The Socialist Party

Of all the political parties that emerged immediately after independence the Socialist Party held the greatest promise. In Jayaprakash Narayan it had a leader next only to Jawaharlal Nehru in mass popularity. It had also several other brilliant leaders, for example, Acharya Narendra Dev, Achyut Patwardhan, Asoka Mehta, Dr Rammanohar Lohia and S.M. Joshi. However, the first problem the Socialists faced—and this was a problem they continued to face to the end—was that of their relationship with Congress. The Socialist Party had been born in 1934 and had remained since then a part of Congress, though it had its own separate constitution, membership, discipline and ideology.

Believing that independence could not be achieved through negotiations, the Socialist Party had boycotted the negotiations with the Cabinet Mission and refused to participate in the Constituent Assembly or the interim government or to accept membership of the Congress Working Committee. It had stoutly rejected the Mountbatten Plan for the independence and Partition of the country. Immediately after independence it had given the slogan of India's development into a socialist state and society. Most Socialists wanted Congress to make a definite programmatic and ideological commitment to socialism. They believed that by refusing to do so, it had become a right-wing bourgeois party. In early 1948 Congress framed a rule that its members could not belong to another party which had its own constitution and discipline. Since the Socialists were not willing to dissolve their own party, they decided in March 1948 to leave Congress and also declared that their objective was to establish a democratic socialist society.

Leaving Congress proved to be a historic mistake on the part of the Socialists. Congress still retained its all-embracing character and, therefore, tolerance for diverse views; it was imposing only organizational uniformity and not an ideological one. Hence, there was no question of the Socialists being asked to give up their ideology or policies. The position was similar to that prevailing in the European labour parties. Since there was no barrier in Congress to informal organization of different trends, the Socialists could have continued to function in Congress as a loose group as the conservatives were doing, without forming a separate organization and breaking discipline.

The Socialists had assumed that with the achievement of independence, there no longer existed any common task to unite them with the non-Socialists in Congress. But, in fact, this was not so, as the material, social and political foundations of a socialist India still needed to be laid through economic development with equity, secular democracy and consolidation of national unity. And Congress was still the main organization that could fulfil this task. As Hariharnath Shastri, a member of the National Executive of the Socialist Party and a former president of the All India Trade Union Congress, put it when resigning from the party for its refusal to join the Congress-sponsored Indian National Trade Union Congress: 'The unfinished task of national revolution

demands the full-fledged allegiance of all sections of the people and every progressive group in the country, including the Socialists and the Congress.'[1]

Political skill and leadership to function in a party that was practically a front lay precisely in competing with other trends in it without breaking party discipline, so as to build a broad coalition for nation-building and social change and, ultimately, socialism. True, the Socialists were a minority in Congress and were facing resistance and organizational discrimination at the party's local level. Political wisdom, as also the art of politics, lay in accepting this situation and then struggling to gradually change the balance of power between the right and the left within the Congress by pulling, inch by inch, the Centre towards the left. This is precisely what the right did throughout the period of Gandhiji's and Nehru's domination of the Congress. Instead of breaking away when Nehru committed Congress to a socialistic pattern of society, it continued inside Congress, representing an ideological and policy trend, though constantly feeling the pressure of losing out to the left. Neither the Socialists nor the Communists or the two together— an impossibility at the time—were capable of replacing Congress or bringing about socialism and social change on their own in opposition to Congress. Nehru's political acumen and historical insight lay precisely in recognizing this. At the time of the Socialist split from Congress, a large number of Socialists stayed in the parent organization perceiving itself and Jawaharlal Nehru as the more effective instruments of social change. Acharya Narendra Dev, the most erudite, mature and level-headed of the Socialist leaders, was also opposed to the decision of leaving Congress but he decided to abide by it.

The Socialists' departure from Congress seriously weakened the left inside Congress and led to Nehru being hemmed in by conservative forces in his party. It, thus, did incalculable harm to the left trend in Indian politics. On the other hand, it initiated the process of the self-destruction of the Socialist Party, leading to repeated splits within it.

The Socialists' optimism regarding the popularity of their party was to be soon belied. The general elections of 1951–52 proved to be a near disaster for the party. All its national leaders were defeated and it won only 12 seats in the Lok Sabha, though receiving 10.6 per cent of the popular vote. In the states, it won 124 of the 2,248 seats with nearly 58 per cent of its candidates losing their deposits; and its winning tally in its strongholds of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Bombay was 18 out of 390, 23 out of 240 and 9 out of 269 seats respectively.

Meanwhile Congress dissidents led by J.B. Kripalani had formed in June 1951 the Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party (KMPP). Claiming to be Gandhian, and being in basic agreement with Congress programme and policies, the new party promised to implement that programme. Two of its leaders, P.C. Ghosh and T. Prakasam, had been Congress chief ministers in their respective states, that is, West Bengal and Madras, while Kripalani was the Congress president till 1950 and had just lost his bid to be re-elected. The reasons for their leaving Congress were personal rather than ideological.

The KMPP too entered the general elections with high hopes and was even more disappointed with the results than the Socialist Party. It won 9 seats in the Lok Sabha and polled 5.8 per cent of the votes; but won only 77 seats in the state legislative assemblies.

Subsequently, both the Socialist Party and KMPP, having grossly miscalculated their electoral strength and being afraid of marginalization by Congress and the Communists, decided to merge and thus consolidate the Opposition forces. The leaders of the two parties felt that there were no ideological or programmatic differences between them. As Kripalani said: 'We both want a classless and casteless society free from social, political and economic exploitation. The Socialists call it the Socialist society. We call it the Sarvodaya society.'[2]

The two parties merged in September 1952 to form the Praja Socialist Party (PSP), with Kripalani as the chairman and Asoka Mehta as the general secretary. It became the largest among the Opposition parties and held the promise of being an alternative to Congress. Its two constituents had received 17.4 per cent of the popular vote in the 1952 elections. Its party organization covered the entire country and it had a large number of well-known and popular leaders at both the national and state levels. But the party could not maintain its cohesion for long.

From the beginning it was racked by ideological and factional quarrels; and it regularly underwent splits. It also suffered from widespread indiscipline among its leaders and cadres. From the outset, it was troubled by major differences over its distinct role in Indian politics as an Opposition party. The issues that tore the party apart from 1953 to 1964 concerned the attitude that it should adopt towards Congress as also the militant and extra-constitutional agitations, and the role it should play in nation-building activities. In June 1953, at the party's Betal Conference, Asoka Mehta offered his thesis that in a backward country the important task was that of economic development and that, therefore, in a constructive spirit, the Opposition should cooperate with the ruling party in that task, though not uncritically. As the Congress and PSP shared a common belief in nationalism, socialism and democracy, he said, the PSP should look for areas of agreement with Congress and oppose it only when matters of principle were involved. Mehta warned that non-cooperation with Congress and all-out opposition to it would make the PSP politically ineffective for a long time to come.

The party conference, however, rejected Mehta's thesis in favour of Dr Rammanohar Lohia's approach. Lohia stood for determined opposition to Congress and a position of equidistance from both Congress and the Communists. He also advocated the organization of militant mass opposition movements even if they were not within the legal, legislative and constitutional framework. Lohia and his followers were also not easily amenable to party discipline.

From the beginning, the PSP suffered from ineffective and unstable leadership. Over a period of time, most of its leaders had 'renounced, defected, or been expelled from the Party, each time leaving it a little weaker by taking with them their loyal supporters'.[3] Lohia and his group left the PSP at the end of 1955. Acharya Narendra Dev died in 1956. Jayaprakash Narayan withdrew from active politics in 1954 and announced that he would dedicate his life to Bhoodan and other constructive activities. After the general elections of 1957, he retired from politics, declared that party politics was not suitable to India and advocated, instead, 'partyless democracy'. In 1960, Kripalani left the party to play an independent role in politics. In 1963, Asoka Mehta agreed to become the deputy chairman of the Planning Commission and, when expelled from the party, joined Congress in the summer of 1964, taking nearly one-third of PSP cadres with him. Many

state-level leaders also regularly defected to Congress—among them were T. Prakasam in Andhra, Pattom Thanu Pillai in Kerala, P.C. Ghosh in Bengal, Mahamaya Prasad Sinha in Bihar and Triloki Singh in Uttar Pradesh. Finally, in 1971, more than half of the party cadres joined Congress.

All this was reflected in the steady decline of the PSP in the general elections. The party won 19 seats in the Lok Sabha with 10.4 per cent of the total votes in 1957; 12 seats with 6.8 per cent votes in 1962; and 13 seats with 3.1 per cent of the votes in 1967. The virtual demise of the party came in 1971 when it won only 2 seats with 1 per cent share of the votes. The remnants of the party joined the Socialist Party to form the Samyukta Socialist Party.

A reason for the failure of the Socialists was their inability to distinguish themselves from Congress, especially after the Avadi Resolution committing itself to a socialistic pattern of society. In fact, they could have played a meaningful role only as a part of Congress, with which they shared a commitment to nationalism, secularism, a polity based on parliamentary democracy and civil liberties, and social change. Outside Congress they were bound to be marginalized and splintered by a bigger party with a better and more influential leader in Nehru, having the same paradigm and therefore more or less the same appeal.

After leaving the PSP, Dr Lohia formed the Socialist Party at the end of 1955. The hallmark of the new party was political militancy. It was unremittingly involved in agitations, civil disobedience movements, walk-outs from the state legislatures and disruptions of their proceedings. The party and its main leader, Lohia, were anti-Nehru in the extreme and also totally opposed to Congress. The two issues that they emphasized were first, the immediate abolition of English and its replacement by Hindi as the sole link language and second, reservation of over 60 per cent of jobs for the backward castes, the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes and women. They accused the Nehru government of being dominated by and serving the cause of the upper castes. In many ways, they were the initiators of the casteist politics of the 1990s in so far as they started making appeals to caste as the basic feature of the party's ideology. Lohia, himself a brilliant intellectual, also encouraged a certain anti-intellectualism among his followers. Later, in 1967, Lohia and his followers were also to seek cooperation with the Swatantra Party and Jan Sangh, on the one hand, and the Communists, on the other, in order to defeat Congress. They clearly articulated and initiated the politics of anti-Congressism. The Socialist Party was also not free from dissidence, defections and splits, especially after the death of Dr Lohia in 1967. It merged with the PSP in 1964 to break free in 1965 and then to merge with it again in 1971. But by then it too had been reduced to a rump. The Lohia Socialists won 8 seats in the Lok Sabha in 1957, 6 in 1962, 23 in 1967 and 3 in 1971 when it polled only 2.4 per cent of the total votes.

The Communist Party

The Communist Party of India (CPI) was a part of Congress since 1936 but, unwilling to accept the Congress discipline, it left the party in 1945. From 1942 to 1945 it had a remarkable growth, even though it got isolated from the mainstream of the national movement and consequently suffered in terms of its hegemonic influence over the people. In 1947, the CPI started out with

certain advantages: it had several able leaders and thousands of devoted, disciplined and hardworking cadres who were active among the peasants, workers, students and the intelligentsia. But, as in the case of the Socialist Party, the CPI was plagued by intense factionalism in the post-1947 years and was engulfed by internal crises every few years till it formally split in 1964. Factions in the CPI were formed, however, largely around political and ideological differences. Put simply, the CPI could not agree upon a stand on the question which P.C. Joshi, the party's general secretary from 1935 to 1948, raised as early as 1950: 'What is the political situation in India?'

The CPI had gone through a great deal of inner turmoil and division during 1947. Initially, it recognized that India had become free and advised all progressive forces to rally round Nehru against the reactionary communal and pro-imperialist forces. Later, under Soviet guidance, it declared in December 1947 that India's independence was fake (*yeh azadi jhooti hai*), 15 August was a day of national betrayal, Congress had gone over to imperialism and feudalism, Nehru had become a stooge of imperialism, the government was ruling in a fascist manner, and the constitution that was being framed was a charter of slavery. The Communists had, therefore, to take up the anti-imperialist and anti-feudal tasks, fight for freedom and democracy and initiate an armed struggle.

At its Second Congress held in Calcutta in February 1948, the party chose B.T. Ranadive in place of P.C. Joshi as its general secretary. It declared that the masses were disillusioned with Congress because of the deteriorating economic situation and the betrayal of the anti-imperialist cause and were ready to revolt. The party, therefore, gave a call for an immediate armed uprising. The CPI organized several adventurist actions, two proving to be particularly disastrous. It decided to continue the armed peasant struggle in Telangana, which had been going on against the Nizam of Hyderabad since 1946, but to direct it now against the Indian government. The result was the death of thousands of heroic party and peasant activists in the unequal and unpopular fight against the Indian army. The second major disastrous step was to declare a national railway strike on 9 March 1949 in the hope that it would lead to an all-India general strike culminating in a general, countrywide uprising. The strike was, however, a complete flop. The party also indulged in several terrorist acts. As a consequence, the CPI was banned in several states. It gradually got isolated from Indian opinion and was organizationally decimated through expulsions and resignations, its membership declining from nearly 90,000 to about 18,000 in 1951.

Near the end of 1951, when Ajoy Ghosh became the general secretary of the party, a new programme and a new tactical line were accepted under the direct guidance of Stalin, leading to the temporary unification of the party. But this still did not represent a new understanding of the Indian social and political reality. India was still seen as essentially a colony, the transfer of power in 1947 as 'betrayal', the Indian government as subservient to imperialism and as representing landlords, princes and the reactionary big bourgeoisie collaborating with British imperialism, and the Indian political system as basically undemocratic and authoritarian with the government having established a police state. The political task was still seen to be the eventual overthrow of the Indian state through armed struggle. The new element in CPI's policy was that the overthrow of the state was to be part of the future agenda because the people were not yet

ready for the task: they still suffered from 'illusions' about Congress and Nehru. Immediately, the party was, therefore, to turn away from revolution-making, to withdraw the armed struggle in Telangana, and to participate in the approaching general elections. The party was helped in making the change by the fact that Nehru was by now in full command of the government. He accepted the Communists' credentials and cleared the way for the CPI by legalizing the party all over the country.

The CPI participated enthusiastically in the first general elections. It concentrated its efforts in only those areas where it had recognizable strength, that is, in what were to become Andhra and Kerala. Along with its front organization, the People's Democratic Front in Hyderabad, it contested only 61 seats for the Lok Sabha and won 23 with 4.6 per cent share of the votes and emerged as the largest Opposition party, doing better than expected by anyone. It was to do even better in 1957 when it won 27 seats and 8.92 per cent of the votes. It won a majority in Kerala and formed the first democratically elected Communist government anywhere in the world. It also won representation in almost every state legislature. In 1962, it won 29 seats in the Lok Sabha and 9.94 per cent of the votes. By this time it had emerged as a strong political force in Kerala, West Bengal and Andhra and among the working class and the intelligentsia all over the country.

The 1952 elections promised that the party would in time be considered as the political alternative to Congress. The promise did shine bright for a few years, as it had done for the Socialists in the early 1950s, but it remained essentially unfulfilled. The truce within the party proved to be quite temporary. Almost immediately after the elections differences in the party surfaced again. Despite arriving at an agreed programme in 1951, the party was not able to maintain a consensus on such major issues as the nature of the Indian state, the role of different social classes and strata, especially the Indian bourgeoisie, the nature of the class alliance which would make the Indian revolution, the very nature and meaning of revolution in India, as also the determination of the principal enemy against whom the revolution would be directed, the attitude to be adopted towards the Congress, the government and Jawaharlal Nehru and their reformist, nation-building activities. Regarding the class alliance, there was agreement on one point: the national bourgeoisie was to be allied with—but there was no agreement on who constituted the national bourgeoisie and who represented it in Indian politics and the state. The party was torn by controversies and conflicts as it tried unsuccessfully to come to grips with the actual course of social development within the confines of the 1951 programme. It was thrown into confusion at every fresh turn of events. Gradually, the differences hardened into factions, even unity on tactics broke down and the party organization tended to get paralysed.

Over the years, the party made four major changes in its official position. First, at its Madurai Congress in 1953, it accepted that the Government of India was following an independent foreign policy though in its internal policies it was still not independent and was an agent of imperialism. Second, at its Palghat Congress held in 1956, the party accepted that India had won independence in 1947 and was now a sovereign republic. The party now held that the government's policies were directed at building capitalism but by following anti-people policies and giving concessions to the imperialists. The government was therefore basically reactionary and the party's main task was to build a 'democratic front' to replace Congress. This front, however, was not to be anti-

Congress because Congress contained many democrats who had to be won over and detached from their leaders. Third, at its Amritsar Congress, in 1958, the party declared that it was possible to advance to socialism through peaceful and parliamentary means. It also declared that if it came to power it would grant full civil liberties including the right of the Opposition parties to oppose the socialist government and the socialist system through constitutional means. Fourth, at its Vijayawada Congress in 1961, the party decided to follow a policy of struggle as well as unity towards Congress. The struggle aspect would be primary but progressive policies of Congress would be supported. The expectation was that Congress would split along progressive–reactionary lines and the party would then unite with the progressive section.

The agreements at the party congresses were, however, only on the surface. The differences were in fact sharpening with time, with new issues, such as the attitude to be adopted towards the Soviet critique of Stalin, Russia–China differences and the India-China war of 1962, being added to the long list. One wing of the party supported the government wholeheartedly against the Chinese attack, the other wing while opposing the Chinese stand on the question of India–China frontiers also opposed the unqualified support to the Nehru government because of its class character. The Soviet–China ideological split also had a great deal of resonance in the CPI, and many in it were sympathetic to the Chinese position. The Chinese fuelled the differences in the CPI by giving a call to all the revolutionary elements in the Communist parties of the world to split from those supporting the 'revisionist' Soviet line.

The CPI finally split in 1964, with one party, representing the earlier 'right' and 'centrist' trends, being known as CPI and the other party, representing the earlier 'left' trend, being known after some time as the Communist Party (Marxist) or CPM. Apart from personal and factional differences, the split took mainly a doctrinal form.

According to the CPM, the Indian state was 'the organ of the class rule of the bourgeoisie and landlords, led by the big bourgeoisie, who are increasingly collaborating with foreign finance capital'.[4] Congress was the chief instrument of the ruling classes and would, therefore, have to be destroyed. The CPM did not believe that its goal of establishing a people's democratic state could be established through peaceful, parliamentary means, especially as the Indian constitution was inherently anti-democratic and 'must go lock, stock and barrel'. The party would, however, use the constitution as an 'instrument of struggle' and try to break it 'from within'. To bring about revolution in social relations, the CPM believed, it would become necessary to start an agrarian revolution and an armed struggle under the leadership of the working class and its party. The party would try to create suitable conditions for an armed struggle as soon as possible, and would use participation in parliamentary politics to create these conditions and to overcome the illusions that people still had regarding the usefulness of parliament and the constitution. A large number of those who went over to the CPM believed that it would lead them in making a revolution. In its international outlook, the CPM continued to regard Stalin as a great Marxist who was basically correct in his policies though he made some avoidable errors. It claimed to take an independent stand on Soviet–Chinese differences but was closer to the Chinese in demanding an attack on Soviet 'revisionism.'

The CPI too wanted to 'complete the anti-imperialist, anti-feudal revolution', but it would do so

by forming a national democratic front which would include progressive sections of Congress. Moreover, this front need not be led by the working class or the CPI. The party also declared that transition to national democracy and then socialism was capable of being accomplished by peaceful and parliamentary means.

Both the Communist parties later split further and have more or less stagnated and remained 'small and growing', though they jointly with each other and other parties formed governments in West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura and also made their presence felt in parliament. But outside these states they have hardly a noticeable presence. In general, they have failed to conduct politics among the people and become the leaders of a broad mass movement. Like the Socialists, the Communists also failed to realize their political potential, though they did not disintegrate and disappear as the Socialist parties had done.

How is the failure of the undivided CPI and its offshoots to measure up to the challenges of independent India and to make a political breakthrough despite favourable socio-economic conditions to be explained? There was, of course, the failure of the CPI to understand the complex Indian social development and the changing mood of the people. For example, it took eight years for it to recognize that India had become free in 1947 and another nine for the breakaway CPI to accept that independent capitalism was being built. The airy debates of the 1950s and 1960s were much more theological in nature. On the other hand, the basic formulae that the economy was in crisis, the economic conditions of the people were worsening, the class contradictions were getting intensified, and the people were disillusioned with Congress were repeated in resolution after resolution without any in-depth economic or political analysis. The hope was that the party, with its committed cadres and carefully vetted members, tight discipline and correct party line, would lead the people's revolution whenever the inevitable social, economic and political breakdown occurred and a revolutionary situation developed. The result was that the party and its contending groups and factions remained stuck in grooves from which they found it increasingly difficult to extricate themselves.

Particular manifestations of the Communist failure to come to grips with the Indian political reality are related to three areas. Despite toiling hard in the anti-imperialist cause and being a part of the mainstream national movement led by Congress and Gandhiji, both before and after independence, the party failed to appreciate correctly the character of the freedom struggle as a massive national revolution, comparable to the Russian and Chinese revolutions. After independence, the CPI by and large failed to come to terms with nationalism and the problems of national development and consolidation of the nation. Nationalism had a different meaning in the ex-colonies than in the European context. Here, it was not merely or even primarily a bourgeois phenomenon or the ideological reflex of bourgeois interests. Here, it did not reflect the befogging of the people's minds by bourgeois ideology; on the contrary, it reflected the grasp of an important aspect of the reality by the people who expected a united and strong India to become a vehicle for the improvement of their social condition. Similarly, nation-building was not a bourgeois task. The Communists could not become a hegemonic or even a major force because they failed to take up the leadership in nation-building and social development of the nation as a whole, in all its aspects; from economic development and the spread of education, scientific

temper, science and technology and productivity to the fight against the caste system and for equity and equality, and the guarding of the independence, integrity and security of the nation.

Next, the CPI was also not able to work out the full and real implications of a civil libertarian and democratic polity. It got repeatedly bogged down with problems posed in the abstract, such as revolutionary versus non-revolutionary path, violent versus nonviolent means, parliamentary work versus armed struggle and so on. The real problem was not posed: what did it mean to be a social revolutionary in the context of post-independence democratic India? Electoral and parliamentary politics were not to be encompassed by the traditional Communist notion of using them as mere forums of propaganda and as measures of the Communist strength. Despite the bourgeois social structure underpinning it, India's democratic polity marked a historical leap; it meant a basic change in the rules of political behaviour. India's parliamentary institutions and framework had to be seen as the political channels through which social transformation was to be brought about.

The CPI did hesitatingly move towards this understanding at its Amritsar Congress in 1958, but the effort was patchy and short-lived; and inner-party contentions soon led to its being abandoned. The CPI also failed to realize that in a democratic polity, social transformation could occur only through a series of radical reforms which had to be put into practice and not pursued merely to expose the rulers and the existing social system. In other words, instead of promising what it would do after it came to power, the party had to struggle to influence existing social development in the direction of its vision. In the absence of such an approach, the CPI failed to adopt a positive and a politically viable attitude towards the nation-building and reformist measures and policies of the Nehru government. At the same time, the party failed to become an alternative to Congress, and to come up with its own agenda of national development and social justice. One result of this was that gradually the opposition space began to be occupied by reactionary communal and casteist parties.

Lastly, the CPI's centralized, bureaucratic and basically secret party structure, relying on whole-time party cadres, also did not suit a democratic and open society. Such a party could not hope to develop mass institutions and mass power. This weakness of the party was compounded in the pre-1962 years by a certain subservience to the Soviet leadership and the importation of the doctrine of ends justifying the means into inner-party disputes.

Bharatiya Jan Sangh

The Bharatiya Jan Sangh, founded in October 1951, was basically a communal party and has to be studied as such. A communal party is one which is structured around communal ideology. A communal party cannot be defined by specific policies, for it can discard any of its programmatic and policy elements and sometimes adopt the very opposite ones. Its economic, political and social policies are generally a husk or a mask which can be changed at appropriate moments to suit its electoral or other political needs, which it perceives as essential for the capture of political power, which in turn the party needs to implement its communal agenda. A communal party is not a conservative party for it is not committed to the conservation of large

elements of the existing social, economic and political structure. It is, however, a right-wing party for it cannot communalize the state and society without strengthening the reactionary and exploitative elements of the economy.

The Jan Sangh could not, however, openly profess its communal ideology as it had to function within two major constraints. Being an electoral party, operating in a secular democratic polity, it had to try to cobble together an electoral majority and therefore appeal to non-communal voters, as also obey electoral laws forbidding political appeals to religion. Further, because of the firm ideological commitment of the national movement and the anti-communal sentiment in India, especially after the assassination of Gandhiji, communalism had a bad odour about it.

To understand the basic communal character of the Jan Sangh and its politics, first the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) is to be studied, for the former was a creation of the RSS, and had remained under the latter's tight ideological and organizational control since its foundation. The Jan Sangh drew its organized strength, centralized character and ideological homogeneity from the RSS. Also the grassroots workers, the well-trained and disciplined cadres and organizers, and in time nearly all the top leaders of the Jan Sangh, especially its secretaries and general secretaries, were provided by the RSS. Founded in 1925, the RSS was organized on authoritarian and militaristic lines which, functioning below the surface and glorifying violence, developed basically as an anti-Muslim organization. It did not participate in the anti-imperialist movement or wage any anti-imperialist struggle even of its own conception on the ground that it had to conserve its strength for its main task of protecting Hindus from Muslim domination. The RSS grew in northern India in the 1940s because of the communalization of politics during the war years and large-scale communal violence during 1946–47, in which it played an active role. The RSS was banned and its leaders and workers arrested after the assassination of Gandhiji.

Though not directly involved in the assassination, the RSS had been waging a campaign of hatred against Gandhiji and other Congress leaders, publicly and in its shakhas or branches, often branding them as anti-Hindu and 'traitors'. For example, referring to them, M.S. Golwalkar, the supreme head of the RSS nominated as such for life, wrote in 1939: 'Strange, very strange, that traitors should sit enthroned as national heroes.'[5]

Keen on persuading the government to lift the ban on the RSS, its leaders gave an undertaking in 1949 that it would not take part in politics. But, in fact, they were quite keen to do so. The Jan Sangh provided the perfect cover for this 'front organization'.

The basic guidelines of the RSS's communal approach towards Muslims were laid down by Golwalkar in *We or Our Nationhood Defined,* where Muslims were portrayed as a perpetually hostile and alien element within the Indian body politic and society, who must either accept total subordination to Hindus or cease being Muslims. This is evident from the passage below.

> In Hindusthan exists and must needs exist the ancient Hindu nation and nought else but the Hindu Nation . . . So long, however, as they [Muslims and other non-Hindus] maintain their racial, religious and cultural differences, they cannot but be only foreigners . . . There are only two courses open to the foreign elements, either to merge themselves in the national race and adopt its culture, or to live at the sweet will

> of the national race . . . The non-Hindu peoples in Hindusthan must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence Hindu religion, . . . in one word, they must cease to be foreigners, or may stay in the country, wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment—not even citizen's rights . . . in this country Hindus alone are the Nation and the Moslems and others, if not actually anti-national are at least outside the body of the Nation.[6]

Golwalkar repeatedly referred to Muslims as 'our foes', 'our old and bitter enemies', 'our most inveterate enemies', and so on, and said: 'We, Hindus, are at war at once with the Moslems on the one hand and British on the other.'[7] More recently, in October 1991, Balasaheb Deoras, the successor of Golwalkar as the head of the RSS, condemned 'the aggressive and divisive mentality of the Muslims' and accused the secular parties of not hesitating 'to sacrifice national interests and to fulfil even the anti-national political aspirations of the Muslims'.[8]

In view of the carefully cultivated communal feelings among its cadres and adherents by the RSS, it was not accidental that, as the noted journalist Krishan Bhatia wrote in 1971, 'the RSS has been behind some of the worst communal riots during the past thirty years'.[9] At a more popular level, the *Organiser* and the *Panchjanya,* the unofficial organs of the RSS, continue till this day to publish articles stressing, with greater or lesser stridency, depending on the political situation, that Hindus constitute the Indian nation and emphasizing the dangers from schemes of the 'Islamization of India'.

The Jan Sangh was launched as a political party in October 1951 with Dr Syama Prasad Mukherjee as its president. Ostensibly, The Jan Sangh was an independent party in its own right and under Mookerjee it did enjoy a certain degree of independence, but even then its spearhead was the RSS and its carefully chosen cadres who were put in crucial positions in the new party. After Mookerjee's death in 1953, the fig leaf of being an independent party was gradually given up. Since 1954, when its second president, Mauli Chandra Sharma, resigned in protest against the RSS domination of the party, Jan Sangh and its later-day reincarnation the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), have been more openly associated with and controlled by the RSS, which has provided them with the bulk of their leaders at the top as well as the lower levels.

Though the Jan Sangh over time adopted a radical programme as befitted a petite bourgeoisie, national-socialist-type party, and supported, for example, a mixed economy based on planning and public sector (the latter controlling the commanding heights of the economy), zamindari abolition, land ceilings and land to the tiller, the cause of agricultural labour and of the working class in the modern sector, regulation of large-scale industries, nationalization of key industries, service cooperatives in the rural sector, ceilings on personal income, etc., these were merely formal positions. The issues which really mattered and on which the party and its members concentrated and exerted themselves were very different, namely, communal questions. All the party's popular slogans and everyday agitational issues were filtered through communal glasses or ideology. The party declared itself to be non-communal and secular and formally admitted Muslims as members. Initially, it also declared that its objective was to work not for Hindu

Rashtra but Bharatiya Rashtra; but the latter was so defined as to stand for Hindu Rashtra. Admitting Muslims into the party was also perceived by its leaders and cadres as a mere formality and technicality—a political manoeuvre. Jan Sangh workers at the lower level, its leaders in public speeches and its journals promoted in a subtle and subterranean manner distrust and hatred of Muslims.

The Jan Sangh consistently accused the secular parties of appeasement of Muslims and pandering to their interests. Even a sober leader like Mookerjee attacked Nehru regularly for following 'a suicidal policy of appeasement of Muslims'.[10] On its part, Jan Sangh declared that it would promote national unity by 'nationalising all non-Hindus by inculcating in them the ideal of Bharatiya Culture'.[11]

The Jan Sangh was strongly anti-Pakistan. According to one of its resolutions, Pakistan's 'aim is to sustain the faith of Indian Muslims in the ultimate objective of establishing Muslim domination over the rest of India as well'.[12] In its initial years, the Jan Sangh argued for the reuniting of India and Pakistan in pursuit of its central objective of Akhand Bharat. The Jan Sangh also accused the government of consistently pursuing a policy of appeasement of Pakistan. It was only later that the slogan of Akhand Bharat was abandoned and even hostility to Pakistan was muted, especially after the Jan Sangh merged into the Janata Party in 1977 and Atal Bihari Vajpayee became the foreign minister; but hostility to Muslims as proxies for Pakistan remained as before.

The Jan Sangh emphasized the propagation of Bharatiya culture and the establishment of Bharatiya nationalism. These two terms were never defined except very vaguely as being based on non-Western and traditional values. In fact, the word 'Bharatiya' was a euphemism for the word 'Hindu' and an attempt on the part of the Jan Sangh to avoid the communal label. As communalism began to grow, Jan Sangh publications openly started using the terms Hindu culture and Hindu nationalism and continue to do so. In reality even the term 'Hindu nationalism' was a misnomer and a substitute for the term 'Hindu communalism'.

Denying the cultural diversity of India, the Jan Sangh also raised the slogan of 'one country, one culture, one nation' and asserted that all those who did not accept this one culture had imbibed 'anti-national traits'. There was also a strong element of revivalism in its talk of Bharatiya spiritual and material values; the revival of Bharatiya culture rather than its development engaged them. It also accused Congress of importing foreign technology and promised that instead it would aim at developing 'a self-sufficient and self-generating economy' by developing 'our own technique'.[13] A disguised opposition to parliamentary democracy and secularism was also intended when it repeatedly accused Congress of developing Indian political life on the basis of foreign ideas. However, gradually it gave up such revivalist formulations as also its talk of Bharatiya values. Their place was taken by the openly communal term 'Hindutva'.

For years, the Jan Sangh took a strident stand and an agitational approach in favour of Sanskritized Hindi and against the retention of English as an official link language of India. Later, keeping in view its need for expansion in non-Hindi areas, it quietly accepted the 1965 decision to retain English along with Hindi so long as the non-Hindi states wanted this. It also opposed the

development of Urdu in U.P. and other parts of northern India. It forcefully opposed the Hindu Code Bill, and after its passage pledged to repeal this legislation.

Interestingly, the Jan Sangh opposed the linking of religion with politics and did not take up any religious issue other than that of a legal ban on cow slaughter. The reasons for the change in this respect in the 1980s will be discussed in the chapter on communalism in independent India.

In fact, significant changes in the official programme and policies as also in the social and regional base of Jan Sangh-BJP occurred over the years. Only the centrality of communal ideology remained. And, of course, no party or leadership can be separated from the ideology with which it operates among the people. Electorally, the Jan Sangh remained throughout this phase on the margins of the Indian polity. In 1952, it won 3 seats in the Lok Sabha with 3.06 per cent of the national vote. (The combined total of the Jan Sangh, Hindu Mahasabha and Ram Rajya Parishad (RRP) was 10 seats with 6.4 per cent of the votes. Thus, the overall performance of the three Hindu communal parties was quite poor.) In 1957, the Jan Sangh won 4 seats in the Lok Sabha with 5.97 per cent of the total votes. This did not mark any real growth of communalism, for it occurred because the Jan Sangh absorbed a large part of the political base of Hindu Mahasabha and the RRP, the total score of the three parties being 5 MPs with 7.17 per cent of the votes. In 1962, the Jan Sangh won 14 seats with 6.44 per cent of the total votes—the three communal parties got 17 seats and 7.69 per cent of the votes. The high-water mark of the Jan Sangh before it became BJP was reached in 1967 when it won 35 seats with 9.35 per cent of the popular vote, with the Hindu Mahasabha and RRP having disappeared as political forces. Its tally, however, came down again in 1971 when it got 22 seats in the Lok Sabha and 7.4 per cent of the votes. Throughout, the party did not win a single seat in South India and it lost its political hold completely in West Bengal after the death of Syama Prasad Mukherjee. In fact, its political influence was mainly confined to Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Delhi, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar.

The Swatantra Party

The Swatantra Party, the first authentic all-India secular conservative party, came into being in early August 1959. It had a number of distinguished leaders, most of them old Congressmen, for example, C. Rajagopalachari, Minoo Masani, N.G. Ranga and K.M. Munshi. Right-wing groups and parties had, of course, earlier existed at the local and regional levels, but Swatantra's formation was the first attempt to bring these highly fragmented right-wing forces together under the umbrella of a single party. The provocation was the left turn which the Congress took at Avadi and the Nagpur Resolutions.

Favouring the nineteenth-century conception of the 'night watchman' or laissez-faire state, Swatantra stood for free, private enterprise and opposed the active role of the state in economic development. It wanted to radically restrict centralized planning and the role of the public sector, as also state regulation of the economy. It opposed any nationalization of private enterprise and any extension of land reforms, especially fixation of ceilings on land holdings. Swatantra was fully committed to secularism and that was one reason it found it difficult to merge or form a

general alliance with the Jan Sangh, though it entered into seat-sharing arrangements with it. In fact, many conservative intellectuals, businessmen and political leaders welcomed the formation of Swatantra because it provided a non-socialist, constitutionalist and secular conservative alternative to the Congress. Swatantra leaders accused Congress of accepting communist principles and trying to abolish private property. Totally misrepresenting Nehru's position, they accused him of trying to introduce collective farming and Chinese-type communes. Nehru, Rajagopalachari said, was treading 'the royal road to Communism'. Swatantra, on the other hand, was 'dedicated to saving India from the dangers of totalitarianism'.[14]

In foreign affairs, Swatantra opposed non-alignment and a close relationship with the Soviet Union and advocated an intimate connection with the United States and Western Europe. It urged the government to work for a defence alliance with non-Communist nations of the South Asian region and of Asia as a whole, including Pakistan, under the US umbrella.

The social base of Swatantra was quite narrow, consisting of (i) some industrialists and businessmen, who were disgruntled with government control, quotas and licences and attacks on the managing agency system and fearful of nationalization, besides lacking confidence in Nehru, (ii) princes, jagirdars and landlords, who were miserable and angry at the loss of their fiefdoms or lands, social power and status, and deteriorating economic conditions, and (iii) ex-landlord-turned-capitalist farmers and rich and middle peasants in some parts of the country, who had welcomed the abolition of landlordism but were fearful of losing part of their land if land reforms went any further by way of land ceiling and the growing awareness and political power of the rural poor, especially agricultural labourers. Swatantra was also joined by a few retired civil servants and disgruntled Congressmen, leading a historian to describe it as 'a holding company for local dissident groups'. The ex-landlords and rich peasants controlled the votes of many of their economic and social dependants while the erstwhile princes, jagirdars and zamindars could appeal to remnants of traditional feudal loyalties.

Swatantra did not fare badly in the 1962 elections. It won 18 seats in the Lok Sabha with 6.8 per cent of the popular vote. It emerged as the main Opposition in four states—Bihar, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Orissa. Out of 18 seats, 7 were won in Bihar, but these seven members included the Raja of Ramgarh's mother, wife, brother, sister-in-law and business manager! In 1967, the party secured 44 seats in the Lok Sabha with 8.7 per cent of the total votes. In both the elections, ex-princes, jagirdars and big landlords were in the main responsible for the party's wins. Riven with factions and defections and failing to acquire a mass following, the party rapidly declined after the death of C. Rajagopalachari in 1967. In 1971, it secured only 8 seats in the Lok Sabha with 3 per cent of the votes. Feeling a sense of hopelessness, most of the party leaders joined the Bharatiya Lok Dal in 1974, a few went back to Congress, while a small faction led by Masani carried on.

Swatantra failed mainly because there was as yet no space in Indian politics for a conservative party, for radicalization of politics was still in progress. Moreover, right-wing class interests were still quite diverse and fragmented and not easily amenable to coalescence. Also the rich and middle peasants were not yet fully and irrevocably alienated from Congress, especially as cooperative farming had been put in cold storage and land ceiling laws actually posed little threat

to the existing holdings. On the other hand, they were the major beneficiaries of several government policies and measures: reduction of land revenue and extension of services including provision of rural credit, improved transport, irrigation and electrification.

The business class—the bourgeoisie whether big or small—was also as a whole not unhappy. By and large, it accepted that the government must play an active role in politics. It found that planning, the public sector and government regulations did not block its growth and, instead, in many respects, helped it to develop. The mixed economy also left enough scope for its expansion. In any case, as a propertied class, it was not willing to oppose a party—Congress—which was certain to retain power in the immediate future. Above all, though steady in pursuing its developmental and reformist agenda, the Nehru government, Congress and the broad class coalition Nehru had built up were in actual practice quite moderate in dealing with and conciliatory towards the propertied classes. They did not pose a radical or revolutionary challenge to the capitalist social order. Nehru would not antagonize the capitalist class and the agrarian bourgeoisie— the capitalist farmers and the rich peasantry—to an extent where they would feel that they were being driven to the wall. Even the princes and landlords had not been wiped out and had been consoled with compensation and other economic concessions. Consequently, in most cases their opposition remained latent and did not manifest itself in political action. Moreover, Nehru invariably 'responded to pressure at the margin'. Just as he had been receptive to the left in the 1950s, he now responded to the right and did not take up state trading in foodgrains or cooperative farming. Simultaneously, land ceiling laws were made quite innocuous by the state governments, which were quite receptive to the rich peasant demands.

Lastly, the Congress right realized that so long as Nehru was alive his position in the country was unassailable; it, therefore, showed no inclination to leave the shelter of the banyan tree that was Nehru. On the other hand, when Congress split in 1969 and Congress (O) emerged as a political force, the reason for the existence of Swatantra as a separate right-wing party disappeared, for the former was much more potent as a right-wing party.

Communal and Regional Parties

A large number of communal and regional parties existed between 1947 and 1964. Among the communal parties, the Hindu Mahasabha was an old party, but it soon faded from the political scene after 1952, when it had won four seats in the Lok Sabha, as it gradually lost its support base to the Jan Sangh. Same was the case with the RRP. Because of its association with the demand for Pakistan, the Muslim League lay dormant, with many of its demoralized leaders and activists joining Congress and other parties. However, it revived in parts of Tamil Nadu and in Kerala where first Congress and then the CPI and CPM gave it respectability by making it an alliance partner. The Akali Dal was another major communal party, though limited to Punjab. A large number of regional parties appeared on the scene during the period. The more important of these were the DMK in Tamil Nadu and the Jammu and Kashmir National Conference which are discussed in other chapters in this book. We have already discussed the Jharkhand party in Bihar in the chapter on the integration of the tribals. The other major regional parties were the Ganatantra Parishad in Orissa, All Parties Hill Leaders' Conference (APHLC) in Assam, and

Scheduled Castes Federation in Maharashtra. There were also several small left parties, usually confined to one state: Revolutionary Socialist Party (Kerala and West Bengal), Forward Bloc (West Bengal) and Peasants and Workers Party (Maharashtra). Most of the regional left and communal groups and parties cannot, however, be discussed here, though they played a significant role in particular states and regions.