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Swatantra in the doldrums

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by
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THE Swatantra Party is in the doldrums. A simmering revolt within the party has compelled the leadership to postpone its all-India conference scheduled for June 1 and 2 at Bhubaneswar. Instead, meetings of the National Executive, the Central Parliamentary Board and the General Council have been called at Madras in the first week of June. The elation and enthusiasm resulting from the phenomenal successes that the party achieved in the fourth General Election are gone, and in their place have set in serious apprehensions about its future. The party's defeat in the Rajasthan by-elections and the debacle of the party in the Haryana mid-term poll have started a process of anxious heart-searching and re-thinking both on the political and organisational levels. Dangerous cracks have appeared in the organisation and large chunks in various units, particularly in Gujarat and Rajasthan, are threatening to break away. Discipline is at a low ebb, constraining the ex-General Secretary M. R. Masani to submit his resignation from his positions in the National Executive and the Parliamentary Board.

The immediate problem has been created by open defiance of 35 party legislators in Gujarat as a result of which the party's candidate for Rajya Sabha, Babubhai Vaidya, got defeated. The rebels are not even penitent. They assert that the candidate was not even a member of the party and had been thrust on them against their wishes. The state party had been even earlier complaining of the unwarranted interference in its affairs by the central leaders particularly by Masani. In the interests of the growth of the party in Gujarat they wanted a free hand. A senior State Swatantra leader, Bhailalbhai Patel, went to the extent of accusing Masani of being anti-Gujarat and threatened that if the latter did not change, he would not be given any help to get

re-elected from his Gujarat constituency. The defeat of Vaidya was a manifestation of this anti-Masani feeling. The accusation against him is reinforced by reference to his attitude on the Kutch and Narmada issues. The Gujarat party feels that it has been stopped from joining agitations on these questions under the advice of Masani.

Masani, on the other hand, feels that whatever its background, a decision once taken must be respected and that its violation is "tantamount to a grave breach of discipline calling for severe action." If indiscipline is condoned, he feels, the party will go to pieces. His view, however, was not shared by a majority in the last meeting of the Executive. Chairman Ranga and General Secretary Dandekar were not in favour of making a serious issue out of it. The general opinion was in favour of closing the affair with a token punishment for the ring-leaders of the revolt. Masani is adamant and has pressed his resignation in the interests of cleaning up the party. He has openly expressed his preference for quality against quantity.

The issue that Masani has brought to the forefront is not confined to Gujarat alone. It has an all-India bearing. Linked with it are a number of other questions that the Swatantra Party will have to resolve if it is to survive. Indiscipline in the party has been the result of unresolved contradictions between the state units and the centre, and between the various interests that strive to make the party primarily an instrument for promoting their cause.

The centre-State conflict was responsible for the exit of the Bihar unit before General Elections. It is now the cause of the crisis in Gujarat.

The Swatantra Party was conceived

ed as a brake on the socialistic trends that had grown in the Congress under the leadership of Nehru. It was intended to be more of an ideological pressure group than an alternative to the ruling party. As such the leaders who floated the party were interested more in getting into the Parliament effective debaters and lobbyists than in developing a grass-roots organisation. The local units, to remain alive and effective, got involved in local problems and, in the process of democratisation, tended to adopt political postures which did not always fit in with the ideology of the party. The clever leaders of the Swatantra Party had seen this happening in other parties. In their view, it weakened the ideological content of a group or party and thus rendered the lobby less effective. So they tried to keep the top unencumbered by the roots. As a result the local units remained neglected and developed a resentful feeling that they were being used as mere pawns in the game. The local party's leaders now feel they have a stake in local politics. Wherever a unit becomes strong either due to local circumstances or due to the pull and popularity of its leaders, it tends to assert itself leading to conflict with the central party.

This conflict has another aspect too. The State units are dominated by the agriculturist class, mostly rich peasants who are interested more in facilities for agricultural operations and in avoiding inconvenient land-reforms. Agriculture being a state subject they are interested more in influencing the state government's than in changing or modifying the central policies, whose impact is primarily on the industrial development. The State-Centre wrangle is, therefore, sometimes described as the conflict between the industrial lobby and the agriculturist lobby within the Swatantra Party.

Again the state units wish to resort to agitations on certain issues. Otherwise, they get left out. The central leadership wants to keep the party confined to "constitutional" means and is opposed to the agitational approach. On issues where other parties try to work up emotions the Swatantra endeavours to take a rational attitude which is found irksome by local level politicians. State leaders feel that

without a response to the emotional needs of the people it cannot hope to build a mass base in the foreseeable future. This state of affairs leads to impatience on both sides: the central leaders, like Masani, show impatience with the irrationality and opportunism of state units, while the latter resent the slowness in establishing links with the people. On issues like Kashmir, Kutch and Language, there is an unending dispute.

The majority of Swatantra units do not see eye to eye with the policy of the party. On many economic issues like planning, opinions expressed by the Swatantra parliamentarians are not fully shared by many important units. Similarly on the issues of an independent nuclear deterrent and support to U.S. policy in Vietnam and elsewhere, Swatan-

tra members hold opinions quite contrary to the official view.

The problems that arose before the 1967 General Elections were quite often swept under the carpet. Sometimes members were given the freedom to differ. This was possible because till then at the state level the party was not very significant. The disputes were also fewer and of a minor character. With the party becoming the largest opposition group in the Parliament and having a strong position in many States, those differences can no longer be ignored. The leadership will have to evolve ways and means of reconciling the various conflicts and harmonising the thinking at different levels of the party. Otherwise, Swatantra Party may become a nine-day wonder in the political history of free India.

of a Rabelais. (Amongst the hero's exploits was copulating with a girl of ten, with a lady who died during the act, and his taking a messenger boy while awaiting his tardy mistress).

With ancestors of the calibre of Murasaki, Basho and Chikamatsu (1653-1725) one would have expected greater things from the present day Japanese writers than the uninspired narrations they describe as contemporary literature. The malaise, I suspect, is the same as that which afflicts Indian writers of today. Tradition, instead of providing a pedestal to climb to greater heights, has become a dead weight round the nib of the writers' pen.

A good illustration is the way our writers deal with nature. After Kalidas few Indians have been able to describe the beauties of nature except in conventional terms: gathering of rain clouds, call of the koil and the screaming of peacocks in mango groves account for a big proportion of the Indian poets' flirtation with nature. It is the same with the Japanese. Few of them get away from cherry blossoms, mist in the pines, falling of leaves and the flight of geese in the autumn.

Influence of Western writers is clearly discernible on both Indian and Japanese pen-pushers. Indians were luckier in being introduced to good English novelists like Scott and Dickens. The Japanese (apart from Russian masters) were largely

Japanese literature

by

Khushwant Singh

CONTEMPORARY Japanese writers have one thing in common with their Indian counterparts — pretentiousness. And both have protagonists who not only feed the writers' vanity but also perpetuate the legend of greatness for a body of writing which, judged by the most charitable of standards, can only be described as mediocre. A typical example of exaggeration is from an introduction to a recently published collection of short stories . . . "his (the author's) literary creations, writes the translator, "are all masterpieces." I was unable to spot even one readable story in the anthology.

It is difficult to understand why our literatures i.e. the Indian and Japanese which have many centuries of tradition behind them should have come to such a sorry pass. Japanese poetry traces back to Eighth Century A.D. The *Tanka* (short poem of 31 syllables) was developed early. The *Haiku* (poem of 17 syllables) took its place during the Seventeenth Century under the Tokugawa Shogunate and flowered into fullness under Basho (1644-94).

The Japanese novel has an equally distinguished past. Long before

European writers had come to writing one, Lady Murasaki was writing her classic *Tale of Genji*. This Eleventh Century novel, which tells of the amours of a bastard son of the Emperor, remains a classic as a mirror of the times, as a sensitive portrayal of nature and for bawdiness that might have been the envy



subjected to the manifestly second rate Bulwer Lytton, Disraeli and Samuel Smiles (his "Self-Help" long remained the most popular foreign book in Japan. It was even dramatized). It took the Japanese much longer to shake off the baneful influence of the West and return to their own traditions.

The leaders of the Japanese literary renaissance were Junichiro Tanizaki's works notably *Some Prefer Nettles*, *Thin Snow* and *The Makioka Sisters* are highly rated by critics. Tanizaki is Japan's Alberto Moravia with the same obsession with sex as the Italians. In *Some Prefer Nettles* he confronts a Eurasian prostitute against a Kyoto beauty. He thus fulfils both his chauvinist pride through the triumph of the virtuous Japanese girl over the sluttish foreigner and his penchant for sexy writing. A lot of information on the puppet theatre is thrown in for good measure.

Tanizaki's obsession with sex attained its fulness when his own prowess declined with his years. *The Key*, which consists of diaries of a married couple whose main preoccupation is sexual athletics and *The Diary of a Mad Old Man*, which tells of the lust of a 70 years old man for his daughter-in-law are perhaps his most widely read works.

The essential trouble with Japanese and Indian writers writing novels and short stories is that they do not distinguish between these two genres of creative expression. A good example of this confusion is the highly rated Yasunari Kawabata (b. 1899) whose two novels *Snow Country* and *Thousand Cranes* are much commended by American critics. In *Snow Country* the author devotes the first fifty pages of his novel (under 200 pages in length) to an exquisitely painted picture of a train ride through snow drifts and the beauty of a girl facing him on the other seat. The reader is led to believe that he is being introduced to the main characters of the story. Then the girl and her aged escort go into the background and the novel dissolves into a series of incidents that add up to nothing.

Thousand Cranes is the story of a young man's relationship with two of his father's mistresses. One is an ugly woman with a disfiguring birth mark on one of her breasts. She is

also a mischief maker and wildly jealous of her co-mistress. The young man first seduces his father's pretty mistress who thereupon commits suicide, then her daughter, who follows her mother's example. The novel derives its title from a scarf painted with cranes carried by a girl who the ugly mistress uses as her decoy. Some information on tea ceremonies is thrown in to increase the readers' information.

The most popular Japanese novelist today is Yukio Mishima (b. 1925). Of his many novels *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* is undoubtedly the most successful. It is the story of a stuttering young man's search for beauty and meaning in life. He finds both in setting fire to a national treasure, a 600-year old temple. The prose is powerful, the insight into the mind of the youth exceptional and the novel, perforce, a resounding triumph. The same cannot be said of Mishima's other works. In *After the Banquet* a geisha owning a posh restaurant marries a man of distinction in order to find a berth in the family graveyard. In *Sound of Waves* an attempted rape is frustrated by a wasp. When Mishima runs out of contrivances he turns to the stock-in-trade of all novelists, sex. In *The Sailor who Fell from Grace with the Sea*, a 13 year old peeping Tom watches his widowed mother undress every evening and then being made love to by a sailor. The boy and his companions murder the sailor, not because of his plans to marry the widow, but because he is gentle, kind and forgiving — for being an anti-hero. It is reminiscent of Gunther Grass's *Cat and Mouse* with its Oedipus and Superman in a muddled literary misalliance.

Lust and explosive violence are recurrently themes in Japanese novels. The chief reason is that many of them are written as serials for journals, — and every serial is given some event either sexual or violence in order to hold the readers' interest and whet his appetite for the next instalment of cheesecake. There is little hope of the Japanese writers producing anything very great as long as they continue to cater for magazines with mammoth circulations and for the film industry. The inkhorn of the Japanese writer is full of gold, what he writes is gilded, but it is not literature.

AT HOME

Madras

Anna goes a-visiting

MADRAS: The first photograph of Mr Annadurai abroad to appear in the local press was that of the CM in a lounge suit talking animatedly to a policeman on duty in Rome's fashionable Via Veneto. The sight of 'our Anna' wearing clothes other than the familiar crumpled *veshti* and shirt, in a very west-of-Suez setting understandably aroused much interest and comment. Many more followed, providing a visual commentary on the tour: the CM being received in private audience by the Pope; with U Thant at a reception given in his honour by the Secretary General's chef-du-cabinet C. V. Narasimhan; with Indian students at New York and Washington; at the Lincoln Memorial; surrounded by a cluster of earnest-looking American students at Yale hearing him expound on the 2nd century Tamil manual *Thirukkural*; and another at dinner with students of the Timothy Dwight Residential College at Yale where he stayed; munching popcorn and riding a sleigh at Disneyland; examining a toy locomotive in a Tokyo factory; in serious conversation with Japanese Foreign Minister Takeo Miki.

The tour has doubtless been a great personal success for Mr Annadurai. What needs to be conceded and recognized further is that the Madras Chief Minister's tour of Europe, the United States and Japan has done considerable credit to the image of India under Mrs Gandhi. The focal point of his tour was his five-day speaking programme at Yale where he went as the first Indian to be made Chubb Fellow.