

MAKE YOUR CHOICE—4

The Swatantra Party

Avowedly conservative, the Swatantra Party has entered into an electoral alliance with the Congress (O), the Jana Sangh and the SSP.



C. RAJAGOPALACHARI (b. 1878), founder of the Swatantra Party, was like a latter-day Parasurama determined to destroy the Indian National Congress in whose history he had played a distinguished part. He joined hands with the DMK to bring about the downfall of the Congress in Tamil Nadu in the 1967 elections. Today his party has broken away from the DMK alliance and found a new ally in the party of Rajaji's bitter opponent, Kamaraj.



MINOO MASANI (b. 1905), Chairman, was one of the founders of the Congress Socialist Party. Over the years he was disenchanted with Marxism and became convinced of the virtues of a free economy. He has held important positions as a management consultant and was for a brief period Ambassador to Brazil. His *Our India*, published in 1940, was very popular. Among his other publications: *Socialism Reconsidered*, *Our Growing Human Family*.

The party stands for "individual endeavour and enterprise", scrapping of economic plans, encouragement of a free flow of foreign and private capital, giving up the policy of non-alignment, entering into military alliances with "reliable powers". In short it raises the banner of *laissez-faire*.

In the 1962 general election, the party secured as many as 9½ million votes, representing 8.25 per cent of the total for the Lok Sabha, making it, with 26 seats, next only to the 33 of the united Communist Party among the opposition parties in the House. And in the State Legislatures, the party's achievement was equally creditable considering that it was still in its infancy. In the 1967 poll, its success was even more remarkable: in the Lok Sabha it captured 44 seats, and in the State Assemblies its strength increased from 166 in 1962 to 175.

The Swatantra Party today is in a dilemma: to join hands with a revivalist party it compromises its modern and democratic assertions; to make adjustments with the Cong (O), it has to subordinate its belief in free enterprise to that of a welfare state. Moreover, its composition has made it a victim of pulls and pressures from various directions. As a result it is threatened with erosion: many of its followers, for instance in Gujarat, are in open revolt. Its ally in Orissa, the only State where it was able to form a ministry in coalition with the Jana Congress, have deserted it on the eve of the national poll.

Aims and Objectives

Fundamental Rights: A stable democracy must be based on the sanctity of the Constitution which should not be tampered with. This calls for unqualified acceptance of the important role assigned to our Judiciary by the Constitution and an equally unqualified guarantee of the maintenance of the Fundamental Rights enshrined in the Constitution.

The lives and liberties of the people have to be protected by effective enforcement of law and order.

Economy: The damage done to the economy by mistaken policies and faulty planning has to be undone. The party suggests a six-point programme of public works.

Among the measures that have to be taken to combat rising prices is the abolition or reduction of the excise duties on all articles of daily use. There has to be a drastic reduction in the cost of administration.

Nothing should be done to weaken the system of peasant proprietorship and family farming on which our rural life is based. Land reforms should be speedily completed and implemented. Landless labourers should be guaranteed a minimum wage and given an assurance that they will share in the fruits of more intensive farming.

Production: The expansion of the Indian economy (agriculture, trade or industry) can only be achieved if government policies provide incentives for hard work and enterprise which are at present lacking. The real cure for monopoly is the encouragement and restoration of competition.

Minorities, Backward Classes: A commission on Civil Rights should be set up to look into and correct discrimination against any section—from the party's election manifesto.

Strength in the dissolved Lok Sabha—35



N. G. RANGA (b. 1900), a former President of the party, has been long associated with the peasant movement. He resigned from the Congress in 1951 to form the Bharat Krishikar Lok Party, rejoined the Congress four years later, and resigned from it again on the cooperative farming issue.

ESTABLISHED in August 1959, the Swatantra is the youngest national party of India. It had a flying start because of the national stature of its founder, C. Rajagopalachari. The party's opposition to socialist ideas and programme, and its avowed conservatism made it a rallying point of all privileged classes in the country.

The Swatantra Party's constitution follows the usual democratic pattern. It has four structural tiers: (1) primary units based on Legislative Assembly constituencies; (2) district units limited to revenue districts; (3) State branches; and (4) the national centre.

The all-India organisation has a General Council of not more than 250 members made up of no fewer than three and not more than 20 from each State—it is elected by the State Councils. The Council elects the National Executive of the party, which in turn elects the President, one or more Vice-Presidents, a General Secretary, one or more Joint Secretaries, one or more Treasurers, and no fewer than ten and not more than 20 members besides the coopted or nominated members.

The State organ's structure is similar to the national set-up. In the districts, apart from the President and other office-bearers, a District Working Committee is elected, if its strength exceeds 25. Every primary unit elects a committee of its own if it has 20 or more workers.

West Bengal—The Ideological Warfare

While the rest of India is concerned about the law and order situation in West Bengal, Bengalis themselves are more obsessed with the emergence of a clear political ideology.

At the start of the 19th century, Rammohun Roy declared that the Hindu tradition, if reformed, could form the foundation for modern India. Most Indians since then have more or less accepted his position and gone about working out the details.

To Bengalis, however, Rammohun's position was but the first shot in a long-drawn-out ideological war. While the "orthodox" thought him to be completely wrong, there were others who would give the tradition altogether and choose the "modern" world. The issues in this ideological war have been changing with each passing decade since, but the Bengalis' life has seldom slackened.

Recently I asked a random selection of Bengalis if they felt that the old Sanskrit tradition of India was "disappearing", continuing but in modified forms, or "not changing at all". While most people in other parts of India responded to a similar question by choosing the second alternative, feeling with Rammohun that the Hindu tradition is surviving albeit in modified forms, in Bengal almost everyone chose either the first or the third alternative, feeling that it had to be a black or white issue—either there was no change or the tradition was disappearing altogether.

Worship of Passion

When this attitude is carried over into political behaviour, it leads to a passionate commitment to one or another of the ideological choices now current in the Bengal political scene. While the news of disorder and violence in West Bengal makes the rest of the country look for a conservative "law and order" solution, Bengalis do not see the issue in simple law and order terms but argue that the different ideologies, including that of the terrorists, must be heard. When asked if they would prefer a party with good men, or one with pragmatic day-to-day politics instead of more ideologically oriented parties, the Bengalis I spoke to insisted on a party having a clear ideology.

What is the psychology behind the Bengali electorate's commitment to ideological politics? The answer to this question is, of course, very complex, but I think a beginning can be made by examining three distinct patterns in Bengal's cultural history. The first of these patterns is a feeling of inferiority, the second a social organisation that tends to produce elitist solutions and the third a worship of passion.

Bengal's feelings of inferiority are rooted in the fact that the area was originally on the periphery of Hindu culture. It was probably populated primarily by an indigenous pre-Aryan people through much of the classical period of the Sanskrit culture which centred in the Gangetic plain. The indigenous culture of Bengal was distinct from the "new" Aryan culture, but not as markedly so as the Dravidian cultures to the South, and it gradually blended in with the culture of the Gangetic plain. In spite of its cultural ties with the rest of India, Bengal has maintained a strong sense of distinctness and has resented the priests, business men and government officials who from time to time have come from other parts of India to "interfere" in the life of Bengal. Swami Vivekananda, Aurobindo Ghose and Subhas Chandra Bose all used arguments rooted in this sense of inferiority to call upon Bengalis for vigorous action and leadership.

"Elitist" Social Structure

The second pattern in Bengali cultural history which explains her present political behaviour is her peculiarly elitist social structure. Bengal contains virtually no "middle" class either in the form of business men or independent landed peasants. The population is divided into the lower castes who follow local indigenous culture patterns and the elite castes of brahmins and near-brahmins. The Bengali brahmins have always preserved an aristocratic distance from the other classes of society. Other castes such as the Kayasthas and Vaidyas moved close to them and were included in the elitist group as they raised their status by taking advantage of English education.

Culturally the "elite" group worked out a synthesis between its indigenous culture and the Sanskrit tradition of the rest of India. Attempting to guide the masses of Bengali society, the "elite" occasionally responded to populist reform movements which were meant to redirect the indigenous culture tradition. In this spirit, the Pala kings who reigned from the 8th to the 12th centuries supported Buddhism. Later Vaishnavism was introduced in a similar way and came to flourish under the inspiration of Chaitanya in the 16th century. In the 19th century the puritanical monotheism of Brahmoism served as the rallying cry of the Bengali elite. And now the elite is suggesting Marxism to the masses of Bengal. While each of these reform movements has put down some roots in Bengali culture they were each essentially

non-Bengali ideas brought in and supported by the "elite" community within Bengali society to contain popular discontent.

The third pattern of cultural history, the worship of passion, explains what Bengal has done with the various reform movements which its "elite" has introduced. More important to the history of Bengal than all the reform movements put together has been the pervasive hold of Sakti, Kali, the Mother. For the lower classes all of the time and for the schizophrenic elitist class half of the time the rhythms of life are determined by the spirit of Kali. Kali is to the Bengali both the warm Mother who pervades all of life and the wild passionate goddess who destroys and requires a blood sacrifice from her devotees. The passion which results from this spirit is on the one hand imaginative and warm and on the other wild and awesome. When this passion infused Buddhism and Vaishnavism it produced the fascinating complexity of Tantric Buddhism and the beautiful emotionalism of Bengal's Vaishnavism. At a later day it transformed Brahmo liberalism into the vibrant and forceful revivalism of Vivekananda and Aurobindo. And, finally, in our own day we are witnessing the passion of Bengal transforming the abstract philosophy of Marxism into the violent terrorism of the Naxalites.

Competing Ideologies

The will of the Bengali electorate is unlikely to be fully revealed by the present election campaign. One of the major political forces, the Naxalites, will not be represented on the ballot paper. A dozen or more competing ideologies will doubtless continue to gain some support with only minor shifts in emphasis. Some Bengalis would no doubt like to vote in favour of stopping the ideological warfare, but it is hard to know for whom such people should cast their ballot.

Most Bengalis seem to feel that the present state of affairs must run its course. A majority said they would argue if a false ideology was coming into power, but they would not favour the use of force to stop it. A sizable majority felt that by 1977 India would be torn apart by even more divisions and more ideological conflicts than she has at present. Ajoy Mukherjee goes around Bengal these days crying, like Yudhishtira at the end of the Mahabharata, that his homeland is being destroyed. Many Bengalis hear his cry and share his anguish, but not many can yet see how the war will end.



R. C. COOPER (b. 1922), Secretary to the party, is also a distinguished Chartered Accountant. A specialist in taxation and a management consultant, he is associated with numerous commercial firms.

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Q: How should young people be introduced to the question?

Q: That attitude exists in America, too.

Q: Which leads to promiscuity at the primary school level!

We are now trying to push the idea of sex education through a different approach. We talk of population education. That is, make your children from the primary stage conscious of population. You teach them civics, geography, history—so many subjects where the question of population can be injected. The child automatically, when he reaches an adult stage, will ask, "How do we manage?"

Q: Are college graduates coming to the F.P.A.I. with the idea of working there? Do you find young women available today with the same vitality of interest you and your colleagues had?

A: I'll tell you. The conditions of living have become more difficult. Educated women are all seeking paid jobs. We were leisured women, we had no paid jobs, and we did not want money. We were interested in social change to make our communities more viable in modern conditions. Now, the present anxiety of young women such as we once were, is to earn more money because life has become so expensive. So that they cannot afford to give as much time, effort, thought and energy as we did, for voluntary work. If women of my generation are still active in the field of social welfare, it is because we realise that the problems India faces—of hunger, poverty, illiteracy and unemployment—are so widespread that these very factors give us the incentive to continue.



