

Chayanov's (17.2.69)
file no - 523

BKD



The emergence of two nearly evenly matched parties in political life of old democratic countries has seemingly become part of the essential attributes of democracy, though it is of little significance to the study of pure political theory and thought whose accumulated wealth has blossomed into what we call democracy today. This history of the functioning of democracy has given rise to the belief that a single party rule with another party sitting in the opposition provides and ensures homogeneity and avoids temperamental and — if one may say so — ideological conflicts in the formulation of governmental policies and in day-to-day administration. During the last few decades Britain and France have experienced two divergent varieties of coalition governments. It was purely during the emergency created by war that Britain put the two parties side by side in the seats of power. This was done apparently in pursuance of the feeling that ^{at} a time when the country was involved in a life-and-death struggle, the natural instinct of opposition in a democratic set-up should be reduced to the minimum so that the war effort might be pushed forward with common consent at the Cabinet table rather than in a partisan spirit in the legislature by rejecting the opposition opinion. In this way, that is, through the two-party coalition, the Opposition was also enabled to contribute its mite to the war effort. In France, before the present set-up came into being, coalitions resulted from the absence of a single-party majority. The experience was not a happy one, but no conclusion can be drawn that all coalitions will meet the same fate and will produce the same results.

(2)

When coalitions were coming up and collapsing in France, the conflicting political parties were wedded to widely different economic, political and religious ideologies, and their meeting-ground for a coalition was a minimum agreed or agreeable programme. On account of different complexions of socialism and communism, the electorate was divided into numerous ideological sections, and the interpretation of Marxism itself differed, like Buddhism, from section to section. Britain was fortunate in this respect. There too political life was affected by a mild variety of Marxism, and the result was the growth of the Labour Party to a powerful stature. Britain escaped sectional divisions like those of France, and has now the advantage of the so-called two-party system.

India has emulated Britain in preparing the framework of its democratic institutions, but has incidentally drifted in the party framework towards the French way. Almost simultaneously with the assumption of the leadership of the Congress by Mahatma Gandhi there sprang up in practical form the ideas of Marxism, and in the twenties India witnessed the birth of a communist party. A decade later some Congressmen formed themselves into another party called the Socialist Party, which was a pink variety of Marxism. These new ideologies were like small islands in the vast ocean represented by Gandhism which was getting response from the vast multitude of the Indian people. Indian history, with its peculiarities, provided the background for other political manifestations, the most conspicuous of which was communal. In the wake of political consciousness communalism spread, quite paradoxically, like wild fire, and we saw the birth and growth of the Muslim League on the one side, and later on, of the Hindu Mahasabha on the other. The British made their own contribution to communal and social ills of India, and by encouraging separate electorates, they divided Indians into



several compartments. The initial blame for electoral separation of "untouchables" lay with Hindu society itself, and it was rather natural for the so-called untouchables to give expression to their suffering by setting up separate political parties and giving these parties life-blood with the caste Hindu hatred. Social rungs of a society are in practical result the economic rungs, and one finds this truth writ large in India. By and large the so-called high castes are more prosperous and better educated than those reckoned as backward classes and scheduled castes. After the achievement of freedom and introduction of Constitution based on adult franchise, these people, calling themselves 'have-nots' discovered their power, and some of their leading men formed caste-based parties to mobilise the aggrieved classes on the political platform. Those who had grown under the Mahatma's leadership to a sound secular stature treating all castes and religions with evenness of temper, helplessly saw the political life degenerating from ideological plane to fissiparous tendencies.

On the ideological plane itself, there were divisions resulting from conflicts between party leaders. The most glaring example is provided by the Samyukta Socialist Party and the Praja-Socialist Party. The common people do not know what their socialism is and how it differs from the socialism of the Congress or any other party. One wading through the Congress ideological thesis comes across a strange phenomenon: as you turn one page, you get the impression of Gandhism, the next page gives you a glimpse of Marxism; the third gives you the taste of full-blooded capitalism, and so on. In the first instance this mixture seemed to suggest that the Congress itself provided material for subdivision; and in the second, the misappropriation of Congress popularity by certain individuals has resulted in division among Congress ranks. I mean to say that many men, appearing by what the Congress stood for under the Mahatma's leadership, were compelled to get out and put up separate parties.

(4)

Such, in brief, is the picture of party politics in India today. On the one hand India is a land of so many parties; on the other, there is the hard reality of political life that the voters in every democratic country have the tendency not to tolerate the rule of one party for a long time ; under no circumstances are they prepared to tolerate it perpetually. A constitution, whether democratic or of any other variety, is imposed from above, whether by a constituent assembly or by a monarch, but parties grow from the bottom, and cannot be regulated according to any established practice. However, one may wish that only two parties grew instead of the existing so many ones, one has got to put up with the present situation, and one has to think of an alternative to the one-party rule in the present circumstances. In the name of 'stability', Congress leaders asked the people during the recent mid-term campaign that they should ^{vote} for Congress. But as the results have indicated, the voters of the four States have acted in the same manner as their counterparts act in other countries. They have tolerated Congress rule for so many years, but they are not prepared to do so for another five years. This is the experience of almost the entire democratic world, and does not conclusively suggest that a coalition government is better than that of the Congress and vice versa.

There is hardly any virtue in a multi-party rule, and there are no arguments to elevate it to a plane of principle. It is the offspring of necessity, and since it is inevitable in India, some virtue and some principle have got to be imparted to it — something has got to be done to utilize it for the greatest possible good of the people. It is comparatively less difficult to work a coalition in the States than at the Centre, the reason being that under the Constitution, State Governments have limited powers with regard to economic structure of society ; they cannot make any basic economic changes, and this position incidentally





gives the excuse to the ideologically divergent parties that all that they have to do is to maintain the status quo and to give the state an efficient and honest administration. One spectacular thing in which all can easily unite is that wealth should increase and production should move forward steadily. In what manner this vital responsibility of a state administration should be discharged is a matter of opinion. It is also a matter of the attitudes of different parties. Usually those struggling against the Congress in election contests hold out high hopes to the electorate: tax reduction, salary raise, less work, all are promised in one breath. If promises are to be honestly translated into practice, the resources would dwindle still further and those available would be squandered away in higher salaries and unproductive whims.

The various political parties arrayed against the Congress and working as constituents of the coalition set-up want to appease different sections of the people, believing that these sections respectively ^{constitute} the backbone of their strength of in the legislature. The appeasement is at times thought of, and given effect to, at the cost of production and prosperity of the people as a whole. It is difficult, rather impossible, to enumerate what items of appeasement are advisable in the larger interest of the poor and what are not. The answer to the baffling question of conflicts always confronting a coalition set-up is compromise, of which obstinacy is the negation. In 1967, when coalition governments came into existence in several states, compromise played a definite role and made it possible for agreed programmes to be formulated. But it is the scruple of ^{conduct} conduct that has played a more decisive role in human affairs than written agreements. The coalition governments had a narrow margin of majority, and even a few hot-headed members could use the veto power. There were instances of notices being served by them upon the Chief Ministers and an honest Chief

(6)

Minister will have to think whether to surrender to the immoral threat or to get out. This is not a decisive argument against coalition, but raises an argument for moral conduct against expediency. The law, agreement or the written word plays a minor role in human affairs; mutual understanding is the real guiding light.



Whatever the colours and complexions in a coalition, all of its constituents have to abide by the law of the land. Even those believing in 'direct action' or violence as the harbinger of a "new order" will have to abide by the law of the land. As long as one binds oneself by an oath to work according to the Constitution, one cannot think of a law-breaking programme. A coalition into which a law-breaking programme is carried by a constituent, will either collapse under its own contradiction or will be dispossessed of its power by the President. Honesty demands that such a constituent remains aloof or declares acceptance of its attitude or programme as a condition precedent to joining the coalition. Certain offices of mild variety do not unseat a member of a legislature, and if such a member is a minister, he can legally continue as a minister also. Here conventional morality occupies a higher position than the legal requirement. A coalition set-up cannot have a different standard of democratic conventions and moral behaviour. A Coalition Govt. Minister, if he indulges in corrupt practices, is as condemnable as his Congress counterpart. Similarly he cannot take part in a "Satyagraha" involving breach of law.

How the coalitions should function is a new subject in India. It is not a purely theoretical question; we are face to face with it in practical politics. It is natural for every party in the coalition to improve its image in public with a view to get more votes and it may be tempted to make use of governmental machinery for this purpose. The experience of the recent past, perhaps, indicates that aloofness of party bosses from the day-to-day

(7)

administration is the best way to avoid conflicts arising out of this ambition. One may deprecate coalition on principle but everybody will have to agree that since it has come to stay, it will have to be based on certain principles, and it is for the coalition parties to evolve them. They will be deceiving themselves if they promote the belief that they need a separate code of democratic conduct. Coalitions are part of democratic life of the country, and they have to fit themselves into it. How smoothly they should conduct themselves is a different matter and it is exactly for this that they will have to formulate some principles. To the extent these principles or postulates can take the place of loyalty to a single party and single Chief which will be lacking in a coalition, and to the extent these principles can reconcile or tone down the conflict between the rival policies and rival ambitions which, by its very nature, will inhere in a coalition - will a coalition government be a success. Much will also depend on the tact and the accommodating spirit of the Chief Minister as also the consideration which his colleagues will extend to him.



LUCKNOW :
17 February 1969.

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