

BOOK REVIEWS

India since Independence— *Making Sense of Indian Politics* by V. Krishna Ananth, Longman (An Imprint of Pearson), 2011, PAGES XV + 435, Rs. 399.00, ISBN- 978-81-317-3465-0 (PAPERBACK)

The title of the book suggests that it is exclusively concerned with the political events in India after independence. But this is not the case. The book discusses events starting from nineteenth century India. In fact the first three chapters of the book exclusively deals with the nineteenth century intellectuals and the emergence of nationalist thought, the emergence of Gandhi and the national struggle and with the Indian capitalists and the freedom struggle. The social reform movements led by Rammohun Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Akshay Kumar Dutt, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, Mahadev Govind Ranade, Jyotiba Phule, Sri Narayanaguru are discussed in the first chapter in a nutshell. These social reform movements actually prepared the base of future Gandhian social reform movements in pre and post independent India. But the importance of these movements however is normally overshadowed because of the Gandhian led movements. So thanks to the author.

The third chapter i.e. 'Indian capitalists and the freedom struggle' is very interesting. One cannot ignore that in 1920s when the FICCI (1927) emerged and the trade union movement became prominent in India a discussion of the national movement without discussing the role of the Indian capitalists in India's independent remains incomplete. Here one interesting point is mentioned by Ananth that the FICCI members and AITUC leaders, both inclined towards Indian National Congress (INC) led movement (though normally we assume that these two groups have opposite interests). The readers will learn that it was because of Nehru's influence and the positive attitude of the FICCI members that the Indian capitalists showed their inclination for a socialist pattern of economy. Even FICCI set up a committee in 1942 to draft an economic policy to be placed before the future Government of India (which is known as 'Bombay Plan'). During that time who knew that this 'Bombay Plan' would be one of the major sources of influence in the implementation of Nehruvian socialism after independence.

It is well known that during the time of independence, the INC was divided into two factions on the issue of who would become the Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru or Sardar Patel. The fourth chapter of this book reveals some facts on this conflict. The readers will be enriched after learning that Sardar Patel came to meet Gandhi on January 30, 1948. Patel's purpose was to get Gandhi's consent from resigning from Nehru's ministry. Even Gandhi's evening prayer meeting was delayed due to this reason. But the

assassination of Gandhi just after a few minutes prevented Patel to do this. After this incident Patel devoted himself in nation-building in a true sense. This can be a lesson for the today's politicians also.

The fifth chapter of the book discusses the Nehruvian era in independent India. He discusses not only how within the government Nehru was able to capture power but also within the party. In 1955, Nehru left the post of Congress President and U. N. Dhebar replaced him. Dhebar who was known as Nehru's man continued to this post till 1959. In February, 1959 Indira Gandhi became Congress president at the Nagpur session. Did Nehru nominate Dhebar to smoothen the passage for Indira to become the future President? Perhaps Nehru's nomination of Dhebar as Congress President is the root of *Nehru parivaartantra* in independent India.

In Indian politics, Indira's importance started to increase after Sino-India war. At the same time Kamraj plan helped Nehru to curtail the wings of the senior Congress leaders and prepare a smooth field for her daughter. After Nehru's death when Lal Bahadur Shastri became the Prime Minister of India for a short period, the situation was almost ready to welcome Indira as India's next Prime Minister (after Shastri). And Nehru family again took the charge of ruling India. The problems which Indira faced inside and outside the government are nicely discussed. The incident regarding Indira's opposition to the official Congress candidate (N. S. Reddy) in presidential election (1969) are nicely depicted. In this election V. V. Giri (who received Indira's support) defeated official Congress candidate N. S. Reddy. Before this election Indira had appealed to the electors to cast 'conscience vote'.

After Giri became the President and after India's victory in the 1971 Indo-Pak war there was hardly anyone who could challenge Indira within the Congress party. It was during that period when AICC president D K Barooah raised the slogan that 'Indira is India and India is Indira'. But controversy never left Indira. 1970s was the decade when Maruti scam, autocratic nature of his younger son Sanjay not only made the countrymen unhappy but it also helped the opposition parties to unite in India. The 'Total Revolution' movement led by Jay Prakash Narayan shook Indira. And when the verdict of the Hon'ble Allahabad High Court came which stated that her 1971 win from Rae Bareilly Lok Sabha constituency was null and void due to violation of the election rules¹ and what is more was that that she was debarred from contesting another election for six years. In a situation of this kind she opted for nothing but to impose emergency on 25 June, 1975. Arrest of opposition leaders, censoring of media started. And this authoritarian rule was responsible for her defeat in 1977 election.

1 The notable part in this chapter is the detail discussion on the irregularities regarding Mrs. Gandhi's election procedure. Most of the authors only write that there were some irregularities in Mrs. Gandhi's election procedure. But what are the exact irregularities regarding this matter they remain silent.

But the first experience of the non-Congress government at the centre was not a good one for the Indians. They had cast their votes for the Janata Party with a lot of hope. But personality clash, emphasizing on narrow interest rather than the broader interest led to the fall of the Moraraji Desai government in 1979. But one major step of this government was the restoration of the Constitution of India. Indira Gandhi changed a number of parts in the Constitution by the 42nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1976. The amendment is also known as the 'Mini Constitution' of India. Through this amendment the democratic Indian Constitution was transformed to a dictatorship Constitution. Its democratic nature was restored by the Desai government by passing the 44th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1978. Charan Singh who was responsible for the fall of Desai government became the Prime Minister of India with the help of the Chavan's Congress, Congress (I), CPI (M), ADMK and some independent MPs. But perhaps the fate of this government was written in its very first day. Because the political ideologies of the above mentioned parties did not match with each other. Today Charan Singh is known as the sole Prime Minister who never faced the Parliament.

The inevitable election brought Indira Gandhi back to power in 1980. This time she enjoys this power till her death. Sanjay Gandhi's fall and Rajiv Gandhi's arrival in politics, Assam and Punjab problems are discussed in chapter XII of the book.

After the assassination of Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi became India's Prime Minister and also the President of Congress (I). Rajiv within a short period dissolved the Lok Sabha and opted for a fresh General Election. Sympathy wave helped Rajiv to get 401 seats alone. Even Nehru in his days could not win this number of seats for his party. The 'sympathy wave' even caused the defeat of some heavyweights, like Atal Bihari Vajpayee (by Madhavrao Scindia), H N Bahuguna (by Amitabh Bachchan), Somnath Chatterjee (by Mamta Banerjee) and so on. Efforts (Assam and Punjab accord) on behalf of Rajiv Gandhi to solve the regional problems are well written. The Bofors scandal finally prevented Rajiv Gandhi to become Prime Minister for the second time and how V P Singh was able to unite the opposition parties under the umbrella of Janata Dal is discussed at length which surely will satisfy the readers.

After the 1989 Lok Sabha elections V P Singh became the Prime Minister with the help of the Left parties and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Like the Janata Party government this government from the very beginning suffered from the personality clash. V P Singh never felt easy with Devi Lal and Chandra Shekhar who badly wanted to become the Prime Minister. And when Advani was arrested, Chandra Shekhar found that his dream might fulfill this time. Because after Advani's arrest it was not possible for the BJP to continue their support to the V P government. Congress (I) was ready to support an anti V P government. So Chandra Shekhar became the 8th Prime Minister of India. Readers may find out some similarities with the earlier Janta Party government.

The epilogue section basically deals with the events that took place between the Narsimha Rao government and the emergence of the first Manmohan Singh government (2004) in a nutshell. Actually the political events of the period itself demand a separate book.

It is a must read book for scholars and interested people in Indian politics. Our only demand from the author is that he should focus on some more controversial issues in his next chance. For example more discussion on Nehru-Patel rift, role of the Godmen in Indian politics, Nellie massacre and 'Operation Blue Star' (more what is discussed), ups and downs in the relationship between '10 Janpath' and 'Prateeksha' (after Bofors scam) and so on are our thirst. It is well known that before the 1989 Lok Sabha election Janata Dal leaders promised to reveal the names attached with the Bofors scam. Did V P Singh take adequate initiative to bring out the names? Was any force/ forces stopped him? Perhaps we get the answer in Ananth's next book. Hope Ananth will consider writing a book on the period in future.

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