

FEAR OF FASCISM

By Sanjay Kapoor

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The decision of the earlier caretaker government of Chandra Shekhar to mortgage 20 tonnes of confiscated gold with a Zurich bank to tide over the foreign exchange crunch, probably symbolises the multi-dimensional nature of the Indian crisis.

For many the world over, gold may be a precious yellow metal, but for bulk of the Indians possession of gold means self-respect and status in the society. Thus the sale of gold, especially for the man on the street, means not only bankruptcy but also loss of self-esteem. Per se the economic decision to sell gold may be sound, but it definitely has negative moral and political connotations. In short the sale of gold represents a culminating point of the economic and political crisis the country is facing.

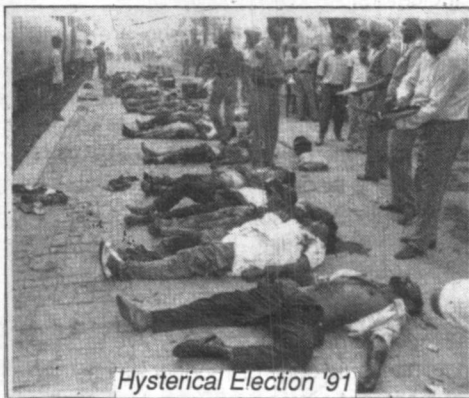
Polyannas or inveterate optimists may cite the examples of the world's largest democracy surviving the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi and also an exceedingly bloody elections and not lapsing into authoritarian rule or military take over. But the moot point which begs an answer is— is democracy enough to prevent a social, economic, political and moral decay? Can democracy really stave off retrograde forces and help in the creation of a modern India?

This kind of cynicism about democracy which seems to have afflicted a better part of Indian intelligentsia may be anachronistic with times. But unlike other countries where democracy may have been a recent fad — India has had surfeit of it. This disillusionment with the entire democratic process which tends to give a fillip to every thing that is obscurantist and

criminal, may be transitory but does it in any way give one a feeling that there is light at the end of the tunnel? Chesterton probably hit the nail on the head when he said "despotism comes in as democracy gets tired."

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In this unusually long summer elections when political parties with their candidates (many of them criminals) really pulled out all stops to hypnotise the voters, the only casualty seemed to be the institution of democracy. The hysterical



Hysterical Election '91

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elections of 1991 were fought on three different issues represented by three political formations namely, Congress — stability, Janta Dal — social justice and BJP — Ram Rajya. These elections which brought out the worst in Indian democracy saw an unprecedented campaign by communal parties like the Bharatiya Janata Party to hijack the entire elections

on a nebulous creation, of Ram Rajya. This effort to win an election by raising a vision of a great Indian tradition swayed a better part of the Indian populace. This symptom of harping on the greatness of the past (as theoretically explained by Gunnar Myrdal in "Asian Drama"), was responsible in lot of ways for obfuscating the real issues that may be behind this exacerbation of the Indian crisis.

Elections, which were held in rather unfortunate circumstances when the parliament had completed barely 17 months of its five year term, brought to the fore the inherent weakness of the parliamentary democracy when no party is able to win a absolute majority. In the last elections in 1989 the Congress lost out to a combined opposition of National Front-Left and Bharatiya Janata Party. Although there was no alliance between the two communist parties and the BJP in their all consuming hatred for the Congress they come to a tacit understanding with each other by using the centrist Janata Dal as the buffer.

Elections in India which are still held on blatantly caste and communal lines saw the main non-Congress parties striking an understanding which chewed into the ruling party's base. One top of that by making corruption an issue, the opposition parties got the much needed acceptability from the middle classes which for many years had backed the left-of centre Congress.

This time around the situation was different from what it was earlier. After the failure of the V. P. Singh government to

resolve the contradictory postures of the left and the rightist BJP, the country saw a freak phenomenon of a rump breakaway of the JD being supported by the single largest party—the Congress. This freak phenomenon where 54 M.P.'s (who were in power) were supported by 200 M.P.'s from outside put the entire parliamentary democracy on its head.

The Congress in an attempt to repeat the 1979 experience (when Mrs. Indira Gandhi withdrew support from a minority Charan Singh government) did the same thing on a specious issue of surveillance outside late Rajiv Gandhi's residence. Although Congress was seen to have been forced into elections, the party could

tiya Janata Party – a party which sought to combine religion with discipline and governance. Although India is professedly secular, people at large were not convinced whether the secular ideology would take the country very far. The BJP on its part manage to fuel fear in the majority community that the minorities may out-

how the IMF would help in alleviating the problems of the poor. One just has to flip the pages of history and figure out the kind of havoc IMF prescriptions have played with the economies of the third world.

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In spite of public postures by different political parties on the issue of IMF, there is total unanimity that the country needs to take drastic measures to bring it out of the abyss. In the coming days the economic crisis would manifest itself in various fronts. If IMF decides to go through its stabilization policies and end subsidies in food and fertilizers, India may find herself in a situation which may not be any different than one obtained in Latin American countries.

not accrue much advantage out of the fragmented opposition. Unlike 1979, in 1991 the rightist BJP and the Janatha Dal has slowly chewed into the Congress base. The traditional base of Congress comprising of the oppressed (harijans) minorities (Muslims), and the upper caste (Brahmins) had all drifted to either BJP or JD. In short the two parties of expression using the emotive issue of construction of Ram Mandir (bringing back the Golden age of Ram Rajya) and the implementation of Mandal report which gave enhanced reservation to the backward caste ensured that no party obtained a stable majority. This situation was further leavened by a corrupt Congress which in an attempt to strike the middle path was widely perceived as indecisive.

strip them in population. This animosity triggered off a spate of communal riots, resulting in widening the chasm between the two communities.

As stated above when the elections were held in this backdrop of the hatred and communal violence it was evident to political observers and psychologist that the election would led to a hung parliament. Although millions of Rupees were spent in one of the costliest elections ever, people had made up their minds to return an unstable parliament.

On top of that with the country showing a clear case of democracy fatigue. There is a increasing possibility of the majority of people voting for a neo-fascist party in the form of Bharatiya Janata Party or some such like in the near future.

As the election campaign started picking up it became amply clear that the country's obsession with democracy would not take it very far. Hung parliament and unstable government seemed to have been a staple diet for the people in the coming days.

The assassination of Rajiv Gandhi changed all that. When finally the second and third round of elections were held, Congress riding a sympathy wave came tantalising close to getting a simple majority in a house of 511 where elections

It is evident that no minority government would be in a position to implement the crippling conditionalities of World Bank and IMF and get away with it the government which has gone ahead with an almost 20% devaluation just needs to capitulate of what happened after a similar devaluation in 1966. Not only did the Congress lose in a number of states; it was also forced to concede ground to a

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Perhaps in consonance with the happenings in Eastern Europe and Soviet Union, the left ideology was taking a beating in India. This gradual stasis in the left movement gave a fillip to the right reaction which started sensing victory. Paradoxically the traditional appeal of the Congress and Left amongst the intellectuals also started waning with the crumbling of the Berlin wall. With growing economic problems, people at large started falling prey for the rightist Bharatiya

were held. Even then the Congress and its allies remained a dozen odd short from the majority they were hoping for. This advent of a minority government at a time when the country is facing the most serious economic crisis since its independence may prove disastrous for its people.

Although the government has chosen to take a hefty loan of about 7 billion dollars to tide over the immediate balance of payment crunch, no one is sure of

rightist formation – the Jan Sangh. Today when the Congress is with its back to the wall, it may not be in a position to fulfill half the conditionalities of IMF which would be perceived as anti-people. In this backdrop, a majority of the population along with even the financial institutions would prefer an authoritarian structure which can pay back their loan. All this has the ominous portents of a fascist upsurge seen in Germany and Italy in the beginning of this century.

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This economic and political crisis is likely to manifest itself in India's future status in the new world order as visualised by U.S. President George Bush. India which has traditionally taken an anti-US imperialist stand seems totally incapable of pursuing such a line. The World-Bank IMF loan would probably ensure that India suffer an amnesia on its earlier anti-American attitude.

Also in the absence of Soviet Union as a major determinant of World events and also its fall from pedestal as the vanguard of working class the world over, countries

like India would find very difficult to sing another tune.

All these imponderables place India in a situation where it will be well nigh difficult to predict the future course of events. The inimical forces around the country along with secessionary movements within would now be determined by the changes India brings about in its foreign and domestic policy. One thing which seems clear both from economic and political standpoint is that from now on the affairs of the country would all be determined by the 'foreign hand'. And it is on that the survival of democracy would depend.