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POLITICS WITHOUT PARTY

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ABSTRACT

Having come to the conclusion, empirically as well as theoretically, that the system of several parties engaged in the struggle for power, to be captured either constitutionally or through armed insurrection, had debased democracy to demagoguery, Radical Democrats and Humanists could no longer function as a political party. They were guided by the time honoured dictum that charity begins at home, or that example is better than precept, and consequently dissolved their party in so far as it had been organized with the object of participating in the fight for power.

But they never accepted either the anarchist view that politics is an evil, nor the Marxist utopia of stateless society. They had defined politics as the theory and practice of public administration, and the state as the political organization of society. The corollary to the definition is that membership of civil society implies the responsibility of doing whatever is necessary to guarantee an orderly, equitable and just administration of public affairs; only the recluse can disown this responsibility. By resolving to dissolve their party, the Radical Democrats did not propose to retire into recluses. The resolution simply was no longer to participate in pattern of political practice which has done more harm than good, has soiled the fair name of democracy. It was to initiate other forms of public activities which would raise politics to a higher level.

KEYWORDS: *political party, equitable administration, civil liberties, realistic considerations.*

INTRODUCTION:

One of the many bad features of the party system is that it restricts the number of citizens participating in political activity. The membership even of the largest mass party cannot embrace more than a small fraction of the people. The restriction logically results from the very term party. Indian terms, such as Congress, Sangh, Sabha, or Dal, do not alter the situation, because of the identity of purpose, namely to capture political power. No matter what ever may be the name, a political party is formed with the sole object of capturing control of the state, sooner or later. The object is justified with argument that only in office a party can put its programme into practice. Therefore, by adopting one of the Indian terms for its name, a political organization does not cease to be a party, that is to say, only a part of the people or the class or the community it claims to represent. Otherwise, there would be no sense in the idea of representation. Since by its very nature, a party is bound to be exclusive, a minority organization, party politics cannot be



democratic politics in the true sense of the term. Political practice is monopolized by a minority of professional politicians; and the bulk of the community is given no place in the practice; they are to follow one party or the other. Democracy therefore can never be practiced through the intermediary of party politics, which by its very nature, reduces the demos to the status of camp followers.

Obviously, the rejection of party politics means a resolution to practice politics on a much wider field, so that the entire people may actively participate in it. Under the party system, the people can do no more than vote for this or that candidate who is nominated by respective parties. Political practice cannot be truly democratized unless the people can nominate as well as vote for a candidate. It is easy to see that parties will have no place in the latter form of political practice, which provides for sustained actual participation of the entire community. While not compelling them to do so, it allows all citizens to play an active and significant role in the State.

It goes without saying that this change over cannot take place from today or tomorrow; nor will an entire country discard the old practice and adopt the new one all at once. It will be process, and the process itself will be uneven. The change over from party politics to democratic politics will be brought about gradually by raising the intellectual level of the people, by quickening their sense of self respect and self reliance. Therefore, democracy is not possible without education.

Those who will apply themselves to the initial task of laying down the foundation of a democratic social order cannot in the meantime be indifferent to the political conditions in which they will have to operate for quite a long time. These conditions may influence their work, for better or worse. In the transition period, parliamentary democracy, with all its manifest failures and inadequacies, will be obviously preferable to a dictatorship. Civil liberties will have a greater chance of survival so long as various parties alternate in power or contend for power, than under one party rule.

The control of the state by one party claiming to be the sole custodian of popular interest is antagonistic to democracy. Paternalism, even with the very best of motives, kills self reliance in the people and fosters in them an authoritarian mentality, a predisposition to accept authority as the natural order of things. In backward countries, an undemocratic one party rule is fortified by the traditional credulity and lack of self confidence on the part of the people, political backwardness and general ignorance. It will be reinforced by the illiteracy of an overwhelming majority of the enlarged electorate under the new Constitutions. Therefore, no realistic democrat can entertain the illusion that in India, for instance, the Congress could be dislodged from power in the near future. The object should be to encourage maximum possible resistance to its totalitarian ambitions, so that at least a semblance of parliamentary democracy and a modicum of civil liberties may be preserved while sustained efforts will be made to build up a democratic order from below.

For these realistic considerations, Radical Democrats should have no objection to supporting parties which would challenge the system of one party rule and the totalitarian claim of the Congress. This attitude will be consistent with the rejection of party politics and scramble for power, because of the difference between voting and soliciting votes. Radicals should support, and ask others also to support, the most promising opposition party, not with the illusion that the situation would materially change if it replaced the Congress in power, but only to shake the foundation of one party rule, and provided that the opposition candidates are better even of provided integrity. The sincerity of the resolution to stand outside party politics will be demonstrated by refusing to be members of the party or to become their candidates for election.

Cooperation with opposition parties at the time of election, however, does not exhaust the possibilities of the political practice of Radical Democracy. The most fundamental task is to educate the people. Election campaigns can be utilized for this task. Democracy will not be successful so long as the masses can be swayed by demagoguery or appeal to emotions. On the eve of an election, when various parties will make big promises to catch votes, the electorate should be advised and helped to examine the promises and vote intelligently. That will mean political education.

On the same occasion, the people should be told that they are not obliged to vote for this or that party; that they can just as well vote for a locally nominated candidate who will be their man, known to them, and therefore can be controlled more easily. The initial propagandas for the nomination of local

candidates, instead of party men, will lead to the formation of People's Committees. The people will replace the party, and a long step towards real democracy will be taken. That will be political activity of fundamental importance, and active participation in the current politics of the country without engaging in the scramble for power. There are many other forms of non-party political activity designed to spread a spirit of independence and self-help in all day-to-day public affairs of a community.

Those who conceived the idea of organized democracy must now put it into practice. People's Committees are to be the basic units of an organized democracy; and it is easily imagined how the rise of People's Committees will mean the beginning of the end of party politics. The experience of individuals working accordingly to this plan in selected place should be a source of general inspiration. Even existing Village Panchayats set up in some parts of the country can be built up as units of organized democracy, defying party control, even of the party in power. To transform the growing dissatisfaction into an informed and constructively directed opposition to one party rule can become an integral part in a larger scheme of political activity which will transcend the narrow limits of interested party politics. In the prevailing authoritarian atmosphere, one party rule is generally taken for granted. This is a dangerous tendency, which must be combated. Otherwise, a dictatorship with 'democratic' sanction may destroy all hopes of political freedom and social liberation. The cultural tradition of the backward countries being the breeding ground of the danger, it must be, in the first place, fought on the cultural front. Enlightenment, civic education, and spread of knowledge are the weapons. Experience also has a great educative value. Elections are part of that and they will show that in an atmosphere of political illiteracy of the bulk of the electorate and authoritarian mentality of the middle class, even formal parliamentary democracy is not possible. Many even in the ranks of the parties, today, deluded with the hope of coming to power at some time or other, may be expected to learn from the experience the lesson that democracy must be built up from below and, abandoning party politics, will turn to democratic politics. Meanwhile, the pioneers must show that politics without party is possible

The last Conference of the Radical Democratic Party marked the opening of a new chapter in contemporary political history with the decision to transform a political party into a broad and comprehensive social movement for the spread of education for democracy and the promotion of the ideal of freedom. The decision is probably unprecedented in the history of political institutions. Instance of political organizations having atrophied, decayed or decomposed may not be wanting, nor case of organizations having dissolved their separate entity with a view to merging into another. But several hundred delegates possessed of political conviction and enthusiasm deciding after prolonged deliberations to transform a political organization of their own creation, is perhaps unique. It amounts at once to an assertion of man's sovereignty and creativity

The decision of the Conference at Calcutta was a logical deduction of the philosophy of New Humanism formulated by the Radical Democrats two years earlier. As a result, the Radical Democratic Party already had been engaged in developing a comprehensive social movement. Having abjured the aim of power, it had placed itself outside the scramble for it, the only sense in which politics seems to be understood in our times. The activities carried on by the party could not lend themselves to be measured by the standards generally applied to a traditional political party. A certain anomalous position had thus arisen between those activities and the designation of a party, which on occasions created confusion even in the minds of those who otherwise sympathized with and supported the cause of Radical Democracy. The Calcutta decision ends that anomaly and thus removes what constituted, in a way, a limitation on those activities.

The Radical Democratic Party had the tradition of freedom and rationality in its own ranks. That enabled the Party to take such a decision. Throughout the period of its existence, it functioned as a school for the education of its members to develop into better human beings, and never as a collectivity with a transcendental significance, demanding the sacrifice of their individuality from its constituents. It had no existence of its own, over and above and independent of its constituents which could enchain its creators and reduce it to the position of subordination. It was an expression of the cooperative activity of Radical Democrats, inspired by a common ideal, as such, it was free from the organizational characteristics of political parties, many of which are necessary corollaries of their being engaged in

coming to power. The discipline in its ranks was an expression of organizational ethics and never meant to be a code of conduct enforced with a whip. Responsibilities were voluntarily accepted and authority had mostly suggestive and directive significance.

Built up in this manner, the Party never claimed a strong mechanical apparatus with huge mass membership which could be no more than a blind following in the prevailing atmosphere of cultural backwardness. But it did surpass any other group in the country in respect of its intellectual integrity and spiritual strength. These were often proved beyond doubt during the short period of its existence, when the Party had to struggle against overwhelming odds, and were recognized even by those who disagreed with it. In the successive waves of nationalist mass hysteria, Radical Democrats alone stood firm, reminding the people that so long as politics was based on emotion and prejudice, it could not bring them freedom. They went against the popular current because to them intellectual and moral integrity always counted for more than immediate and temporary success.

Though the Radical Democratic Party was a comparatively small political party, its traditions and functioning gave it a cohesion that is rarely seen in any political groups. The decision of the Radical Democrats to cease functioning as a political party is an expression of that spirit struggling to expand beyond the limits of a closed group.

Inspired by a democratic ideal and aiming at the construction of a political apparatus in which power would be effectively vested in the people as a whole, it could not and did not endeavor to function as an intermediary between the people and the state. The task it had formulated for itself was the diffusion of power, and meant to remove the gulf between the ruler and the ruled, which has so often proved to be destructive of democracy, even within the framework of formal representative institutions. The party could not therefore achieve its task through the capture of power, not even by the aid of the ballot box, much less through insurrectionary means. It was thus neither a constitutional nor revolutionary party in the traditional sense. Sharing a common ideal, the Radical Democrats were united in an organization which worked for the diffusion of knowledge as the essential precondition for the diffusion of power and the building up of the institutions for a free and democratic society. Given this nature of their task and the activity which followed from it, it was difficult to see why they should remain a political party. The decision to cease doing so simply signifies recognition of that difficulty and an endeavor to remove it.

This difficulty was not one of their creation, but one which Radical Democrats had to face in the process of the development of their activities. Having abjured the aim of power and thus placed themselves by their own choice outside the game of power politics, there is no reason why they should have exposed their cooperative effort to be judged by rules and standards relevant to that game. Having been an entirely different kind of political party, there is no reason why they should have tied themselves to a name denitrified by a form of organization which they rejected as undemocratic. Engaged in activities to promote the freedom and well being of all, they were stultified by an organizational form which by its very nature is sectarian, and erects barriers against non-members. After all, the term 'party' has a meaning; it signifies a part of the people, sharing a particular ideal, and engaged in activities with the purpose of achieving it, which invariably imply its dominating the whole as an indispensable stage.

Education of the citizens and gradual building up of a new political structure from below are the only guarantees against these dangers of the party system. Education will make people consistently self-reliant, rational, discriminating and hence capable of protecting themselves from being easy victims to mass hypnosis of one kind or the other, and only among such people can a new institutional framework crystallize which will provide the guarantee against an individual or group of individuals dominating and exploiting them. The institutional framework of parliamentary democracy with its inherent concentration of power in the hands of few through the political parties can hardly be expected to fulfill this need. It is not in the nature of political parties to function in this role. Leaving aside the obviously monolithic parties frankly aiming at the establishment of a dictatorial rule, even a constitutional party seeking to obtain the support of a majority through the ballot box in order to control the political state apparatus cannot make it its primary task to educate the people. Being

involved in the game of power, it has to play it according to the rules, and objective political education of the people might be a means to defeat the end of coming to power. That a party comes to power backed by a majority is no proof and guarantee that it is democratic. And education of the people may also militate against its next objective of remaining in power.

To have discarded the organizational form of a party does not in any way, even remotely imply that Radical Democrats will eschew politics. Those who cannot conceive of politics without the incentive of power, and therefore without a party, are not the best doctors for the maladies of our time. They themselves need to be cured. Political parties have been instruments devised mainly for the smooth functioning of the political apparatus of parliamentary democracy, which seldom went further than paying lip service to the sovereignty of the human being. In the contemporary context it does not the sovereignty of the human being. In the contemporary context it does not guarantee even the continuation of that formality. The problem of democracy can therefore no longer be solved by political parties. It is a deeper and more comprehensive problem than one of institutional adjustment. It can be solved only by a comprehensive social movement, developed on the basis of the realization of the ultimate identity of political, economic and moral problems and inspired by a philosophy capable of suggesting solutions to them all. "New Humanism", of which Radical Democracy is the political expression, is such a philosophy. Guided by this philosophy, Radical Democrats will now endeavor to develop a Radical Humanist Movement, and in consequence discard a form of organization which had become irrelevant to their task.

Party System and Electoral Political in the Indian States, 1952-2002: From Hegemony to Convergence

The challenge of theorizing the party system in India at the state level has never been felt as acutely as it has been in the last decade or so. One reason for this is too obvious to miss. The 1990s have witnessed a sea change in the political arena in India. The map of Indian politics today appears strikingly different from what it was in the late 1980s. Professional students of politics have begun to see this change from the late 1980s to the 1990s as signifying a reconfiguration of Indian politics: it is not just that the game has started yielding different and surprising results; in some way the rules of the game itself have changed.

The 1990s have unleashed several independent yet simultaneous trajectories. The intensity of electoral competition has increased with the rise in electoral volatility. This has been accompanied by something of a participatory upsurge. The level of political has shifted from the all India level to the states. The national electoral verdict appears no more than an aggregation of state level verdicts. These changes have been accompanied by a change in the idiom of politics. All this adds up to quite a messy picture. Messy, not only because many of these dimensions are intertwined, but also because we do not understand many of these very well and lack a frame to see their inter connection.

A word about the perspective that informs this reading of the party system may not be out of place here. We are interested in the party system because we are interested in the possibilities of social transformation in and through democratic politics. We are interested in mechanisms through which competitive politics opens or closes possibilities of expanding meaningfully the available range of options or the probability of the more effective options being taken up. The party system is critical mediating factor in this possible relationship between democratic politics and social transformation. The party system defines the structure of political competition that shapes and constrains the political choices that a citizen can exercise. The party system thus form the menu of choices that determine the possibility of social transformation through democratic means. To believe in this is to share the conviction that democratic politics opens the possibility of electoral choice being turned into a radical instrument of social change, of rearranging the composition of the power elite, of renegotiating the political agendas, of redefining the relations of power in society. At the same time this reading is tempered by the knowledge that the operation of structures of social and economic inequality works systematically against the realization of this possibility.

CONCLUSION

Having come to the conclusion, empirically as well as theoretically, that the system of several parties engaged in the struggle for power, to be captured either constitutionally or through armed insurrection, had debased democracy to demagoguery, Radical Democrats and Humanists could no longer function as a political party.

Since by its very nature, a party is bound to be exclusive, a minority organization, party politics cannot be democratic politics in the true sense of the term.

Many even in the ranks of the parties, today, deluded with the hope of coming to power at some time or other, may be expected to learn from the experience the lesson that democracy must be built up from below and, abandoning party politics, will turn to democratic politics.

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