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Note No. 51

"No. We should not turn back. We will make use of our experience in the Janata Party. We shall move ahead on the strength of our original thinking and principles."

This statement of Vajpayee in 1980 (a quote from an essay written by J.P.Mathur-'BJS to BJP') founder president of the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) on the suggestion of some of his party men during the foundation convention of the BJP that the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS) should be re-launched, indicated that he wanted to move ahead with the new political party without jettisoning the ideological content of the erstwhile Jan Sangh. At that time, Jan Sangh, which was started as a political front of RSS, had merged with the Janata Party.

Vajpayee now appears to be poised to energise his government with a spirit of launching a national movement in the form of NDA. As a first Prime Minister of the country, who had no direct or indirect association with post-independence Indian National Congress, he is seen to be keen to move the people in a manner the leaders of freedom movement had mobilised the people against the British.

The failure of the BJP to achieve parliamentary majority on its own through its stated objective of "integral humanism as basic philosophy and commitment to nationalism and national integration, democracy, Gandhian Socialism, positive secularism ('*Sarva Dharma Sambhava*') and value based politics" as laid down in the Party's constitution, has turned Vajpayee towards a new

approach of consensual politics.

The two mainstreams of Indian Nationalism viz. Pan-Indian identity and Regional-Linguistic-Cultural identity, which had been flowing along the holy rivers of this sub-continent, were transformed into a political movement against the British colonialism by the leaders of the freedom movement under one umbrella of Indian National Congress. Since the Indian National Congress was not a political party but a national movement; Mahatma Gandhi had suggested its dissolution after the achievement of independence. But, the then Congress leaders with their eyes on political power converted this movement into a political management body. In spite of their diverse ideological inclination, the Congress leaders compromised with Nehruvian concept of polity that was based on the Western concept of democracy and secularism and shared power without taking into consideration the social, cultural, economic and traditional aspirations of the people.

The first manifesto of the BJS (Bharthiya Jan Sangh) adopted in its foundation convention held on November 21, 1951 said,

"India got freedom after long centuries of foreign rule but it has failed to create the expected glow and enthusiasm in the peoples' mind. The country is suffering from a number of internal and external problems... The people are being ground between the economic and political mismanagement... There is an atmosphere of disappointment and frustration in the country and peoples' faith in the leadership is getting shaky. The ruling congress party in its haste to make India a carbon copy of West is undermining the people's faith in National values and ideals... There is need for new approach and leadership in all walks of national life..."

Keeping in mind this 'original thinking and principles' the task before Vajpayee is perhaps to lead the NDA as a movement with the sole objective to meet the urgent basic needs of the people and make India a "progressive, powerful and prosperous nation." His approach towards social, economic and security problems of the country without any colour of ideological considerations appears to be an attempt to revive the mainstream politics of Gandhian Congress in pre-Independence days, turn it into a national movement of the people, and as an alternative to 'Nehruvian and Indira Gandhi Congress'.

We may recall that when BJS was founded at the instance of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the party leadership was not averse to support the then Union Home Minister, Sardar Vallabhai Patel who had strong reservations against the approach of Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru on a number of issues. Mr. Balraj Madhok, one of the founding members of the BJS in his book 'Why Jana Sangh?' maintained that "Pandit Nehru was more of an internationalist than a nationalist in his approach to political issues and more of a Russian than an Indian in his approach to economic issues". Since Vajpayee was also one of the founding members of BJS, he was also not opposed to the approach of Sardar Patel on issues of national interest.

The compulsion of a coalition government is consensual politics. By cobbling together, his own party men as well as his allies and opponents; Vajpayee has no alternative but to go for consensus. The recent nomination of members to Rajya Sabha, appointment of non-controversial governors, sending all party delegations to the ministerial conference of World Trade

Organisation (WTO) at Seattle (USA), proposal for a national consensus on CTBT may be cited to support this view. Allaying the apprehension that his government would push through 'the hidden agenda' of the BJP, Vajpayee, on the eve of the winter session of parliament (November 28, '99) said that '**A moratorium had been put on all contentious issues' and that 'our only agenda is the agenda for a proud, prosperous India – the common manifesto of the NDA'**. The economic reform measures of Vajpayee government have hardly any difference with that of the Congress in its election manifesto, another indication of the attempt to go for consensual politics in matters of national interest.

Despite the clarity and honesty in the approach of Mr.A.B.Vajpayee, the trouble makers both from within as well as from opposition appear to be determined not to allow him a smooth passage to achieve this goal. While the congress, the main opposition party is putting pressure for deletion of Rajiv Gandhi's name from Bofors charge sheet in return for its cooperation, the restive forces within his own party are eagerly waiting for an opportunity to strike and put him in an embarrassing situation. For this Vajpayee may have to carry out a soul searching exercise. A large number of educated people of the country, the main force which brought NDA into power are not happy with some of the decisions of his government. Extension of reservation benefit to new groups of OBCs, his recent statement in support of Constitutional amendment to neutralize Supreme Court orders on reservation issues etc. are being viewed as part of vote bank politics. The supporters of Vajpayee perceive some truth in the accusation of Kalyan Singh that he (Vajpayee) has nothing to bother for the party once he has reached the highest position. That, in the guise of realpolitik he is trying to follow Nehruvian socialism and back tracking from Gandhian socialism – is a question that has arisen in the minds of his supporters.

Kalyan Singh, former Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh and also a national Vice President of the BJP has already launched a campaign to drag Vajpayee into a debate on Ayodhya – "Mr.Vajpayee has thrown Rama to dust bin for the Prime Minister's chair. I had kicked Chief Minister's chair for the sake of Rama." Though the BJP leadership has already taken steps to expel Kalyan Singh from the party and is determined to isolate him with damage control exercises, the nuisance value of the former Chief Minister whose effort to resurrect temple issue and supplement it with OBC card may not be written off completely. With the VHP, Bajrangdal and lower middle class cadres in BJP known to be the strong segment of Sangh Parivar supportive of the temple issue, the party has a tough task ahead in doing damage control.

Will the NDA move towards a national movement? It is difficult to say right now.

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