

India after Nehru

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In a broadcast soon after Jawaharlal Nehru passed away, the President of the Republic, Dr. Radhakrishnan, said: "An epoch in our country's history has come to an end".

There is reason to believe that President Radhakrishnan is right. Though we shall not know for some time yet, it is likely that a page in the history of independent India has come to an end and we are now about to launch on another. Whether one calls it the phenomenon of the banyan tree, or hero worship, or the cult of personality, the fact remains that Prime Minister Nehru's hold over his own party and over the country generally was out of the ordinary. When such a personality is removed from the scene, there is bound to be some kind of a break.

This is not a situation peculiar to India or Nehru. This is a phenomenon one comes across in a large number of newly independent countries. In many of the countries of Asia and Africa emerging into independence one figure is to be found who dominates the scene and who in his lifetime yields to no challenge. Several such figures are still alive. There is Sukarno in Indonesia, Nasser in Egypt, Nkrumah in Ghana, Kenyatta in Kenya, Nyerere in Tanganyika, Bourgiba in Tunisia, Senghor in Senegal.

It is unlikely that this situation will continue after the first leader of the newly-freed country is removed from the scene. It is only too likely then that India has come to the end of what may be described as the post-independence phase of its existence—a period that is marked by a hangover of nationalism and of the fight against a foreign government. The foreign government has departed, the substance has gone, but people go on fighting the shadow. Most of the new countries still fight the myth of what is called "neo-colonialism", an invention of communist propaganda for which many in Asia and Africa fall. They feel insecure in their freedom. Hence, the fear of alliances and the consequent policy of neutralism or "non-alignment".

Similarly, there is a hangover of paternalism. During the last 17 years, the old *Mabap Sarkar* (Mother Father Government) tradition of the British Raj has been carried on. The *Mabap*

Sarkar will provide. The state will do this for us. The state will do that for us. The people sit back and expect the *Mabap Sarkar*—whether it is British or Indian makes little difference, to do all the things that are desirable. They do not realise that they alone can provide these things for themselves. People say “They” don’t do this, “They” should do that, “They” are corrupt, “They” are oppressing us. Who is the “They”? This idea of “We” and “They” is no part of a democracy or a really free society. This is symbolic of a gulf between the people and the rulers. They talk about “They” in Russia, they talk about “They” in China. The time has come when the Indian people will have to learn not to blame things on “Them”, but to do and change things for themselves.

Looking a little ahead, let us consider what the next 10 or 15 years may bring. What are the likely trends and changes that will come over the scene in the next decade or so? These changes are now slowly going to commence. They will no doubt often be accompanied by a refrain that nothing is changing, that nothing shall change. But the changes will be there perhaps under the surface, but there all the same. It is to be hoped that the current practice of making obeisance to the dead past will now stop and that each policy will be increasingly discussed and worked out on its own merits.

Will there be any change in the relationship between the union or federal government and the states? I should be inclined to think that, in the years to come, the federal principle will get stronger, that states rights will come into their own. The present subordination of the states has been largely caused by the fact that one party alone has dominated both the federal government and all those at the state level. Once this monopoly is broken and once the chief ministers and governments in some states are of a different political colour from that of the government in Delhi, the federal principle can really function. It is altogether likely that this monopoly will be broken in 1967.

Will there be any change in the functioning of the cabinet system? In the Indian Press recently there have been found references to something now described as “collective leadership”. This concept emerged in Moscow, after Stalin’s death. It has no place in a democracy. What those who talk about “collective leadership” really mean is that now there will be joint responsibility. This of course is nothing new in a democracy. It is the essence of cabinet

and parliamentary government. It is much more likely now that the Prime Minister in India will, like democratic prime ministers elsewhere, be *primus inter pares*.

Will there be any changes in our international relationships? I do not know. One would like to think that there may be a change towards greater realism in our international relationships and our policies abroad. Even as it was, it could have been said that the Age of Innocence in our foreign policy had already come to an end in 1962 with the invasion of Nefu and the collapse of the policy of Panchshila, which turned out to be a Himalayan blunder. So, already the ground had been laid for this change and it would therefore be reasonable to think that this process will now accelerate. People will, of course, go on talking about "non-alignment". But the lessons must inevitably, if slowly, be learnt.

It was sad and yet amusing to read the rather pathetic confession by the neutralist leader of Laos, General Kong Lee, who had insisted that neutralism was the solution for his country. He said, last May: "I do not like the communists, I like neutralism. But the communists try to destroy the neutralists every time. So from now on I announce that all who are against communism I will support and my neutralist forces will join them in the fight."

A very touching confession. If General Kong Lee had learnt that lesson five years ago, he would have saved his country much suffering and disaster. But that is how peoples and nations learn historic lessons.

Perhaps we shall now attend more to our own business and less towards that of others. More to our business, which is to guard our own neighbourhood, to attend to our own backyard, which we have very badly neglected till now. We have gone here and there all over the globe but we have failed to cultivate our own little garden, which consists of our neighbourhood in South and South-East Asia. We shall have to pay greater attention to Laos, Vietnam and Malaysia unless we want to see them occupied by the Chinese communists and their satellites, and India encircled.

Above all, I hope we shall attend more to our primary task of restoring some kind of normal relationship with our immediate neighbours in Pakistan. Surely the wounds of partition must now heal. A whole generation is about to pass. That effort was incomplete when the threads dropped from Jawaharlal Nehru's hands. We may hope that the threads will be picked up and the effort resumed

when Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri and President Ayub meet shortly.

Then, of course, we have to think of our economic problems. Will the priorities in our plans of economic development remain the same or will they be modified? Will the emphasis on heavy industrialisation, which has for the last ten years dominated the scene, continue or will it be replaced by a more realistic set of priorities, where agriculture takes the first place, as it should, as even Mr. Chou en Lai and the Chinese communists have learnt that it should? Will the bulk of our people who live on the land get a little more attention and be less neglected than they have been during the last decade? Here again, the beginning of new thinking is taking place.

It is to be hoped that, in the coming years, agriculture will get more attention, the peasant more sympathy. When we go easy with our plans of gigantism, we shall have less "white elephants" to feed and we shall have more food for the people.

In the last year or so, the need for foreign capital was already beginning to be understood. If this education proceeds a little further, we shall realise how badly we need foreign capital for the country, since we are short of tools but overpopulated, with too many mouths and too many hands. It has been well said that the only incentive to investing foreign capital is to treat one's own capital well. If we really mean what we say, our government's present punitive approach to Indian capital will have to be abandoned.

Finally, it is fair to guess that there will be new political alignments in our national life. There will be new comings together and fallings apart, and out of these new alignments there will emerge a new balance, perhaps a better balance than we have had. So far, we have had a lopsided political pattern—one party too big, other parties too small; or, too many political parties.

If Mr. Lal Bahadur Shastri's leadership of the Congress cabinet lasts, we may take it that the Congress Party will follow what may be broadly called a "democratic socialist" policy trimmed, one hopes, of the Marxist overtones and frills which had adorned it under his predecessor. In that case, obviously, there will really be no room for socialists outside the Congress Party and the correct place for any democratic socialist will be in the Congress Party. Whether the communist fellow travellers, some of whom are today in the Congress Party, will have any place there still remains to be

seen. Whether they will be edged out and driven into the Communist Party where they really belong is an open question which will have to be watched carefully in the coming year or two.

What will happen to the right wingers in Congress? In 1964, the terms right and left have surely lost all meaning. In that context, it may be useful to recall that during the last three months, in the heated discussions that have taken place over Kashmir and our relations with Pakistan, the accord between Mr. Morarji Desai, so-called rightist, and Mr. Krishna Menon was quite remarkable and so too the convergence between the Jan Sangh, described often as Hindu Rightists, on the one hand and the Communist Party on the other.

The likely pattern is going to be that the Congress Party will hold together with a hard core of about 35 per cent of the electorate. They had only polled 44.72 per cent out of the vote for parliament in the general elections of 1962. They must already have dropped below 40, so far as one can make out. There will thus be a third or a little more of the electorate with the Congress Party, with its democratic socialist policy. Then there are around 10 per cent who are wedded to the communists, who will now probably be divided into two parties. Then there is the Jan Sangh, which at present has got around 6 per cent of the vote. It may rise a little, but the ceiling can rise higher, but hardly exceed 10 per cent, because their sphere of influence is the urban middle-class Hindu population in Northern India. The Swatantra Party polled around 9 per cent of the electorate in 1962, getting over 10 million votes. A third of the electorate has still to make up its mind.

The changes anticipated above cannot be automatic. There is no predetermination in these things. Because one era comes to an end, another era does not have to move or point to a particular direction. If these trends are to materialise, they will have to be supported. People will have to stand up for them, to work for them, to speak up for them. This situation provides a great opportunity and a great challenge for those who are adherents of Liberalism, who are inclined to work for these changes and these trends.

That brings me to the role of the party to which I belong. Obviously, the Swatantra Party will remain in opposition. The Swatantra Party must, more than ever now, play the role of the leading opposition in the country. But it must be a loyal opposition. I have not the least hesitation in recognising a good democrat

in my old friend, Mr. Lal Bahadur Shastri, and therefore opposition to his government will be that of a constitutional opposition. After all, we belong to the same stock of the national movement. We fought together for freedom, went to prison together. Many of us served together in drafting the constitution of the country. So we have got common roots, common roots of patriotism and of democracy.

We in the Swatantra Party have the advantage of an incomparably great leader. India's last great pre-Independence statesman is fortunately with us. When Babu Rajendra Prasad died, Mr. C. Rajagopalachari said very sadly: "Now there are only two of us left—Jawaharlal Nehru and I". When Nehru died recently, "Rajaji" said, with pathos: "Eleven years younger than me, eleven times more important for the nation, and eleven-hundred times more beloved of the nation, Mr. Nehru has suddenly departed from our midst and I remain alive to hear the sad news from Delhi."

We Indians are often accused of tending to look backwards, of resting on our oars, on the glories of our past. Perhaps there is some truth in that complaint. India will now have to decide that from now on it faces the future, with its new problems and its new perspectives.

Notes on Contributors

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