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FACTIONALISM AND THE CONGRESS PARTY IN UTTAR PRADESH*

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The growth of personal and factional politics has been the most important development in the Congress party organization in Uttar Pradesh since independence. Personal and factional politics existed in the U.P. Congress before independence, alongside a politics of issues. Since independence, personal and factional politics have come to dominate the internal affairs of the state Congress. This essay will describe the differences between pre- and post-independence patterns of politics in the U.P. Congress and ways in which the changes have taken place, the character of contemporary factions and factional politics, and the impact of factionalism upon the ability of the Congress organization to maintain itself.

The Growth of Factional Politics: Three aspects of the external environment and the internal political process of the Congress party in U.P. have contributed to the development of factional politics—the absence of an external threat,¹ the presence of an internal consensus upon ideological issues, and the absence of authoritative leadership. All of these characteristics have developed within the Congress party in Uttar Pradesh only since independence. The first requires little explanation. Before independence, the struggle for independence and the threat to the party organization of administrative reprisals provided an external incentive for internal unity. Since independence, despite several splits of important groups from the Congress organization, opposition parties have not been able to threaten the Congress hold over the state government.

The other conditions encouraging the growth of factional politics developed gradually as a result of two interrelated changes which took place in the internal politics of the Congress party in Uttar Pradesh in the years after independence—a change in the content of political debate and in the character of political leadership. The content of political debate changed from an internal discussion of the place of language, culture, and region in

* This article is part of a larger study of Congress party organization in Uttar Pradesh, based upon field research in that state from 1961 to 1963. Research was carried out during the tenure of a Foreign Area Training Fellowship granted by the Ford Foundation. Miss Maureen Patterson very helpfully read and criticized the first version of this article. However, the responsibility for the statements, opinions, or any errors in the article is entirely the author's.

¹ The importance of the external environment for the internal structuring of political parties has been discussed most extensively by V. O. Key, Jr., in *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949) and in *American State Politics: An Introduction* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956).

the modern state and of the social and economic goals of Indian democracy to a more mundane controversy over the respective roles of party and government in the political system. Simultaneously, political leadership in Uttar Pradesh passed from the hands of the prominent leaders of the nationalist movement from this state into the hands of the second rank of party workers. The charismatic leaders, the prophets of independence, whose positions in the movement depended upon the esteem and awe in which they were held by the rank and file of Congressmen were replaced by "political" leaders—men whose positions depend less upon their personal esteem than upon the political patronage they distribute. These changes took place partly as a result of internal political crises and partly as a result of a natural and gradual process of the adjustment of the Congress organization to workaday, non-agitational politics.

For pre-independence U.P. Congress politics, it is possible to construct a typology of political leaders related to patterns of conflict. Two kinds of latent conflicts which existed in Uttar Pradesh before independence and which culminated in open conflicts in the post-independence period were between "modernists" and "traditionalists" on the one hand and between ideologists and virtuoso politicians on the other hand. A fifth kind of politician of considerable importance in the pre-independence period and for some time thereafter was the arbiter. The arbiter did not participate in conflicts either of principle or of men. His role consisted in reconciling conflicting principles and in making enemies work together in a common cause.

It is useful to make this typology of political leaders because it can then be shown how certain kinds of politicians have declined in importance and others have come to prevail. The "modernists," the "traditionalists," and the men of ideology were the first to disappear from state Congress politics. The next to go were the arbiters, those who were adept in the art of compromise and reconciliation. In the end, the state Congress was left almost completely in the hands of the modern virtuoso politicians, men who understand both the traditional society in which contemporary U.P. politics must operate and the modern machinery of party organization and government patronage.

Conflict between the "modernists" and the "traditionalists," between secularism and Hindu revivalism, reached a crisis during the 1950 presidential election of the Indian National Congress between Purushottamdas Tandon and Acharya Kripalani. The details of this conflict at the national level, the victory of Tandon, his later resignation, and the assumption of the presidency by Pandit Nehru have been dealt with extensively elsewhere.² Here, it is necessary to point out only that Tandon and men who respected him as a symbol of Hindi and Hindu culture dominated the Uttar Pradesh Congress during this struggle. The eventual victory of Nehru was a warning to Congressmen from U.P. In effect, Hindu revivalism became unaccept-

² See Myron Weiner, *Party Politics in India: The Development of a Multi-Party System* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1957), chap. iv.

able in the Congress party in U.P. and the cause of Hindi and of Hindu culture was left to the communal opposition parties.

Conflict between ideologists and politicians in Uttar Pradesh was also evident within the Congress movement in the pre-independence period. Until 1948, Congressmen in U.P. had the choice of joining the ideologically-oriented Congress Socialist Party, which operated within the parent Congress organization, or of joining one of the non-ideological, personal groups which had no less real an existence, but no formal organizational structure. However, in 1948, the departure of the Socialists from the Congress brought an end to ideology as a factor in U.P. Congress politics.

The departure of the Socialists in 1948 and the defeat of the Hindu revivalists in 1951 removed political extremes from the U.P. Congress organization. A moderate consensus emerged, more or less faithful to the principles which Nehru represented—a moderate approach to questions of language and culture and a gradual, non-dogmatic approach toward “socialist” ideals. With no issues of substantial importance left to fight about, politics in the U.P. Congress more and more revolved around personalistic group or factional politics. The party organization was left in the hands of the virtuoso politicians.

In this period of conflict and crisis in the years immediately after independence, a generational change in political leadership also took place. The leaders of the nationalist movement from U.P. either withdrew from the Congress and went into opposition or joined the central Cabinet. However, this process was not finally completed until 1955, when Pandit Pant left for the center.

The departure of Pandit Pant for the center in 1955 marked the end of an historical period in U.P. politics. Pant had been the dominating personality in the U.P. Congress since 1937, when he became the state’s first Chief Minister. Two important elements of stability which Pant gave to U.P. politics went with him when he left—authoritative leadership and the art of political management. Pant was the last of the prominent leaders of the nationalist movement in U.P., a man who occupied a position of unchallengeable authority and esteem because of his seniority in the movement and his sacrifices on its behalf, because of his integrity, and because of a certain touch of charisma drawn partly from his own personality and partly from his association with the great leaders of the Indian nationalist movement. Furthermore, in the internal politics of the Congress, Pant had performed the role of arbiter. In this capacity, he had rarely participated directly in political controversies. Pant’s skill was in the art of political management; he knew how to make men work for him and he knew how to make enemies work together under him.

The whole tenor of U.P. politics changed after Pant’s departure. Authoritative political leadership was replaced by group and faction leadership. Men who brought personal prestige to political office were replaced by party workers who have little stature in the society other than what they achieve

through the party organization. For the new political leaders, politics is a vocation; the contemporary faction leader does not bring status and prestige to office, but rather seeks status and prestige through office.

Since Pant's departure in 1955, there have been three new Congress Chief Ministers in a period of time less than that of Pant's own tenure of office. The internal politics of the Congress party in U.P. has revolved around a struggle to gain or control the office of Chief Minister by dominating the party organization. Two broad groups, with a fluctuating membership, have grown up inside the Congress organization; the group in power is called the Ministerialist group and the group out of power the dissident group. This pattern of Ministerialist-dissident conflict in the Congress is not confined to Uttar Pradesh, but appears to be general in Indian states' politics.³ Internal political debate in the Congress party in U.P. now revolves around the issue of party versus government. The dissident group criticizes the administration of the state and demands a share in government, while the Ministerialist group insists upon the independence of the state government from party dictation. The issues raised are of little importance, for both party and government are controlled by party workers.

Characteristics of Factions and Factional Conflict

The Ministerialist and dissident groups have the same structure and the same ends. Both are collections of factions, coalitions of district faction leaders who seek position and power in the state government. Organizational charts to the contrary notwithstanding, the basic unit of the Congress party in U.P. is the faction. The structure of the Congress party in this state and its internal political processes can be understood only through a knowledge of the patterns of conflict and alliance among factions, the composition of factions, and the ties that bind leaders and followers.

Conflict and Alliance: The first and most obvious characteristic of contemporary factional politics in the U.P. Congress is the predominantly personal nature of factional groups. Although the language of conflict is often phrased in terms of important principles and a policy issue may sometimes be seized upon as a pretext for factional struggle, factions and factional conflict are organized completely around personalities and around personal enmities among party leaders. A second characteristic of factional conflict in the U.P. Congress is the shifting character of political coalitions. Alliances develop and splits and defections occur wholly because of the mutual convenience and temporarily shared power-political interests of group leaders. Although the Congress appears to be split into two camps—dissidents and Ministerialists, party organization and Government—neither of these groupings is ever monolithic. The minority group, the dissident group, be-

³ A similar pattern of politics also exists in Japanese political parties where the group in power is called the Main Current and the group out of power the anti-Main Current. See Robert A. Scalapino and Junnosuke Masumi, *Parties and Politics in Contemporary Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), pp. 59–60.

comes a majority group through gradual accretions of supporters, most of whom switch allegiances for personal reasons. The pro-Government forces at any time are similarly composed of a number of faction leaders. Each group will have a leader, the Chief Minister or his heir apparent on the Government side and the aspirant for the Chief Ministership on the dissident side. The groups are often called by the name of the leader, that is, the Gupta group or the former Sampurnanand group, after the last two Chief Ministers of the state.

These "groups" in U.P. politics are actually very loose coalitions of local, district faction leaders, tied together at the state level partly by personal bonds of friendship, partly by caste loyalties, and most of all by political interest. The membership of these groups change constantly so that it often appears that there are no persistent conflicts and no permanent alliances, that all is perpetually in flux. In fact, lying at the core of factional conflict and constituting a boundary line for group conflict and for shifting alliances are personal enmities between prominent leaders.

The inner core of a faction, which is usually very small, is bound together by a relationship which is in many ways similar to the *guru*-disciple relationship in education and religion—a relationship which is cemented by the warmest personal ties of affection and loyalty between master and disciple, leader and follower. It is the closeness of the ties among the members of the inner circle which often makes for the most intense hatred of those outside the faction. The faction leader is literally a potentate for a small circle of followers, for whom he holds a nightly *darbar* and from whom he expects unswerving and unquestioning loyalty. Men who are used to such esteem as part of their daily lives are quick to take offense when those outside the circle do not offer them sufficient respect. Trivial misunderstandings between faction leaders can lead to life-long enmity. As a result, an atmosphere of bitterness pervades contemporary politics in the U.P. Congress.

Alliances among faction leaders from the districts can be lasting or temporary. Like the faction itself, each group or coalition of factions has a relatively solid inner core. On the other hand, there are some faction leaders who will not form permanent political alliances with any group, but retain complete independence and switch alliances at their convenience.

To make sense out of changing factional alignments, it is essential not only to identify the patterns of alliance, but to isolate the lasting enmities between certain faction leaders. Enmities between prominent leaders form the boundary lines for U.P. Congress factional conflicts. One can usually identify leading opponents who have never formed an alliance for any reason. However, the allies of such protagonists may freely form coalitions with opposing sides for temporary political advantage. Within the boundaries of such personal enmities, there is considerable fluidity.

The Composition of Factions and Groups: The most important man in any faction, of course, is the leader. Moreover, there can be only one

leader in a faction. Wherever there is more than one leader, at least for purposes of definition, there is something broader than a faction—a group or a coalition of factions. Faction leaders differ widely in personal temperament, but an ideal type can be constructed. The ideal Indian faction leader has seniority, education, integrity; he has an understanding of people's personal problems and struggles; he is personally conciliatory in temperament (as long as he is shown proper respect) and is able to solve disputes. He is politically adept; as Indians say, he has "tact" and knows the art of political manipulation. Most important, he is selfless and generous and provides money and jobs to his followers.

A faction in the U.P. Congress might be described as a clique with a larger, fluctuating membership.⁴ The inner circle of the faction remains with the leader through thick and thin, for the members of the clique are attracted to the leader by the character of his personality. The larger, fluctuating membership remains with the leader only so long as he can provide material benefits or the likelihood of material benefits in a not too distant future. These men represent the "floating vote" of internal Congress politics.

Both the members of the inner circle and the outer circle of followers generally come from diverse social and economic origins. This is true equally of the members of an *ashram* and of a faction. It is not to say that there are no differences in the composition of factional groups. The most important social category in U.P. politics, as elsewhere in India, is caste. Personal enmities between faction leaders occur more frequently and are more intense when the opposing leaders come from different castes. The inner core of a faction also is likely to be somewhat more socially homogeneous than the outer circle.

A particular caste may occupy a predominant position in a faction or in a coalition of factions. However, at all times, there is a broad spread among caste and community groups represented among both dissidents and Ministerialists. Social diversity dictates coalitions among caste and community groups as a political necessity in a society so diverse as that in U.P. Politics works in the same direction by dividing the allegiance of various caste groups.

State and District Factions: The political differences which divide faction and group leaders are not differences over ideology or policy. For the most part, differences arise over political influence and patronage in a faction leader's home district. Control over the District Congress Committee or over an important Congress-controlled district institution, such as the District Board or a Municipal Board, is a stepping-stone to power in

⁴ The relationship between cliques and factions is described in the context of politics in a Mysore village by Alan Beals, "Leadership in a Mysore Village," in Richard L. Park and Irene Tinker, eds., *Leadership and Political Institutions in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), pp. 433-37.

state politics. Under the new system of factional politics, the state party organization, the Pradesh Congress Committee (PCC), has great influence over the state government. The delegates to the PCC are elected from the districts. Any district Congressman who can control the votes of the delegates to the PCC from his district is a man of potential power and influence in state politics. Conversely, any man who wants power in state politics must have support in the districts.

Associated with the development of groups at the state level as collections of district faction leaders has been the rise of party men from the districts to positions in the government. The biographies of Ministers in the state government show that most have occupied positions on the District Congress Committee (DCC) or on the District Board or on a Municipal Board in their home districts before joining the Ministry. The reasons for the rise of party men to government office are clear. To gain or maintain control over the state government, a group leader must have the support of district faction leaders. The most important way to gain such support is to appoint faction leaders as Ministers. Similarly, an important way to defeat a factional rival in a particular district is to appoint one of his opponents from his home district as a Minister; the Minister may then use the patronage of his Ministry to build a rival faction in the district.

The most important aspect of district factional politics that must be noted is the fact that local factional systems are largely autonomous. That is, factional conflicts in the district arise out of social and political differences in the local environment. For the most part, district faction leaders bargain with leaders of groups at the state level for positions of power and patronage. However, group leaders at the state level can influence the course of factional politics in a district, as has been mentioned, by giving positions of power in the party and in the government to local faction leaders.

This integration of separate factional systems is facilitated by the institutional structure of the Congress party organization. For example, the most important point of contact between the state and district party organizations comes in the selection of candidates to contest the general elections to the state assembly and to Parliament and to contest important local elections, such as the Chairmanship of District and Municipal Boards. The procedure followed is that the DCC's make recommendations to the state Parliamentary Board, which may accept the recommendations of the local committees, choose from a number of names when more than one candidate is recommended, or may even select a candidate not recommended by the DCC. Thus, it is of some importance for district faction leaders to be associated with group leaders in the state party organization. The situation is very much like what would exist if the British system of party organization were imposed upon American politics.

The Functions of Factions

Factions and factional conflict perform both integrative and disintegrative functions for the Congress party organization in U.P. The disintegrative impact of factionalism upon the Congress is the more evident impact. The integrative functions which factions perform are less obvious, but may be more important in the long run.

Disintegrative Functions: In a sense, factional conflict in U.P. cuts at the very basis of the existence of a modern democratic political party. Although a system of factional politics may develop in any society under certain objective conditions, factional conflict in U.P. is intensified by traditional attitudes toward decision making and conflict resolution. In the traditional society, decision making is a long process of evolving a consensus.⁵ Conflict is resolved ideally over time; if disagreement prevents a decision now, then the desired agreement may be reached later. When conflict cannot be solved by agreement and a quick decision is essential, arbitration is the only acceptable alternative. Decision making and conflict resolution in a democracy and in a democratic political party rest upon different bases. In place of consensus and unanimity, there is the doctrine of majority rule;⁶ when conflict arises, formal institutional procedures are established to resolve them. However, faction leaders in the U.P. Congress accept neither the doctrine of majority rule nor institutional mechanisms to resolve their disputes with other factions. Defeated faction leaders tend to describe an unfavorable vote as a corrupted vote, a misguided vote, or a vote of betrayal, a failure of allies to deliver promised assistance. Institutional mechanisms are perceived as unfairly constituted, dominated by one's personal opponents, from whom a fair decision is hardly to be expected. As in the traditional order, the only procedure for conflict resolution which is acceptable to faction leaders is the mediation of an impartial arbitrator. In the state Congress and in the district Congress organizations, the role of arbitration has been performed by senior Congressmen who have no factional affiliations. However, the number of arbiters has been decreasing as the internal politics of the Congress has more and more become organized along factional lines. The kind of personality who best performs the role of arbitration is rarely recruited into the Congress now, since it is the faction which now performs the recruitment function for the Congress.

Where arbitrators are no longer available to resolve conflict, a real danger exists that the party organization may split apart. In 1959, 98

⁵ For a description of the traditional process of decision making in a village in western U.P., see Ralph H. Retzlaff, *Village Government in India: A Case Study* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1962), p. 24.

⁶ Majority rule is, of course, not the only or necessarily the primary way in which decisions are made in practice in a democracy. However, the principle of majority rule has a general legitimacy in modern Western democracies which is lacking in Uttar Pradesh politics.

members of the then dissident group of the U.P. Congress Legislature Party declared that they had no confidence in the state Congress government. Although the dissidents did not actually vote against the government, the threat to do so was obviously implicit in the declaration. In the districts, factional conflict has sometimes become so intense that local Congressmen, occupied with their own internal struggles, have failed to perceive external threats. In such cases, it is not uncommon for a local Congress party organization to lose most of the Assembly and Parliamentary seats in the district, even in a district where the Congress has been traditionally strong. Where arbiters cannot mediate conflict, disaffected and defeated faction leaders may run against official Congress candidates or sabotage election campaigns from within the organization. A disaffected faction leader does not mind participating in the defeat of the entire local Congress organization if this is the only way to defeat his faction rivals.

It is not uncommon for factional conflict in U.P. to reach such an intense pitch. Factional politics in traditional societies is personal politics and status politics. Conflicts of status between faction leaders lead to intense factional disputes which are often in their very nature insoluble. When prestige or honor becomes of primary importance in politics, the possibilities of resolving conflicts are reduced, for honor cannot be shared. Factional conflicts in the Congress party in U.P. often have an extra-political origin. They may be extensions of conflicts which arise in the society between former rivals in school or business as part of a more general struggle for personal prestige. Political disputes in U.P. tend to be part of an interlocking pattern of disputes in which faction rivals seek status and esteem not only in politics, but in the society as a whole. Thus, political rivals may carry their conflicts into business and social life, even into such apparently petty affairs as the running of a local library and reading room. Conflicts which have such extra-political ramifications are not amenable to ordinary political solutions.

The disintegrative impact of factional conflict on the Congress party organization in U.P. has led to a decline in Congress electoral strength in the state. The Congress polled only 35% of the vote for state assembly seats in the 1962 election,⁷ making the Congress party in U.P. the weakest state Congress party organization in India. Yet, the Congress remains in power in U.P., with a comfortable majority of seats in the state assembly.⁸ More important, the local Congress organizations have occasionally demonstrated their ability to regain lost electoral strength in succeeding elections. A number of features of the factional system of the Congress party in U.P. have contributed to the ability of the Congress to maintain itself in power.

Integrative Functions: Factions perform the function of political recruit-

⁷ In 1957, the Congress polled 42% and, in 1952, 48% of the assembly vote.

⁸ The Congress won 58% of the assembly seats, 249 out of 430, in the 1962 election.

ment for the Congress organization. In fact, there is a direct relationship between the intensity of factional conflict and the size of Congress membership. Factional opponents enroll primary members for the local organizations in order to acquire voting strength in the organizational elections.

Factional conflict broadens the bases of participation in the Congress organization. Not only are more members enrolled, but new caste and religious groups become politicized and integrated into the Congress organization, adding to its diversity and to its strength. Most important, factions tend to divide caste and community groups and so to free the Congress from the threat of communal politics. The integration of local caste groups into the internal factional system of the district and state Congress organizations prevents either the dominance of a particular caste or community over others in the Congress or the development of polarized conflict between large caste groups or between Hindus and Muslims.

In the contemporary factional system of the U.P. Congress, the party organization is threatened neither by communal nor ideological issues. Ideological issues are unimportant both in the external relations of the faction leader with his rivals and in the internal relations of the leader with his supporters. Ties between leaders and followers are personal and material in character. Within reasonable limits, party leaders may follow whatever policies they choose as long as they maintain the respect of their followers and provide them with material benefits.

Another important feature of the factional system of the Congress party in U.P. which contributes to the stability and resilience of the party organization is the autonomous character of each local factional system. The autonomy and separateness of local factional systems mean that sudden changes in the electoral strength of a district Congress organization will not affect other district organizations. In one district, factional conflict may become so intense and so disruptive that the local Congress organization cannot function. Yet, Congress organizations in neighboring districts will be unaffected. In the state party organization as a whole, the disruption of one or a few local organizations is a relatively unimportant matter.

Moreover, within each district, factional conflict tends to become stabilized. After independence, a variety of factional systems existed in the U.P. districts. Some Congress organizations were dominated by one leading personality, others were divided into two large factions, still others were multi-factional in composition. In most districts, the tendency in recent years has been towards increased fragmentation and fission of factions, so that multi-factional competition has become the rule. Multi-factional competition in the U.P. Congress has been less disruptive and less bitter than other forms of factional struggle. Struggle between large and well-organized factions may lead to the total disruption of a district Congress organization. Under a multi-factional system, several political

leaders with strictly local influence may coexist, bargaining among themselves for positions and patronage and forming temporary alliances of mutual convenience.

The most important function which factions perform for the Congress party in U.P. is to channel conflict and hostility within the party without endangering its stability. Although factional loyalties take precedence among Congressmen over loyalty to the party organization, faction leaders will leave the Congress only when absolutely necessary for reasons of prestige and will return to the Congress as soon as it is possible to do so with the least loss of face. The dominance of the Congress in U.P. and the inability of opposition parties to gain control over the government in the foreseeable future is a fact which all faction leaders recognize. Faction leaders will go into opposition to defeat a political opponent, but they will return to the Congress whenever it is to their advantage to do so. The looseness of Congress discipline on such matters permits the maintenance of this kind of factional system.

Dissident faction leaders are permitted by the looseness of Congress discipline to form alliances freely to replace the party leadership. When a dissident group succeeds in becoming the majority group, the process of factional alliance to replace the new leadership begins again. Under the new system of factional politics, the leadership of the Congress party is always unstable, but the party organization itself is rarely in danger.