the Jana Sangh's evolving into a truly secular party, for 'nationalist' must mean 'secular' in the present context. Such an inference would be plausible provided the author had detected some trend in the history of the Jana Sangh so far to suggest that its principles and policies were undergoing, howsoever imperceptibly, a fundamental modification away from religious obscurantism and Hindu cultural chauvinism. But all the evidence that Dr Baxter gives, from its conception and birth to its growth and development as the second party after the Congress in terms of voter support in 1967, points to the contrary. One should not be misled by the fact that the Jana Sangh talks of *Bharatiya* instead of *Hindu Rashtravad*. For, as Dr Baxter himself points out, ever since its inception the Jana Sangh, according to Deenadayal Upadhyaya, has been 'persistently treating Hindu Rashtravad as synonymous with Bharatiya Rashtravad' (p. 133). Golwalkar too does not ask for anything more.

Nor is there much chance of members with a non-R.S.S. background being able to promote, in the foreseeable future, a process of liberal modernization in the Jana Sangh. First, not many would be there in any case in important positions in the party.

And after its experience with Mauli Chandra Sharma the hard core of the Jana Sangh leadership, which is entirely manned by former R.S.S. members, is not likely to take any further chances with the few liberals that happen to be in its ranks.

It is true that the Jana Sangh professes faith in democracy, and there is no reason to believe that its leaders do not mean what they say in this regard. However, so long as the Jana Sangh continues to be under the ideological hegemony of the R.S.S. and its cadres are drawn from among the members of the latter organization, such professions indicate only a confusion of thought. For the R.S.S. is clearly contemptuous of democracy and has made no secret of its views. Baxter himself quotes a Christian (*sic*) member who asserts: 'The silly idea that Fascism and totalitarianism are evils, and parliamentarianism and Anglo-Saxon types of democracy holy, should be got rid of from our minds, if we want to approach problems realistically and bring solutions to them' (p. 58). This was said in 1951, but as far as I know there has been no rethinking on this question on the part of the R.S.S.

A similar confusion characterizes Jana Sangh thinking on economic problems. Barring Mr Balraj Madhok, no one in the top leadership seems to be genuinely concerned over the growing concentration of economic power in the hands of the state. Believing in 'integral humanism', and consequently in the organic theory of state, the Jana Sangh would indeed welcome a statist economy, provided it itself controls the state. It is this combination of economic radicalism and cultural chauvinism which makes the Jana Sangh philosophy a serious threat to democracy.

Dr Baxter is fair to the Jana Sangh when he observes that 'there is no evidence so far produced that the Jana Sangh or the R.S.S. as organizations have been instrumental in communal incidents, notwithstanding some cases where rioting has been proven against members of each organization'. 'The Jana Sangh and the R.S.S. are convenient whipping boys', not only for the ruling party (p. 202) as Dr Baxter adds, but also for leftists of all varieties. However, Baxter fails to note that in India any group which, like the Jana Sangh, sees the faults of non-Hindus alone or, like almost the entire Muslim leadership, always talks of Hindu persecution of minorities but refuses ever to turn the searchlight inward is an important factor in perpetuating an atmosphere in

which even the slightest incident triggers off a riot. Also, the historical legacy of Muslim rule in India and the persistence of Hindu exclusivism and Muslim separatism rule out a resolution of the Hindu-Muslim conflict on liberal lines unless Hindus and Muslims learn to confine religious doctrines and sentiments to the strictly personal sphere. The Jana Sangh may not be guilty of provoking Hindu Muslim riots; at least, available evidence would not substantiate the charge. But it cannot disown responsibility for promoting an upsurge of Hindu obscurantism and thereby a climate which non-Hindu obscurantists can easily exploit to keep their followers confined to their own shell of religious tribalism.

Dr Baxter shows no understanding of all this. His judgment on the character of the Jana Sangh is more an example of wishful thinking than a sober assessment of available evidence. However, this should not cause surprise in countries of the Third World, for American liberals have in recent years been evincing a similar trend in relation to communism also—so long, of course, as it does not pose a direct threat to their own sense of security or affluence.

Baxter makes a similar mistake in understanding the Jana Sangh mind. Talking of the party's stand on cow-slaughter, he says that it 'looked askance at chemical fertilizers and therefore required the cattle as the major producer of natural fertilizers' (p. 149). The fact, of course, is that all the scientific or economic arguments advanced by the champions of the cow in India are mere rationalizations intended to make their demand acceptable to those benighted Hindus who cannot see its inherent merit. Apparently, Baxter has no idea either of the cattle problem in India from the standpoint of economic development or of the pseudo-scientific sophistry in which the Indian mind, Hindu or Muslim, so easily excels.

Curiously, Dr Baxter is unfair to the Jana Sangh on certain other points where the facts are more clear and universally accepted. For instance, he implies that the Jana Sangh charge of persecution of the Hindus in Pakistan is an expression of its own communalism. Thus he talks of the '*alleged* mistreatment of Hindus in East Pakistan' (pp. 146, 196; emphasis added), and of the Jana Sangh criticism of the US for '*its presumed* stand on the Goa issue' (p. 146; emphasis added). Similarly, Baxter also

questions the Jana Sangh allegation regarding Muslim infiltration from East Pakistan into Assam by putting "infiltration" into quotation marks (p. 196).

Dr Baxter obviously does not know that the 1964 riots in East Pakistan made nearly a million Hindus flee as refugees to India. Nor apparently is he aware of the fact that ceiling legislation for agricultural land is more stringent in East Pakistan, where land-holders are mostly Hindu, than in the Western Wing, where Muslims constitute the traditional aristocracy. As regards Muslim infiltration into Assam, Dr Baxter may with advantage consult Mr Hamid Bey, Assam correspondent of the *Statesman*. And surely it should not have been difficult for him to dig out from the USIS files a clipping of Mr John Foster Dulles' egregiously stupid statement, in which he agreed with Dr Salazar that Goa was an 'overseas province' of Portugal.

It is therefore somewhat amusing that the publisher's blurb should describe Dr Baxter as one of 'the best scholarly observers'!

Mistakes of judgment or prejudice apart, there are a few other shortcomings to which the reader's attention should be drawn. The (Lohia) Socialist Party was *not* a constituent of the Samyukta Maharashtra Samiti (p. 159). That Usha Bhargava was raped by two Muslim youths is not a matter of what Hindus or Muslims think (p. 202); the incident was investigated officially and the culprits punished according to law. China and Pakistan make up, to use Dr Baxter's words, the 'Chamber of Horrors' (p. 198) not only of the Jana Sangh alone but of almost all the citizens of India. And Pakistan's intention in receiving American arms *was* to use them against India as Mr Z. A. Bhutto has now confirmed in his *Myth of Independence*. With his training in the American Foreign Service, Dr Baxter need not have jibed at the Jana Sangh for its adducing Pakistan's use of these arms in the 1965 conflict (p. 200). The Ugly American has done enough harm to his country's interests in the Middle East; must he now do it in the Indian subcontinent?

Lastly, why cannot the author or the publisher's editorial department see that 'effect' is not a variant of 'affect' (pp. 136, 233, 294, 240), that 49 plus 65 does not make 115 (p. 180), that an atmosphere is *scholarly or of learning*, not *erudite* (p. 62), and that even an American edition of Fowler would frown upon 'agriculturalist' in place of 'agriculturist' (p. 297)?