

Secular Secularists
July 1969
Wulf

Confusion of Merger Moves

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It is difficult to define what is Right and what is Left in politics, but it is easy to say, in the context of India, what is communal and what is secular. For more than half a century these two manifestations in Indian politics have been vigorously asserting themselves. Although communalism, despite its great victories in the past, has been lagging behind, secularism has been finding itself in a somewhat disabled position to fully subdue its foe.

Since the achievement of independence, communalism has been making steady progress obviously at the cost of secularism. While the secular forces are divided according to different ideologies, or more correctly according to personal whims about ideologies, those of the communal variety are united under one party and one flag.

PROBLEM OF POLARISATION

In what is generally known as British pattern of democracy, two political parties are necessary and more than two have got to be tolerated under the fundamental right of freedom of association. Two nearly evenly matched parties ensure a clear majority verdict of the electorate—the occasions of lack of such a verdict are few and far between.

That mainly is the reason why the coming together of like-minded parties is advocated in India. But the steady progress of communalism is an additional reason calling for the polarisation of secular parties so that they may be able to fight the common enemy.

This is the first basic point which has to be taken into account in the thinking for polarisation. The other is of ideologies. It has been possible, and it may be possible for a long time to come for the countries like the United States and the erstwhile British colonies dominated by white races to have a two-party system with both belonging to nearly the same ideology; but India and

other countries where distressing poverty and wide gulf of disparity between the rich and the poor are the dominant features of public life, socialism has been manifesting itself in different ways for about half a century. Here political life cannot be thought of without this prominent aspect, and even polarisation cannot be thought of without it.

Since the advent of the so-called planned economy, which has, paradoxically enough, made the gulf of disparity very much wider, the necessity for the growth of socialist parties has become acuter. Corruption is also contributing its mite to the widening of the gulf: in consequence of the constantly mounting inflation of currency the State authorities have been getting ever more money to spend and they have been doing so recklessly and building around them dens of corruption.

There are numerous cases of officials and their agents who have amassed enormous wealth without any pretence to any industrial or business enterprise. Such political parties as are deeply concerned over this economic phenomenon are naturally impatient to make some political arrangement by which the growing disparities may not only be done away with but now economy of reason and equity may be established.

THE RIGHTISTS

Those who are indifferent to economic disparities are, in common parlance, called the Rightists; the communal elements also belong, generally speaking, to this variety of politics. Some of those arrayed against them, in the battle field of the ballot, belong to different complexion of socialism. There are some who are secular in outlook and opposed to communal organisations, though not without a certain amount of indifference and tolerance. Every variety of Marxism is their main dislike and yet they express them-

selves against disparities and are found groping for a way to give society a just economic order. They resent being styled as Rightists.

Amusingly enough, one can go on delimiting the Indian political scene and one will still find much to delimit. So many of the regional parties scattered over the length and breadth of the country defy definition under any of the categories discussed above. Some are mere embodiments of regional sentiments whose translation into practice is their only concern; they are not worried about Right or Left; the administration must go on, perhaps efficiently, and the people, moved by the sentiment aroused by them, must feel that the leaders are true to it. Parochialism may be loosely described as their political ideology.

THE BKD ATTEMPT

This brief introduction of Indian 'political' parties is perhaps enough to give an idea of the problem that is bound to face those who want to work for some kind of rationalisation and polarisation with the intention of reducing the number of parties. An attempt was recently made by the Bharatiya Kranti Dal. In determining its approach, it seems to have proceeded on the basis of the legal maxim that everybody is honest until otherwise proved. That can be surmised as the only reason why the Dal carried on negotiations with the Jana Sangh. The Sangh has undoubtedly been protesting against the charge of communalism levelled against it by most other parties, who have been adducing considerable evidence.

It is common knowledge that the Jana Sangh, as a political structure, stands on the base of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), whose intensely communal character is beyond doubt. Of late the Jana Sangh has been endeavouring to show itself as a progressive party in terms of economic life; but it has scrupulously retained its base, the RSS, realising quite rightly that without it the field work, such as election contests, cannot be managed. It began its career as a fountainhead of Hindu sentiment, as expressing itself in word and deed, against the Muslims.

Some advocates of the BKD-Jana Sangh merger, transcending the

common argument against it, suggested that the expected consummation would at least yield one good result; it would liquidate a party dubbed as communal. The argument was at once countered by the suggestion that the chances of the Jana Sangh swallowing the Bhartiya Kranti Dal were far greater. There was force in it: The Jana Sangh's area of influence is so far restricted to the Hindi-speaking states; and it is here that the Dal also operates for the time being with UP as its storm-centre. In UP where the Dal has annexed about a hundred assembly seats, the resounding victory was due to the personal popularity of its leader Mr Charan Singh and, in no small measure, due to anti-Congress vote having shifted to a new opposition party which was the third best party to possess resources.

POSITION OF JANA SANGH

The fact, however, remained that the Jana Sangh was a far better organised party with an army of devoted workers, which is a rare possession in Indian politics today. Therefore the apprehension of all that the Dal stood for, whatever it be, disappearing into the belly of the ghost of the Jan Sangh was, it seems, right.

The Swatantra Party is another party of the Right which seems to have covered the maximum distance in the electoral race, and was apparently apprehensive of shrinking to smaller dimensions. The B K D has not yet formulated its economic ideology, though, by a resolution seeking to restrict urban property to five lakhs of rupees, it has displayed a trend towards the Left. But its readiness to merge its identity into a new party with the Jana Sangh and the Swatantrites as partners has led critics to reckon it as a party of the Right. Such a reckoning is inevitable and cannot be taken exception to in the context of the merger move.

CHARACTER OF BKD

A few weeks before the move got a start Mr Dange was reported to have told the UP Secretariat of the Communist Party at a meeting in Lucknow that the character of the Bhartiya Kranti Dal, as depicted

at the mid-term poll, was that of a poormen's party, because it was mostly the poor who rallied behind it. Quite a sizeable section of the intelligensia shared this view; but it was washed away by the proposal to closet the B K D in a common room with the Swatantra Party and the Jana Sangh. Nevertheless, one need not be despaired of the B K D; if it moves further to the Right, it is doomed; if it mends itself and prepare a programme of abolishing economic inequalities, it will definitely have a future.

It is only by a shift towards what is called the Left that the B K D can prepare ground for an elaborate get-together of the parties directly or indirectly attached to socialism. What is socialism is again a difficult term to define. It is not for political parties to produce a definition and then to draw up a programme. What they need is a socialistic programme aiming at solving the country's economic problems mainly and other problems generally.

SWAY OF CAPITALISTS

Parties with capitalistic leanings have, during the last twenty years, enjoyed an advantage over the parties of the Left inasmuch as they have drawn upon the rich resources of the industrialists and big contractors, and with the funds so raised they have often given crushing defeats to the left-wingers. Money and elections are so closely correlated in India, as elsewhere in the capitalist world, that a poor party just ridicules itself at the contest. The little it collects by small subscriptions is frittered away in multi-cornered contests. By and by the elections are proceeding towards an alarming phenomenon: with the Left being slowly eliminated, eventually the Right will fight the Right with either side being financed by capitalists and with the financiers gaining in the victory of either.

The two party system is not part of the fundamental principles of democracy, though admittedly it has its own merits that are of advantage to the functioning of democracy. But in the present peculiar conditions of India the necessity to reduce the number of parties is warranted by the broad fact that if that is not done the leftism

which has held the field for about half a century will be wiped out by the capitalists who have been gaining in their mission all along the line.

THE ALTERNATIVE

The Jana Sangh is no substitute to the Congress; and the Swatantra Party is no substitute either. And a get together of such elements in the body-politic of India will be a worse substitute. Anybody who knows political India can at once declare that it is well-nigh impossible for any single party to make itself worthy, in the foreseeable future, to replace the Congress. If an alternative has got to be thought of, and it must be, then what we miss in the multi-party politics can be found in a confederation of the nearly like-minded parties of the Left. One may say 'Left' advisedly, because the temper of the country definitely indicates that the people (having adult suffrage) will never vote for an order in which the capitalists multiply their bank balances at the cost of the poor, unless they are outwitted by different devices of the capitalists displayed at the battlefield of the ballot.

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