

Elections, Confusion and Unity

Mudrarakshas

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The refreshing breezes of the election season have begun to blow again. When the seasons change, one's skin begins itching, as if one had the mange. The joy that such an itch affords is the scratching. If you take medicine for it, you lose all the fun. So it is with the election season. The itch comes and the opposition parties scratch their armpits. Sometimes they even scratch each other. If the one with the itch is Jagjivan Ram, then you'll see that neither does he scratch himself nor does he allow anyone else to scratch him. He goes out into the wilderness and rubs his back against a tree trunk. If Atal Bihari Vajpayee gets the itch, then he applies ointment on his own skin and his fingernails on the backs of others. Raj Narayan is a strange case. He'll scratch your back so hard he'll leave welts. Then he'll run out all over the place for a bit of ghee for you. Chaudhari Charan Singh never gets the itch himself, he gives it to others. Then he wants them to scratch his back and leave their own itch to the hands of God.

So, the election season is upon us, and the itch is particularly bad this time. Will the opposition parties unite or will Indira Gandhi win again? And if she does win, then all this itching and scratching will be for nought.

I had hoped that Unity would be accomplished this time, especially since the reform of Raj Narayan. It appears, however, that Raj Narayan wasn't the only problem. Every leader of an opposition party is a kind of Raj Narayan.

For many days brains were wracked. Many people applied their powers of ratiocination more than they ever had before. After all that

thought and consideration they all arrived at an intelligent and important conclusion: The opposition parties should become united.

What a great country this is! We've had the greatest saints, sages and wisemen. In the pithiest of sutras they distilled the most profound wisdom. I had every reason to believe that this tradition was still healthy today. In just one or two hundred sutras Kanad, the founder of Samkhya philosophy, explained the secrets of the soul, the Supreme Soul and creation. The Kanads of the opposition parties set out the future of India in just one sutra: We should be one.

The sage Kanad wrote philosophy and lived off the grain left over in the fields. The leaders of the opposition parties, too, are Kanads. They peck at grains. They peck at whatever grain they happen to find. They never sow the fields themselves. When plowing has to be done, they take the blade of the plow in their hands, scrape the handle of the plow in the dirt and say, "Dictatorship is the farmers' enemy." Therefore, they never sow the fields themselves. They descend onto the sown fields, peck at the grain and fly away. They've already pecked at the grain this season. Now they're flying away. They're flying through the air and looking around for some clue to the elections.

So they have this sutra: We must be one.

If they are not unified, they will lose the elections. If they lose the elections, there will be a lot of trouble. Not for the people, for themselves. The people can carry on their work without Raj Narayan, but Chaudhari Charan Singh finds it impossible to work without a chair. Therefore, Unity is essential.

Now the question arises: How will Unity come about? To answer that, deep discussions were held among the wise, learned leaders of the opposition parties, and after much debate this sutra was arrived at: We must be unified on the issues.

What a big step forward! There should be a unified stance on the issues. But on which issues? Here Mathuradas has a suggestion. Just as there must be Unity among the opposition parties, so should there be Unity among the issues, and that unified issue should be this one-word sutra: Leadership.

That short sutra has been a long and difficult exercise for the leaders in opposition. The commentaries on that one word have spawned ten separate parties and twenty combinations and subgroups of those ten. Then the call for Unity starts all over again.

With complete innocence a leader raises this issue, hurls others down a well, forcefully places himself in a position so that he can take over the chair of leadership and says, "One should not make Leadership a hindrance to Unity." Which means, "Make me the Leader and establish Unity, but do not establish Unity on the condition that you be Leader."

Sometimes people don't fall into this confusion at all. They become simpletons and say, "Bring about Unity and be the Leader, too." When such a situation arises, it is one's duty to express doubt. The Leader himself, however, greets the suggestion warmly, but he has his second-in-command oppose it.

In the end, what is this confusion? What is behind all this confusion about Unity, Leadership, elections and speeches? Mathuradas has the answer. He overheard a discussion in his neighbour's house, and the gates of wisdom opened up. His neighbour was worried about his son's future. His neighbour was an opium smuggler, but his son, since he wore bellbottoms instead of a dhoti, wanted to smuggle hashish. His father explained to him, "I want you to have a good profession. Why don't you become a political leader? With their revolvers dacoits can only steal so much, but a politician, wearing just a simple kurta-pajama, can become lord over many times more than that. If you become a smuggler, you run the risk of being caught, but if you become a political leader, you can steal the people blind and they'll call themselves blessed!"

So just think. When there's an election, the candidates for Student Union President at University spend half a million to a million rupees, and for a seat in a state's Legislative Assembly or in the federal Parliament that sum is nowhere near enough. What a wondrous thing it is that people are willing to spend two to two-and-a-half million rupees just to become public servants. And even when they do get elected they often never get the chance to serve the people. All year they have to spend their days dozing on the back benches.

Mathuradas believes that no one would spend that much money just for the pleasure of dozing. So why do they do it?

To answer that question, one must observe politicians rather closely. After they have solemnly promised to serve the people, their attention naturally begins to focus on 1 Safdarjang Road. There is no better means to serve the people than that. In order to serve the people, one must become Prime Minister. Once the latter is accomplished, so is the former.

But how? In an election about fifty members of about sixty parties

win, and each of those sits facing Safdarjang Road. Then he keeps on sitting right there and never gets the chance to go inside.

Lord Krishna ate a lot of butter. So his mother would put the butter bowl high up in a hanging basket. Then Krishna would get his friends together, and using them as a ladder he would reach the butter bowl and eat his fill. Safdarjang Road is sort of like that. No matter how high you jump, you cannot reach it by yourself. In order to reach the butter you need the shoulders of your friends. Then the question arises: Who is to get on whose shoulders? If they could, your friends would pull their shoulders away just as you were about to reach the butter.

That's why Unity is necessary. The hanging basket must be reached and the butter eaten. If there is Unity, then all that is possible. In 1977 the people themselves gave the opposition a boost up, but Brother Morarji didn't like plain butter. He gave the bowl of butter over to Kanti Desai, preferring himself to go to the bathroom. Chaudhuri Charan Singh was insulted by that corruption, so he took the bowl of butter and smashed it against the ground. Now there's just an empty basket hanging there with eyes focussed on it. The effort for Unification carries on. This time, however, ?Janata? have an even greater responsibility to fulfill. They have to uncover the butter bowl and fill it with butter. And they have to bring not just one person within reach of it, but everyone. That is why Mathuradas, too, is making a strong appeal for cooperation with the Janata.