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Swatantra Party

Subject: Swatantra Party

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Cues

Swatantra set-back

The debacle of the Swatantra Party and the combined opposition in the two Assembly by-elections in Rajasthan cannot be facily explained away as being due to lack of organisation and adequate propaganda. This cannot pass muster seeing that the Swatantra had made good showing in the last general elections in that State which consists largely of former feudal principalities with an electorate not as much politically enlightened as in other States, and was therefore considered the party's citadel. The Swatantra Party has at no time suffered from want of resources, monetary or organisational, and had the added advantage of the charming leadership of Maharani Gayatri Devi, assisted by the Rajmata of Gwalior, who brought to the recent campaigning her long-distance halo as the king-maker in Madhya Pradesh. In Gujarat, yet another Swatantra stronghold, the party is riven by serious internal dissensions, reflected in the election of a rebel candidate to the Rajya Sabha in open defiance by several of its legislators of the party whip. This was too serious a blow to its claims of being a well-knit and disciplined party, a blow which prompted its General Secretary, Mr. M. R. Masani to resign his position.

All this has only helped to expose the hollowness of the Swatantra claims of being a credible and powerful alternative to the Congress, at least in these two States. The lessons of the party's defeats that its political philosophy has not developed deep roots among the masses, and that its earlier electoral successes were largely conditioned by a negative sense of anti-Congressism among the people, as witnessed in many other States, cannot be missed. The Swatantra's failure need not necessarily mean that there has been a swing in favour of the Congress, although understandably the latter would like to derive whatever political advantage it can out of the situation. Yet another inference from the Swatantra defeat is that no party, however powerful, can take the electorate for granted, unless its political philosophy is in tune with the aims and aspirations of the people whom it seeks to serve.

MRM