



English

## *Whither India?*

କବି ରଘୁନାଥ ଦାସ

### **Whither India?**

Democracy postulates a conscious mass: people who know their rights and responsibilities. If people do not know what is good for them, what is bad, what are the problems facing them and which way they can be solved best, it is tomfoolery to extend franchise to them and call the government by their representatives a people's government. In a set up where the general mass is illiterate and ignorant, it becomes easy to beguile them with hoax and high talks. People who know very little about the value of votes can barter them for good meal and some pocket money.

We, in India, have of late set up parliamentary democracy as our system of Government. It is a concept entirely foreign to this land. It lacks the historical background in which westerners adopted it gradually and cautiously as one most suited to them in place of authoritarian and monarchical rule. Educating the masses in democratic norms and values is a sine qua non for the successful working of parliamentary democracy. We, lamentably, lacked it. As a result, all our elections have been great feats in fraud and false hopes. All sorts of corrupt practices have been free play to beguile the ignorant masses to cast their votes in the most irresponsible manner.

We have had run several rounds of electing popular representatives to set up a government of the people, for the people and by the people. Instead of consolidating the democratic forces, the system easily lent itself to an oppressive authoritarian rule that threatened to be hierarchical. The system could not be overthrown, not because of its own strength, but because the democratic values are enthralled very deeply in the culture of the people revolting against a dictatorial and corrupt order of Government.

Mrs. Indira Gandhi's rules highlighted the weakness of the parliamentary system engrafted in our soil. The system could not safeguard democratic values in spite of the thousands of peoples' representatives it had elected. It revealed that people could be hoaxed by cheap slogans of economic benefits and the

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peoples' representatives could be coaxed to barter away people's fundamental rights for keeping themselves in position and for pensioner grants to themselves.

It is high time we think seriously about the worth of the British parliamentary system and evaluate it as an institution that can be entrusted to stabilize popular government for the greatest good of greatest numbers. The electorate in the vast country is hardly conscious of the worth of their voting right, much less the problem facing their country and the solutions offered by different political parties. In such a vast country such as ours, it is outright impossible to expect the masses to develop that degree of consciousness which would ensure a correct and conscientious exercise of the right of the franchise. The representatives are themselves by and large not conscious. Quite a number of them are illiterate and ignorant and get elected, not because of being the most conscious citizens in the constituency, but by securing party tickets, often, by dubious means. Only a handful of the party leaders bother to understand the party's policy and programs. The rest are dummies recruited to add to the party's numerical strength to outweigh the rivals. The process of representation does not ensure the common man's representatives. It is no wonder that after election, they contribute little to the establishment of the popular government, much less advancing popular benefit. In this setup, are we to be surprised if they resort to favoritism and nepotism and help in all trades of corrupting the administration?

Some people schooled in Macaulay institutions are so fascinated with the foreign system that they don't see any alternatives. They are blind to the fact that the Indian way has been firmly democratic through ages, even during monarchical rule. The Indian people were mostly scattered through villages miles apart and each village governed itself. If there was a government of the people, by the people and for the people, it was in the Indian villages. They and their elders sat together to decide their affairs, whether it was economic, social or political. They even administered justice through their local instrument, the Panch Narayan. They elected their representative - usually the most conscious of their lot - to represent them in matters concerning several village units

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(called Mandal or such likes). The election was not by brute majority but by consensus of opinion. This ensured the representation of the most conscious element available in the village for a higher unit. Any error in their selection could be corrected by recalling the representative and replacing him by another. Similarly the Mandal sent the most conscious of their village representatives to the next higher representative body with a similar right to recall. The hierarchy of those democratic institutions formed the body politics of this vast country. Her teeming millions chose to live in far flung villages rather than in close knit cities as was in Rome or in Athens. These institutions build what, in modern terminology, is called democratic centralism, providing a two way traffic both for the common man and higher ups in the administration to be in close touch with each other in all vital matters. That was a system of social and political order based on a scientific basis to suit this subcontinent that is Bharat.

The monarchs that conquered the country did not disturb the existing system very much. The empires that the Pathans, Mughals and the British built only supplemented it. The parliamentary democracy we have introduced after independence has, however, sapped the indigenous institutions of their entire vestige and has replaced it with bureaucratic centralism. Officialdom has been entrusted to run the administration. It has no direct responsibility to people over whom their authority is imposed. They are responsible to the law which the so-called peoples' representatives make. This leads to all sorts of corruption which has corroded all walks of life. The balance sheet of our progress in all fields of activities, be it economic, political or social, is all back with the worst ever corruption and degradation that India experienced. If this progress is not reversed, we are doomed - a corrupt society aberrant to the natural law of existence. In no time, Nature will totally destroy this degenerate race and replace it with better people.

It is not too late to take stock of our progress. It is wise to veer when we realize the catastrophe we are heading for. What would be wrong if we revive our age-old institutions of self-governing villages, mandals, and regions? That would give the people the taste of real independence and free them from claws

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of the bureaucratic octopus we have brought in the name of parliamentary democracy. Let people manage their own affairs and learn by their failures rather than be victims of a vast machinery that calls itself welfare state. Gandhiji's ideal of Gram Swaraj was not an idle dream. It was based on the sound knowledge of the historical development of our economic and social institutions. Those who swear by historical materialism would find that Gandhiji's concept was not remote from it. Although he was concerned about spiritual development, we have ignored his wise counsel of Gram Swaraj and have come to grief. His ideas still hold candle for us.

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