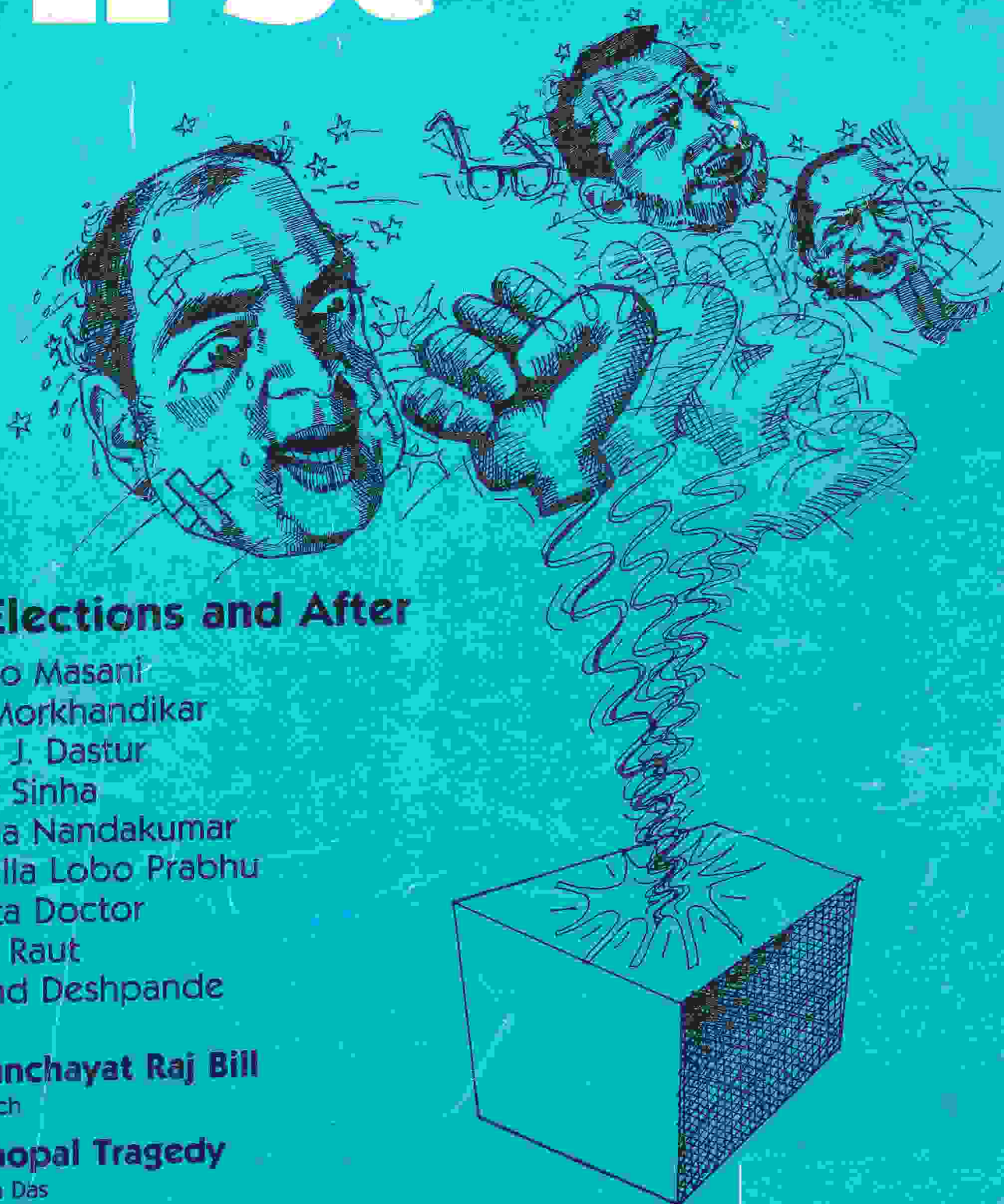


A QUARTERLY OF LIBERAL IDEAS

Freedom First

January-March 1990
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38TH YEAR OF PUBLICATION



The Elections and After

- Minoo Masani
- R.S. Morkhandikar
- Aloo J. Dastur
- Mihir Sinha
- Prema Nandakumar
- Louella Lobo Prabhu
- Geeta Doctor
- Nitin Raut
- Arvind Deshpande

The Panchayat Raj Bill

- M.N. Buch

The Bhopal Tragedy

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A Letter from America

- Madhusree Mukerjee

The Dalai Lama on being Awarded the Nobel Peace Prize

I am deeply touched to be chosen as this year's recipient of the Noble Peace Prize. I believe my selection reaffirms the universal values of non-violence, peace and understanding between all members of our great human family. We all desire a happier, more humane and harmonious world, and I have always felt that the practice of love and compassion, tolerance and respect for others is the most effective manner in which to bring this about.

I hope this prize will provide courage to the six million people of Tibet. For some forty years now Tibetans have been undergoing the most painful period in our long history. During this time, over a million of our people perished and more than six thousand monasteries — the seat of our peaceful culture — were destroyed. There is not a single family, either in Tibet or among the refugees abroad, which has gone unscathed. Yet, our people's determination and commitment to spiritual values and the practice of non-violence remain unshaken. This prize is a profound recognition of their faith and perseverance.

The demonstrations which have rocked Tibet for the past two years continue to be non-violent despite brutal suppression. Since the imposition of martial law in Lhasa last March, Tibet has been sealed off, and while global attention has focused on the tragic events in

China, a systematic effort to crush the spirit and national identity of the Tibetan people is being pursued by the Government of the People's Republic of China.

Tibetans today are facing the real possibility of elimination as a people and a nation. The Government of the People's Republic of China is practising a form of genocide by relocating millions of Chinese settlers into Tibet. I ask that this massive population transfer be stopped. Unless the cruel and inhuman treatment to my people is brought to an end, and until they are given their due right to self-determination, there will always be obstacles in finding a solution to the Tibetan issue.

I accept the Noble Peace Prize in a spirit of optimism despite the many grave problems which humanity faces today. We all know the immensity of the challenges facing our generation; the problem of overpopulation, the threat to our environment and the dangers of military confrontation. As this dramatic century draws to a close, it is clear that the renewed yearning for freedom and democracy sweeping the globe provides an unprecedented opportunity for building a better world. Freedom is the real source of human happiness and creativity. Only when it is allowed to flourish, can a genuinely stable international climate exist.

The suppression of the rights and freedoms of any people by totalitarian governments is against human nature and the recent movements for democracy in various parts of the world is a clear indication of this.

The Chinese students have given me great hope for the future of China and Tibet. I feel that their movement follows the tradition of Mahatma Gandhi's ahimsa or non-violence which has deeply inspired me ever since I was a small boy. The eventual success of all people seeking a more tolerant atmosphere, must derive from a commitment to counter hatred and violence with patience. We must seek change through dialogue and trust. It is my heartfelt prayer that Tibet's plight may be resolved in such a manner and that once again my country, the Roof of the World, may serve as a sanctuary of peace and a resource of spiritual inspiration at the heart of Asia.

I hope and pray that the decision to give me the Nobel Peace Prize will encourage all those who pursue the path of peace to do so in a renewed spirit of optimism and strength.

October 5, 1989

The Dalai Lama

End Chinese Aggression in Tibet

— The Liberal International's Call

The Congress of the Liberal International, at its meeting in Paris, October 12 – 14 adopted a resolution moved by Miss Shirin Panthaky representing the Indian Liberal Group. The resolution endorsed the Dalai Lama's five-point peace plan and resolved to mobilise world opinion against continuing Chinese aggression in Tibet.

The following is the text of the resolution

This Congress of Liberal International is greatly concerned by the current political situation in Tibet.

Therefore the Congress calls on all member parties to urge their respective governments and the European Parliament to actively endorse:

1. the Appeal of 13 March 1989 by the Assembly of Tibetan Deputies to the United Nations Secretary-General urging him to put pressure on the Chinese Government to:

- lift Martial Law immediately;
- release all political prisoners including those arrested earlier;
- establish basic Human Rights for the Tibetan people;
- halt the arrest, intimidation, imprisonment and execution of Tibetan political activists;

and seeking his intervention to:

- appoint a special rapporteur on Tibet to investigate the situation in Tibet;
 - enforce the implementation of the three UN Resolutions of 1959, 1961 and 1965 passed on Tibet;
2. the Five Point Peace Plan presented by His Holiness the Dalai Lama – awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for 1989 – to the European Parliament in 1988, proposing:
- transformation of the whole of Tibet into a zone of peace;
 - abandonment of China's population transfer policy which threatens the very existence of the Tibetans as a people;
 - respect for the Tibetan people's fundamental human rights and democratic freedom;

- restoration and protection of Tibet's natural environment and the abandonment of China's use of Tibet for the production of nuclear weapons and dumping of nuclear waste;
- commencement of earnest negotiations on the future status of Tibet and of relations between the Tibetan and Chinese peoples."

In recognition of the fact that action is most effective when concerted, this Congress finally resolves to:

- register with the United Nations Secretary-General its active support both for the Appeal of The Assembly of Tibetan Deputies and for the Dalai Lama's Peace Plan;
- mobilise world opinion against continuing China's aggression in Tibet.

Freedom First

A Quarterly of Liberal Ideas

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Dear Reader,

As this issue goes to press, the 'National Front' government has secured the ninth Lok Sabha's vote of confidence. The general comment has been that by so doing, the Lok Sabha has only kept faith with the electorate's verdict for a change.

The votes secured by the various political parties in percentage terms is yet to be known. When it is, we shall have a clearer picture of the nature of the people's verdict. Nevertheless we must welcome the fact that a new government of a different complexion is in power and its predecessor now sits in the opposition in sizeable numbers. This a healthy development.

The initial pronouncements of Mr. V.P. Singh and that of some of his Ministers on such issues as civil liberties, an open government and the freeing of the electronic media from ruling party control are welcome. The new government's economic policy is not yet clear. One hopes that there is no reversal of the trend towards liberalisation — halting as it has been — initiated by previous governments.

In October we had discussed some issues facing the electorate in the context of the general elections. We had hoped in the subsequent issue (this one) to focus attention on the election platforms of the major parties before the elections. But events overtook us and, we now look at the results and what they mean.

We invite our readers to share with the family of *Freedom First* subscribers their views on issues and policies as they unfold in the months to come.

We pay our tribute to three outstanding men who passed away in 1989. In their separate ways, spanning three continents Prof. Sidney Hook, Mr. A.D. Gorwala and Dr. Andrei Sakharov toiled tirelessly to uphold the dignity of the individual and his right to live in peace and freedom.

We also pay our respects and remember two others who did much to promote individual dignity and freedom — Mr. V.B. Karnik who left us on November 5, 1985 and Mr. J.B.H. Wadia who passed away on January 4, 1986. Both were intimately associated with the Democratic Research Service which publishes *Freedom First*.

We had sought your views on the question of increasing subscription rates to meet the rising cost of producing this journal. All those who have replied have suggested we double the subscription. The Management has however decided not to increase the annual subscription which remains at Rs. 20. However a single copy will now cost Rs. 10. Life Subscription has gone up to Rs. 400.

Finally, Mr. Masani's article published in this issue is based on his column in *The Statesman* and reprinted with their permission.

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We wish our readers A Happy and Prosperous New Year.

WITH MANY VOICES

"The deep moans round with many voices. Come, my friends
'Tis not too late to seek a newer world" — Tennyson

The ravaged Sikh psyche is not a myth.

Anuradha Dutt, *The Illustrated Weekly of India* November 5

Look at the sky and there are payoffs in the helicopter deal; look at the earth and there are payoffs in the Bofors gun deal; look at the sea, and there are payoffs in the submarine deal, and look under the earth and there are payoffs in the pipeline deal.

V.P. Singh in a campaign speech, *Aside*, December 1

Why should I forgo my earnings by taking time off to vote? If the Congress has left gaping potholes on the road, the Sena will not fill them if it comes to power. Whoever is elected, let them fall into the hole.

An Autorickshaw driver, *The Times of India*, November 25

We do not believe in communism, but would prefer the Marxist 'bhadralok' to represent us rather than the Congress(I) lumpens.

A Calcutta housewife, *Sunday Observer*, November 26

Missiles today continue to be symbols of international clout. For India, too, missiles are an absolute necessity.

Indranil Banerjee, *Sunday*, October 22

I joined BJP as a natural offshoot of the Janata Party... I do not think they are communal — they are not anti-anyone.

Viren Shah, *The Week*, November 12

(If I were the Prime Minister) I will make a separate state for politicians. Let them do what they want there — scream, dance, play. I am sure the country will heave a sigh of relief. And everyone will live happily ever after.

Pramod Navalkar, *Bombay*, November 7

Dr. Andrei Sakharov 1921 – 1989

Dr. Andrei Sakharov died of a heart attack in Moscow on December 15, 1989. He was 68. He was given a truly people's funeral. Tens of thousands braved the cold of the Russian winter to pay homage to a man who had dared a totalitarian tyranny. His tormentors were there too, to pay their respects.

Dr. Sakharov was a nuclear physicist. But the world knew him as the spearhead of dissent in the Soviet Union. He was awarded the Nobel Prize, not for nuclear physics but for peace. And here lay the greatness of the man. Sakharov the nuclear physicist was showered with honours by the Soviet Government. Sakharov the dissenter was hounded, harassed, imprisoned and exiled.

He deliberately turned his back on a life of luxury and comfort to embrace a cause that brought him nothing but persecution. For Sakharov this mattered little, for he had a conscience. The morality of his nuclear government bothered him. He wrote to Nikita Khrushchev calling for an end to the Soviet nuclear programme. This was the beginning.

Soon he was asking for greater freedom for the Soviet citizen. There could not be a greater crime in those pre-glasnost days. Dr. Sakharov formed a Committee for Human Rights. It was promptly banned.

In 1975 Dr. Sakharov was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace. The then Soviet leadership treated him as they did that other great dissenter and Nobel Prize winner, Alexander Solzhenitsyn — refused him permission to receive the prize in person.

In true Gandhian style, Sakharov resorted to hunger strikes demanding better treatment of political prisoners if not their release? He went on fast when the authorities refused visas for members of his family.

Stalin liquidated dissenters. Khrushchev and his successors preferred to commit such troublesome people to psychiatric wards or exile. In 1980 Dr. Sakharov was stripped of his title and exiled to Gorki which was closed to foreigners.

Five years later when Gorbachev took over as the General Secretary of the CPSU he lifted the exile and Dr. Sakharov returned to a Moscow full of glasnost and perestroika.

Though not an uncritical admirer of Gorbachev, Sakharov nevertheless supported the Soviet President in pushing the pace of his reforms. Sakharov and Gorbachev had angry exchanges on the floor of the new Soviet Parliament. Sakharov wanted a multi-party system. To which Gorbachev's response was perhaps a 'don't be silly!' But the point has been made.

Without Gorbachev, Sakharov would have died in exile. Without Sakharov, Gorbachev will find it that much harder to push perestroika.

The world will miss Sakharov who made the bomb and atoned for it by embracing the life of a dissenter and a champion of the rights of man.

The Ninth General Elections to the Lok Sabha

Can we say with any degree of confidence that the ninth General Elections to the Lok Sabha marks the end of one party dominance? Can we breathe a sigh of relief that the mist of charisma has cleared? Are we finally seeing the end of dynastic rule?

While it is too early to draw any firm conclusions, there is one healthy trend that is discernible — by and large people have voted with their heads and not with their hearts. It would appear that issues and not personalities decided most voters' choices. This by itself is a great step forward in improving the *quality* of representative government.

Why Early Elections?

Banners in Bombay City (obviously put up by the Congress(I) congratulated Rajiv Gandhi for calling the elections and proving his critics wrong. However apprehensions whether elections would be held at all were not entirely baseless. The months preceding the elections not only saw an escalation of violence in Punjab and Kashmir but the recurrence of communal violence in the States of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. Would this outbreak of violence be used as an excuse to put off elections, if not in declaring an "emergency" *a la* Mrs. Gandhi? That Mr. Rajiv Gandhi decided to seek a fresh mandate from the people through the ballot box is to his credit. But why was he in a hurry to call for fresh elections two months ahead of schedule?

After two very good monsoons the economy is in better shape than it ever was. The liberalisation policies in the first two or three years of the Rajiv Gandhi government had started paying dividends. His economic policies had at long last broken the barrier of the 'Hindu' growth rate at 3%. For the first time the annual growth rates average 5.7%. True, prices of certain essential commodities have registered a sharp increase (there are accusations that the rise in the prices of sugar and edible oils, for instance, was due to collusion between the ruling party and the lobbies concerned to raise slush money for the elections — as much as Rs. 500 crores according to speculation in some sections of the press). While economic indicators were in favour of the ruling party, there were rumours that the only way to avoid a debt trap was to seek the assistance of the IMF. And the IMF wanted not only a stepping up of the process of liberalisation but also a more realistic value of the Rupee vis-a-vis the US Dollar. This meant devaluation. A step that would not at all be popular.

But three events, all occurring less than a week before elections were announced, were perhaps responsible for Rajiv Gandhi's decision to go to the poll immediately.

On October 12, Mr. N. Ram, the associate editor of *The Hindu* produced fresh evidence of fraud and cover-up in the Bofors deal with the finger clearly pointing in the direction of the Establishment at the highest levels.

On October 15, the Panchayat Raj and Nagarpalika Bills ostensibly intended to decentralise power to local bodies in the rural and urban areas was defeated in the Rajya Sabha.

Finally, on October 15, the National Front leaders sought the permission of the President of India to prosecute Mr. Rajiv Gandhi in the light of Mr. Ram's revelations.

Rajiv Gandhi gambled with an early election to get the Bofors albatross off his back and get a fresh mandate that would enable hard economic decisions to be taken. He must have also calculated that the bickering parties in the opposition would not have adequate time to strike seat adjustments and, as always, enable the Congress(I) to romp home with a majority of seats despite a minority of votes, as has happened repeatedly in the last eight elections.

Rajiv Gandhi's gamble failed. That is now history. But what went wrong?

The "Surprise" that Failed

The pre-emptive strike recoiled on the Congress. The 'surprise' actually served to spur ongoing opposition talks and hastened the process of seat adjustments. The strategy of the opposition parties was based, not on grounds of common policies or platforms, but on pure electoral arithmetic. The only consideration — to ensure that Rajiv Gandhi did not return to power.

With a speed that surprised everyone, the Janata Dal (JD) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) agreed on a sharing of seats in the large majority of constituencies in the Hindi belt which accounts for as many as 221 of the 543 seats in the Lok Sabha.

Equally surprising was evidence of Congress confusion in many constituencies. Until the last date for withdrawal, many Congress (I) candidates were not sure whether they would be official or dummy candidates (dummy candidates, for the uninitiated, are two candidates from the same party who file nominations in a constituency. The dummy withdraws once the regular candidate's nomination papers are found to be in order. In case the papers are rejected on technical or any other ground the dummy candidate steps in to fill the breach).

Even the Manifesto of the Congress (I) which ought to have been the first to be released was way behind that of the BJP and the National Front. One reason for the delay, according to reports, was astrological advice prescribing an auspicious day and time.

And then there was the Congress advertisement campaign reportedly costing over Rs. 50 crores which was widely criticized for its negative content and poor taste. It might have had some impact in the South but was derided in most other parts of the country.



vastly enlarged electorate of 490 million. The suspicion that the two new Election Commissioners had been appointed to ensure that the Chief Election Commissioner did not get too independent is not entirely without justification.

Poll Violence and the Mafia

While most people voted with their heads, some others did it with guns and knives. It is indeed a sad commentary on our political system that we have not been able to rid ourselves of continuing violence in our politics. What is deplorable is that all parties are equally responsible. This violence has been both communal and for other reasons. Electioneering seems to bring out the worst in some of our political leaders and their followers.

The Lone Congress Campaigner

With most of his Union and State Chief Ministers no better than totem poles, it was natural that the Congress Party had only one leader — Rajiv Gandhi — who criss-crossed the country campaigning tirelessly. Ever since the Congress split in 1969 the Congress has been a one-person party and it is hardly surprising that when it came to the hustings there was none of a national stature to lend a hand in the campaigning. As *India Today's* 'Newstrack' (November 1989) noted: Rajiv Gandhi had reshuffled his Council of Ministers 27 times in 58 months; during this period 95 persons were in and out of the Cabinet. While only two persons retained their portfolios throughout Rajiv Gandhi's term of office, 19 Chief Ministers were changed; 8 discarded Chief Ministers were taken into the Central Council of Ministers and 10 discarded Union Ministers were made Chief Ministers.

Any wonder he was all alone?

In nothing did the former Prime Minister exhibit his ineptitude more clearly than in his campaign style. Almost every reprehensible gimmick was attempted — from tarnishing the opposition to pandering to religious sentiments recalling atavistic slogans and promising goodies which clearly transgressed democratic norms.

Violation of Democratic Norms

For instance on November 19, (Mrs. Indira Gandhi's birthday) three days before polling, Mr. Rajiv Gandhi announced a Rs. 5,000 crore scheme for the upliftment of women — the Indira Mahila Yojana. This was in clear defiance of the Election Commission's model Code of Conduct that enjoins lame duck governments not to take or announce substantive policy decisions once elections are ordered. Yet another transgression of democratic norms was the announcement of the election by Rajiv Gandhi as Prime Minister. This is the prerogative of the Election Commission and not of the party in power.

On the other hand the Election Commission of India did not exactly cover itself with glory. An independent body answerable only to parliament, the Commission had so far maintained a reputation for impartiality. This time it emerged with a sullied reputation. Two days before elections were announced two members were added to the Commission on the specious plea of assisting the Chief Election Commissioner to cope with a



Equally condemnable is the criminalisation of our politics. Mafia dons, convicted criminals and business tycoons have formed an unholy alliance with sections of the political leadership to make a mockery of our electoral system. It has been argued that they will gain in power and influence in the years to come. Those elected with the help of goons have a price to pay — the legitimisation of the activities of their criminal supporters.

The November elections were the bloodiest. 130 persons are estimated to have died. Among them a senior Minister of the Government of Gujarat. The violence that shook the Prime Minister's constituency in Amethi resulting in near fatality to one of the candidates drew not one word of condemnation from the then Prime Minister. Even as late as the first week of December the elected member from Faizabad (Ayodhya is in this constituency) in Uttar Pradesh was riddled with bullets. He escaped death, but was seriously injured.

For this orgy of violence, the National Front is as responsible as the Congress. Evidence of this was provided in a shattering real-life film on booth capturing. Apart from the brazen manner in which armed gangs invaded polling booths and stuffed the boxes with ballot papers, a police official who was standing a few yards away solemnly denied any violence even while the criminals were at it. For the first time millions of Indians saw on TV the blatant collusion between political goons

and officials in what can only be described as a 'rape of democracy'.

It will need more than determination to put an end to such violence. It requires courage on the part of the Government to enforce the law and distance itself from criminal elements. If this does not happen, violence which currently is confined to certain pockets will soon become the norm and make a mockery of our democracy.

The Role of Religion

As a people we are religious by temperament. But the results seem to indicate that we have learnt not to mix religious symbols and actions with the essence of religion. Thus, while NTR (the actor who portrayed god) initially had an advantage, the grease paint peeled off his face and with that his office. So did the antics of Rajiv and his coterie in using the religious card for political purposes recoil on them.

This accounts for the success of the BJP. Both when in political wilderness as well as in their recent near spectacular success they steadfastly adhered to their religious identity. They were respected for it and, this time round, got the voters' trust in as many as 85 constituencies as against a paltry two in the eighth Lok Sabha. Even the CPI(M)'s godlessness was consistent and they were judged for their record in politics.

The Muslims in turn, hitherto ardent supporters of the Congress(I), realised the opportunism of their favoured party and deserted them.

In the years to come our politicians will have to learn not to play the religious card for electoral gain. All the world over we are witnessing a return to religion and India is no exception. Calling parties that swear by one religion or another as fascist, communal or treating them as political untouchables will only drive such parties to take extremist positions. The Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid dispute was a convenient handle for parties to whip up communal passions purely for political gain. The parliamentary constituency of Faizabad within which falls Ayodhya, the legendary birthplace of Lord Rama and scene of the temple-Masjid feud, elected a muslim and a communist to boot. Surely he could not have won if Hindus in large enough numbers had not voted for him. The spirit of religion and religious fundamentalism are not the same. If parties are boycotted and abused on the ground they are religious, they will only be driven towards fundamentalism.

Populism

Mrs. Indira Gandhi's rise in party politics can be attributed to populist appeals most of it insincere and soft on the electorate. Promises were made to extend privileges, write off loans, initiate loan melas, raise salaries of government servants and offer plenty of other goodies. And all this at the cost of the public exchequer.

No party is an exception to this kind of gimmickery. The only hope lies in the fact that an increasingly maturing electorate sees through the game and discounts election promises as nothing more than that.

Regionalism

In our country there is an irrational fear of this thing called 'regionalism'. This fear is a direct outcome of the tendency of Delhi to dictate to the States. Unfortunately this phobia is shared even by the elite. There seems to be a pre-supposition that regional identities mean backwardness, stagnation, obscurantism and even incipient separatism. This is a lie that needs to be nailed. Regional political parties gain popularity because of neglect of their regions by successive Central governments over a long period of time. This is particularly true of South and East India.

Ironically, for the second time, it was the South that saved the Congress from near extinction. In 1977 and again in 1989 a large majority of the Congress members elected to the Lok Sabha were from the four southern states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. The Congress(I) in other words, is now basically a party representing the South. Will the Congress(I) MPs now complain of step-motherly treatment by the Central Government ruled by the National Front that has a mere three MPs from the South?

In other words, it is precisely the states with strong regional parties that have sent a majority of national party members to the Lok Sabha. So much for the fears of regionalism.

A Vote for Change and Experimentation

Beware of the splintered opposition. They will not be able to offer stability. Remember 1977 and the SVD governments that rose and fell like nine pins in years after 1967? This was the Congress Party's warning — a slogan that was very effective until it was also dismissed as of no consequence in the November elections.

The voter who played safe so as not to rock the boat and voted Congress grudgingly, decided this time to put away the fear of the unknown.

A new development has been the emergence of non-party farmers' organisations as a formidable pressure group. In the last two years the farmers union led by a small landowner — Mr. Mahendra Singh Tikait —



compelled state governments in North India to listen and act irrespective of the party in power. Mr. Tikait instilled confidence in the farmer who now knows that he is no longer alone and cannot be taken for granted.

The emergence of a party of the backward classes also in the North — The Bahujana Samaj Party — and their rather creditable performance in both the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections is another development that has brought realisation to the backward classes that they no longer need to be tied to the apron strings of the Congress party and their support too must not be taken for granted.

In other words, people, by and large, are ready for political experimentation.

A Triumph for the Principle of Accountability

Parties that did not perform were thrown out even if led by the most eminent. Both Rajiv Gandhi at the Centre and N.T. Rama Rao in Andhra Pradesh paid for their arrogance of power. Accountability is not merely corruption, though in the case of the fall of the Congress

it was so — at least in North India. N.T. Rama Rao who burst on the Andhra scene six years ago and received an unqualified mandate from the people was pulled down for his unmindful, thoughtless and arrogant conduct. The actor-turned politician who became a household word among the Telugu speaking people for his film roles as a god, believed he could do no wrong.

In Karnataka the Janata Dal, was humbled and the breakaway Janata Party practically destroyed by angry voters fed up to the teeth with internal squabbles and faction fighting.

On balance, the outlook for Indian democracy that emerges is one of hope. With every successive election the voters, by the manner in which they have exercised their franchise have shown an improved awareness of the power of the ballot paper in their hands. The ninth general elections provide further evidence of this progressive improvement in the quality of the electorate's choice. The voting pattern also indicates that there is no direct co-relation between illiteracy and an exercise of the vote based on commonsense.

R. Srinivasan
S.V. Raju

A Great Opportunity

C. Rajagopalachari

Had Chakravarthi Rajagopalachari (CR or Rajaji as he was known) been alive he would have been 111 on December 9, 1989. More importantly, what would he have advised the President of India in the context of the results of the elections last November?

In the 1967 General Elections the Congress just managed to retain power. Rajaji's own Swatantra Party emerged as the largest Opposition group in the Lok Sabha with 44 seats.

Rajaji expected the Congress to do badly and wrote in the *Swarajya* of December 24, 1966 the likely post-election scenerio. What he wrote 23 years ago could well have been written in December 1989 — only the players were different.

This is what he wrote:

Shri Jayaprakash Narayan has as usual said the right thing on the right occasion. Presiding over the Non-Party Democratic Convention in Delhi on December 11 he called for a non-party national government to pull the country out of the morass into which it has been sinking. He suggested that after the February elections, successful candidates should function as representatives of the people and select a leader who should form a cabinet composed of talented men irrespective of party affiliations. He asserted that a non-party national government would be a practical way out of the situation.



Sri Jayaprakash Narayan thus disposes of the bogey raised by Congress partisans of chaos resulting if the Congress does not secure a majority. As I have said before, the Union Constitution will not be helpless and leave the nation without a government if the Congress is deservedly defeated. People should vote as they honestly feel and leave the President to meet the situation arising out of honest voting. This is our Constitution.

If the President finds a very mixed Lok Sabha issuing out of the general elections, there are two courses open to him. One is to see which group is the biggest and call on the leader of that group to form a ministry and give it a chance to bear the burden of affairs and show its command of the general confidence of the House. The other course is for the President to make up his own mind as to who is the *individual* leader who may be expected to attract the respect and loyalty of the House as a whole and ask him to form a government.

This second course would be a new venture, but it is not any deviation from the letter of the law as embodied in our Constitution. The Constitution does not anywhere refer to political parties. If successful this course would help the evolution of leadership based on something distinctly better than partisan loyalty, which, if I am a good judge of Indian psychology, is what the people of India desire.

We have a great opportunity now to establish a new and good convention. Policies would not depend on majorities in the elections and on their dogmatic commitments, but on debated decisions of the Lok Sabha from time to time. Parliament would then be given a real and much greater share in the actual government of the country instead of being a mere registration of the Cabinet's decisions and party whips. Debate in the House would be a serious investigation instead of being merely a theatrical performance according to the parts allotted by the several partisan affiliations.

COURTESY: *Swarajya*, December 24, 1966

A Hung Parliament

— The Beginning of Coalition Politics in India

Minoo Masani

When I wrote in *Freedom First* that I would welcome a hung Parliament, I was asked by many friends what a hung Parliament was. Now that, to my delight, it has become a reality, every one knows what it means, namely a Parliament with no Party in a majority. A hung Parliament is a reality in all countries of the world except the USA and UK. A coalition government is more natural than a one-party government. I am glad India has now entered that phase.

So the Indian electorate has done it. With native shrewdness they have thrown out all the miscreants, to which-ever Party they may have belonged. Not only the main miscreant, Rajiv Gandhi, but others at State level like N.T. Rama Rao and Ramakrishna Hegde.

There is no dichotomy between North and South. The whole of India has voted the same way, namely, for a change. They have declared 'enough is enough'. We all have reason to rejoice at the election results.

Defying the People's Verdict

Unfortunately, the people of India are being once again let down by the politicians. On the one side, members of the Congress Party in Parliament, most of whom were said to have complained bitterly against Rajiv Gandhi, have not shown the courage to replace him by another leader as would happen in any other country. If sycophancy is common in India, it is particularly rampant in the ranks of the Congress Party. A Party that cannot push out an utterly useless leader does not deserve to rule the country.

On the other side, the behaviour of Devi Lal and Chandra Shekhar, neither of whom has a good track record, in trying to block Mr. V.P. Singh's election as leader of the new government, was also indicative of the low level of morality on the part of some members of the Janata Dal. Their behaviour does not bode any good for the future of the new

A 'Hung Parliament' is a Parliament with no party in a majority. A hung Parliament is a reality in all countries of the world except the USA and UK. A coalition government is more natural than a one-party government. I am glad India has now entered that phase.

government and that is a matter that concerns not only the members of the new government but the whole country. One hopes there is no truth in the widespread rumour that big money had gone from certain Bombay industrialists to stop Mr. V.P. Singh's election. Evidently these businessmen prefer men of bad character to a good and honest man, who may not be friendly to them. God help India!

Success of New Government Important

Let me explain why the success of the new government is important for the country. If the new government performs well and gains credibility, it could last its whole term. From the point of view of a two-party system, this is very important. What has to be avoided is a repetition of the misbehaviour of the Janata Government which my friend Jayaprakash Narayan put into power, but they let him down by internal squabbles which ultimately brought down that government and ensured Mrs. Gandhi's return.

That was a big tragedy, which was a cruel disappointment to the people of India, and must be avoided this time. A great deal, therefore, depends on the

wisdom of the leadership of the new government. It is to be hoped that the BJP and the Communists, who have started realising the mood of the people of India, will adhere to their offer of cooperation and not let the new government down.

The Commonsense of the 'Illiterate' Voter

No tears need be shed over man like Buta Singh, K.K. Tewary and Balaram Jakhar, who have been ousted by the electorate. Rajiv Gandhi crowned his inglorious career as Prime Minister by the massive rigging in his own constituency and by the murderous assault by his supporters on Mr. Sanjay Singh.

Once again it has been proved that it is not the illiterate part of the electorate that lets the country down but the affluent class. Many members of the educated class were to be heard saying before the elections "what do the poor masses know about corruption and about Bofors?" It has now been proved that it is a moral issue which has moved the rural masses whether in the Parliamentary elections or in Andhra or Karnataka. So far as the rich class is concerned, they seem to prefer bounders to honest men who may not be to their liking.

This is not the first time that this phenomenon has come to light. Throughout the existence of the Swatantra Party from 1959 to 1974, it was proved that the entire support for the Swatantra Party candidates to Parliament and state Assemblies came from the farmers of India. Not a single candidate of the Swatantra Party was elected from an urban area all of which were successfully brainwashed by Jawaharlal Nehru into believing that "socialism" was progressive and "capitalism" was reactionary. The people of East Germany, Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia are now demanding the market economy in place of "socialism".

Perestroika for India

If there is one major reform that India needs, it is Perestroika, the disbanding of the Stalinist pattern of socialism imposed on this country by Jawaharlal Nehru, and its replacement by a competitive market economy.

It is possible that the new government may take some time for this truth to dawn on them. But the whole world is now moving in the right direction and even these men cannot hold India back from moving with the rest of the world. If Gorbachov, Walesa and the leaders and the people of Hungary and Czechoslovakia have come to realise that socialism does not work, we in India will have to come to the same conclusion however much we may delay the change at our own cost.

They have promised a clean government, but clean government cannot come about without abolition of controls. Every control means corruption. This basic truth has to be accepted by Mr. V.P. Singh and his colleagues

Not only in Amethi

The election to the ninth Lok Sabha is undoubtedly the dirtiest and bloodiest held in this country since Independence, worthy of a banana republic. The election commission has ordered repolling in not less than nearly 1500 booths, as against the 400 booths during the previous elections. In Amethi repolling has been ordered in 97 polling stations. Amethi was naturally made into a big issue by a wide variety of do-gooders — after all, it is the prime minister's constituency, and the prime minister must be, like Caesar's wife, above suspicion. But does that mean that booth-rigging might be condoned in other places? Let us take a look. In Andhra Pradesh alone, repolling has been ordered in no less than 576 polling stations, well over a third of the total repolling ordered. As far as violence is concerned the number of accounted-for people killed in Andhra Pradesh is at least 20. I mention Andhra Pradesh because it is close to home, but ghastly things — chopping off of an election officer's hands, murder of a minister in Gujarat — have happened all over the country. The reason I wish to draw attention to all this is that those who have constituted themselves our watchdogs on their own had a lot of screaming to do about Amethi but have been singularly silent about excesses elsewhere.

S. Krishnan, *Aside*, Dec 1-15

A.D. Gorwala — A Tribute



A.D. Gorwala

I first met Mr. A.D. Gorwala when I was Mayor of Bombay in 1943 and he was Secretary of the Civil Supplies Department of the Government of Bombay. It was war time and I saw him in my capacity as Chairman of the People's Provincial Food Council to discuss food rationing and its implications. I was charmed by the man. He was efficient, transparently honest and tried to be fair to all concerned. If food rationing in Bombay during the war ran smoothly, much of the credit goes to Mr. Gorwala for the efficient way in which he organised it. Mr. Gorwala had a distinguished record as a member of the Indian Civil Service.

Mr. Gorwala started by being a supporter of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's foreign policy, but was soon cured. We used to meet regularly at what was then called Greens Hotel at Apollo Bunder, which has now become the new Taj.

Our discussions were frank and intimate and I learnt a great deal from him.

Mr. Gorwala had a sad experience after Independence. He told me that the British governors, with whom he had worked, appreciated honest advice, however distasteful, provided of course members of the Indian Civil Service like Mr. Gorwala finally did what the bosses decided. With Independence, however, this was not good enough. The Congress Ministers wanted the civil servants to tender advice which they themselves desired and they threw back advice which did not suit them. Mr. Gorwala was much too honest a civil servant to accept this nonsense. The Ministers claimed that they were the chosen representatives of the people and knew what the people wanted! Mr. Gorwala said he was prepared to carry out the orders provided they were given in writing. That did not

suit the Ministers, who wanted to shelter behind the civil servants. So Mr. Gorwala retired prematurely from the Indian Civil Service.

Mr. Gorwala then started writing for *The Times of India* and other Papers under pseudonyms such as Vivek and Vidura, but the Congress administration caught up with him. Under pressure from Delhi his articles were discontinued. Mr. Gorwala then started his own little journal called *Opinion*. It soon acquired influence out of all proportion to its circulation.

Then came the Emergency of 1975 and Mr. Gorwala and I found ourselves comrades-at-arms waging a battle for the freedom of the press against Mrs. Gandhi's bogus Emergency and censorship. I used to edit *Freedom First* at that time and secured two judgements from the Bombay High Court overruling Mrs. Gandhi's censorship. During the last days of the Emergency, I thus wrote freely under the protection of the Bombay High Court. Mr. Gorwala when prevented from writing what he wanted by the owner of the printing press, who succumbed to government pressure, closed down the paper, found a new printer and started all over again.

Mr. Gorwala once told me that his name and mine were often put up to Mrs. Indira Gandhi for detention under MISA, but she refused to sign those orders and evidently felt that honest, but misguided people like us should be allowed to write what we liked. I wonder how many dictators had the wisdom and generosity to make such a distinction?

I would like to pay my tribute to this man of great integrity and courage, whom I was proud to have as a friend, and who has now left us at the age of 89.

Minoo Masani

Elections 1989: Implications and the Agenda

R.S. Morkhandikar

The 1989 elections can be a turning point in the political life of the country. It can bring about a realignment of forces, open a new chapter in Centre-State relations and most important of all make possible a new effort at solving the Punjab tangle and the communal impasse

If regular elections are regarded as an index of democracy then India well qualifies for being termed a successful democracy. It has just completed, for the ninth time, the exercise of electing a Parliament. In addition, during the last thirty-seven years Indians have participated in many more polls for the Assemblies, Zilla Parishads, Municipal Corporations and so on. The recently held elections, however, mark a departure in many respects from the earlier ones.

Firstly, unlike the earlier occasions, there was no charismatic leader casting his shadow over the political scene — no Nehru, J.P. or Indira Gandhi. Unlike the 1977 elections there was no 'wave' to sweep the voters off their feet. A 'wave' can be said to exist when three conditions are met: a party secures more than 50% of the votes cast and more than 80% of the seats, and the seats are won or lost by large margins. This was, in a sense, the most 'normal' election which tested the maturity of the Indian voters. The first of its kind!

Is 1989 a Turning Point?

This year could well mark a turning point for India's national life. Will India continue its efforts to become a well-knit nation or would it break down under the stress of increasing ethnic tensions? Will its people opt for a decentralised policy and a, more or less, self-sustained, if slow, economic growth, as against a semi-autocratic rule with all powers concentrated in the hands of one person and his or her favourites? — an economy fast travelling on the slippery slope towards a debt trap? These were the questions that the voters had to decide.

A great deal was at stake. The rulers did realise the enormity of the stakes and used all the tricks, without any scruples, to win. This was the most blood-stained poll that India has experi-

enced. About a hundred people, including a minister, lost their lives and many more seriously injured. Re-poll had to be ordered in more than a thousand polling booths including 97 booths in the Prime Minister's constituency where there were flagrant violations of the law and evidence of poll rigging.

Second, in the past few years there has been a steady increase in the communal fever. Hindu and Muslim fundamentalism fed upon each other. The number of communal incidents steadily increased. In Maharashtra, the Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Kerala, Assam and Goa communal forces were encouraged, at least initially, by those in authority as a measure of political expediency. The orthodox and the fundamentalists — Hindu, Muslim or Sikh — were courted and appeased. Witness the Babri Mosque-Ram Janmabhoomi issue, the Muslim Women's Protection Act, the Bhindranwale phenomenon. All this led to a sharp communal polarisation. The Bharatiya Janata Party, which for a while in the recent past was professing secularism, veered towards its Jan Sangh moorings. Parties and party leaders openly appealed to religious sentiments in the elections as never before. Never before have so few candidates from the Muslim community been put up by political parties and so few elected.

An Anti-Establishment Electorate

A feature of the election result was the North-South divide. The Congress lost heavily in the North while in the South the erstwhile opposition tasted defeat. One plausible explanation is that this was a vote against the Establishment. The masses, tired of the wayward rise in prices, corruption and unemployment held the proximate governments responsible for their ills, the

exception being West Bengal. The CPI(M), presumably, was more successful in convincing the Bengalis of the culpability of the Central government for the ills afflicting the state. In any case the running battle of words between the West Bengal Government and the Centre was there for all to see.

Hung Parliament — Need for a Consensus

Only last month Mr. Minoo Masani called for a hung Parliament. The people have heeded his call — the Goans literally so by electing two perfectly balanced sides to the Assembly. At the Centre, no party could form a government on its own. Given the ideological incompatibilities of the BJP and the Left, it would be difficult to conceive of a coalition of these two with the Janata Dal. In the circumstances the only option that was open for the Janata Dal to form the government, with the Left parties and the BJP lending their support.



COURTESY: Mid-Day

This calls for tight rope walking, more difficult than the one attempted in 1977. Then, there was Jayaprakash Narayan to mediate and a seasoned politician like Morarji Desai to head the government, and what was more important the Janata Party had a numerical majority in the Lok Sabha. The Janata Dal is without these advantages. It faces the task of working with a Rajya Sabha under the control of the Congress and the likelihood of an unhelpful President. This calls for the building up of a consensus on policies wherever possible, and a high degree of unity and discipline among the members supporting the government to overcome a hostile Rajya Sabha and a possibly unfriendly President.

The 'National Front' government is likely to find itself being pulled in different directions by its supporters — the BJP and the CPI/CPI(M). Being outside the power structure they wouldn't feel the constraints of those who wield power. If they are to have a stake in the stability of the government they must in some way share the responsibilities of power. It may be advisable to have a coordinating council of the three parties to evolve a continuing consensus on at least the day to day political problems.

Erosion of Institutions

The elections since 1967 make India a plebiscitary democracy with the people approving or rejecting a person or a party's claims to power. The legitimacy of all political institutions has been undergoing gradual erosion. Parties and Parliaments hardly ever seriously debate issues of substance close to the life of the people: poverty, exploitation and the inequities in life. These increasingly find expression outside the political process — through violence and mass politics. Further, there is a growing trend towards the criminalisation of politics. In the North, links with criminal elements has almost become a precondition for political success. Many politicians (in all political parties) face criminal charges. To rebuild people's confidence in democracy needs their active involvement in governance on a day to day basis and not once in five years. This would be a truly participatory democracy. Mass sanctions alone can cleanse political life in the country.

The 1989 elections can be a turning point in the political life of the country.

Rigging by Consensus

Jonnalgadda, a small sleepy village on the Guntur-Nasaraopet road in Andhra Pradesh was strangely devoid of tension on the eve of the recent elections thanks to a compromise agreement between the rival political parties. The village has 2,900 voters including 1,000 Kammas, 200 Reddies, 500 Harijans, 200 Yadavas and others. There was tension initially as the rival groups, armed with country bombs, threatened to clash. Elders belonging to the Telugu Desam, the Congress(I) and the CPI intervened, sat in the village temple and helped arrive at a compromise after five hours of heated discussion on the night of November 21. It was finally agreed that the Telugu Desam should "poll" 1,900 votes and the Congress(I) 700 votes, leaving 300 votes uncast because 100 per cent polling would invite the suspicion of rigging.

Following the agreement, polling day dawned in an atmosphere of peace. When polling started at 8 a.m. both the parties went to the Presiding Officer and told him about their agreement. The officer looked out and found only one lathi-wielding constable on duty. He had no option but to "cooperate" with them. There was no need for voters to stand in queues. Five workers from each party took the signed ballot papers from the Presiding Officer and stamped them in his presence and stuffed them in the box until they reached their agreed number of votes. There was neither confusion nor hurry. At the end of it all, the Telugu Desam workers elbowed out Congress(I) men and cast the remaining 300 votes also in their own favour, making it a hundred per cent polling.

As the Congress(I) had polled 700 votes, they argued that even if a hundred per cent votes were polled it would not be called rigging. (According to the amended election law, rigging is presumed to have taken place if 90 per cent of the votes are cast in the booth and if one candidate gets 90 per cent of the votes, repoll is held.)

The Hindu, Dec.10

It can bring about a realignment of forces, open a new chapter in Centre-State relations, and most important of all make possible a new effort at solving the Punjab tangle and the communal impasse.

Rightly or wrongly, the Congress party and its leaders were held responsible for the humiliation of the Sikhs and the violation of the sanctity of the Golden

Temple. No solution seemed possible with the Congress in power. Even entering into negotiations with them was regarded sacrilegious. Therefore, a beginning can now be made with persons who have the goodwill of the Sikhs and who are in the Janata Dal. Such a solution will have to begin with the release of Sikh political detainees languishing in jail without trial; the rehabilitation of the victims of the 1984 riots and a serious effort to punish the guilty; the removal of formal or informal restrictions on the recruitment of Sikhs to the army and rebuilding Punjab's economy so as to provide greater avenues of employment and capital investment. All these, while insisting on an effective separation of religion and politics by all political parties.

An Agenda for the New Government

The larger communal situation also calls for a secular approach. Secularism has meant all things to all people. To some, it is another name for Hindu nationalism, while some see in it elements of appeasement of the minorities. While the Government should not interfere in religious freedom, it should not relinquish its responsibility for reordering social relations on the basis of equality and freedom from exploitation. Conceding the argument that social reform is the exclusive concern of the members of one community can be as dangerous as the demand for communal electorates. At the same time positive steps for equal opportunities for all and especially the minorities to participate in the economic and political life of the country are urgently needed.

Another important item on the agenda of the new government is charting a new course of development — a course which is marked by equity, help to the deprived, greater stress on self-reliance and ecological balance. This may not appear spectacular but will be of lasting benefit to the nation.

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Act as if the whole election depended on your single vote, and as if the whole Parliament (and therein the whole nation) on that person whom you now choose to be a member of it.

John Wesley

The National Front Government

— Will it Survive?

Aloo J. Dastur

Once again our people have established that the faith the Constituent Assembly reposed in their political maturity was justified. The vast majority is illiterate but by no means ignorant; it may be humble and quiescent but given the opportunity it asserts itself. It can sift the chaff from the wheat and this is precisely what the electorate has done this time.

It is a Prime Minister's privilege to call for an election at a time both convenient and propitious to his party. It must be owned, however, that for quite some time the leaders and spokesmen of the parties in opposition kept on needling him into it. They were also active otherwise; over a reasonable period of time they talked of permutations and combinations among themselves. Much of this in public view and hearing. This delighted the hearts of the ruling party — remember the fighting roosters, the scorpions, the serpents, the lions on the throne, which sought to make our hearts beat for India?

Early Elections not a Surprise

So when the election was announced it took none by surprise. The opposition wrangled a little more but a single political perspective emerged — the Congress must be defeated at the polls. For this, the first priority was to avoid multiple contests. This was achieved by and large, particularly in the north — the Hindi belt. The results are there for all to read. It was evident; through a distribution of seats that no single party of the opposition would or could get a working majority in parliament. So the next priority was self-generated. The parties of the right, the most prominent being the Bharatiya Janata Party, and parties of the left, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and Communist Party of India, even while sniping at each other read the writing on the wall. Neither tried to pull apart the centrist party, the National

Comparison with the Janata Party government of 1977 is not on the level. Then, political parties, bar the communists — who during the 'emergency' were on two different sides — had merged their identities. This time the Janata Dal is a cohesive unit supported by other, equally cohesive units. What brings them together is the urge to give the country a stable government informed with the desire to lessen the burdens and injustices people labour under

Front with the Janata Dal in the forefront. Without surrendering their professions and proclaimed principles, both the sides accepting the first priority opted for supporting the Janata Dal from outside. Nothing could have augured better for the immediate future.

The North-South divide is not something new in our electoral history. In 1964, although the Congress had a working majority in parliament, the northern states for a time witnessed coalition governments. Ten years later, the historic post-emergency election, 1977, also opted heavily for the Janata Party but in the north alone; the south was for the Congress. Indira Gandhi after her rejection in the north found a safe constituency in the South. So the ninth general election seen against this background should cause no worry.

Minority Government

What is worrisome is the so-called "hung" parliament and its aftermath. The single largest party, Congress(I), albeit in a minority, opted out of the government. The Janata Dal, the second largest party, put forth its claim to sit on the treasury benches. Is it courage, arrant optimism or foolhardiness? Perhaps lure of office? This is not the first time that a party in a minority constitutes the government. When the Congress split in 1969 Indira Gandhi's government functioned because the Communists supported it. Today the tables are reversed. The Janata Dal has the Communist parties as its staunch allies. Nothing has been heard or read of "conditional" support. Remember V.P. Singh's earlier statement — the left are our natural allies? Support, not wholly ungrudging or ungrudged, has been forthcoming from the BJP. It is this party which has benefited the maximum and is conscious of its role as a balancer. Political compulsions and arithmetic cannot but keep all the three parties on their toes and in their seats. And we must remember that the President has asked the Prime Minister to get a vote of confidence in the Lok Sabha. This is the Government's first assignment and in which it should cover itself with glory. The opposition can at best muster about 211 to 220 votes.



V.P. Singh

Learning from 1977

Comparison with the Janata Party of 1977 is not on the level. Then political parties, bar the Communists — who during the emergency were on two different sides — had merged their identities. This time the Janata Dal is a cohesive unit supported by other equally cohesive units. What brings them together is the urge to give the country a stable government informed with the desire to lessen the burdens and injustices people labour under. Such an adjustment is bound to have its constraints, one of which is very salutary — V.P. Singh's government cannot adopt policies or programmes which may go against theirs. But there is much, too much, on which there can be cooperation and collaboration. An agreed minimum programme is not difficult to chisel. The Prime Minister in his first national broadcast has listed the items; they can hardly be improved upon; they are so unexceptional. Experiences, especially of the recent past, appears to have sobered the hotheads and flamboyant in all parties. The voters also have humbled the two. Work, hard and sincere, is the call of the day.

V.P. Singh's ministry need not necessarily have to do tight-rope walking. With understanding between the three

parties on the basic issues and style of implementation the task of government is eased. The character and political integrity of their leadership have made a mark in hammering out unity of purpose and action. All the three know how delicate the situation in parliament is and are aware of the well-known *cliche* that they must hang together lest they hang separately.

Communalism for Political Gain

A nagging fear with every election is the appeal to communalism, if we relegate casteism to the background. As already stated a not so subtle appeal to cadge the Hindu vote was launched by the Congress before elections were called. Earlier in 1980 Mrs. Gandhi had sent Mr. Antulay to express her regrets to the Shahi Imam, Abdullah Bhukhari for the excesses near Jumma Masjid; that was to seek the Muslim vote which had been lost in 1977. So a communal division for electoral and ultimate political purposes. What is of greater importance is the rise of violence, mainly in hitherto Congress ruled states, leading to bloodshed. This is one of the priority areas which the government will have to tackle with imagination. Kudos to the Prime Minister for appointing Mufti Mohammed Sayeed as Home Minister. A deft move likely to yield dividends.

Pragmatism — Need of the Hour

There are some issues on which the three have widely different views — for instance the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid fued. Here the BJP has the main responsibility of offering a workable solution. The contribution of the BJP towards lessening of communal, mainly Hindu-Muslim, tensions can be substantial. The party has come a long way since its inception with hard attitudes and is, one hopes, striving to be pragmatic rather than dogmatic. So is it with the once hard-core ideologies of Marxism and Communism. *Glasnost* and *Perestroika* may not be quite so striking but they are evident. The Marxists, specially, have shown political sagacity and accommodation of a high order. The right and left, are not two grindstones crushing the Janata Dal; they are helpmates and co-workers. All the three have one common goal — the country and its people, their prosperity and progress. Herein lies the hope and the future.

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The North-South Divide

One wonders how the perceptions of the South and the North can be so diametrically opposed? Poll analysts and panelists on the Prannoy Roy election programmes, mentioned that the communal card of the Ayodhya and Ram Shila pujas had hurt the Congress with Hindus, simultaneously alienating Muslims, thereby pleasing neither. The South is certainly quite distant from Ayodhya, and while some Ram Shila pujas took place in the South they were few and of lesser impact than those in the North. Yet, the South is said to have some highly literate states. It was from the South that Mr. Ram and *The Hindu* broke the Bofors scoops, virtually, if not quite, leaving the last government with a "smoking gun".

Is the South, then, convinced that Bofors, Fairfax, Westland *et al* are figments of a writer's imagination? Or did

they react to scandals nearer home — from the arrack bottle case to the Revajetu land scam in Karnataka, and the perceived nepotism of NTR. *vis a vis* Chandranbabu Naidu and company? But even while conceding that the Chief Ministers of the South were not paragons of lily-white politics, their escapades were different not only in degree but in kind from those of which the Centre could be guilty.

There was also no question of national security involved. And yet, the South did not merely defeat the Janata Dal, Telugu Desam, the DMK and the LDF. It routed them. By installing huge Congress majorities in the Karnataka and Andhra Assemblies the South has also destroyed any check on the lumpen elements in the Party. These were very much in evidence when the Chief Minister of Karnataka was sworn in, pushing, jostling and nearly

making the dais collapse, for a closer proximity to the new power centre!

Since 1977, whether it has sided generally with the Congress or the Opposition, the see-saw of Congress victory in the North defeat in the south and vice versa, has usually seen the South lose out on big projects coming from Central funds. As it seems unlikely that this divide will ever give way to a reasonable balance of power, it would need a very sagacious government to give the South its legitimate devolution of finance and other projects. If, instead of punishing the South, the present government gives it honey rather than bitter medicine, it could win the South back, instead of leaving it outside the national mainstream.

Louella Lobo Prabhu

Of VIPs and their Soothsayers

It is natural that one should be curious about one's future. In fact, we know that Cheiro predicted to Radhakrishnan in Europe by examining his palm that he would occupy the highest position in his country and that during his last years he would be out of his mind. Both predictions turned true. What is not known is whether it was the philosopher who sought for this information from Cheiro.

Politicians in our land are naturally anxious about their political future. But the methods they resort to influence the likely course of events is to say the least most unedifying. This comes to the forefront during elections and during serious illnesses. It is well attested as to how one of the Congress high-ups collected blessed offerings from all the holy temples and offered them to Pandit Nehru when the Prime Minister was in his last days. As to what the Panditji did with them is anybody's guess. It is rumoured that Mrs. Annathurai used to regularly smear the forehead of the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister with holy ash — all to no avail. When MGR was taken ill, civil servants were not only given special casual leave to pray in temples to intercede with the Almighty on behalf of their beloved leader, but notice boards in government offices publicized this to those who might not be in the know.

The swamis and babas and lesser Viswamitras come into their own during elections. One of the newspapers reported that Shri T.N. Seshan had made arrangements with his retired brother Vaidyanathan at Madras (the metropolis of the still benighted State) to arrange with a holy man from Andhra to offer special prayers and conduct *Havans* in some of the hallowed spots of the South and East. This was not reported in other newspapers.

But other newspapers not only published a photograph but gave details of a

■ KESHAV/THE HINDU



COURTESY: The Hindu

highly educated westernized literator turned foreign secretary (who had met and conversed with all the mighty in the world of British culture and letters) pouring litres of valuable, consecrated cow's milk on a pile of cow-dung to symbolise Govardhan. Since he was seated in front of this stinking pile in an attitude of prayer along with his *sowbhagyavathi*, it surely was connected with some immediate returns, perhaps electoral or political. This much for our enlightened educated leaders.

Equally disgusting was the photo of Buta Singh being kicked on his head by a *Baba*. The voters electorally kicked him out of power. That the government should have built helipads to enable our ex-Prime Minister to make his visits to have a *darshan* of this calculating holy man is not something that is eloquent of his claim to take us to the 21st century. Said a report: 'Hundreds of labourers prepared three helipads through the night. Mr Gandhi came in the morning. With him were Narain Dutt Tiwari, Mr Balram Yadav, Mr Natwar Singh, and Mr Buta Singh a frequent visitor.'

Of course, the *Babas*, the shamans and the Viswamitras were not able to ensure the success of the political leaders who had occupied seats of power for too long a period to do them and the country any good.

One does not know whether they consulted astrologers but rumour has it that the release of the Congress Manifesto was delayed to coincide with an auspicious hour. The astrologers threw in their magical caps and offered their predictions and all of them were confident that the ruling party and Rajiv Gandhi would win elections. They were equally confident of the opposition doing badly.

K.K. Rao, described as 'the doyen of Delhi astrologers and one of the leading

scholars in the field of Fundamental Astrology (whatever it might mean) forecast that 'not only will she (Sonia Gandhi) stand for elections, but will win with a sizable majority.'

Three 'eminent' astrologers based in Delhi predicted that Rajiv would win elections with a considerable (to others a reduced) majority. One of these eminences felt that the date on which elections were held, November 22 was of special significance to Rajiv whose 'moon is in Leo. His ascendant is also in Leo and that means success and victory.' By contrast, 'V.P. Singh is not in a good position as there are signs that his partners will betray him.' Chandrasekhar it was predicted would not make the premiership. Ajit Singh will remain a backbencher though he would win his election. The same prophet saw Maneka not doing well. Her time has not come. She will have to wait a few more years.' NTR will be a *mandalapathi*. 'He will have fame, fortune and every likelihood of continuing as the Chairman of the National Front.' Another argued that he would win the elections but will have to take care of his health. Like Rajiv, another saw in NTR a leader who would benefit the party at the national level.

Interestingly, though L.K. Advani and A.B. Vajpayee would win the elections, 'their party will be isolated and its sphere of influence will decrease.'

In Uttar Pradesh they predicted the Congress(I) winning hands down and N.D. Tiwari being returned as Chief Minister. They also predicted the victory of Buta Singh and of Rajiv completing his second term as Prime Minister.

These predictions were made three weeks before the elections. Both *Babas* and astrologers have been proved wrong. It will do good for people to read of these soothsayers for what they really are and of their VIP clientele.

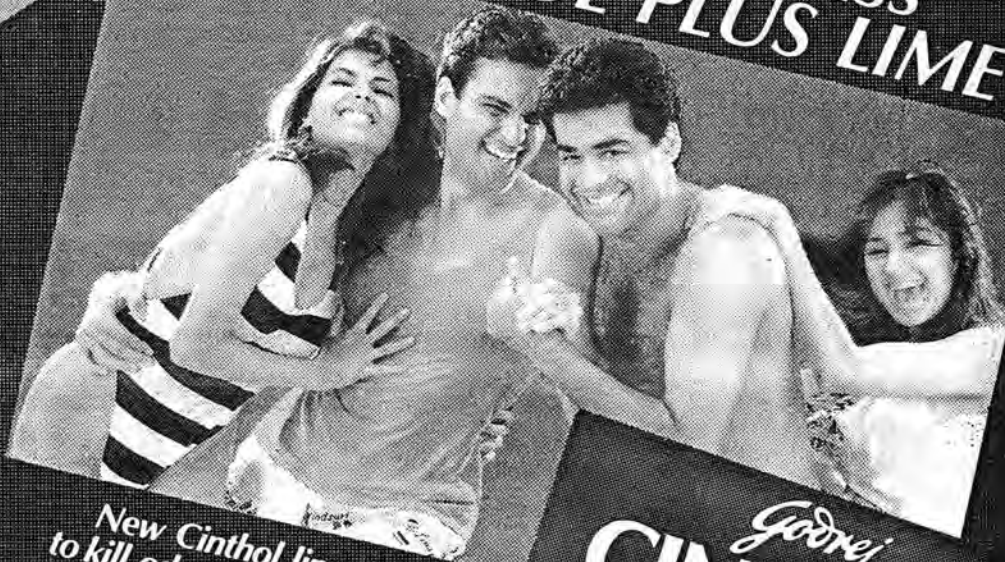
But human nature being what it is, one is certain that both these tribes of professional comforters will flourish well in the decades to come. Let us end with a prediction made in Bombay: V.P. Singh's cabinet will last for six months when a bloody civil disturbance will rock the country and with that will fall the ministry. Any takers?

R. Srinivasan

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Thoughts at the Demise of the Nehru Centenary Year

Mihir Sinha

Man proposes and history disposes. Gandhiji had perhaps thought in terms of dominion status. As such, Nehru was an ideal choice for the office of the Prime Minister. History intervened; India set the third world pattern of national freedom. Basic problems were swept under the thickening carpet of colourful platitudes and knotted up thoughts. Moreover, a dynastic throne was consciously set up on that dusty carpet, a practice followed in many Afro-Asian and in some East European countries.

Consolidating the Dynasty

In many people's perception, Shastri's stewardship, in spite of the Kamraj Plan, gave the nation its only fighting chance in its first four decades. But it ended in a tragic mystery. The dynasty resumed. The only time I met Indira Gandhi — at her home, thanks to Mukul Banerjee, — she was widely perceived to be a puppet in the hands of the 'Syndicate'. But I told my wife on my return from Delhi, that the lady was nobody's fool. She consolidated the dynasty, increasingly without the saving graces of Nehru. Democracy in all its aspects was swallowed up by autocracy.

People like Lohia fought a quixotic fight, though its sediment remains. JP gave the first real battle. But he was more of an idealist than a politician. However, many valuable lessons are to be learned from the ultimate, and, from hindsight, the inevitable defeat of his movement. A bit like the reformism of Khrushchev. The Indian people seem to have learned those lessons in their own way. Have the Janata Dal, the BJP, the CPI(M)?

Anyway, Indira Gandhi returned. With vengeance. Then, through three bloody mysteries, namely, the death of Sanjay Gandhi, the assassination of Indira Gandhi herself, and the Sikh pogrom, the dynasty continued. We have seen, but have been strangely averse to speak out, of the rape of democracy and of all ordinary human values. We are, right now, supposed to

Nehru the democrat would perhaps have been happy that in his centenary year the long contradiction between dynastic rule and democracy has got another chance to be resolved

feel a sneaking sympathy for Rajiv Gandhi. Pray, exactly why? Because he will no longer be able to use the Indian Navy itself for his private picnic? Or the brave Indian Army for his private purpose of providing a political diversion?

V.P. Singh — An Assessment

I for one, have written in admiration of V.P. Singh (VP) from his days as the Finance Minister. Unlike JP, he is a professional. I did have some misgiving during the tumultuous (last) days of President Zail Singh. The role of the Left was quite understandable. But was VP somewhat like Hamlet? Again on hindsight, the hard earned popular mandate has turned out to be a far wiser alternative. It is no coup. No 'palace revolution' derided by JP. The whole nation is in ferment today. Both the BJP and the Left have had to grow up, — largely under people's pressure. Let us hope that the elimination of historical irrelevants like Chandra Shekhar will be completed soon.

JP lent his glory to others. The rigidly principled Morarji was, unfortunately, never a people's man. VP, the proven administrator and bold innovator, still without any skeleton discovered in his cupboard, is the most popular politician today. Particularly among the jaded youth of Bengal. And to an observer like me, he has always played by the ear, as for instance, when he suddenly distanced himself from the BJP. Why? Please note the audience reaction in the Ramleela Maidan gathering on 3

December: the BJP leaders are less communal than the Congress leaders in practice, but their supporters are supportive for wrong reasons.

My only other serious misgiving was at VP's going to the three opposition camps instead of going to the people straightaway. His timing and aplomb at the Allahabad by-election proved how correct he was. He played, perforce, within the rules laid down by the dynasty. Yet erected a scale model of what was possible. And now he has come to the point from where he can change the rules of the game. A revolutionary change within a parliamentary setup, and that, on the basis of the largest open general election in human history is bound to be a long and painstaking process. And a total process too.

Good Beginning

But, belying the dark prophecy of Pritish Nandy, the new ruling power has already started delivering the goods: Note Rajmohan Gandhi's devastating interview on Doordarshan on 30 November, followed by the absolutely naked reportage of the Jethmalani fracas at Chandra Shekhar's place, and of the drama of the Janata Dal electing a leader. This preliminary exercise in transparency was capped with gusto — by telecasting Nalini Singh's short film on the indigenous industry of booth capturing. That was last night, 3 December.

Ours is a quiet neighbourhood. Jyoti Basu's house too is here. In the still night, I could hear the distant explosions of (home made) grenades. Nalini Singh's last words echoed in my mind. I also thought sceptical thoughts about the editor, a man of modest means, allegedly an ex-naxalite, a mere sports editor till the middle of 1986, who, in his espousal of the Opposition cause has outshouted the mouthpiece of the West Bengal CPI(M) itself, but who has suddenly found the means to buy a costly flat near this expansive locality. The poison has gone deep.

Without dismissing the urgent need for removing these micro-level contradictions, priority will naturally go to macro-level contradictions. Chauthala's dynastic succession in Haryana, for example, seems to be the first big blot on the record of the new regime. The conflicting parliamentary compulsions before the BJP and the Left are, on the other hand, quite understandable. But they must also keep in mind the crucial

role played by VP in first ending the dynastic rule. If the boat is rocked, people's frustration will again accumulate. And, given half a chance, will again manifest itself.

Gandhiji had wanted a structural change in the system of political parties. He was ignored. He himself founded no dynasty. He was not emulated.

The Congress has been the mere vehicle for a dynasty. Nehru the democrat would perhaps have been happy, in a way, that in his centenary year the long contradiction between dynastic rule and democracy has got another chance to be resolved.

MR. MIHIR SINHA is a journalist based in Calcutta.

Hung Parliament

Students of British history will be familiar with the phrases Addled Parliament, Barebone's Parliament, Drunken Parliament, Good Parliament, Little Parliament, Long Parliament, Mad Parliament and Pensioner Parliament. There were also a Parliament of Dunces. The Parliament of Charles I that lasted from June 18 to August 12 1625 was called the Useless Parliament.

Each of these parliaments refers to a specific parliament. The Addled Parliament of 1614 was dissolved without rati-

fying a single Act; the Mad Parliament met in 1258 to pass the Provisions of Oxford. The Drunken Parliament was a Scottish Parliament that met after the Restoration of January 1, 1661. Pensioner Parliament was the nickname given to the Long Parliament of Charles II which lasted for quite sometime.

But the phrase *Hung* Parliament does not seem to have had such venerable history. It does not figure in any of the treatises on Parliament. It obviously is derived (as a friend suggests) from the

phrase Hung jury i.e. a jury that is unable to agree. American in usage, it seems to have been current from the 17th century.

We have had to wait till the '70s for the phrase 'Hung Parliament'. The *Economist* of 3 August 1974, wrote: "This Parliament has been called many names: the hung, the cynical, the shiftless, the cowed". No political party has an overall majority in such a parliament. Some members perhaps will prefer the last three in the quotation as proper words to describe our present parliament."

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A Temple Town Goes to the Polls

Prema Nandakumar

The pre-dawn hours of 21 November brought some nervousness as the ten feet high statue of Nehru in the National College Higher Secondary School was blasted to smithereens by a time-bomb

SRIRANGAM: We had had a surfeit of electoral noise and confrontation only ten months earlier and hence the announcement of the Lok Sabha poll (though not quite unexpected) received only a wan reaction. The blarings of mikes, street-corner meetings, waiting for Janaki Ramchandran's motorcade at midday, for Jayalalitha's cavalcade at midnight, for M. Karunanidhi's convoy in twilight: aren't we going to have a replay of the scenario?

"Freshly Harvested Paddy"

Surprisingly enough, this was not so; for one thing, the Congress(I) and the AIADMK (which is Jayalalitha) had struck a deal and hence that camp could afford to be complacent. Again, as the Tiruchi parliamentary seat (of which Srirangam is a segment) was allotted to the CPI(M), the DMK had no personal confrontation with its arch-enemy. Hence, no poster-war, no battle for blank walls, no garish paintings. Besides, the DMK may not have liked to antagonise the Congress(I) by a bitter mike-war as M. Karunanidhi had always avoided confrontation with the Centre (which has been Rajiv). As one who has watched several Lok Sabha elections in two states, I found this almost a non-event as far as publicity blitz goes.

But one could not get away from the background realities. Tiruchi had voted Mr. L. Adakkalaraj (who owns a brewery) into the eighth Lok Sabha as a Congress(I) candidate (of a Party that is dedicated to the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi including Prohibition, I presume) with a convincing margin. He had polled 3,37,786 votes against the DMK candidate's 2,34,881 in 1984. At that time also the Congress(I) was partnered by the AIADMK. A living M.G. Ramachandran was then the magic wand for the Congress(I). Now, the

extra-impulsion for the AIADMK's charge came from the possibility of returning to power in the State. For, when the seat adjustments were made in October it was understood as a 'deal' by poll-watchers. Rajiv would dismiss the DMK once he returned to power (of this not many in the State had any doubt, come Bofors or HDW submarines) and help Jayalalitha become the crowned queen of Tamil Nadu politics. This propaganda led by Jayalalitha's strident demand for a change in Tamil Nadu (despite the fact that the duly elected Government was just ten months old) could not be ignored by the DMK and Karunanidhi's usual metaphorical brilliance warned the DMK workers: "This DMK Government is like freshly harvested paddy gathered in the field. You have to be vigilant lest it is stolen".

A Low Key Campaign

Numerous schemes had already been launched with an eye on the Lok Sabha elections. For instance, on 8th October, schemes to the tune of Rs. 10 crores were inaugurated at Virudunagar by the Chief Minister. There were the free rice, free clothes bonanzas too. And gifts of Rs. 5000 for poor girls who wish to get married and so on. After the announcement of the elections, there

were more promises strewn with a prodigal hand all over Tamil Nadu. Minister Duraimurugan announced on 18 November at Tiruppattur that meat and tonic will be added to eggs in the mid-day meal and said: "This is not an election stunt." Methought the Lord protested too much!

The actual campaign wasn't much. The Congress(I)'s style was aristocratic except in the large cut-outs when at the feet of a bigger-than-life-size Jayalalitha, L. Adakkalaraj's name was printed, symbolising as it were the *saranagati tattva* (total surrender) of Srivaishnavism. For the rest, Rajiv Gandhi breezed in and out of Tiruchi for an hour. The candidate went round the Srirangam roads quickly in a convoy of cars decorated with flowers, flags and festoons. There was door-to-door 'hello' by the Congress(I) representatives but this was mostly a silent handing over of the booth slips with the ubiquitous hand symbol. They were impatient with questions when asked about Bofors and turned away with a shrug: "Venumana suthiyalukku pottukka. Namakku vendiyadhu irukku (if you wish so, vote for the hammer. We have enough)". Of what use blaming these canvassers who were most of them doing the job for a day's pay? The CPI(M) candidate, T.K. Rangarajan depended entirely on door-to-door canvassing. The canvassers who seemed definitely involved sought to elicit voters' sympathy by pointing out that TKR is poor, is a dedicated worker for the cause of the downtrodden and is easily accessible. There was also the invariable hint: "TKR is a Brahmin". An understandable hint in Srirangam where there is a sizeable number of Brahmins.

Neither of the canvassing teams was equipped with the ideological back-



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WEALTH OR EVEN OF
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CHARACTER”*

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ground of their respective parties. As for rising prices, neither would accept the blame. The irregular and inadequate supply of kerosene and rice, the high price of rice and sugar in the open market and the non-availability of palmolein oil for cardholders had been generating a lot of frustration and the last minute release of one litre of palmolein could not but gain a derisive epithet or two from harried householders.

The Fear of Balkanization

Apart from such local issues that were uppermost in the voter's mind there was a fear that began to take *viswarupa* (universal form) as the days went by. The conservative electorate of Srirangam is mortally afraid of an unstable Centre; and the Centre's stability is always associated with the names of Gandhi and Nehru. The line of succession of the Nehru family with the name of Gandhi is equated with a strong Centre, and criticism of "the dynastic rule" does not evoke any horror. The Rediffusion message, 'En nadi thudipellam Indiya nalanukke' (my pulse beat is only for India's good) showing a self-divided India coupled with the memory of the early days of the Dravidian Movement suggesting separatism jumbled images in the voter's psyche. Yes, there are everyday irritations, but India must not be allowed to disintegrate!

Did the voter prefer the Congress(I) candidate to the CPI(M) comrade? It is hard to say. If the sitting MP was criticised, the voter's response was: "Well, who doesn't eat when in power? They all make money. They are all the same. At least he belongs to the *tyagigal* (those who sacrificed in the freedom struggle) party". A party of people who sacrificed themselves to the country? Of course, was the spontaneous reply of a retired teacher who then launched into a remembrance of things past featuring Mahatma Gandhi, C. Rajagopalachari, S. Satyamurti and T.S.S. Rajan. The tricolour will never fail us!

Thus it seemed that the Congress(I) was placed in a very strong position. The pre-dawn hours of 21 November, however, brought some nervousness as the ten feet high statue of Nehru in the National College Higher Secondary School was blasted to smithereens by a time-bomb. The statue had been unveiled only on 5 September by the President R. Venkataraman to mark

Nehru's birth centenary. There was immediately a spate of speculations. Who was behind the blast? Sri Lanka's LTTE? Local Naxalites? A calculated blast by a desperate contender to frighten the voter? Or cash in on a 'sympathy wave'? The mystery found no solution but the last three days had a touch of uneasiness. Would there be violence on polling day?

Very recently the Neelan chariot carrying consecrated bricks for Ayo-dhya had received an enthusiastic welcome at Tiruchi on 13 November and had gone through Muslim-dominated areas without any problem. But on the 19th the chariot had been detained in Madras and prevented from moving forward by the police. This news had its own fall-out too and there was muted resentment at the way the State Government had acted, and a candidate of the CPI(M) could not gain in spite of being a Hindu Brahmin.

Polling Day

The Tiruchi seat has an electorate of 10,51,908 spread over the Assembly segments of Srirangam, Tiruchi-I, Tiruchi-II, Tiruverumbur, Lalgudi and Musiri. The last two are rural, Tiruchi I and II are urban and Srirangam is semi-urban. Come voting day on 24th, 1,142 booths came to life all over the Tiruchi seat.

In Srirangam the several schools came in handy. Though my own booth was located elsewhere, I could watch one (Booth No. 42) across the road. I found women to be more enthusiastic and they were generally for 'Rettaillai' (Twin Leaf) and they could not easily understand why that symbol will not be on the ballot paper. There was brisk polling in the morning. Autorickshaws sporting the Hand and the picture of Rajiv Gandhi plied blithely bringing in voters (TNP 5149, 4075, 9122 were some the number plates) upto the booth-step but nobody seemed to care. By 12 noon the booth was deserted. It was the same in Booth No. 40 where I exercised my franchise. The guards outside relaxed in rickety chairs and yawned.

The only booth that seems to have witnessed a flutter was located in the Boy's High School. The sitting Janata Dal MLA, Y. Venkateswara Dikshitar had discovered that the ballot papers had been stamped on the reverse mak-

Madurai, November 24, 1989:

A man who could not persuade his wife to vote for the party of his choice, threw his infant son into a sewer running nearby.

"The police said the man, a DMK sympathiser, lost his temper when his wife, who wanted to vote for the Congress, refused to change her mind even after half an hour persuasion. He picked up the child, who was standing nearby, and threw him into the sewer.

"The people of the area took the child and bathed it".

The Times of India, November 25, 1989

ing it appear as if the 'Hand' should receive the voter's assent. The presiding officer apologised and promised to see that they were more careful in the future. But the damage had been done. There were whispers in the evening in the temple corridors, in the street corners, at the vegetable market: "You known what happened? Our Dikshitar found out ..." What else did you expect? Pana balam pesukirathu (the power of money talks)". "But who would like to lose after spending so much?" The voices are now barely audible. "My tailor says they were all given ... rupees each. Ezhaikki kasakkuma (will it be bitter to a poor man?)"

The ballot paper gave pride of place to L. Adaikkalaraj (some alphabetical luck, that) who was followed by ten contestants. Apart from the CPI(M), the Janata Party and the Pattali Makkal Katchi were represented. The rest were independents. The symbols, gave varied fare: hand, horse, ladder, clock, peacock, lion, elephant, balance, bow and arrow, hammer-sickle-star, farmer-in-circle. The lone lady R. Baghyam belonged to the newly floated Pattali Makkal Katchi.

The electorate came out the victor in this battle of the ballot. There was a 70.9% turnout. With enviable maturity of mind, they simply brushed aside the independents. The Congress(I) polled 4,29,185 against the CPI(M)'s 2,59,219. The great day was over. By the evening of 26th one could hear bursts of crackers. As we looked forward to a colourful, crackers-bursting spree leading victory processions the next day, the sounds grew fainter. The Lok Sabha results had cancelled the State-level euphoria. And we returned to the problems of the common day.

DR. (MRS) PREMA NANDAKUMAR is a freelance journalist and a resident of Srirangam, a temple town in Tamil Nadu.



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Dakshina Kannada Votes

Louella Lobo Prabhu

After two minor liaisons with the Opposition, at the Assembly level, the Dakshina Kannada district stayed firmly wedded to the Congress. I have been unable to answer why. What does it take to change such blind faith — even in 'the God that failed'?

Dakshina Kannada, the beautiful cosmopolitan west coast district of Karnataka, with its extraordinarily high percentage of literacy, is not a constituency typical of India. However, at least in some respects, some features of the recent poll may serve either to confirm or contradict national trends.

Old Wine in Old Bottle

Karnataka was one of the States having simultaneous polls for the Lok Sabha and the State Assembly, but the Congress opted for old wine in old bottles with the choice of its sitting MPs, and most MLAs. The first two were Messers. Janardhan Poojary and Oscar Fernandes, who now appear invincible giants. This is an old phenomenon in politics. When Mr. Poojary first stood, a headline shrieked "Who is Mr. Poojary?" He has, since then, become the loan-mela messiah of the masses. Mr. Fernandes, originally an agriculturist graduating to the small-scale manufacture of plastics, is nonetheless now regarded by Mr. Rajiv Gandhi as a miracle man!

Lacklustre Hopefuls

In one of the slightly more sophisticated news bulletins which have come out after Karan Thapar became associated with Doordarshan, it was stated that the qualifications of candidates stood higher than ever before. Nevertheless, quite a few candidates, here, were just about matriculates; one independent coyly claimed "upto B.A.". Briefless lawyers (originally), were the best qualified, in terms of educational credentials.

Independants

These were a colorful tribe — at any rate they had a high opinion of themselves! One independent, a dissident Congress candidate saw me the day after the election calendar opened. It



was 4 p.m. in the afternoon. The lady was made up as if for the *Muhurat* of a Hindi movie, eyebrows shaven and pencilled *a la* Marlene Dietrich; she wore a shiny black and silver saree straight from the supermarkets of Hong Kong. Her blouse was a mere strip of cloth with generous portions of anatomy showing between it and her "hipster" saree! The lady was obviously cashing in on the belief, that current politics have rendered the staid khadi look archaic, and the filmi look "in". Her dissidence was based on the failure of the Congress to honour its commitment of a 30% reservation for women in its selection of candidates. She felt confident of beating Union Minister Janardhan Poojary — but was vague about the size of her parliamentary constituency! Indeed, the poll campaign she fashioned appeared to equate Hampankatta, the heart of Mangalore Assembly constituency, with the whole of Mangalore Parliamentary constituency, an area stretching up to Coorg, almost a distance of 167 kilometers! Her English slogans took the form of hilarious doggerel.

Campaigning

Campaigning was surprisingly dull. Only the Congress and the BJP gave out voting slips, testifying, no doubt, to the money-power of the first, and the cadres of the latter. The Prime Minister and Mr. Ramakrishna Hegde, had addressed large meetings about two months before the elections. Mr. Hegde briefly passed through interior areas of the district, while the PM made a brief stopover in Udupi, *en route* to Cochin. I happened to be sitting in the office of a local administrative functionary, when an Executive Engineer and a full team from Bangalore, came in by car to inspect the kitchen of the Circuit House and the local five-star hotel, which would possibly have to keep aerated drinks and coffee ready on standby for the 'royal' entourage!

Raison d'etre of Voting?

Curiously, though Mangalore is one of the most literate constituencies in India, a socialite at a party I attended on the eve of the election, said she would vote for whichever candidate called on her personally! Another wanted to vote for the Janata Party (JP) candidate who did visit her home. However, as she forgot his symbol she voted for the "Dal" instead. The fact is, that in an election dominated by vernacular literature, English-educated people are often illiterates, who have to vote by the symbol, much like the most unlettered peasant in the most backward part of India!

No Proper Propaganda

Campaign material was woefully poor. For the urban elite, the only knowledge of the candidates in the fray was through short profiles, in a small, recently-started English daily from Mangalore. Material distributed with the voting slips, was in Kannada. Apart

from the old-wine-in-old bottle Congress candidates, even the names of other Party candidates standing, were not widely known.

Polling Day

In Milagres, the booth where I voted (a stronghold of the affluent and the elite) no Party-transport was to be seen on the roads. Voters were very well dressed — teenagers, particularly, decked as if for a party. One policeman, of the sort who loves to throw his weight around, bustled about, ordering us to stand in a single file. (There was one anyway, though a winding one!) Comic relief was provided by the dyed brown hair of an independent candidate, who, despite having withdrawn, ostentatiously paraded the booth, obviously craving for recognition. She rated

a few sniggers of amusement and amazement — for her temerity in standing at all! On the brighter side, again, the presiding officer was very courteous — and very correct. When I mentioned that my 84 year old husband had been waiting to vote for 45 minutes, and was overtired, he invited him to sit inside, but made him vote, only when the queue reached the place where he had been standing. It was hard to think of such concern in the North, under conditions here, of what the French would call *"tres politesse."*

Results

The Congress swept the Parliamentary, as also the Assembly seats, though in some of the latter, with precarious margins. Despite its profile as a highly literate constituency, (where

people should have a perception of public affairs and democratic norms), the Dakshina Kannada district, after two minor liaisons with the Opposition at Assembly level (1967-1983) stayed firmly wedded to the Congress. Even as an analyst, I have been unable to answer why. Perhaps it is largely, because this district has an unusual concentration of Christians and Muslims. Rightly or wrongly they look upon the Congress as a sheet anchor of secularism. What does it take to change such blind faith — even in "The God That Failed"?

MRS. LOUELLA LOBO PRABHU is a regular contributor to *Freedom First* and Associate Editor of *Insight*.

A Rejection of Marxism and a Vote for Stability

Babu Joseph

The 9th elections to the Lok Sabha were of special significance to me in many ways. Having been in active politics for over 26 years and now out of it, for the first time I could view the elections and the goings on with a detached mind and as dispassionately as possible, thanks to the religious conversion experience I had had in early 1986. Ever since that experience I started on my journey from liberal democracy to spiritual humanism. Since then I am of the strong view that fundamental religious values should form the bed-rock of any democratic polity without which democracy becomes mobocracy.

'Rajiv Hatao'

It is in this background I would like to view the election results. At the national level the choice offered to the voter was the Congress(I) headed by the erstwhile Prime Minister Mr. Rajiv Gandhi and the National Front headed by its architect Mr. V.P. Singh in electoral 'understanding' with the BJP on the one hand and CPM on the other. For Rajiv Gandhi it was clearly a referendum on his rule or mis-rule for the last five years. For the opposition it was "Rajiv Hatao" instead of "Indira Hatao". The only lesson the opposition seemed to have learnt from the past was a realisa-

tion that a one-to-one contest, atleast in a majority of the constituencies in Northern India, would be to their advantage. Projecting a leader or future prime minister and placing a minimum programme before the electorate was not their cup of tea.

Under such circumstances what mattered for both contestants was the arithmetic of election victory and the acquisition of power by hook or by crook. Money and muscle power was let loose and quite a few hundred killed or injured besides large scale rigging and booth capturing in different parts of the country. Probably as *Time* magazine has rightly pointed out the 9th Parliamentary election were the most valueless and bloodiest of all the elections held in Independent India. Even after the elections and a new government had taken over the reins of power nobody seems to be bothered about the levels to which our polity had plummeted.

The 'Stability' Factor in Kerala

Coming to the Kerala scenario, the choice was between the Congress(I) and a non-performing Stalinist Left Democratic Front government, led by the CPI(M). There was not even the remotest possibility of marxists coming

to power at the Centre. What the people in Kerala wanted was a stable government at the Centre and Rajiv Gandhi symbolised that stability to us whatever the word 'stability' meant. V.P. Singh and his National Front were an unknown quantity to the average voter in Kerala. Hence along with millions of other democratic minded voters I too had cast a negative vote in favour of Rajiv while wishing V.P. Singh all the best. Between Rajiv Gandhi and the Stalinist marxists who had ruined the economy of Kerala in the past by their acts of commission and omission we preferred the former and a mere 5% swing in favour of Rajiv made possible the miracle of the Congress(I) winning 17 out of 20 seats it contested. It was clearly a negative vote against the non-performing Left Democratic Front headed by outdated stalinist marxists.

Now Mr. V.P. Singh has taken over. His initial steps have been imaginative and bold. We all wish him well. He has to perform a lot of tight rope walking between the BJP and CPI(M). Will he shirk imaginative and bold decisions to cling to power? Will the BJP feel happy to support a government without them for long? Let us wait and see.

MR. BABU JOSEPH is a leader of the Christian Liberation Front in Kerala

What, No Bofors Today?

Geeta Doctor

It was the rising cost of ordinary items, like rice, sugar, vegetable oil, milk and tea, that swung the vote in favour of Bofors. As far as the ordinary voter was concerned the Congress slogan should have been: "We'll put a Bofors in every pot — or pocket."

For the people of Tamil Nadu, the '89 Election was a non-event.

In the aftermath of "the verdict" people have remarked on the immense sagacity of the Southerners. They voted for a strong Centre. Others less sympathetic have shrugged the South off, saying that the South has always been stupid, the Southies can't hate properly, never having suffered as the North has, the horrors of Partition. They just don't understand issues like corruption, or communalism, or concepts like democracy. Their minds have been white washed through the centuries. They eat curd-rice, which is white, they listen to politicians dressed in white, ideally, starched *khadi*, with a towel over the shoulder *a la* Kamraj, and worship deities who are light complexioned, if not porcelain white, like the amazing Jayalalitha. She personified all these three attributes, looking well fed in a curd-rice way, dressing, in her poster pictures at least, in a white sari with a small border, and appearing within the circle of her hefty, dark skinned bodyguards like a latter day Gajalakshmi, Goddess of fortune surrounded by elephants.

Not Much Enthusiasm

When Rajiv appeared on the scene flanked by the ever smiling Vijayanthimala Bali, the scene was like any one of the thousands of calendars that hang in every home, shop or office, a bewitching, flower bedecked, pink cheeked stereotype of the Aryan ideal that has mesmerized the Dravidian mind through endless incarnations. No one expects gods or goddesses to actually come down to earth and enquire about the price of kerosene, after all they have been non-performers for as long as people can remember.

So why on earth should mere politicians be expected to indulge in miracles. They have just to "be".

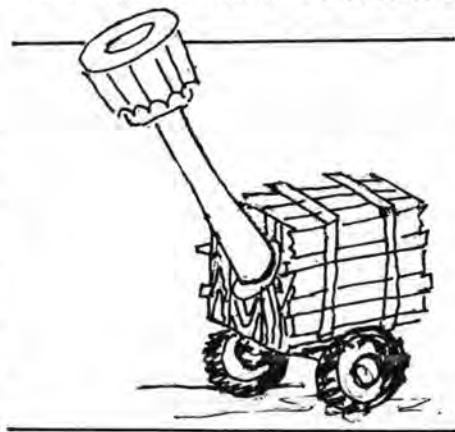
And so it was. Neither the DMK, who have more and enough to do with the running of the State, nor the Congress(I) and its associate, the Jayalalitha dominated AIADMK, pretended for one moment that the elections were going to be anything more than a matter of form. The Congress(I) were merely better organised. There were hundreds of new jeeps at their disposal, millions of posters, plenty of portable mikes available to the soap box orators who had a field day in pointing out the defects of the ruling party in the State, and guest appearances by Rajiv Gandhi in all the remoter districts of Tamil Nadu, where the countryside itself looks benign after the good rains this year. But there was no excitement, not even one mass rally, let alone the cycle parades and truck loads from the "mofussil" that the DMK were able to mobilise in the past. The only extravagance the DMK allowed itself was the use of illuminated symbols at night. Their "Rising Sun" sign was pin-pointed in tiny light bulbs of red and white, that looked like stars and

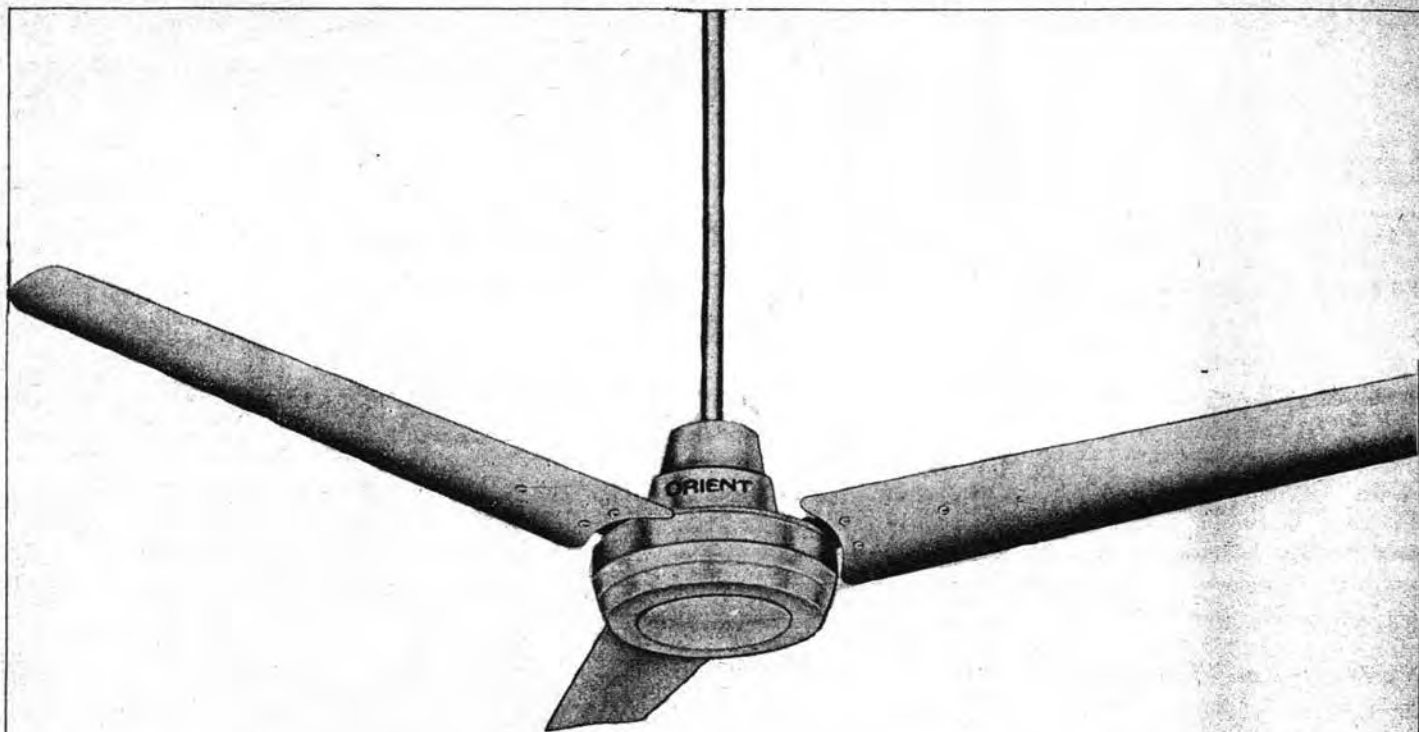
which transformed Mount Road into Oxford Street at Christmas.

The Rejection of Independents

To be sure there were some independent candidates who made a brave attempt to concentrate on issues. A.P. Venkateswaran cast himself as the intelligent voter's only choice, with a gutsy campaign that included posters, auto-rickshaw campaigners and ads. in the press. He even introduced a wry philosophic note when he explained, at least to one interlocutor, why he had decided to stand. The aim of every good Hindu, he said was to be completely free of ego. When he was dropped from his post as Foreign Secretary he lost 40% of his ego. If he lost his candidature he would lose the rest of it and then at last he would have the satisfaction of having become a good Hindu.

At least he fared better than another candidate in the same constituency, C.V. Seshadri, who campaigned on behalf of the scientific community. A charming eccentric, who designs windmills along with fibre glass catamarans, for the fisherfolk who have been curiously disinclined to accept them, he hoped on winning their support. His candidature raised a number of questions about our system which perhaps deserve to be debated. The main question is of course the perennial one of money. How can an independent candidate hope to stand for election without funds. On an earlier occasion Rajmohan Gandhi had wondered aloud whether it would not be possible to allocate funds to the different parties based on some mutually agreed formula. But where does one draw the line? Seshadri pointed out that even the deposit that an independent has to pledge, is





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beyond the means of most of them, but regardless of that the electoral process has to allot a symbol and print thousands of ballot papers, that are now so long that they have to be folded up like grass mats. Should candidates be allowed equal time on TV and should the print media allocate newsprint to every independent candidate? As it so happens Seshadri was sent back to tilt at his own private windmills. If there was one lesson that this election underlined, it was that the independent candidate is wasting his time and other people's money. People vote for the party right or wrong.

The Issues that Mattered

There is no doubt either that the Hindi belt giants did not even attempt to woo the sceptical Tamil voter. The DMK to their credit, having stated their clear opposition to the imposition of

Hindi and their aversion to, or at least avoidance of religion as an issue, did not renege to accommodate the views of their National Front partners. The great controversies, the Ram-Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid question, or the Save the Sati campaign, or the tragedy of the Punjab did not figure as an issue at all. While there is so much relief that the wretched Sri Lankans are slanging it out between themselves, instead of squabbling in Tamil Nadu, that any initiative to keep them away is seen as a positive sign, even though no self respecting politician would ever be able to say that.

The only bit of fun in the DMK campaign consisted in the mounting of models of the Bofors gun at strategic points in the City. The ingenuity of the Indian mind in using waste material to good effect is truly admirable. With two or three used wooden fruit crates, a

length of PVC tubing, two old autorickshaw tyres and some camouflage paint, several guns of Bofors-type design were on display. The word Bofors itself has become a part of the lingo. At the Secretariat, where helpful touts lead you through a maze of corridors towards a minister or an official, the normal demand for a tip is made with a gracious request for "tea money". Now the etiquette is to say, "What Madame, no Bofors today?" It was the rising cost of ordinary items, like rice, sugar, vegetable oil, milk and tea, that had swung the vote in favour of Bofors. As far as the ordinary voter was concerned the Congress slogan should have been, "We'll put a Bofors in every pot — or pocket."

MRS. GEETA DOCTOR is Contributing Editor, *Freedom First*

The Elections in Maharashtra — Inroads into a Congress Citadel

Nitin G. Raut

The Congress policy of pandering to Muslim communalism for electoral gain rather than ensuring the long term welfare of Muslims was carried too far. Otherwise, why would the Hindu vote which was never an electoral factor in Maharashtra for the last forty two years suddenly become such a potent election weapon?

The ninth Parliamentary Elections have seen a drastic change in the political scenario of Maharashtra — long considered an impregnable bastion of the Congress. Strange as it may sound, Maharashtra, the birth place of Hindu nationalism which provided leadership to the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS has, so far, reposed implicit faith in the Congress Party. The dominant Marathas, who from the early 1960s built a network of cooperative institutions comprising cooperative sugar factories and banks, had developed a political vested interest in it which was best served by the Congress Party. Except in 1959 during the Samyukta Maharashtra movement and in 1977 during the Janata sweep, the Congress has romped home with majestic disdain for the splintered opposition. The state opposition tenuously clung to isolated pockets of influence attributable more to the political personalities concerned.

Congress Stronghold

In the November elections the Bharatiya Janata Party — Shiv Sena (BJP-SS) combine looked a puny David facing the Congress Goliath. The impact of the combine on Maharashtra was a matter for speculation. Its plank — the Hindu vote — had never been an electoral factor in previous elections.

Opposition Mainly Leftist

In the past, the opposition, however feeble, was provided largely by leftist parties like the Peasants and Workers Party, the Samyukta Socialist Party, the Praja Socialist Party and The Communist Party of India. Here again these parties revolved around personalities. If names like S.M. Joshi, Madhu Limaye, and George Fernandes were synonymous with the SSP, N.G. Goray, Madhu Dandavate and Nath Pai personified the PSP. Even the CPI depended more on the Sovietophile S.A. Dange. Per-

haps, only the PWP could boast of an organisational base in the Konkan and in districts like Kolhapur and Parbhani. The 'Right' in Maharashtra was a non-entity. The Swatantra Party remained a paper organisation although the bulk of its leadership came from Bombay. The Maratha aristocracy refused to hitch its bandwagon to the 'Swatantra Star'. Even the erstwhile Jana Sangh with the organisational backing of the RSS found that at best it could come second (behind the Congress) in some of its 'strongholds'. Its strength seldom touched double digits in the 288 strong Maharashtra Assembly. As such, Maharashtra remained a Congress bastion.

The BJP-SS Combine

It was against this political background that the emergence of the BJP-SS combine in Maharashtra must be viewed. Having never tested their strength after the 1984 poll debacle in

Bombay, parties like the Janata Dal were in no mood to have an electoral understanding with the combine even if it meant triangular contests to the advantage of the Congress. The fear that the 'stigma' of Hindu 'communalism' would rub off on the Janata Dal and its left allies and thereby alienate the muslim vote made an electoral understanding impossible. State Janata Dal Chief Mrinal Gore's insistence that the combine should not be touched with a barge pole scuttled any lingering hope of limiting multi-cornered contests.

The poll results showed the combine emerge with spectacular success. It bagged fourteen seats — ten by the BJP and four by the Shiv Sena. The BJP polled 23.69% of the votes and the Shiv Sena 4.43%. In the Congress strongholds of Vidarbha and Marathwada the combine bagged five and six seats respectively. It emerged second in as many as fifteen other parliamentary constituencies. In pure arithmetical terms the present performance means that the combine is capable of bagging 120 to 140 of the 288 assembly seats in the State Assembly.

Historically speaking, 300 years ago,

Shivaji challenged the might of the Moghul empire and heralded its downfall with the battle cry of '*Hindavi Swaraj*'. Historians consider this a glorious chapter in Indian history. The glorification of Shivaji (Congress included) and its emotional appeal played an important role in galvanising the Hindu vote in rural Maharashtra in favour of the combine.

Beginning of Congress Decline

The exit of Sharad Pawar the present Congress(I) Chief Minister from the Opposition camp had created a void in the ranks of Maharashtra's opposition parties. The BJP-SS combine with its strident pro-Hindu stance struck the right chord in the minds of the electorate. An electorate looking for a strong opposition found the combine bandwagon a vehicle to jump on to. The BJP-SS thus projected itself not only as a strong opposition in Maharashtra but also as a viable alternative capable of taking on the Congress in the state.

The Congress policy of pandering to Muslim communalism for electoral gains rather than ensuring the long term welfare of Muslims, as also its

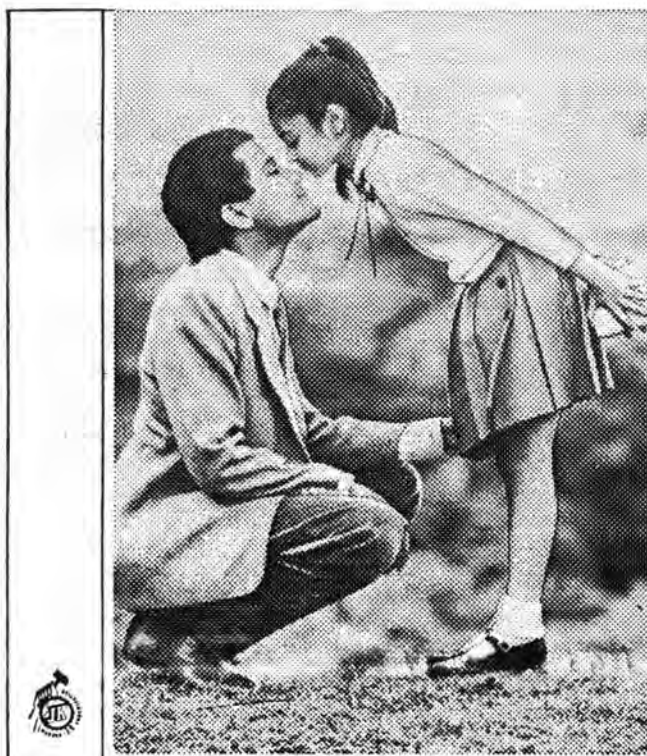
open alignment with obscurantist Muslim leaders like Syed Sahabuddin and parties like the Muslim League was carried too far. Otherwise, why would the Hindu vote which was never an electoral factor in the last forty two years suddenly become such a potent election weapon?

Assembly Elections — The Acid Test

Maharashtra which was considered a 'safe' State for the Congress does not appear to be so any more. While the Janata Dal swept the North and the Congress triumphed in the South, Maharashtra stood at the crossroads giving the Congress a majority of seats (28 out of 48) even while beckoning the opposition with the remaining seats.

The forthcoming Assembly election will show whether the phenomenon of regional parties gaining dominance in the States, spares Maharashtra or sweeps it. If the combine sweeps again it will not be Maharashtra but the nation that will be at the crossroads.

MR. NITIN G. RAUT is a lawyer and a member of the Editorial Board of *Freedom First*



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An Independent's Campaign

— An Experiment with Truth

Arvind A. Deshpande

What is truth, asked the jesting Pilate and would not wait for an answer. Those of us who mooted the idea of sending a few Independents to the Lok Sabha, irrespective of political parties' support got the answer to that question the hard way.

Why Independent Candidates?

We had a meeting some time in June last year, in which Mr. Minoo Masani, Lt. Gen. S.K. Sinha, Mr Madhu Mehta and others participated. It was anticipated even at that time that the 1989 elections to parliament would usher in political instability, because there wasn't much hope for the Congress(I). While the Opposition would benefit by the negative vote (against the Congress) it would not inspire such faith amongst our people as to get an absolute majority. It was thought that while it would be impossible to change things drastically we could try and change the profile of the Lok Sabha by putting up as Independents, five or six men of integrity and rational outlook who would provide the contrast and raise the level of debate.

Eventually, of the five or six persons suggested Lt. Gen. Sinha and Prof. P. G. Mavlinkar kept out as the opposition parties refused to support their candidature; one joined the Janata Dal and fought on its ticket and lost and Mr. A.P. Venkateswaran, the former Foreign Secretary, decided to stand even after being ditched by the DMK. In Bombay, Mr. Madhu Mehta was persuaded to stand, though the opposition had put up two candidates, against Mr. Murli Deora, the sitting Congress MP.

The opposition parties had ignored the appeal made by Mrs. Vijaylakshmi Pandit, Mr. Minoo Masani, Mr. Nani Palkhivala, Mr. Achyut Patwardhan, Dr. Usha Mehta, Justice Khanna and Swami Chinmayananda to support a few Independents in a one-to-one contest against the Congress.

No Illusions of Victory

We had no illusions about our candidate winning in a multi-cornered con-

The assumption that there was general revulsion against the Congress, its exhibition of wealth, its image as a corrupt regime and the voters opting for the best candidate proved wrong. On the other hand the assumption that the Muslims had decided not to vote for the Congress(I) or the BJP also proved wrong.

test against the Congress, yet we persisted for two reasons :

- a) Both the Janata Dal and the BJP had put up weak candidates against Mr. Deora and we thought we would provide a third positive choice to the people of South Bombay, especially the youth and those 50% who habitually keep away from voting.
- b) We wanted to test where Mr. Mehta stood in terms of mass support. He had done a great deal through the Hindustani Andolan to focus public attention on our real problems viz. black money, smuggling, mafia operations, civil liberties, wrong economic policies, etc. While thinking people had appreciated his work and respected him, the politicians and the press had generally dismissed him as a "harmless, do-gooder" without mass support.

Bringing out the Non-voters

The Congress(I) had a base of 1 lakh plus votes, the BJP also had a base of 95,000 votes. The Janata Dal had a base of 30 to 40,000 votes. As an indi-

vidual and respected social worker, Mr. Mehta, we thought, had a base of 10,000 to 20,000 votes. So the strategy was to build on this by bringing out the habitual "non-voters" particularly in the Malabar Hill, Opera House and Colaba areas and offer them a positive choice.

In the end, there was a sharp increase of 20% in the voting in these segments of the constituency. For the first time 2 lakh voters came out this time (while in the past, the figure was 90,000 to 1,00,000) but overwhelmingly voted for the Congress(I). Only one in every nine or ten voters here voted for Mr. Mehta. The assumption that there was general revulsion against the Congress, its exhibition of wealth, its awful advertisement campaign, its image as a corrupt regime and voters opting for the best candidate proved wrong. On the other hand the assumption that the Muslim areas (where there was a sharp fall in voting) had decided not to vote for the Congress(I) or the BJP also proved wrong. We had expected to build up a respectable base of 50,000 to 75,000 votes. This did not happen.

Campaign Funds

As for the actual campaign, we had decided to spend only the amount legally permitted viz. Rs. 1.5 lakhs. An appeal was sent to over 1000 industrialists, businessmen and professionals to contribute to the special election fund. We received Rs. 1.5 lakhs. Some top industrialists gave token donations of Rs 1000, while small businessmen-traders and professionals contributed much more.

Our principal assets were:

- a) An Appeal in favour of Mr. Mehta by eminent people like Mr. Palkhivala and others.
- b) Two Jeeps and a few cars lent by friends.
- c) Thirty to forty dedicated volunteers.
- d) Donations totalling Rs. 1.5 lakhs from friends.
- e) Open support by a few (out of sixty intellectuals and activists) like

Mr. Gulabdas Broker, Ms. Shabana Azmi, Mr. Shatrughan Sinha, Mr. Adam Adil, Justice Nathwani, Mr. M.V. Kamath and Admiral Awati.

With limited funds and manpower, our campaign mainly consisted of door to door visits by our workers distributing the Appeal of eminent people and our manifesto and direct contact with constituents. The goodwill generated by such contacts with people was indeed tremendous.

The Press, by and large, ignored our candidate ("an Independent has no chance" according to them).

Pending Electoral Reforms...

To sum up it was a rewarding experience which drove home the realisation that Independent candidates have little chance of winning except in one-to-one contests. Electoral reforms might come when they come, but we must at least do three things:

- a) The candidate should be allowed to spend Re.1 per voter. A Rs. 3 to

5 lakhs limit makes no sense because South Bombay has 7.26 lakh voters while North Bombay has 15 lakh voters. So, a legitimate expense would be Re.1 per voter. A friend from North India who had come down to help told us that you cannot fight even a municipal election with Rs. 1.5 lakhs

- b) Instead of asking candidates to send information cards to voters (the roll number, booth number etc), Government should send such cards thus saving an expenditure of Rs. 2 lakhs to candidates which by itself makes a mockery of the statutory limit of Rs. 1.5 lakhs.
- c) To reduce expenses on posters, banners etc. candidates should be given one or two hours time on T.V. during the month of campaigning. Without posters (as in our case) not many people can see the face of the candidate.

On the whole, the campaign was extremely dignified, peaceful and clean

with two exceptions. First, some of our rivals floated the rumour that Mr. Mehta had been set up by Mr. Ambani to help Mr. Deora by dividing voters against him as also posters put up by the BJP to the effect that Mr. Murli Deora is a 'Dalal' (agent) of Bofors and Ambani; that Mr. Rajda was a 'Chamcha' (stooge) of Mr. Deora and that Mr. Madhu Mehta was a candidate of "Tata-Bata". The other was the disruption of our meeting in a Muslim locality by some anti-social elements who threatened a local organiser with dire consequences if he organised any meeting in their area for Mr. Mehta. In fact the organiser sustained a knife injury. Barring these, utmost respect was shown to our candidate by people at large and by those who campaigned for the other candidates.

MR. ARVIND DESHPANDE is a member of the Editorial Board of *Freedom First*. He was Mr. Madhu Mehta's Campaign Manager.

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The Panchayat Raj Bill

— Power to the People or Backdoor Centralisation?

M. N. Buch

Article 40 of the Constitution of India lays down as a Directive Principle of State Policy that the State shall take steps to organise village panchayats as units of self-government. While there is no similar provision relating to urban local bodies, Entry 5 of List II of the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution gives the State legislatures the competence to legislate on all forms of local government, urban and rural. Because the preamble to the Constitution provides for India to be a democratic republic, it is assumed that every State Assembly will enact laws for the setting up of self-governing local bodies, which could provide democratic local government to the people.

By the 64th and 65th Constitution Amendment Bills, the Central Government, through the instrument of Parliament, attempted to amend the Constitution so that a uniform pattern of urban and rural local government was super-imposed on all States in India. For example, the 64th Constitution Amendment Bill proposed that all States will have a three-tier *panchayat raj* system, whereas the 65th Amendment Bill proposed a three-tier municipal system consisting of municipalities, municipal corporations and corporations for large cities which would have a provision for a local or borough council within the city corporation area. The fact that local government falls exclusively in the State List and, therefore, within the sovereign power of the States has been lost sight of. In effect, a rider is being placed on the manner in which this sovereign power may be exercised.

Sovereign Components of the Republic

It is important to understand the basic nature and structure of our Constitution and our federal polity. Article I provides that India shall be a Union of States. In other words the only two sovereign components of the Republic

If the sovereignty and diversity of States is an 'integral part of our federal system, then any attempt to create a single, unified mould of local government automatically encroaches upon State sovereignty. No amount of platitudinous speech making on the devolution of power to the people can detract from the growing encroachment of the Federal Government on the powers of the States

recognised by Article I, which are totally immutable so long as the present Constitution exists, are the States and the Union to which they have given birth by coming together. Even the territory of India consists of the territories of the federating States and the Union Territories, together with such other territories as may be acquired. There is no third sovereign component of the Indian Republic. This means that local government and the territorial jurisdiction of the local government units cannot be sovereign. Once the Constitution lays down that sovereignty cannot vest in any entity other than the States and the Union, all local governments become creatures of the States concerned and not of the Constitution. By introducing into the Constitution the concept of a mandatory and uniform unit of local government the 64th and 65th Amendments, in effect, sought to cut into the sovereignty that is assigned

to the Union and the States by Article I of the Constitution.

The Constitution not only lays down that India is a Union of States, but also recognises that the States are diverse and varied in terms of geography, topography, ethnicity, exclusive social characteristics, etc. Part XVI, Articles 330 to 342 of the Constitution has been written into the constitutional framework in recognition of the basic diversity of the States. Part X and the Fifth Schedule provide for special administrative and legislative arrangements for scheduled areas and scheduled tribes, with both legislative and administrative powers being vested in the President and the Governor to determine which laws of Parliament or the Legislature will or will not apply to such scheduled areas. The Seventh Schedule, List II which gives exclusive legislative competence to the States, is in itself a recognition of the need to allow State legislatures to frame laws in areas that affect the State and its citizens, both of whom may have totally differing perceptions and needs from other States and their citizens. Had there been no concept of the sovereignty of component States or the need to permit States to have differing laws in areas of exclusive jurisdiction, there would have been no need to include List II in the Seventh Schedule.

Encroaching on the States' Powers

If the sovereignty and diversity of States is an integral part of our federal system, then any constitutional amendment which attempts to create a single, unified mould of local government automatically encroaches upon State sovereignty. No amount of platitudinous speech making on the devolution of power to the people can detract from the growing encroachment of the Federal Government on the powers of the States.

The Prime Minister and his officers

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and the parliamentarians who voted for the 64th and 65th Amendment Bills have all loudly stated that it is their intention to devolve power to the people. How sincere the Central Government's professions are can well be judged by the fact that even today there is no move to delete from List I of the Seventh Schedule Entry 2 A, which permits the Central Government to deploy its forces in any State in aid of civil powers, even without any requisition being made in this behalf under Section 130 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973, by an Executive Magistrate. As it is, under Section 131 Cr.PC. any commissioned or gazetted officer of the armed forces can disperse an unlawful assembly even if the Executive Magistrate has not requisitioned their services, if public safety and security are manifestly endangered. Entry 2-A in List I is a direct encroachment on Entries 1 and 2 of List II, which place public order and the police exclusively within the jurisdiction of the States. Entry 2-A of List I was mischievously introduced during the Emergency so that if a State Government were to be recalcitrant because of political differences with the Central Government, central forces could be inducted for arm twisting. This, in fact, was done in Tamil Nadu when the Karunanidhi Government was thrown out during the Emergency.

If the Central Government is so concerned about the devolution of powers, why does it not at least revert to a position wherein public order once again becomes an exclusively State subject? This would in no way endanger the security of India because Chapter XVIII of the Constitution would remain on the Statute Book and the Central Government could always intervene under the emergency provision. As it is, under Article 256 every State government is obliged to exercise its executive powers to ensure compliance with the laws of Parliament and the State legislature and, where it fails to do so, the Union Government can give suitable directives. Entry 2-A in List I of the Seventh Schedule, therefore, is continuing evidence of the duplicity of the Central Government when it talks of devolution of powers.

Every State in India has legislated for rural and urban local government. In fact these institutions existed in British days, though it is after independence

that various laws have given them a totally democratic character, with office being held through a process of election and the elections being based on universal adult franchise. The system has no doubt been perverted by various State Governments by exercise of the power to supersede and retain the local bodies under State administration almost indefinitely.

The 64th and 65th Constitutional Amendment Bills seek to curb the powers of the State to supersede local bodies. However, before the power of the States to supersede local bodies is circumscribed through constitutional amendment, is there not need to amend Article 356, which gives almost untrammelled and arbitrary power to the Central Government to supersede a State government and to proclaim President's rule? Undoubtedly such a proclamation has to be confirmed by Parliament, but the supreme legislature itself was reduced to a rubber stamping body because of the vast majority enjoyed by the ruling party and the indiscriminate use of the whip to force members to vote in a particular manner. So long as Parliament and the members of the ruling party follow a herd behaviour and respond to a given situation only in accordance with the party whip, Parliament cannot act as a watch dog on the executive. Before the Central Government, therefore, delimits the power of the States to supersede local bodies, let it first delimit its own powers to supersede a State Government.

Uniform Systems of Local Bodies Unnecessary

Why should there be a uniform system of local government in India? By tradition, practice and the needs of regional variations, different systems of local government have been established in this country. For example, in Madhya Pradesh the tehsil or block level *panchayat*, known as the *Janpad Panchayat*, has always been the principal unit of rural local government. The District Council or *panchayat* has always been more a clearing house and a coordinating body than an executive agency. The system works. Why should a uniform, three tier system be superimposed on Madhya Pradesh? In West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka a system has been worked out whereby the village *panchayat* and the

mandal panchayat have real powers and the *zila panchayat* acts more as a legislative body than one which executes all the works. Why should the system be changed?

An Exercise in Futility

There are certain other questions which arise. Suppose a State legislature refuses to enact legislation to give effect to the local government structure which the Constitution Amendment Bills prescribe? The 64th and 65th Amendments do not delete Entry 5 of List 2 of the Seventh Schedule. Will Parliament then enact detailed laws even in matters in the State List under Article 249? Or will the President take over the government of such States under Article 356 where the legislature refuses to enact the relevant laws? Can a citizen go to the High Court and obtain a writ directing the State government to introduce, and the State legislature to enact specific legislation? Would this not be an encroachment by the judicial power on the executive and legislative power of the State? All these issues are likely to further exacerbate the relations between the Federal and the State Governments and to bring our federal polity under greater tension. These measures will not devolve real powers to the people.

When one tinkers with the Constitution one has to be very sure about the objectives of the exercise. Constitutional amendments based on dishonest premises always hurt the Constitution rather than enhance it. Certainly any amendment which cuts into the sovereignty of the States destroys the very fabric of the Constitution. By setting the States against the Centre and against their own creatures, the local bodies, Mr. Rajiv Gandhi may achieve the objective of embarrassing certain opposition ruled States, but he would certainly not devolve power to the people.

NOTE: This article was written when the 64th and 65th Constitution Bills were being debated in the Parliament in early October 1989. Subsequently the Bills failed to obtain a two-thirds majority in the Rajya Sabha. This failure is attributed as the immediate reason for Mr. Rajiv Gandhi's decision to go for a general election two months ahead of schedule.

MR. M.N. BUCH is Chairman of the National Centre for Human Settlements and Environment, Bhopal.

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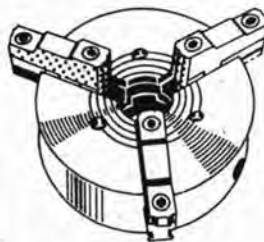


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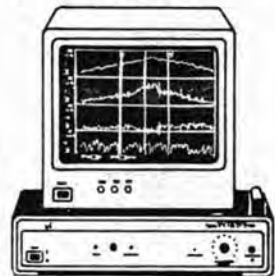
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The Bhopal Tragedy — A Monument To Socialism

Arunava Das

The Bhopal gas leak disaster occurring on December 3, 1984, and the \$ 470 million Supreme Court award as full and final settlement on Feb. 14, 1989 — two events, calamitous as they are for the citizens of Bhopal — could not be more united by their common origin. Their origin lies in the realm of ideas — the same set of ideas.

The Bhopal gas disaster of 3rd December, 1984, being a physical, technological disaster, its nature and extent is easily observable. The February 14, Supreme Court Award on the other hand is an event which is physically inexact and hence its disastrous proportions are not discernible at first glance. But disastrous it is, for the victims of the Bhopal gas disaster as well as for Indians at large. It is a fact that the award is pitifully low, considering the cost in terms of the loss of lives, lack of future earning capacity, cost of rehabilitation, the element of punitive damages and the cost of arriving at the settlement. Equally unconscionable is the fact that the individual victims never got a chance to get their claims heard in the courts of law. The Government of India had expropriated from the victims, their right to be heard, through the Bhopal Gas Leak Act, 1985. This act empowered the Government to act as the sole representative of all the victims together. It was all in the "public" interest of course, although the expropriation remained unscrutinised under the law. The Government, as such, has not yet been able to gauge with accuracy the number of victims dead or suffering, to work out the modalities and logistics of payment, let alone process the claims of all the victims. The arbitrary \$ 470 million award is the fruit of "public interest" litigation by the Government, uprooting the canons of natural justice in favour of "social justice". Through private litigation, if even one individual victim had succeeded in getting a judgement extracting full rehabil-

The Government is responsible, in large measure for the accident in Bhopal in the first place, albeit indirectly, through the political philosophy it stands for — an archaic philosophy that is crumbling all over the world under the weight of its own destructiveness. Indians have been trying to evade the anti-life reality of socialism for too long. Unfortunately, for the citizens of Bhopal, they could not escape the consequences of that evasion any more on December 3, 1984

itation from Union Carbide in the form of damages, others could have followed suit on the strength of the precedent created by it.

Victims of Socialism

Again, it is the Government that is responsible in large measure for the accident in Bhopal in the first place, albeit indirectly, through the political philosophy it stands for. A probe of the political background of Union Carbide's operations in India is called for at this stage.

Indian socialism and its economic component were formulated in the late '40s by socialists like Nehru and P.C. Mahalanobis, the former's economic adviser. They were influenced as much by the then growing statism in England and its adherents like Harold Laski of the LSE, as they were by the Soviet Central Planning model for the "rapid industrialization" of an agricultural country.

Socialism was formalized in India's Industrial Policy Resolution of 1956. This policy unfurled itself in the years to come in the form of state patronage of selected target industries (i.e. politically approved businesses) through subsidies, concessions, and other "carrots" and punitive taxes, regulations and other "sticks" against politically unpopular businesses. Protection of domestic businesses against foreign competition and import substitution at all costs were overriding national goals. A permit-licence-quota raj was unleashed with furious zeal by the nation's newly powerful *babus* and their *netas*, on existing and potential entrepreneurs and capitalists. The spoils-system was propped up by a tribe of so-called intellectuals, consumed by envy of the rich, and by a pack of incompetent businessmen, unable or unwilling to compete in the market place. As a result, Indians paid the world's highest prices for a whole range of infrastructure inputs and consumer goods, from insurance and banking to coal and steel.

Political Decision

Divorced from the objective signals of free-market forces, industrial policy distorted economic investment, replacing private goals by national goals, economic decisions by political decisions. The businessman was not left alone to take investment decisions based on the profit motive and corresponding market incentives, lest he failed to invest in areas where the costs were uneconomical or the demand was low, resulting in lower returns on investment. He was coerced to take wrong decisions by the *neta-babu* combine and its "carrots" and "sticks".

This ended up sapping the financial health of such businesses, unless fed by an ever-increasing infusion of institutionalized loot from the tax payers. The

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Innovative Drug Technology
— a tradition and a promise

FERA laws were designed to provide India with "technology transfers" while restricting direct foreign investment. Under FERA, Indians must be trained to manage any business established by foreigners and only Indian firms may be employed in designing, building and establishing such ventures. This attempted to force-feed advanced technology to a culture that had not yet developed the infrastructure and the requisite technical skills at the grassroots level to handle it properly.

The final scenario that often emerged was of selected, government-favoured businesses growing up to unmanageably big sizes. Often they were bureaucratic complexes in themselves, as different from efficient, entrepreneurial outfits. They were thus slow to react, slow to innovate and being artificially pumped with higher levels of technology, required for their increasing range of operations, were too complex for the limited technical skills that were available to them.

Union Carbide (India) Ltd. (UCIL) was one US-based Company that chose to contribute to this scenario by remaining in India where others like IBM and Coca-Cola had left, refusing to be exploited by the state. In the 1960s, there was need for pesticides to fuel the oncoming green revolution. Hence, the Union Carbide proposal to build a pesticide plant was accepted by the government. This initial decision of Union Carbide was to build a packaging facility for imported raw pesticides such as Sevin — a safe and simple operation. The decision was a profit based one, as such, but industrial policy and its operating licence to UCIL required it to enhance the packaging and marketing unit to a manufacturing unit of basic pesticides and even their ingredients.

Modern Technology, Poor Infrastructure

To produce Sevin, carbon tetrachloride is mixed with alpha-naphthol and a chemical known as methyl-isocyanate or MIC (the one that leaked). Liquid MIC is a highly unstable and volatile chemical and a deadly toxin, there being no antidote. MIC was not required in Bhopal while the factory was simply packaging Sevin. But industrial "self-sufficiency" required the manufacture of Sevin from scratch. In 1971, UCIL started making alpha-naphthol in a new plant while importing and storing its

MIC requirements. The government and its industrial policy thus forced UCIL to bring MIC into a factory with handling skills that were suspect, to say the least.

By the late 1970s industrial policy had bloated the small five-acre UCIL formulation facility into a massive manufacturing complex spreading over eighty acres. In 1977 a new \$ 2.5 million plant for increased alpha-naphthol capacity, designed by an Indian firm was built, as demand was projected to grow in the near future. In 1978, the plant, already much too costly by local standards, was shut down for modifications. The plant, even when reopened, did not function properly. Nevertheless Union Carbide had to go on pouring money into it as the alpha-naphthol facility was part of its operating licence from the government. Ultimately, the management decided to import alpha-naphthol and make MIC instead. Hence, the MIC facility was opened in February, 1980.

Before 1980, MIC was stored in 55-gallon drums to reduce the damage in the event of an accident. But now, to ensure supplies, such that manufacturing delays would not disrupt Sevin production, it was decided to store MIC in three, 15,000-gallon stainless steel tanks. This increased the amount of possible damage per drum 300 times. What had begun as a Carbide subsidiary for marketing pesticides was now a government-directed business, manufacturing and storing a deadly chemical, in a milieu lacking in commensurate technical skills. Simultaneously, the government went on with its task of sapping the financial health of big business, including Carbide, by inducing it to throw good money after bad on repairs and maintenance of the unsound alpha-naphthol plant, in order to advance "self-sufficiency". This undermined the safety of the plant in no small measure. The government also promoted "small" pesticide units by relieving them of any excise or sales tax in order to dole out cheap pesticides to politically useful farmers.

Cost Cutting and Poor Maintenance

By 1984, capacity utilisation in the Bhopal plant had dropped to below 20% and losses amounted to nearly \$ 4 million. As a result, cost-cutting was in. Maintenance practices became

poor. Safety systems were out of operation for weeks on end. The number of MIC operators was reduced from 12 to 6 — too few for safety. Vital maintenance ran behind schedule. Most of the skilled and experienced personnel left and were replaced by lesser skilled novices. The factory was experiencing a "brain-drain". After 1982, when the American supervisory and training personnel had to leave Bhopal on expiry of their licence, Carbide headquarters in the USA controlled the Bhopal unit mainly on the basis of reports issued from Bhopal. No safety inspections were carried out by the headquarters after June, 1982 as safety was now the responsibility of the local management.

But, according to the Bhopal employees, the local management failed to implement safety recommendations of the headquarters. There was little it could do with less-qualified managers, lesser-skilled operators and cost cutting requirements. The result was all round sloppiness, as is natural for a losing business with no future.

The government chipped in with yet another of its disastrous policies. In 1975 the local government encouraged thousands to resettle near the plant by pumping them with loans, driving them towards the plant that it had helped make unsafe in the first place.

A government, mad for power, was contributing to all-round economic madness, calculated to benefit none in the long run and harm some with irrevocable damage. The damage was wrought by 12.45 a.m., December 3, 1984, killing 1,800 people and injuring 200,000 more. It was the toxic waste of industrial policy that billowed out in the form of an ominous, white cloud, engulfing the streets of Bhopal, asphyxiating and blinding to death and permanent disrepair, lakhs of its citizens.

The Guilty Neta-Babu Combine

Through its industrial policy, the *neta-babu* combine had effected a backdoor nationalisation of apparently private businesses, appropriating for itself the sole responsibility of making major economic decisions concerning individual businesses — decisions such as capacity expansion, make or buy, technological enhancement etc.

continued on next page

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Democracy — What is it?

Raphael Kazmann's article in *Freedom First* Oct – Dec.'89) on Democracy is illuminating. However some of the conclusions arrived at by the author need to be considered further to fully appreciate the complexities of the issues involved.

For the successful and effective functioning of democracy, some of the attributes required are: a sound and effective education system which inculcates the development of character and self-discipline. Since a majority of our people are, either by the circumstance of birth or due to environmental restrictions, not fortunate to fully develop their personality, society has to lean heavily on religion with its moral principles to contain negative tendencies inherent in human beings. The importance of this last fact cannot be over-emphasized as democracies, by and large, have been successful in those countries where the Church has had sway over the masses. On the other hand, countries which mainly depend on a particular religion and its commandments end up creating a fundamentalist state.

Another important problem is the one man-one vote system. There can be no practical, fair and reliable method of segregating the electorate into the competent and the not so competent. Property owners or tax payers are often those with a dubious reputation and whose sole intention would be to subvert the system for personal gain in conjunction with ever-willing politicians and obliging bureaucrats.

If the voters are segregated on the basis of so-called competence, countries will end up with a large percentage of second class citizens who would be exploited for the benefit of a privileged few. This is contrary to the basic principles of democracy. Even a system evolved with best of intentions will prove beneficial only when it is implemented honestly. Therefore while the one man-one vote system may not be the ideal one, there is none better available.

People are influenced by the social, cultural, historic, religious, educational and economic conditions obtaining in their countries. Hence, though the basic

requirements of democracy namely education, character and self discipline do not change, the implementation of the system will differ to suit the different traits of people. This is particularly so as the development of human beings is a continuous process and no fixed yardsticks can be laid down as norms for a democratic form of government.

Many Third World countries have, on achieving independence, adopted a democratic form of government modelled on the West without taking into account local factors. This explains why democracies in a number of Third World countries have been only partially successful. These countries, with experience, will have to gradually evolve systems of government most suited to them. One can only hope that the transition will be as painless as possible and that too within the democratic framework.

COL. S.S. OBEROI (Retd.) 5, Waman Smriti, Deccan College Road, Pune 411 006.

continued from previous page

Incentives to safety, ordinarily offered to businesses by a free-market, were replaced by the usual allurements and threats of industrial policy. The public sector units, reaping the fruits of uneconomic decisions by a political management, were beset with problems such as low capacity utilization, overmanning, low productivity, time and cost overruns that averaged hundred percent as a norm; chalking out losses year after year. Yet they had to be supported by the tax-payers in order to further national goals. With a capital output ratio as high as 7:1, the public

sector was "crowding out" much more efficient, market-based private investment.

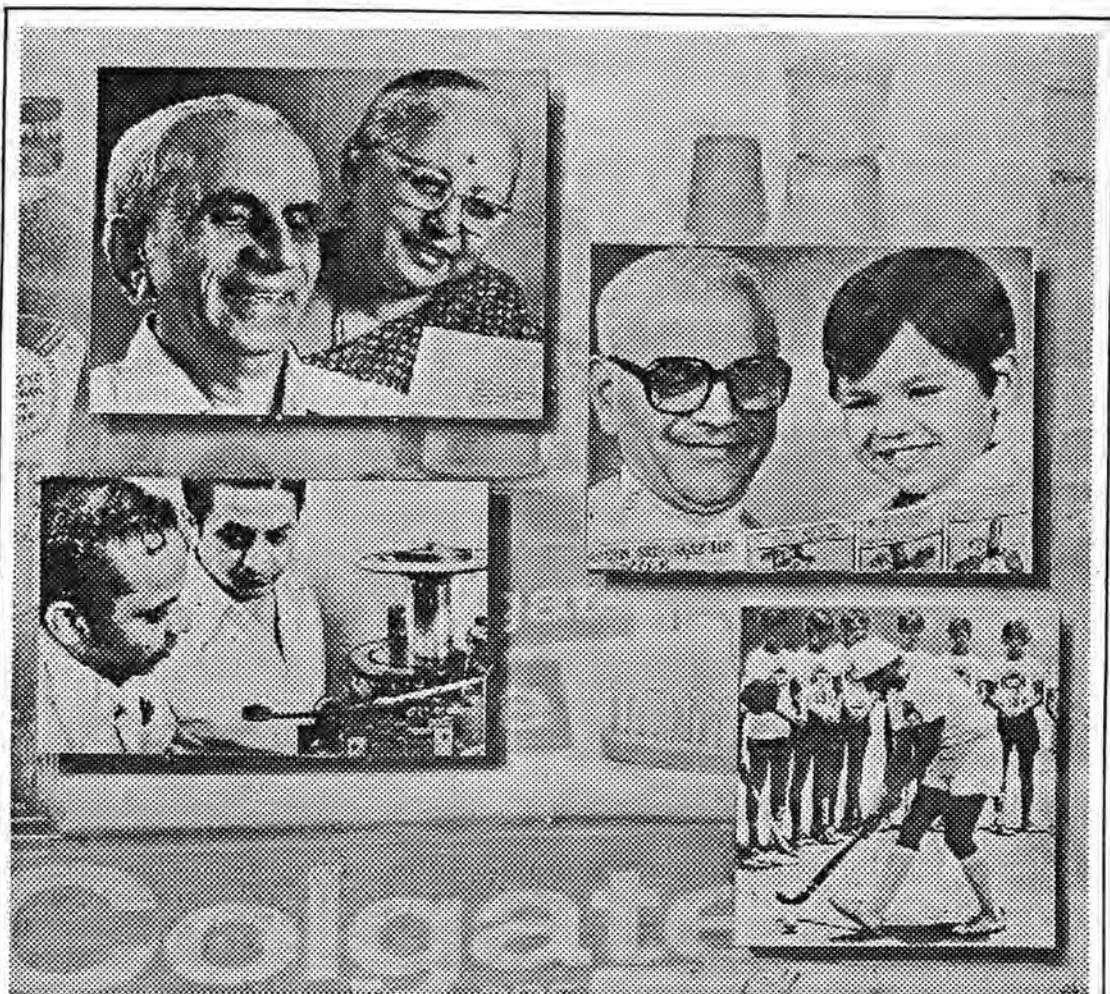
Victims of an Archaic Philosophy

If now "social justice" failed to deliver full retributive justice to the victims of the Bhopal gas disaster it is only the logical result of reducing individuals to the status of pawns in the political game of socialization. The parasite of welfare statism and its concomitant politicisation of economics is eating insidiously into the financial, moral and intellectual resources of Indians, while feeding on their sanction in the name

of "social" justice.

In the final analysis, the people of Bhopal are the victims of an archaic and evil political philosophy that is crumbling all over the world under the weight of its own destructiveness. Indians have been trying to evade the anti-life reality of altruism-socialism for long. Unfortunately for the citizens of Bhopal, they could not escape the consequences of that evasion anymore on December 3, 1984.

MR. ARUNAVA DAS is a Chartered Accountancy student.



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Press Freedom and Social Responsibility

Mr. M.V. Kamath's article on 'Newspapers, Newsprint and Press Freedom' (*Freedom First*, October-December 1989) is not only well-documented, but well-argued. When there is so much vague and woolly talk about freedom of the Press, it would be useful to bestow some thought on the author's concluding words:

"The limits to freedom imposed from outside are easily recognisable. What is a more daunting task is the exercise of that freedom for the good of society. That presents problems that are not so easily resolved."

Devoting a lot of space to the problem of newsprint supply the author argues convincingly how this has become quite an effective weapon in the hands of the Government to control the newspapers, even to blackmail them. It is true that the release of newsprint entitlements to newspapers is decided by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, the price of indigenous newsprint is controlled by Ministry of Industries and the Newsprint Control Order is operated by the Registrar of Newspapers (also under the Ministry of I & B). The placing of governmental advertisements is done by or through the Directorate of Advertising and Visual Publicity (again under the same Ministry).

There might be and, indeed, are a variety of other weapons too at the disposal of the Government, like the laws of customs and excise under which import of machinery is regulated. These do not exhaust all the possibilities of brow-beating and arm-twisting which include checks on building construction, as also the supply of water and electricity, under the direct or indirect control of the Central or State Governments.

When newspapers are run mainly or largely for profit, on business lines, apart from political clout and patronage, like any other industry, e.g. jute and cement, sugar, tea and coffee, or iron and steel (before nationalisation) it is but natural that they should be subject to the same limitations as the others.

The Press, as we see it functioning now, can no longer flaunt the faded badge of patriotism, nor can it claim to be a self-denying profession dedicated to the mission of human freedom and universal enlightenment.

Two or three vital questions would arise, to be answered by those working in the newspaper profession and those managing the newspaper industry, before they could think of pointing their finger at the Government as the villain of the piece coming in the way of the soldiers of freedom.

The first relates to the concept of freedom itself. Is it not high time that newspapers (most of them politically committed and a few blatantly partisan) turned the searchlight inwards to see how far they have proved true to their own lofty professions. The same newspapers that cry hoarse about freedom from governmental control have scant regard for the freedom of their own readers and other individuals affected by their news and views, comment and criticism.

My friends and I have had bitter experience of the monopolistic, illiberal, intolerant attitude of national newspapers of repute, which brook no difference of opinion from their own partisan views, based on vested interests of various kinds. Whether it is the language issue, or that of dress regulation in social clubs or our policy towards South Africa, Israel and the Arab States, it is well nigh impossible to find space for the expression of a point of view different from that of the newspaper concerned.

It is well-known how, in the name of investigative reporting, mainly to titillate the inquisitiveness of the average reader about the semi-private, semi-public activities of well-known public figures, even respectable newspapers do not nowadays hesitate to indulge in the pleasant hobby of character-assassination. In the process, they show a callous indifference to the freedom of the citizen to be left alone. We are only too familiar with the calculated manner in which any denial or correction by the aggrieved party is consigned to such an insignificant corner as to be missed by most readers.

As for the hue and cry raised about the shortage of newsprint, it might be legitimate to ask how many pages does an average newspaper require for presentation of its news and views and how exactly most of the newspapers are utilising the newsprint at their disposal and the column space available to them. Most of the major newspapers publish 16 pages on week-days and 24 to 36 pages on Sundays. If we look at the ratio of reading material to advertisement, we may be led to wonder which of them is the main thing and which the aid and accessory. Is reading matter only an excuse for attracting advertisements? The average reader is uninterested in the complex and complicated economic pattern of a newspaper, but he feels cheated when he looks for substantial reading matter and fails to find it.

Is it not possible for many of our overfed newspapers to shed their excess fat and become more slim and trim, not only for their own health but the health of society? How can we expect the honest reader to be excited over the growing number of pages, the soaring profits or the astronomical salaries of Editors, some of whom are ready to chuck a Rs. 15,000/- p.m. job for another carrying Rs. 20,000/- or Rs. 21,000/-? We can hardly derive any comfort from the fact that they are vying with top company executives, if not our matinee idols, in their earnings and life-styles.

Finally, within the limitations of the present economic and administrative situation, with all the newsprint control, customs regulations, FERA etc., is it not possible for our newspapers to show a greater sense of social responsibility and work for the evolution of a more just, compassionate and enlightened society, somewhat in the manner of the *Christian Science Monitor*? For doing this, it would be necessary to give up, or go slow on, the game of playing for high political stakes and making millions by night and by day.

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A Letter From America

Madhusree Mukerjee

When I stepped off the plane in Albany six years ago, I found that the student who was to have met me wasn't there. A porter gave me a dime and showed me how to make a call. Ramesh had overslept. I pulled my suitcase to the pavement and sat on it. It was a cool fall morning, gray but pleasant. The airport was empty. Next to me on a patch of grass stood a small tree, laden with fat red cherries. I stared at it, unable to tear my eyes away. Where I came from, that tree would have been ripped of its bounty in seconds. Every once a while, a plump offspring would fall off the tree onto the grass. One rolled right next to me. I stared at it, wanting to pick it up and bite into it; for a long minute it was a struggle with my will. I had to learn to believe it, believe in dripping cherry trees, believe in the bounty of the land I had dropped into. I did not touch it. When I left, I was completely aware of it lying there, red and tempting.

America was far more bountiful than I had imagined, or could have. It was like another planet. It puzzled me that there were no people on the streets till I discovered they were all in cars. When I took a Greyhound bus to the west we drove across vast empty tracts of land, devoid of houses or fields or any sign of human habitation. In the grocery stores, there were plastic bags for the fruit one picked off the shelves. For a long time I shopped obviously, deliberately, lest anyone have the least shred of suspicion. It wasn't necessary.

Students Study

Students, I found, studied. One had to. Problem sets, new to my experience, kept me up till the early hours of the morning. But there was more to it — one *could* study. In Calcutta, my classmates had a lot other than studies on their minds. Getting to and fro from college, hanging off buses and trains, was a daily nightmare. In the evening there were queues to stand in, power failures to curse and sweat in. Often those who lived outside the city would

be sleepy in class from having spent the night on the village patrol. This was common in '82 because of dacoits. Most didn't want to be there anyway — they were biding their time till they could get into engineering college, or even better, get a job. In short, survival took up all of one's time and left pitifully little for self-improvement. American students seemed so blessed, so happy — their only problems were their homework or the next exam. Everyone, when I looked around, seemed excited about the present and eager for the future, never doubting that whatever they wanted they could get. Even the woman who sold stamps at the post office and engaged me in friendly chatter seemed to enjoy her job; she liked to meet people and help them.

When the novelty wore off, I became slightly disturbed at all the happiness, all this complacency. They were so trusting, so ignorant — they had no idea how the rest of the world lived. Once, when I mentioned to a classmate that I was going home for the summer, he said,

"How nice! Do you have a job?"

"No..." I hesitated, feeling defeated by the gargantuan task of explaining that not everywhere are summer jobs just for the asking.

"Oh, so you'll live off your parents for a while, eh!" he laughed knowingly.

"Yes..." I smiled weakly. How could I even begin to describe Indian life to him? His world was so different, and he didn't really care to know about mine. He, and the others, were like children in an amusement park, absorbed in their careers, their "relationships", their cars and homes, in the pursuit of fun. It was as though the Atlantic and Pacific oceans had created a playpen, an impervious insulation from the ugly realities of the rest of the world. The only news from abroad was that which threatened this idyll — an occasional hijacking, a kidnapping in Beirut. To get news from home I had to wait for letters.

Of 'Awaara' and 'Animal Farm'

My most enjoyable encounters were with other foreigners at the university. My Russian landlord surprised me with snatches of a song from "Awaara"! I was to hear that song from at least three others, one Pakistani and the other Chinese. One Chinese student told me that his parents had seen the movie when they were young, and as soon as he was old enough they had taken him to see it! Raj Kapoor alone has won us far more friends than all our expensive foreign policy.

My first friends were a Polish refugee couple, Andrzej and Kasha. In their home I found some of the warmth of a family I had left behind. They had left behind far more — they believed they could never go back. Andrzej had been thrown out of Warsaw University for, I suspect, his technique of innocently asking devastating questions. Becoming a schoolteacher, he was confronted with having to teach a class of political indoctrination each day. The solution was simple — he painstakingly translated (he was learning English at the time) a renegade copy of Orwell's 'Animal Farm' for his students. One day, an inspector arrived and seated himself at the back of the class. Andrzej explained, "If I had taught something else that day it would have destroyed everything I was trying to teach the children." Of course, this job, too, was lost — if it hadn't been the heyday of Solidarity he would have lost much more. How they had scraped money together for the next few years and finally fled was another story. They were to become two of my closest friends and their home a refuge I could always seek.

Later I had a roommate, Nie, an attractive Chinese woman of about forty, with whom I spent many happy hours learning to cook her native Szechwanese food. Nie had a husband and a son in Beijing — she was in the States briefly as a visiting researcher. She was

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always cheerful. She seemed to have put the trauma of the revolution behind her completely, to be happy and optimistic. Her son had spent only two of his fourteen years with her — born on a farm during the Cultural Revolution, he had immediately been taken from her. The revolution was especially brutal to its children. One afternoon, before she herself had been arrested, Nie had looked out of the institute onto the snow-covered courtyard of a neighbouring school. The young teacher was tied to a stake in the center of the courtyard, being beaten by her students. A beautiful adolescent girl ("She could have been my daughter!") picked up the cauldron of drinking water that boiled all day in the school yard and poured it over her teacher. She must already have fainted or died, for there was no sound.

I learnt to be thankful that I was Indian. The Chinese students were fearful of going back home and tried desperately to stay on in the United States. Because of special agreements between China and the US this was next to impossible. I also found many common features in our experience. One was bureaucracy. The other was that we were all scientists. The third world has a magic faith in science as the cure for all ills. In the States we found that the humanities and the sciences enjoyed equal prestige. But not in India or China. Since we are "underdeveloped", it is assumed that one day we will be 'developed', with science leading the way just as (we naively believe) she did in the west. But there is no one path to progress. We still have to understand our heritage and grow beyond it; only then will we find solutions to our unique problems. We need the humanities before we can use the sciences.

American Egalitarianism

An aspect of American life that I found valuable was its egalitarian nature. You are assumed to be capable of far more than you have achieved so far, and so you earn an automatic respect. Students often work at menial jobs such as cleaning or waiting at tables; conversely, each janitor you meet you assume cleans floors by choice or while waiting for something else. There are none of the symbolic distinctions we in India impose on our social inferiors. If you are alone in the cafeteria at night it is equally likely that a

professor or the janitor in your building will join you.

I had always thought of America as the land of liberty, and most foreigners continue to think it this way. I was surprised to find that Americans don't think of themselves as defined primarily by liberty. Conservatives believe in a grab-bag of values deified as the "American Tradition" — freedom and nationalism tied together by a strong dose of religion. This was a letdown — I had never anticipated the importance of religion in American life, had always assumed that their capitalism was a rational choice, not an emotional one.

A variant on the conservative is the 'yuppie' — symbol of orgiastic consumerism and self-indulgence, the ultimate rich kid in a toyland of BMW's and quiches. "I consume, therefore I am" is the motto attributed to yuppies. But it is not only yuppies who consume. Americans consume, unconsciously, voraciously, simply because it is there. Paper, that precious commodity which in India we use only to read and write on, and which is then collected and made into bags by thousands of busy hands (so that a schoolgirl's arithmetic might hold your mangoes) — paper is used here to wipe behinds, hands, noses, mouths, tables, windows: for mailads, milk cartons, cups, grocery bags, everything. Kasha would collect all the plastic bags the groceries came in and store them in a kitchen drawer till it was bursting. Then, sadly, she would have to throw them away. She would rather have mailed them home.

The American 'Liberal'

A variety of American common on campuses is the 'liberal'. 'Liberal', to a liberal, means 'enlightened'. Liberals have reacted against the near-dogmatic conservatism of middle America and define themselves in contrast to it. Compassion (read 'welfare state') they declaim to be as virtuous as liberty; consequently, lack of liberty is but a minor distraction from a nation's claim to virtue. Liberal were profoundly embarrassed by Reagan's characterisation of the pre-Gorbachev Soviet system as an "evil-empire". No one is truly evil, he just had a rough childhood. True, liberals have a larger realm of interests than the typical conservative: they recognise that there are unhappy people in America. All problems, they believe, stem from poverty — all solu-

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tions, likewise, lie in larger government spending. A liberal sees no traps in the big-brother omniscience of the welfare state. A not-so-common variant is what I might call, after my friend Brad, a 'Laguna Beach Socialist'. An ardent believer in violent proletarian revolution, he cannot imagine living anywhere other than on California's most luxurious beach.

A walk through a slum is a nightmarish experience. Drunks lounging in broad daylight, burnt-out buildings, angry, threatening looks seem to follow you around. Once, seeing a notice for furniture on sale, I went to a home in a depressed area. The apartment was quite large. It seemed to have about the same appliances as a middle-class Indian family. But there the resemblance ended. The apartment was a live-in godown, little different from the cellar we had just stepped up from. The dining-room table was six tables stacked on each other; the chairs, stools, the bed, everything was in triple or quadruple layers. There was hardly any space to move in. The floor underfoot was covered with cigarette-stubs, broken glass and dust. Dirty dishes, some broken, were stacked in the sink. They had been there for months. A stale smell of alcohol and trash clung about the apartment. As I picked my way across the scant floor, I thought, "I have been in the poorest Indian homes. They have nothing but a pot to cook in, perhaps a few extra rags for the night, perhaps a picture of a goddess on the wall. But every day they sweep the floor, sometimes plaster it with cowdung; every day they rearrange their home to make it a home. Never have I seen decay like this." The depressing atmosphere of the apartment stayed with me for many days.

Urban Poverty

The urban poverty problem is of an intensity unknown in other developed nations, and the cause that comes to mind instantly is slavery: the violent uprooting of millions of Africans from their homes and traditions and their transplantation to an alien and hostile society. There are no traditions left, no values to order one's life around. Teen pregnancy, drugs, violence and abuse combine in a vicious cycle in which there remains no home, no family; perhaps a mother who lives on welfare, and her boyfriend who steals her wel-

fare check to buy crack. There is no one to look up to except the powerful drug kings who wear gold to school and whip out their guns at the slightest — or no — provocation. This is as close to an intractable problem as can be found. Increasing welfare won't help. The key is the family, but how to go about restructuring it is anybody's guess. The problem can't be addressed until Americans admit the evil here is not economic but spiritual poverty.

I hadn't expected that by leaving India I would learn more about India, but that was a large part of my growth process on leaving home. Distance and contrast made it easier to examine myself and the attitudes I had grown up with; made it easier to shed some and take pride in others and have a greater choice in the kind of person I become. In learning about myself I also learnt about other Indians; in particular, about Indian women, their upbringing, and their special problems. I came across different perspectives on Indian history, especially of the period just before independence — much of what we were taught in school was of the quality of myth; never were we presented with a critical study of the choices the founders of our country had in determining its future. I learnt to be resentful of the Vedic view of India's history — as if what we are was determined five thousand years ago, and since then we are condemned to be assimilators, absorbers, synthesisers, never creators or doers. I met Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Sri Lankans, other Indians and found that differences fade with distance; in the end we are alike, children of the same subcontinent. I wondered how the American experience had been to other Indians. Many had seen a personal growth but other habits can be more persistent. At a party the other night I came upon my friend Neera — from Poona, studying economics — engaged in a political discussion.

Utopia is for the Other Guy

"I think capitalism is fine for the US, but in India we need communism"

"Don't you think communism is a bit extreme? Do you really think the Indian peasant wants that? After all, they killed ten million kulaks in Russia just trying to collectivise the farms!" I said.

"But that was just a small fraction of the population!" Neera took a sip of her

plum wine." It might be worthwhile in the end, if we could feed everyone."

"Why do you assume everyone will be fed by communism? Since the government took over the coal industry the price of coal has increased eight times, even with immense subsidies. What do you think would happen if they took over the whole country?"

"But totalitarian regimes are more efficient than the kind of public sector we have in India!"

"Who's statistics is that? Anyway, do you really want to live in communist India?"

"I might not want to live there, but that doesn't mean it's not best for India as a whole!"

Utopia, it seems, is always for the other guy.

MS. MADHUSREE MUKERJEE is a Post-Doctoral Fellow, W.K. Kellogg Radiation Laboratory, California Institute of Technology, Pasadena, U.S.A.

The Constituency of Horsham

"In 1847 ... it was contested by a Conservative and a Radical, both with plenty of money ... Liquor was free for all six weeks, the favourite election brew being lemonade and brandy, an invention of a waiter at the 'Black Horse'. This made it a Radical drink, but it seemed to be equally popular among Conservatives. It was also potent, for 'most of the male population of Horsham was frequently drunk, some were continually drunk for the whole six weeks...'. The cost of liquor at two conservative hotels was £ 1590 and at two Radical hotels £ 1218; but this must indicate the cubic capacity of the respective electors, for there is no evidence that treating, affected votes. In the end the candidates — or, strictly speaking, their agents — had to resort to bribery and kidnapping; and, since the latter was prevalent, it was thought necessary to protect the voters. A vanload of Conservative electors, for instance was driven to Brighton, where they were fed and kept under till polling day, when they were driven back to vote conservative. One elector promised his vote to both sides, but was captured by the Radicals and lodged at a Radical inn. He was rescued by the Conservatives, recaptured by the Radicals, given £ 40, and driven off drunk for a quick trip into the country. The cost to the Conservative candidate is put at various figures between £ 60,000 and £ 1,00,000; and the Radical candidate probably did not spend much less."

I. Jennings, *Party Politics*, Vol. I, 1960

BOOK REVIEWS

RADHAKRISHNAN: A BIOGRAPHY by Sarvapalli Gopal: Oxford University Press, Bombay; 1989; pp. 408; Rs. 250.



This is a remarkable book. A famous historian-son has written a biography of his even more famous philosopher-statesman father. The life of Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan (SR) itself is remarkable — he rose from the grinding poverty of his childhood to the highest office of the President of the Indian Republic.

There was something indomitable in SR that helped him conquer all adversities. His career can easily be divided into two parts — academic career and political career. A scholar of international reputation, he became a public figure even as an academic. From humble beginnings as a teacher in Presidency College, Madras, he rose to the high office of Vice-Chancellor (Andhra and BHU) and to a coveted professorship at Oxford. SR's achievements as a scholar are all the more remarkable because he had no benefit of foreign education. Burdened with the responsibility of looking after his family, going abroad for higher education was an unthinkable luxury for SR.

He did not have a Ph.D Degree in Philosophy from an Indian university. Indeed, he became a philosopher by accident. A spell-binding orator in English, he had a fantastic command over the language, again all the more

remarkable because he mastered it on his own. Generally orators do not make good class-room lecturers. The needs of the two audiences — the undefined public and the defined students — are different. Radhakrishnan seems to have been as good a lecturer in the class-room as he undoubtedly was from the public platform. When SR left Mysore University to join Calcutta University, he did not want any farewell function. On the day of his departure, students unhooked the horses from the carriage and themselves pulled it to the station. The station itself was full of students and teachers, with flowers strewn all-over. Radhakrishnan received many, many honours, one more coveted than the other in his life. But Gopal writes that his father valued that farewell the most. As a teacher myself, I can well believe it.

Even as a young man, Radhakrishnan must have been a charismatic figure. It was a treat to hear him. This reviewer had the good fortune to hear Radhakrishnan way back in 1946 as a young boy. The memory of that thrill still remains — the tall, turbaned, majestic figure of SR and an uninterrupted flow of words, in one beautiful sentence after another. Had SR's career ended as a professor, it would have been regarded as a very fulfilled and successful one. But Radhakrishnan made a huge success of his political career — first, as our ambassador to Soviet Russia, then as Vice-President for 10 long years and finally, as President for five years in the course of which both Nehru and Shastri died. Rajendra Prasad as President, S. Radhakrishnan as Vice President and Jawaharlal Nehru as Prime Minister was a kind of glittering combination of unique personalities in high offices that is rare anywhere in the world. Alas, there has been a steady and sometimes steep decline in the calibre of people who have since held these high offices in India.

Gopal is brutally frank about his father. In fact, he is so frank that one wonders why he is so frank. (I will, in seeming contradiction, later say that

Gopal is not frank enough). In the first paragraph of the first chapter (p. 10), we are informed that SR was perhaps not his father's son and that he himself accepted it "critical of his mother's conduct, always, throughout her long life, kept her at a distance." This devastating fact is mentioned so blandly by Gopal as if he is saying that Radhakrishnan had small pox or measles in his childhood. One had heard rumours about Radhakrishnan's philandering. Now we have the historian-son's word for it. Let him speak: "It was also at Mysore that Radhakrishnan ... found time for sexual adventurousness... The affair with the neighbour's wife was to set the pattern for the long series of involvements of which this was the first. As time passed they formed a fairly constant undercurrent to the decorum of his outward life. But self-indulgence carried with it no emotional investment... but he never gave them even the semblance of love." (p. 50). In other words, Radhakrishnan was abusing women for his sexual gratification. By doing so, was he taking revenge on his mother for her infidelity?

Gopal is obviously a well-read man and his reading seems to be wide-ranging. I cannot believe that he is unfamiliar with psycho-analytical writings. For others to know and for SR to believe that he is not his father's son is not such a tiny bit of insignificant information that it was just somewhere inconsequentially lodged in his photographic memory. It must have coloured his whole attitude to women. I am amazed that Gopal shows no insight into it, beyond recording. And, one would like to get more information from Gopal. If the neighbour's wife was not safe in Mysore, who was safe? Girl students? Female faculty members? Female employees in the universities of which he was Vice-Chancellor? Friends' wives? Friends' daughters? Or, did women come unsought to him, a not at all unlikely possibility, considering his brilliance and power to draw? When did SR stop his philandering? As Vice-President? As President? Did Gandhiji and Nehru know about it? Are there illegitimate children of SR? (Given the

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state of contraceptive knowledge when SR was having his affairs, it is a very likely possibility). Having told us something, you must now tell us everything, Professor Gopal. You must write another book, entitled 'Radhakrishnan and His Many Women' and tell us all you know. It is odd that Gopal does not say anything about his own reactions and his sister's reactions to this aspect of their father's reputation as they were growing up. And what he writes about his mother is wholly inadequate. Gopal writes more as his father's son than as his mother's son.

Why did Gopal write such a book on his father? It was possible to write a very different kind of biography, a wholly intellectual biography, omitting all personal details and chronicling his outward achievements. Radhakrishnan's reputation has certainly suffered; Gopal's reputation has improved. While admiring the frankness, one must also say that it is a curious tribute by a son to his father in his birth-centenary year. What revenge is Gopal taking on his father? Avenging the pain to his mother?

It is well-known that Nehru wanted Rajen Babu to retire as President after his first term and wanted Radhakrishnan to succeed as President. In fact, if Nehru had his way, Rajen Babu would not have become President in the first place. While it is obviously true that Nehru and Radhakrishnan hit it off very well, Gopal seems to overdo their bonds of affection and admiration. Though Radhakrishnan had his own formidable reputation, Nehru was the giver and SR the receiver in the political field. Gopal would have us believe that so good and great was their relationship that nothing could sour it. This claim is made despite Gopal himself recording that Rajagopalachari "recommended that the Constitution be revised so that, instead of ministers, the prime minister and the cabinet should act on the advice of the president." (p. 317).

And, there was Radhakrishnan's own fantasies, though jokingly expressed before trusted people, "as to how it might be worthwhile, after Nehru, for the President to take charge temporarily of the government, ..." (p. 328). Radhakrishnan obviously was an activist President. His role in removing

Krishna Menon from the cabinet is well-known. And there is the account of his very active and constructive role in getting Indira Gandhi elected as the leader of the Congress in Parliament. Radhakrishnan must have treated Indira Gandhi as a high school girl, with indulgence and condescension. Though Gopal tries to give a different impression, Radhakrishnan must have assumed that she would naturally give him another term as President. To be denied this by Indira Gandhi must have been particularly galling to him. Retirement did not come easily to him. "Despite himself, Radhakrishnan found that enforced leisure and inconsequential living did not come easily to him." (p. 362). Towards the end, he became completely senile. At his funeral in Madras, "two persons were conspicuous by their absence. The Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, and President Ahmed had not the grace to attend." (p. 373). One wonders if Gopal would have written these lines if Mrs. Gandhi were alive and in power. "Certainly throughout a long life he had never been guilty of a mean deed; and it is unlikely that he ever had a mean thought." (p. 365). For someone as human, all-too-human, as Radhakrishnan, it is an impossible claim and may be accepted as a son's boasting about his father.

Reviewed by PROF. D. NARAIN, Head of the Dept. of Sociology, University of Bombay.

AGRICULTURAL PRICE POLICY FOR DEVELOPING COUNTRIES, edited by John W. Mellor & Raisuddin Ahmad; Oxford University Press, Bombay; 1988; pp. 327; Rs. 120.

The present agricultural price system in India was conceived when the country was facing an acute food shortage and the potential of our agriculture unknown. Besides being unsuited to our present day conditions, it is perhaps the costliest — the cost of distribution, including the cost of buffer stocking, being 85 to 95 per cent of the price paid to producers — and catering to the needs of less than 15 per cent of our population. Our best security against food scarcity lies not in maintaining huge buffer stocks of

foodgrains, which are prohibitively costly but in keeping our production 20 per cent above the demand level. This is quite feasible in the light of our vast untapped potential. If we were to do this, we will never face a scarcity situation, because weather aberrations have never reduced our production by more than 20 per cent of the expected yield.

The Real Beneficiaries

Another aspect of food policy is that while ostensibly, it is for the benefit of the poor, the real beneficiaries are the most vocal and aggressive sections of urban society. The rural poor are hardly served by the public distribution system. In India 85 per cent of foodgrains so distributed is consumed in cities alone, while five out of six destitutes live in villages.

Agricultural Price Policy for Developing Countries — a compilation of essays, written by various authors — throws much light on the agricultural policies of developing countries, and their impact on domestic and international economies.

The book gives convincing evidence that there is no single model, which any country may exclusively adopt without reference to its prevailing conditions. In the very same country, if conditions change, the system has to change to suit the new requirements. Experience has shown that public intervention in foodgrain markets requires considerable administrative resource, analytical support and political agility to meet the changed

John W. Mellor & Raisuddin Ahmad
Agricultural Price Policy
for Developing Countries



Agricultural Price Policy for Developing Countries

JOHN W. MELLOR
& RAISUDDIN AHMED

circumstances successfully. These are lacking in most developing countries, including India.

Agriculture Prices Commission

The observations of J. S. Sarma, one of the contributors to this volume are very pertinent in this regard. He draws attention to the fact that when the Agriculture Prices Commission (APC) recommends prices for supporting or procuring grains it takes into account only the underlying trends in the costs of the commodity. This is certainly not fair to the agricultural sector for it ignores "inter-commodity parity, inter-sectoral parity and several other factors." In contrast to our own APC, in the U.S. and Japan these are worked into the support price. He also sees the need to impose restrictions on the movement of grains across states. Two other scholars, Krishna and Rai Choudhari, again stress the un-coordinated manner in which the APC applies criteria for fixing prices.

It has been argued by some of the contributors, that higher prices of farm produce do not necessarily lead to faster agricultural growth. That is true only when the requisite technology and infrastructure do not exist. They have not explained why productivity in agriculture is the highest, where agricultural prices are also the highest. Also why the Soviet and Chinese leaders, having tried cheap food policies for a very long time have now largely restored the farmers' right to sell in the open market. According to Bruce tone: "In China in 1979, the terms of trade between agricultural and industrial products were made more favourable to agriculture and rural areas than in any previous year... The output response to these shifts was dramatic... from stagnation at 285 m. tons, during 1975-1977, foodgrain production multiplied to 407 m. tons by 1984".

Free Competitive Farm Economy

Examining the evidence from the different countries, the conclusion is escapable, that in the long run, minimum intervention in open market operations is the best policy. But no government, for political reasons, can resist intervention. In developed countries, the intervention is to subsidise agriculture; in developing countries, it is to keep foodgrain prices

depressed. Both have resulted in a waste of public resources and distortions in the economy, without even ameliorating, in the long run, the lot of those on whose behalf the interventions were made. Witness the economic plight of U.S. farmers, who are most heavily subsidised, and of urban consumers in India, where in spite of mounting subsidies paid to the Food Corporation of India they have to pay ever-increasing prices for foodgrains.

The state, instead of pampering either the producers or consumers, should aim at building a free and competitive farm economy. The very poor ones, should be properly identified and provided direct food aid. The farmer's interests would be well served, if they are provided with warehousing facilities within easy reach, so that they do not have to resort to distress selling of their produce. As a further precaution, they should be assured of a support price, which is directly linked to the cost of living index of the poorest class in villages, viz., the landless agricultural workers.

The Government, if at all, should aim to regulate farm prices within a realistic specified range, in the context of open market prices and not at a particular level, arbitrarily fixed, and enforced throughout the year. The vegetable oil prices policy, recently announced by the Government of India is more sensible than their foodgrains policy.

I would recommend this book as compulsory reading for our policy-makers in Delhi.

Reviewed by MR. BHANU PRATAP SINGH former Union Minister for Agriculture.

SOME ASPECTS OF EARLIER INDIAN SOCIETY AND POLITY AND THEIR RELEVANCE TO THE PRESENT by Dharampal; Indian Association for Cultural Freedom, Aboli, 850/8A, Shivajinagar, Pune 411 004; 1987; pp. 54; Rs. 20.

The book under review consists of a series of three lectures given by Dharampal, the gist of which is that the system bequeathed by the British is an alien imposition and if India is to renew

herself, she would have to discover her own roots, traditions and talents.

Quoting from Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj*, he shows how passive resistance had always existed in India. Gandhi had such an understanding of the working of the Indian mind that it enabled him to commune with it at great ease. Unfortunately, what we find in India today, both in governmental and non-governmental spheres is largely what the British created during the demolition of Indian Institutions and structures between 1760 and 1830.

By 1920, a substantial section of the elite in India had become alienated from their own society. Many of Gandhi's own followers did not take him seriously. Perhaps our people had lost the capacity to recreate. They could not internalise the Indian past nor what they had learnt from the West recasting it into an Indian idiom. This brought about a civilization in which the distinction between society and polity was shattered.

Though not a professional historian, Dharampal was intimately connected with rural reconstruction. By the 1960s he concluded that although most people like him were dedicated to their objectives and had a great love for the country, they did not really know how ordinary people thought and what their priorities were. There was a vague picture of villagers oppressed and tyrannised by their rulers as well as by their customs. Rarely did anyone think of the memories, thought preferences or priorities of the people themselves.

During his experience of rural reconstruction work in Rajasthan, the author realised there were parallel people's panchayats eg. the *Bees Biswa Panchayat* apart from *sarkari* panchayats, which did things like repairing tanks or building panchayat *ghars* by their own efforts and organisation. The people believed that an official panchayat's work was 'development' and development was what the government required them to do. There were also 'Sesana' villages in Andhra Pradesh and 'Samudaam' villages in Thanjavur which, with regard to aesthetics, design, state of agriculture and planting of trees resembled an Israeli *Kibbutzim*.

The author also discerned from 19th and 20th century British records that in Bengal and Madras, the revenue fixed by the British was 50% of the gross

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agricultural revenue, which was excessively high. This can be verified even from Indian records of old, aristocratic families of bankers and merchants. But these have unfortunately not been identified.

The records also refer to '*manyams*' the land which was assigned to various village institutions and functions. In South India these were called '*Swatantrams*' for the maintenance of the village and even for intra-village institutions and activities. Usually about 1/6th of the cultivated land was classed as '*manyams*'. Altogether, in such a society, the records show that the individual was well-provided for and enjoyed a certain dignity. In a sense, the polity of those days resembled Mahatma Gandhi's '*Oceanic*' circles where the innermost circles maintained the utmost autonomy and only such fiscal and other support was extended by them to the outer circles which was essential for performing the residual tasks.

The rate of revenue which went to the apex state was indeed very small. According to Munro it was only 1/4th of the revenue imposed by the British. Even the Mughal rulers never exacted more than 20% of the total revenue. Throughout India, the rights of the actual cultivator were permanent and hereditary and these began to be scrapped by the British from 1790 onwards in order to realise a greatly enhanced revenue.

With regard to education, some unexpected information has come to light. Between 1822 and 1825 in Tamil-speaking states 70% to 80% of the total number of students belonged to the Sudra Caste, 62% in Oriya states and 54% in Malayalam — speaking states. Similarly in science and technology, the making of steel, freezing water into ice as well as plastic surgery were known since ancient times. Certain methods of protest or civil disobedience like *dharna*, were also practised.

An early documented protest against the salt tax took place in Surat in the 1840's. The living standards of the poorer classes were adequate and much higher than those of similar classes in Britain. Agricultural productivity was higher and agricultural implements as well as crafts were more sophisticated.

We may now legitimately ask if all this is true, how are the present day

realities in India so different? Because of India's defeat by the British, two things happened. Indian scholarship withdrew itself from the arena of social affairs and immersed itself in sacred texts or rituals. Then 1830 onwards English education was introduced and in 1857 the Universities were founded. A new elite was created and within four to six generations this new elite came to know and believe what the selective British system taught and some even thought themselves the equals of the British.

It is also conceivable, says the author that in today's circumstances we cannot have recourse to the institutions and structures of pre-British India. Genuine decentralization in the sense of the Central Government shedding its controls is important.

It may also be necessary for India not only to master modern theories, modern technology and their products but also to innovate or improve upon them. In such a reshaping of India, the explanation of the past by Indian authors is of great value.

Reviewed by DR. ALOO DALAL Head of the Dept. of Political Science, Wilson College, Bombay.

IN THE WONDERLAND OF INVESTMENT by A. N. Shanbhag; Popular Prakashan Pvt. Ltd., Bombay; 1988; Rs. 65.

The management of money has always been a fascinating subject, for the simple reason that a discreet investment of funds gets better returns for the person through tax saving, and a rupee saved, after all, is a rupee earned.

Financial security is important; it comes with savings, and savings can be maximised (without cutting down on normal expenditure) through proper tax planning and profitable investments. Tax planning has different significance for different people depending upon their tax slab. For a tax payer, tax planning means reduction to the minimum of the incidence of tax by availing of the benefits admissible under the tax laws.

Investment is an equation of income status, risk attitudes and liquidity pref-

erences of the persons concerned. Therefore what is a good investment for one individual may be a very bad investment for another.

Normally, an individual has three objectives when he takes an investment decision:

1. Maximise return on investment.
2. Minimise risk of capital loss.
3. Ensure a certain degree of liquidity of investment.

But as there are too many alternatives having different concomitant benefits to choose from, he feels lost in taking crucial financial decisions. Some schemes give him tax concessions on income earned whereas some give him tax concessions on the monies invested. Some provide loan facilities while others give him premature withdrawal options.

Return, risk and liquidity vary with each plan. Risk and liquidity are subjective aspects related very much to the personal needs and preferences of an individual. To sort out all these factors and to assess the correct worth of a particular plan requires an in-depth proficiency and knowledge.

Mr. Shanbhag's book contains a wealth of information about various investment plans and the existing tax structures. Using these data, the author has made a unique attempt to give the reader a capacity to make his independent judgement.

As the author himself points out, the book has been written with two basic purposes:

The first is to fill an information gap by providing the reader with decision-oriented data on most of the savings schemes currently available to an individual investor. The second is to impart to the reader an ability to evaluate financial schemes without his requiring to read any text-book either on finance or mathematics.

The book helps prospective investors to make an intelligent comparison of the yields expected from different investment and gives them an overall picture of the most profitable way in which to invest their savings.

The author has enriched the book with a number of appendices and tables on the mathematics of finance and break-even rates. These will be of great interest to the students of mathematics but may not make much sense to the

lay investors. The book also contains a bibliography for those who desire to make a deeper study of the subject.

The major problem in publishing a book of this nature is that there is always a possibility of some of its contents getting outdated by the time the book is put on sale. Tax laws keep on changing from time to time. The interest rates for most of the plans may be changed through government notifications. The annual budgets bring about quite a few changes in the existing investment schemes. As a result of such a continuous flux in this field, the readers would do well to keep updating the book and re-check the details independently before making an investment.

There is one point on which many investment analysts may not agree with the author of the book and that is his treatment of life insurance as a second rate investment. The fact of the matter is that life insurance cannot, and should not, be taken as an investment, pure and simple, and therefore cannot be fairly compared with other investment schemes on the basis of returns alone. The confusion arises because the author works out the return on a life insurance policy on the basis of a maturity claim amount, and ignores the return on a hefty death claim amount after only a couple of premiums are paid! Life insurance is something distinct and apart from investment and should therefore not be compared with other forms of investment.

But, after all is said and done, to Mr. A.N. Shanbhag goes the credit of being the first principal guide to take millions in this country around the wonderland of investment. The fact that his book should have gone into seven editions in virtually as many years is a clear indication of the popularity of his pioneering work in this field.

Reviewed by MR. M. D. MUKHI, President, Merchant Banking Division, Battivala and Karani, Bombay.

FOR A REVOLUTION FROM BELOW: An M.N. Roy Commemorative Volume edited by Sibnarayan Ray; Minerva Publications, Calcutta; 1989; Pp. 146; Rs. 100.

This well chosen collection of essays is a brief but weighty contribution towards the understanding and appreciation of M.N. Roy. He is justly recognised as an outstanding figure in the history of modern Indian thought. The Renaissance in the West, the revolutionary thought of Karl Marx and the aberrations of the Communist movement in Russia and elsewhere, formed the background of his re-consideration and re-assessment of Indian thought and tradition and his prescription for the re-ordering of Indian life and polity.

As the editor has summed up the matter in his concluding essay, "It is my understanding that M.N. Roy did not exclude revolution from his view of the future, nor abjure his commitment to revolutionary ideals, but he gradually reached the view that social, political and economic revolution must be preceded by or synchronise with a cultural and philosophical revolution if the hazards of centralisation were to be eliminated. He used the term 'renaissance' to describe this philosophical revolution. In radical humanism he tried to weave into a whole the two distant phases of revolution and renaissance."

Agehananda Bharati has observed in his essay that Roy "never stopped from being a Marxist — albeit in the complex, refined form suggested in this contribution. Just as he rejected 'vulgar materialism' (his term), he rejected 'vulgar Marxism (my term)'".

In spite of his record as a thinker and revolutionary, Roy remained a lonely figure — both the communists at the behest of the Comintern and the Indian Left who were unable to free themselves from the spell of Gandhi's leadership were cold, if not hostile towards him. By temperament, too, Roy was aloof and lacked the charismatic appeal of popular political leaders. His ideas were also seen as borrowed from the West and alien to the Indian tradition. "Roy ploughed the lonely furrow of anti-fascism in India only to be doomed to political isolation. He had, however, the conviction as also the satisfaction of being a true pioneer, both as a thinker and political activist." (Ganguly. P 92)

The title of this collection, expresses the core of Roy's philosophy of revolution. It was to be a revolution from below as compared with Lenin's which emphasised the need for a revolution from above, led by a determined group forging ahead towards a fore-ordained goal, drawing within its fold all 'progressive', nationalist elements within a colonial society. Roy maintained that in such an event a colonial society may win freedom but would only find that native tyrants and exploiters had succeeded their earlier imperial masters.

Philip Spratt, referring to Roy's differences with Lenin remarks that what was denounced at the time as the heresy of *decolonisation* has been justified by the facts. (P 118). That is why the revolution must be from below and start with the mind; its motto should be that man is the measure of everything (Protagoras), that man is the root of mankind (Karl Marx). As North has noted, the contradiction between Lenin's and Roy's theses has "presented difficulties for communist cadres in Third World revolutions ever since." (P 14).

Roy's philosophy of radical humanism was an answer to this contradiction; equally, it was an alternative to the incomplete doctrines of Liberalism and Socialism. An uncritical liberalism might end in an empty liberty even as an uncritical Socialism might end in the suppression or denial of liberty. Radical humanism would combine the truth of both in a fruitful synthesis and establish man in his true status as the sole and universal criterion of value.

This collection includes 15 brief essays by well known scholars, besides an introduction by the editor. The "Twenty Two Theses" which state the essence of Radical Humanism are reproduced in an appendix. The essays are readable and suggestive; the one on Chinese source materials on Roy should be of particular interest to serious students of the subject. Niranjana Dhar's comments on Hindu revivalism are worth serious and critical consideration — he considers that the Indian renaissance as well as the reformation are both essentially obscurantist. Other essays in the volume, too, are interesting and appropriate. The volume is excellently brought out.

Reviewed by PROF. G. N. SARMA, Professor of Political Science (Retd.), Marathwada University, Aurangabad.

In Calcutta, when people discuss
people, events and news
an important point of reference is
"What did The Statesman say?"





Sidney Hook

1902-1989

"Philosophy", John Dewey once wrote, "recovers itself when it ceases to be a device for dealing with the problems of philosophers and becomes a method, cultivated by philosophers, for dealing with the problems of men."

That may be taken as the credo, and the measure, of the life of Sidney Hook, who died on July 12 at age 86. The range of his writings, and involvements, was prodigious: from democracy, religion, education, Marxism, morality, metaphysics, to specific problems of civil disobedience, racial segregation and affirmative action, nuclear war, to questions of judicial activism (which he opposed) and the defense of legislative actions and majority rule.

Hook's first major book, *Towards the Understanding of Karl Marx* (1933), presented Marx as a naturalist whose early works were continuous with the developments of pragmatism and the instrumentation of John Dewey. His second, more detailed book, *From Hegel to Marx* (1936), was a meticulous tracing out of the intellectual origins of Marx' philosophical thoughts. Although subsequent studies have supplemented the two books with greater detail, they remain original readings of Marx.

Though Sidney was not an anti-Marxist, he did become a thorough going anti-Communist. In 1932 he had been a supporter of the Communist Party ... what appalled Sidney was the brutal, de facto alliance the Communist Party of Germany had made with the Nazis to overthrow the Weimar Republic, and its

justifying this by the theory of "social fascism" — the argument that since fascism was the last stage of monopoly capitalism in economic crisis, Hitler would only be a transient figure, and the main task of the Communist Party was to smash the rival Socialist movement.

From 1934 Sidney was an unyielding enemy of the Communist Party, his beliefs reinforced by the dreadful repetitions of the Moscow Trials, the Nazi-Soviet pact; the Slansky trial in Czechoslovakia; the abortive Doctor's Plot in 1953, when Stalin was ready to unleash violent anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union following the arrest of the Kremlin doctors; the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, etc. etc. Sidney never flinched from the phrase "Cold War liberalism," and lived to see every one of his arguments and charges sustained first by Khrushchev and finally by Gorbachev — the rehabilitation of Bukharin, the admission that the Moscow Trials were a frame-up, and the complete denunciation of Stalin in the Soviet Union.

With Orwell, Koestler, Silone and manes Sperber, Sidney epitomized a generation of intellectuals who fought in the combat of ideas against Sartre, Brecht, Lukacs and other deceivers defending the Soviet Union and its repressions under the abstraction of the "March of History."

For those who knew Sidney personally, as a student or friend, his greatest prowess was as a teacher. His greatest demand was for clarity. His greatest skill was his emphasis on distinctions relevant

to an issue. Thus, when the McCarthy issue arose, Hook published his essay, *Hersey Yes, Conspiracy No*. He defended the full rights of all honest dissent...

Given his public and combative role, many of Sidney's more reflective works were eclipsed, yet they remain enduring in the history of ideas. His *The Hero in History* (1943) anticipates Isaiah Berlin's later strictures against historical determinism. His most poignant essay was entitled "Pragmatism and the Tragic Sense of Life" (1960), and it became the title piece of his best collection of essays published in 1974...

... the most remarkable aspect of Sidney was his courage, intellectual and personal. He always had a calmness about death. One of his earliest essays, "The Ethics of Suicide" (1927), defended the act as sometimes rational. In his essay on "Pragmatism and the Tragic Sense of Life," he remarked that "the fear of death, the desire to survive at any cost or price in human degradation, has been the greatest ally of tyranny, past and present." In the last decade of his life, he suffered much pain and many onslaughts. An Op-Ed essay in the *New York Times* defending voluntary euthanasia, elaborated later in a longer essay in the *New York Review of Books* (a remarkable reconciliation on its part with Sidney), won wide attention for its emphasis on personal dignity and self-awareness as the greatest good for the close of one's life. He himself lived a full life. And that was all he asked for — and achieved.

Daniel Bell