

Abiding Grace

■ Dr. M.N. Buch

India is a democracy which follows the Westminster Parliamentary pattern of government. Every five years elections are held directly through adult franchise on the principle of one man one vote for the House of the People (Lok Sabha) of the Parliament which, at present, has 543 seats. The life of the House is five years from the date of its constitution, unless earlier dissolved. The Upper House, The Council of States (Rajya Sabha) is constituted under Article 80 of the Constitution and under Article 83 (1) it is not subject to dissolution, but as nearly as possible one-third of the members thereof shall retire every two years. Out of a total of 250 members every two years one-third of 238 members will be indirectly elected by the Legislative Assemblies of States, each of which is allotted a number of seats in the Council, with the remaining twelve members being nominated by the President. As per Article 75 the Prime Minister and the Council of Ministers have to be members of either House of Parliament or should be elected thereto within six months of appointment, with the Council of Ministers being collectively responsible to the House of the People. I have stated this in some detail because the government of the day has to come to power through the process of election and must enjoy the confidence of the House if it is to continue in power. There is no other way by which a government can be formed in India.

Our democratic process has seen many ups and downs. In the initial years of Independence the Congress was in power both at the Centre and in the States. Slowly the situation changed with the Congress continuing to enjoy power at the Centre, but in many States other parties or combinations of parties forming the government. This created some tension between the Centre and the States. The last government of a single party, the Congress, which enjoyed power at the Centre with an absolute majority was in 1984. Thereafter for thirty years India saw a coalition era in which sometimes the Congress led the coalition and sometimes the BJP. Coalition governments have their own compulsions and by and large these thirty years, while witnessing economic progress, also saw weakness in government, public violence, unacceptable compromises, high inflation and widespread corruption. There was a belief that in India we would probably never have a single party government and that we would have to live with coalitions. The 2014 elections are a landmark in that BJP proved that it is possible to win the confidence of the electorate adequately to restore the government of a single party having an absolute majority. The BJP captured 282 seats in the Lok Sabha and together with its NDA partners it has 338 seats in Parliament. The mid-way figure is 272, which means the BJP has a comfortable majority even on its own. This is a remarkable achievement. The Congress only has 44 seats, down from 207, which is not enough to give it the status of a recognised Opposition whose leader would be the Leader of the Opposition. As Narendra Modi put it, for the first time instead of a coalition to form a government there would have to be a coalition to form an Opposition.

The 2014 election campaign was one of the dirtiest campaigns in our electoral history because the Congress and parties claiming to be left leaning and progressive subjected the BJP leader, Narendra Modi, to some of the vilest abuse, including calling him a liar, a deceiver, a manipulator and a mass murderer. During this campaign efforts were made to polarise minority

votes, which boomeranged because this only led to some coming together of Hindu votes. Anyway, the electorate decided decisively in favour of NDA, BJP and Narendra Modi and the fact remains that for the next five years India will have an NDA government in which BJP alone has an absolute majority in Parliament. It behoves all of us to gracefully accept this fact.

Arun Jaitley publicly stated that the outgoing Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh, is a scholar, a gentleman, personally honest, who is leaving the office of the Prime Minister with grace and dignity. Dr. Manmohan Singh graciously congratulated Narendra Modi on his victory and wished him well. The Heads of State and Government throughout the world, including the United States, Britain, Pakistan, Russia, Germany, France, China, Japan all congratulated Narendra Modi on his victory. However, neither Sonia Gandhi, the leader of UPA and President of the Congress, nor Rahul Gandhi, Vice President of the Congress has said one word of congratulations or sent any good wishes to Narendra Modi. Sashi Tharoor, by contrast, by his conduct and words proved that he is a gentleman. The limits of absence of dignity, common courtesy or even breeding have been crossed by frustrated, embittered people such as Kumar Ketkar and Mani Shankar Aiyer. Mani Shankar says he refuses to accept the verdict in favour of Narendra Modi because Modi is a murderer. According to him even Hitler had a majority in the German Parliament and the world never accepted Hitler. Mani Shankar should read William Shirer's "The Rise and Fall of The Third Reich". The Nazi Party, though the largest in Parliament, had only 34 percent of the seats, despite which Hitler was able to persuade President Hindenburg to invite him to form the government. Within one week Hitler introduced "The Enabling Act" in Parliament, by strong arm tactics prevented the socialist opposition from being present in the House, had the Bill passed and assumed the power to rule Germany for two years through Ordinance. The first Ordinance abolished the Constitution. Is it Mani Shankar's case that Modi will do the same in India? The only person who tried to rule India absolutely by misuse of Article 352 of the Constitution was Mani Shanker's spiritual guide, Indira Gandhi, in 1975. The very Constitution that she tried to subvert forced her to order an election in 1977, in which the people of India firmly rejected her. Our Constitution is too strong for anyone to assume absolute power. Modi is no Hitler and can never become one. Mani Shankar will for ever be a bigot. My personal regret is that Sonia, Rahul and Mani Shankar have removed from the political scene that which is its hallmark, the abiding grace of our leaders. Our polity is the poorer for this.
