

THE INDIAN NATION

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 1971

Exemplary Tolerance

The Masani family has set the pattern for the electorate in the country. According to a newsagency report the wife and the son of Mr. Minoo Masani are campaigning for the Ruling Congress while Mr. Masani himself, as everybody knows, is contesting as a candidate of the Swatantra Party. We do not suggest even remotely that following the example of the Masani family the wife and the son or sons of each voter should vote for the Ruling Congress Party and the head of the family should vote for other parties. That will be giving a mischievous twist to the example set by the Masanis, and we would not be surprised if the information given by the newsagency, in good faith is misused by interested persons.

In fact, it is not the choice of the party or parties by the members of the Masani family that is of any significance and consequence. The choice is incidental. What is really praiseworthy is the spirit of tolerance in the family. Certainly Mr. Masani, the senior Masani we mean, would have lost the right to plead for democracy and democratic values had he put any kind of pressure on his wife and son for toeing his line. One cannot be a dictator in one's own house and a democrat outside. But most of the people, in India are of that sort. The revolt of the youth notwithstanding, India is still in Patriarchical Society. Elections, however, have no meaning if each and every voter does not exercise his franchise according to his own understanding and conviction. Democracy goes by the true verdict of the people. And the popular saying or belief is that the verdict of the electorate is never wrong as the voice of the people is the voice of God.

The tolerance of the kind shown by the Masani family is of paramount importance for Bihar. For in no other State there is so much of authoritarianism or tribalism in the name of caste, clan, sect or family as in this State. The political parties in the arena of election approach the voters collectively and the swing towards one party or the other is also collective depending on the equation of a particular group of people with a particular party or candidate. This herd mentality makes a mockery of the election as the individual voter is never left free to exercise his vote independently. Incidentally this also leads to clashes between different groups. The political parties are only interested in securing votes no matter how it is done.

The Election Commission is fully seized with the problem and several times it has expressed concern over gangsterism in Bihar. In the light of the past experiences we hope, it will be taking steps for ensuring free and fair election as far as possible. But that is not enough. It is the duty of the enlightened and saner sections of population to create a healthy climate for the coming elections. It should not be forgotten that we live in a plural society. No one group of people howsoever resourceful or powerful it may be can win the election in any constituency. Groupism in such a set-up is self-defeating.

Moreover, it is not the group that fights the election. It is the individual. He should be judged on his own merit or on the merit of the party that he represents. Positively or negatively, the identification of an individual candidate with a particular group is deliberately made to befool the people and to arouse base instincts in them. Has any group been ever benefited by the election or elevation of any politician? Beneficiaries are only the kiths and kins or not even the kiths and kins but the tuft-hunters. Therefore groupism or tribalism is a myth which must be exploded not only for a free and fair election but also for the future well-being of the State.