

Politics is an Art of Gaining power and the craft of retaining it

“To reign in hell is better than to be ruled in heaven”, is what Milton’s Satan in Paradise Lost believes. In no way it is the self-consolation of a defeated angel nor a humble resignation to the ministers of fate; it is the ingrained ambition of all the earthly people. Physical superiority had given more exalted status to man, more prominence to might than to right, more chances for the fittest to survive. Wars were fought to establish superiority over others, and to force the nations to take up humiliating path of paying homage. Civilised nations have begun to realize that war is the obsolete method of obtaining decision; physical power has been substituted by the mechanical power. But the love of power-the desire to dictate and direct action and thinking of others – is still uppermost in human psychology. Rather it has assumed many other shapes – shapes that are painted in fair colours and are given very attractive names. Communists recommend the regimentation of the laboring class to exert collective influence for their collective interests, the capitalists use money as the source of economic power; they use it for exploiting others. International alliances are designed to pool the resources and power to bully other nations to dance to their tune or to horrify them into inaction. But the controlling power in the international and national spheres, is political power. It is all-embracing – wielding its sway over social and economic life – it is omnipotent on earth. It can mobilize public opinion, gear up propaganda machinery, make or repeal laws, invoke or amend constitution and what not. Under democratic set up political authority, contrary to layman’s belief, assumes wider powers. Backed by the public opinion, supported by the majority of the legislators, armed with the means to keep the people in a state of ignorance, it crosses the limits of even dictatorial powers. As democracy affords and guarantees equal opportunities, political manipulation is the handy means to come to power. Political power, like the most powerful intoxicant makes the persons in power to forget social ethics, political morality and obligations. This satisfies the ego of man and politics becomes means to power. Politics is the art of gaining power.

Politics is the lever to come to power and use it. It is so intimately connected with ideologies, political and economic, that in democratic countries people are befooled into the belief that a particular ideology will serve as a panacea for their ills. They are charmed to such an extent that the ideal or ideology becomes an intellectual superstition for them; they stick to it fanatically; they live and die for it. A large number of the Germans died because they believed that they were born to rule. Thus Hitler enchanted people by talking of racial purity, Mussolini,

charmed the Italians with Fascism, Pakistani dictators have given a powerful expression to anti – India feelings. People must support, even if after coming to power the ruler becomes all-powerful dictator. Without people's support even the powerful tyrants like the Czar of Russia or Louis of France had to bow out of office. Politics is the means to win the people and so power.

In democratic states, particularly, politics is to enlist the active support of the people. Election manifestoes are to dazzle the people, who are baited by them. False promises, appeals to their sentiments, political baits, fine phrases are some of the tricks of the politicians to get the support of the people. They feed them on ready-made opinions and charming ideologies.

The opposition is outwitted. The strategic planning, out-manipulating their moves, counteracting their programmes are a part and parcel of politics. Within the party itself the opponents are won over; posts are offered, their factions are promised representation, linguistic groups are satisfied. Persons representing certain communities, certain sections and certain interests are tackled politically. When one steers clear through these obstacles that impede, one finds a smooth way to power. It is through political feelers that the responses of the people are gathered, it is through the spirit to compromise that opposition is won, it is through the art of discovering the dominant influence, that opposition is paralysed, it is through manipulating the whole affairs to one's advantage that one comes to power. Are these not the methods of politics?

Gaining political power is, of course, an art, needing the knowledge of the working of human heart, national aspirations and national hopes and fears. If the people in power fail to conform to the wishes of the common man, fail to channelize their energies within the embankment of the national tradition, their power cannot be preserved. Gandhiji, astute politician as he was, evolved a non-violent method of struggling against the colonial rule, from the cultural heritage of India. Clearly it branches out from the experiences and aspirations, failures and triumphs of the Indians, as a nation. Had he imposed a foreign method, it would have needed adjustment, particularly on the part of the people. Generally a common man is suspicious of new ideas, he is orthodox and so immune to all the novel influences. Aspirants for political power, as all politicians are, will have to defer to the wishes and aspirations of the people. Alternatively, propaganda machinery should be used to inculcate those feelings and ideologies. Politics is thus the craft of retaining power.

It is easy to win trophies but difficult to retain them. There are many dangers, potential and real to the political power. Even when in power, a man remains a man – a bundle of frailties and an embodiment of weaknesses. So while doling out favours – and it is essential to show favours for retaining power – personal

limitations may not allow him to bless all. This breeds frustration. As realities fall short of expectations, in politics particularly, vindictive campaign to undermine power structure and assert one's own importance, is started. Some, more arrogant and counting too much on themselves, may form new parties, whereas more subtle diplomats bring a split from within. Thus there are dangers from without hidden and obvious. So men in power will have to be cautious, unlike Caesar's wife above suspicion, ready to renounce friendship, capable of realignment with others. They will have to be, more or less opportunists to get the best out of the opportunities and doing best to get opportunities. Like Shelley's West Wind they are destroyers and preservers – destroy that pulls them down and preserve that supports them. Politics is, of course, the craft of retaining power.

If coming to power is meteoric, downfall may be dramatic. The leaders, finding a gap between theory and practice, fall short of the promises, expectations and even obligations. Popular resentment gathers momentum and may come to a head in the form of a revolution. People will have to be calmed down. This needs the craft of propaganda – tell two lies before coming to one truth – and it also presupposes the craft of removing the cause of resentment. Silence must be secured either by making an outward show of observing ethical principles in this unethical game or by fulfilling the promise made to the supporters. Politics is harnessed to retain power.

Politicians' private life is exposed because political rivalries sink down to personal animosity. The opposition tries to tarnish the public image of the people in power. Some projects may fail and other politicians may exploit the situation. If opposition gets the upper hand, the people in power meet an unhappy end. Sometimes, misdeeds of the politicians in power are brought to light. In fact eternal vigilance is the price of liberty and vigilance brings darker spot to light. The people in power may be shaken; a Watergate scandal may rock even Mr. Nixon, the President of America, who was holding one of the most powerful offices among World Governments. It is politician's stubborn attitude, his adherence to his own point of view, his skill to manipulate, his effective lobbying, in short his political moves that will help him to retain power.

Laski, the famous political thinker, said the man in power tries to keep the society static. He endeavours to freeze the currents of the social change because their own stability is threatened by change; out of the changes emerge new values which need new adjustment, so such people are reduced to square pegs in round holes. So they try to make the society static. But society by nature is in a process of change; the evolution of life demands social changes. Society is essentially dynamic. It is politics only that can hold, though for some time only. The currents of change.

National politics, in some respects, is more dirty than the international politics; in the former sole aim is to gain power, by hook or by crook whereas in the latter, at least national interests are kept in mind. National politics reduces itself to personality cult – Mao was worshipped and followed, Stalin was considered a prophet and savior. Building up an image in the modern world of conflicting interests, needs political manipulation. It is another method to retain power. Politics is the ladder to climb up and the means to consolidate one's gains.