

Legislators for Sale!

Mudrarakshas

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MPs, that is, Members of Parliament, are no longer for sale; they're put out just for show. An age has passed. I had hoped that after Morarji Desai was no longer Prime Minister he, too, would have shown up in the bazaar, along with the eggplants, but things got fouled up. MPs went from this store's gunny sack to that store's, but they never sold. You can still see them just sitting there. And if the MP is Akbar Ahmad, of Dampi, then not only won't he sell, but he won't even be put out for display for fear of frightening away the customers.

Mathuradas has always asked, "What's the current wholesale rate for a legislator, and what does he go for in the bazaar?" When making that inquiry I do not include those legislators who are in Delhi while the Chief Minister and Governor of Andhra Pradesh think they are ready and waiting in Hyderabad. In such a situation trustworthiness is diminished, not of the Chief Minister and the Governor, of the legislator. In Delhi a reporter sees the legislator in the flesh, sits down with him and has a drink (which must have been a very thin tea without milk or sugar), takes his photograph, and while walking with him asks, "Legislator ji, why does your kurta look like it's just been purchased? You're not someone else, are you, who ordered a new kurta for himself because he wanted to be in a parade?"

So, friend, in that sort of situation it is not the trustworthiness of the Governor that is diminished, it is the legislator's.

Just recently, while displaying his triumph in not starting a new tradition, our honourable President has started a new tradition. He met each group of MPs and conversed kindly with them, but he did not count them. This tradition is a healthy one. Now, the Governor of any state will

certainly welcome all those from the majority party who come to see him, he'll give them tea and kind conversation, but he can refuse to count how many they are. Afterward, he can choose whomever he wants to be Chief Minister.

Something like that happened once on the federal level. Taking along with him two and a half genuine MPs Chaudhuri Charan Singh met with Nilam Sanjiv Reddy. On his part, Reddy upheld the principles of democratic government. He refused to count the MPs. He even refused to consider numbers at all. Jag Jivan Baba had brought a large number of MPs with him; Chaudhuri Saheb—two and a half. Or if you absolutely insist on considering Raj Narayan a full-fledged MP, then three. Whatever.

Reddy said, "Lists and numbers do not mean a thing." He was satisfied. Chaudhuri Saheb would be the next Prime Minister.

But that was a digression. Actually, every real topic these days is a digression.

So Mathuradas wanted to know what the going rate was for a legislator.

It's easy to find the price of potatoes. Just go to the bazaar and ask the vegetable seller. For legislators, however, that approach doesn't work. What vegetable seller handles legislators? Not only that, where's the legislators bazaar? There's a market for gur, there's one for hay, and there's one for vegetables, but in what Azadpur is the market for legislators?

What a taxing problem this is for the brain! During the Emergency a law was passed to the effect that if you sold something in a package, you had to write the price on the package. The price was written but the package went missing, so one was left with neither (*na rahega dibba na dikhega dam*).

Where should the price for the legislator be written? On what part of his body? If we put it on his forehead, it won't seem as much a price as a blemish, and something that costs so much shouldn't have a blemish. If we put it on his back, then there's even more trouble. People will say, "Sure, that's his price when his back is toward us, but who knows what he'll say when he faces us?"

Suppose the price of the legislator is drawn on his chest. Okay, there it is, on his chest. But when he looks like that you don't know if he is a legislator or the blackboard in some primary school. Besides, rates for legislators will require a long list. For example,

- EXCHANGE RATES
 - FIRST CLASS, HIGH INCOME
 - FIRST CLASS, BARE MINIMUM
 - LOWER CLASS, HIGH INCOME
 - LOWER CLASS, BARE MINIMUM
 - TEACHER'S RATE
 - ENGINEER, HIGH CLASS
 - ENGINEER, LOW CLASS
- RATES OF REINSTATEMENT
- APPOINTMENT RATES (ACCORDING TO CLASS OF APPOINTMENT)
- DISCOUNT RATES
 - FRIENDS
 - RELATIVES
 - DUE TO COERCION
- FREE PUBLIC SERVICE (THOSE IN CHARGE OF GIRL(S) SHOULD MAKE AN INDIVIDUAL APPOINTMENT)
- RATES FOR FILES
 - TO HAVE IT STOPPED
 - TO GET IT GOING
 - TO HAVE IT BE DECLARED NON-IMPLEMENTABLE
- RATES FOR CHANGING PARTIES (MAKE AN INDIVIDUAL APPOINTMENT)

(It is necessary for a legislator to make an individual appointment to find out his rate for changing parties because his payment is neither by cheque nor bank draft.)

So just consider for yourself, if such a lengthy, detailed list were to be written on a legislator's chest, then from far away you would think he was a walking advertisement for mange. Therefore, Mathuradas has persisted

in getting to the bottom of this important question of where, on what part of his body, should a legislator's price be written.

Ah, yes, there's a further complication to this whole problem. A legislator's price changes depending on time and place. In fact, it's always changing. Sometimes, when you're in the market, you can even suggest a price yourself. In the vegetable market once two wealthy men got into a bidding war. The price for a cartload of pumpkin started at 200 and finally sold at 25,000. Unrelated to our present problem, of course, is the fact that that evening the buyer ambushed the farmer on his way home and beat him up. He not only took his 25,000 back, but he also robbed him of his pair of oxen.

All the same, generally speaking, it will not be considered a bad suggestion that a *sattā* bazaar, in the *bhadra* tongue a stock market, for legislators be opened. The alluring cries of the buyers and sellers would naturally facilitate a most profitable trade. The most important and largest stock exchange, of course, would have to be set up in Delhi because India's largest, perhaps Asia's largest, political-industrial city is Delhi. There, politics are produced on a large scale, and the political wares available in the markets in the rest of the country all come from Delhi.

As India's other industries are in the hands of a hundred families, so in Delhi India's political industry is in the hands of twenty-five, and those twenty-five are not all just Indira Gandhi's. Hers is just one.

From Delhi's Political Stock Market we should begin hearing news like this: "In party switching, a sudden rise. Transfers are mild."

Once the buying and selling of legislators is well established in the stock market, a way will be found to start a trade in Governors.

Many people maintain there's no longer any ethics in politics. They're just philistines. Is politics the only place for ethics? And let me ask something else. If ethics were to be in politics, could it still be recognized as ethics? Is milk to be put in a sewer? And if you do put milk in a sewer, the sewer will still be the sewer, but the milk will no longer be milk.

That's why I never raise the question of whether or not ethics should be in politics. If politics itself remains a part of politics, isn't that at least something?