

The Complex Art of Political Organisation

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The science and business of government is what politics is all about. In fact the dictionary meaning of politics is “The science or business of government; moves and manoeuvres concerned with the acquisition of power”. Politics is played by political parties and in a democracy it is political parties which contest elections and which, if they are fortunate enough to be favoured at the polls, form a government. Therefore, in a democracy any group of people which wants to capture power and thereby determine the manner in which a country will be governed has to form a political party. Anna Hazare, who had taken up the theme of fighting corruption and eliminating it, largely through a law in this behalf to be enacted by Parliament, finding that the agitational approach alone was not enough to win success, has now decided to use the political road to power in order to achieve his objective.

Before India embarked on its campaign for independence this country did not have any meaningful political parties because the road to government and to power lay not through the political process but rested on the bayonets of an imperial power. One was either British and, therefore, a ruler, or one was an Indian whose principal task was to be governed by his imperial masters. Here there was no room for politics or a political party. No doubt there were movements such as the revolutionary movement led by the Anushilan Party in Bengal, but this was a pure campaign of terror whose ultimate objective was nihilism and, therefore, this group did not really constitute a political party. Its origin was the partition of Bengal by Lord Curzon, which it hoped to undo by creating a situation of anarchy through terror. It suffered the fate of all such movements, which was that the British security apparatus penetrated its cellular structure and then destroyed it. This was an excellent example of how a terrorist movement could be broken, but in my view it did not constitute a political movement.

My contention could be questioned because on 28th December, 1885 the Congress was born in Bombay through the initiative of Allan Octavian Hume. This initiative had the blessing of the British Viceroy, Lord Dufferin. Hume intended this party to be a group which would meet under the chairmanship of the Governors of the Provinces as a type of grievance court which could place before government issues relating to India. However, the Viceroy wanted an Indian to preside over the Congress so that it could place the Indian point of view before government without inhibition. Hume was the first General Secretary of the party and remained so till 1907. Lest it be understood that the Congress at the time of its origin was a party fighting for independence, it might be noted that in 1888 the President of the party was George Yule, an Englishman, in 1894 it was Alfred Webb, in 1904 it was Sir Henry Cotton, a retired ICS officer and in 1910 it was Sir William Wedderburn, who had been Secretary to the Government of Bombay. The early role of the Congress is best described in the words of Louis Fischer in his book “The Life of Mahatma Gandhi”. I quote, “The Congress was organised to channel popular protest into legal moderation. But into the channel flowed the fresh waters of national revivalism... The world theosophist movement ... likewise fed that pride in the past which constituted the foundation of the movement for national regeneration.

Thanks in part to the unification and orderly administration of the country by the British, Indian industrialists, Hindus and Parsees in particular, grew rich and began to buy out their British partners. The emergence of Indian capitalism and a new Indian middle class gave a

powerful impetus to the urge for self-government. Under these multiple influences the Congress outgrew its collaborationist boyhood and became a demanding youth". Here it needs to be acknowledged that in the conversion of the Congress from a group which petitioned the British into a political party which became a formidable instrument for organising the whole of India into a freedom movement, the greatest credit must be given to Gopal Krishna Gokhale and to Bal Gangadhar Tilak who coined the slogan "Swaraj is my birthright".

The metamorphosis of Congress from a group representing Indian interests into a political party whose objective was the same as that of any modern political party, that is, the ousting of foreign rule and then gaining power to govern the country, followed a long and tortuous path. A comparison could be made with the African National Congress in South Africa which also began as a group of people believing that the white masters could be petitioned to recognise the existence of the black population and then gradually turned into a political movement which combined militancy with genuine politics and then culminated in the elimination of apartheid from South Africa and its replacement by a genuinely democratic polity. Because the Congress had a leader of the stature of Mahatma Gandhi and ANC of the stature of Nelson Mandela the transition of power from imperial rule in India to independent India and from white supremacy to genuine democracy in South Africa could take place without embitterment or hatred for the British in India and the whites in South Africa. In this lies a lesson for those who want to constitute new political parties in India, for example, Anna Hazare. There seems to be a belief in the followers of Anna Hazare that because their's is a popular movement against corruption if the movement converts itself into a political party it will instantaneously be voted to power and will then be able to use this political power to abolish corruption. Fortunately politics is not like a packet of Rasna, a flavoured powder which one dissolves in water to create an instant cold drink. Politics, even the politics of revolution, is an evolutionary process in which first there is an idea, then the idea is converted into a seed, the seed into a seedling, the seedling into a tree on which grow various branches which together constitute politics. People who start a political movement need enormous endurance and staying power if they want their ideas to mature into the tree of which I have spoken.

Let us take the example of two revolutionary movements, that of Lenin in Russia and of Mao-Tse-Tung in China. The seed of Marxist philosophy was sown by Karl Marx in the latter half of the 19th Century. It was the consequence of the horrors of the industrial revolution which planted in Karl Marx's mind an idea that the future belonged to the proletariat and that could only be achieved through a total egalitarian dictatorship of the proletariat in which ultimately the State would wither away. This gave birth to the Communist Party which, after intense struggle in Russia and in the midst of the total defeat of that country in the First World War, resulted in the elimination of the Tsarist regime and the establishment of the Soviet Union under Communist rule. The objective of this political movement was the destruction of the existing State in Russia, but it was not an anarchist movement because its sequential objective was to establish the Soviet Union as a dictatorship of the proletariat. There was no instant fix in the change of the political and social order, it came at the end of a long, hard struggle. Similarly, the Communist triumph in China in 1949 was the result first of the Sun Yat Sen Movement in China in which the Kuo-min-tang party established by him overthrew the old imperial order and established a republic. Despite the interregnum of Chiang Kai-shek, during whose regime the Kuo-min-tang descended into the depths of corruption, Mao Tse Tung's Communist Party struggled against the government and this ultimately resulted in the Chinese Revolution of 1949. Unlike the Soviet Union, where Lenin and Trotsky heavily depended on the urban proletariat, the

Chinese Revolution was entirely peasant based because the reality of China was that it was a predominantly peasant based country. Mao's genius lay in realising that dogmatic Marxism which depended on the urban industrial proletariat needed redefining in the Chinese context and here it is the peasants who constituted the proletariat.

In India independence saw the Congress in power in the Centre and the States, just as in Pakistan it was the Muslim League which gained power. After Jinnah's death and the assassination of Liaquat Ali Khan the politics of Pakistan underwent a change. Multi-party democracy virtually disappeared and despite its sporadic emergence from time to time in various forms, the fact remains that in Pakistan it is the Army which calls the shots. India continued in the democratic mould. The Mahatma realised that the Congress was all powerful in India, it was in government and could not, therefore, oppose government and, therefore, Congress rule would degenerate into one party rule. No one-party rule can be truly democratic. He fully appreciated that the Congress consisted of many disparate elements which come together in the freedom movement, including the powerful group of socialists. The cementing force which held these groups together was power and this is the worst kind of a bond because it only temporarily binds groups within a larger whole which can ultimately only be destructive. He recommended that the Congress should dissolve itself and new parties should be formed according to their respective ideologies which could help democracy to function. When this did not immediately happen the Mahatma tried to create a group of Constructive Workers. They would not go into power politics but would guide government and the people in the running of government on truly democratic, nonviolent lines. For Anna Hazare and his associates I would like to quote the words of the Mahatma who said, "I do not want to take power into my hands, but abjuring power and devoting ourselves to pure, selfless services of the voters we can guide and influence them. It would give us far more real power than we shall have by going into the government. A stage may come when the people themselves may feel and say that they want us and no one else to wield power. The question could then be considered". Let Anna Hazare not feel that he is the only crusader against corruption. This is what the Mahatma had to say "There is so much corruption today that it frightens me. Everybody wants to carry so many votes in his pocket, because votes give power... Banish the idea of the capturing of power and you will be able to guide power and keep it on the right path... There are other ways of removing the corruption that threatens to strangle our independence at its very birth".

To return to the main theme of this paper, a multi-party democracy needs more than one political party, but does not need and cannot survive fragmentation of parties into tiny components, each with a highly selfish agenda of its own. Therefore, before a new player enters the political scene it must first identify its own ideology and spell it out, first to its members and then to the people at large. The Communist Party was born out of a Marxist ideology, the parameters of which were created by Marx and the body of which was created by Lenin. Karl Marx was the ideologue and Lenin was the person who gave substance to the party. Fabian socialism in Britain grew out of an idea and the originator of this dogma was the London School of Economics. Even the Nazi party, or the National Socialist Party to give it its full name, was born out of a somewhat confused amalgam of racist thoughts, Nietzsche's philosophy of rejecting the Christian compassion for the weak and advocating the creation of the *Übermensch*, or superhuman, combined with an ill formed idea which was generally anti capitalist and ultimately focused onto extreme anti Semitism. The point being made here is that even the ultimate horror launched on the world by the Nazis came out of some form of ideology.

However, let me hasten to add that this was an aberration and does not represent what I mean by ideology in the context of politics.

From the ideology of a party emerge its programmes, aims and objectives. Whereas these can be flexible to a contextual reality, ideology must be based on firm foundations. Judged by the criteria of ideology and ideology based programmes no political party in India lives upto the ideal. Politics is a game of power and ideology is what lends a direction to the purpose for which power will be utilized. When Clement Atlee came to power as the head of the Labour Party in Britain his programme, based on the ideology of socialism, was to make available universal health care and education to all, to nationalise major industry and to transfer from private ownership to the public domain the major utilities and capital goods industries. Atlee's government proceeded to achieve its objectives with single minded purpose and succeeded. That is the power of an ideology based programme. By contrast in India, especially after 1967, almost all programmes of all parties are based on expediency because the objective is no longer to govern but to gain power and to use it for self-aggrandisement. This means that even the existing parties are no longer ideology based and, therefore, Indian politics has become rudderless. That as a result of this India is fast becoming a victim of non-governance does not seem to cause any worry or concern to any politician or political party. I can think of nothing more cynical than L.K. Advani's recent statement that in 2014 India may face a situation in which neither the BJP nor the Congress can form a government, that some third party candidate will become Prime Minister and an extremely weak coalition will be cobbled together, either with the support of the Congress or the BJP, which will just not have the capacity to govern India. As the senior most active leader of the BJP it was Advani's duty to suggest steps which could strengthen the major political parties and thus enable either the BJP or the Congress to be sufficiently strong in Parliament to form a meaningful government. I am afraid a leader of his seniority and status cannot enjoy the luxury of making cynical statements without suggesting a remedy.

In an earlier paper I have referred to what is happening to this country because of the state of degeneration of our political class. Now into the fray has jumped Anna Hazare with his motley group of supporters whom he has now disowned. I myself was approached by a person who is a former civil servant, whom I personally like, to join this group and offer my candidature for Parliament. Fortunately I have had the experience of a parliamentary election in 1984 which I narrowly lost because the then Chief Minister, Arjun Singh, had heavily manipulated the votes in two assembly segments where I have not served as an officer. I am proud of the fact that I carried all six assembly constituencies of Betul District where I had been DC twenty-five years before the election. That, however, was a one time phenomenon only, because I had no organisation, no money, no vehicles and the entire election was fought by the students of the district and by people at large who had fond memories of me as their D.C. I certainly do not have the resources and energy to again fight such an election and I also acutely realise that I retired from Service twenty-eight years ago and I cannot expect people to fight an election for me on the basis of old memories. I mention this because whatever its intentions, the Anna Hazare group must realise that fighting an election calls for an organisation, which we call a party. Even after totally eliminating the corruption factor it should be understood by Anna Hazare that a parliamentary constituency, especially a rural constituency, covers an area of about ten thousand square kilometers and embraces at least eight assembly constituencies. For the candidate and the supporters to travel around the constituency and place their point of view before the electorate requires fairly complex logistics, including ten to twelve off road vehicles, their drivers, POL, maintenance, etc. A parliamentary constituency has probably about five thousand polling

stations at each of which a candidate would need two polling agents to look after his interests. These agents would have to be given some small sum of money, say Rs. 100 each for the day of poll, for refreshments and food. Taking into account the cost of travel and of the polling agents' allowance alone, a parliamentary election campaign needs a minimum of rupees twenty-five to thirty lakh. Which honest candidate from an ordinary background would be able to find this large amount? That is where party funding comes in and this becomes the root of all corruption. The very process by which Anna Hazare now wants to eliminate corruption is the genesis of corruption. By all means go into politics because that is a fundamental right of every Indian citizen, but do so with eyes open and an acute awareness of what politics requires.

At present Anna Hazare has no ideology at his command. Neither he nor his colleagues understand dialectics, they do not have the capacity to formulate long-term programmes, they have no clearly enunciated objective other than the elimination of corruption and that, too, through an Act, the draft of which has been prepared by Prashant Bhushan and his father, Shanti Bhushan, together with some inputs by their colleagues. The very act of drafting the Bill and then insisting on its adoption by Parliament without changing a comma or full-stop is aimed at completely undermining the democratic process as exercised through Parliament and does not bode well for the future of any political party to be set up by Anna Hazare. What will be the stand of this party on economic organisation in India? Will the economy be based on free market capitalism, will it be socialism or will it be a continuation of the present *mélange*? How will the new party tackle the problem of unemployment? How will it deal with questions relating to energy, physical infrastructure, social infrastructure, the future of education and health services, the policy relating to industry and a future blueprint for agricultural development? In other words, what will be the philosophy of government of this new party? I do not think anyone has applied any thought to these issues. It would be a tragedy if an anti corruption movement ultimately becomes a farce in which Don Quixote, Anna Hazare, mounted on a spavined charger and accompanied by his Sancho Panza, Arvind Kejriwal, goes careening across the plains of La Mancha tilting at windmills. That is how I see the fate of the Anna Hazare movement, for which I blame Anna himself. A novice at politics, totally unable to fathom how complex a political organisation is, led by the nose by unscrupulous former bureaucrats and half baked activists, on whose bandwagon has now jumped V.K. Singh who almost tore the Indian Army apart by his ridiculous posturing, I see Anna Hazare and his laudable campaign to fight corruption disappearing without a trace in the dreary desert sands of Indian politics. Gandhi understood politics, used it to build a national movement for freedom, but then by choice preferred to stand outside politics. Anna is the exact opposite.
