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BJP: In search of a viable political order ?

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Note No. 53

"For us power has never been an end by itself, but the means to an end.... Nothing can stop us from finding for the BJP its rightful place in history as the force that fired a resurgent India " - Kushabahu Thakre at NEC meet of Party on 3rd November, 1999.

Despite the high-sounding call of Thakre after coronation of Vajpayee as Prime minister (*Raj Tilak ki Karo Tayyari*), from the way the political events are unfolding, one gets the impression that all is not well within the BJP.

Politically the BJP has to contend with the following aspects in its governance now:

- a. To come to terms with practical politics and manage pressure from RSS on Sangh ideology.
- b. Managing the coalition with disparate groups with different objectives but brought together by a common agenda for governance.

c. Damage control after Kalyan Singh's exit and the policy towards Backwards.

The party with its a moderate face in Mr. Vajpayee may have succeeded in capturing power in the country but the puritans in Sangh Parivar are seen to be under severe constraint to re-invigorate and re-dedicate their cadres to the cherished ideals of the party and the noble task of nation building, as desired by Mr. Thakre during the National Executive meet. President Kushabhau Thakre and General Secretaries, Govindacharya as well as Narendra Modi were Pracharaks of RSS, but drafted to the BJP for promoting the Sangh ideology in Indian politics. Though, they never contested elections, their role as monitors and strategists had always kept them in a high profile. For these bachelor leaders, political power hardly mattered if it was unable to pursue the Sangh ideology. They feel that the BJP in terms of RSS ideology has not come up to their expectations.

Thakre in his Presidential address put up a brave front and said, in the bipolar polity which emerged from 1999 Lok-Sabha election, the BJP was a dominant pole. But these leaders due to their commitment to RSS traditions are learnt to be of the view that the dominant pole has become the prisoner of junior partners in the coalition government at centre.. Kushabhau Thakre has already said that he was not interested in a second term as President of the party for which election is scheduled next year. These leaders, compelled to accept the ground reality of coalition Dharma, feel helpless to maintain the ideological mascot of the BJP.

Most of the Party leaders with strong RSS inclination find themselves at the cross roads in a situation more confusing than ever. To them the BJP led NDA government has hardly anything substantial to offer to Sangh Parivar befitting its ideological or political philosophy. With Ayodhya in cold storage, Swadeshi becoming a slogan of the past, recent pronouncement of Vajpayee for constitutional amendment to overcome the verdict of Supreme Court on reservations issue appears to them to be in pursuit of a vote bank and against the known stand of the RSS. The seemingly conflicting statement of party leaders over Ayodhya controversy, which has generated a furore in parliament, appears to be another fallout from this state of confusion.

The BJP parliamentary party in its emergency meeting (December, 14, 1999), chaired by Mr. Vajpayee, declared that though the temple issue was a part of BJP agenda, it had been left out of the common minimum programme of the coalition government. This exercise was carried out to satisfy the junior partners in the coalition government, but what about the growing disenchantment among the puritans in the party over the approach of Vajpayee on issues related to the political philosophy of the BJP? L.K..Advani and M.M.Joshi, the two senior most leaders in Union Cabinet and known to be the real face of the BJP, do not appear to be in a position to push through any of the political agenda of the party. Being accused and charge-sheeted in Babari Mosque demolition case, their moves are under the close scrutiny of anti-BJP forces. The month-long nation wide Vande Mataram programme, chalked out by Union Ministry of Culture, Youth Affairs, and Sports was launched by Advani on

December, 11, 1999 at Tirunelveli in Tamil Nadu. The programme, which commenced with the birth anniversary of Tamil poet Subramanya Bharati will culminate at Ahmedabad on January 12 next year on the birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda. This government-sponsored programme which reportedly has the approval of the Prime Minister Vajpayee was proclaimed to be for national resurgence in a new millennium but anti-BJP forces are learnt to be viewing it as an attempt to push through the hidden agenda of the BJP.

On December 6, 1999, the seventh anniversary of Babari Mosque demolition, the opposition in parliament made a loud demand for resignation of L.K.Advani and M.M.Joshi, and Ms Uma Bharati from Union Cabinet on the ground of their being accused in the Mosque demolition case. Revival of this issue by the opposition might be a blessing in disguise for the cadres of the Vishva Hindu Parishad. They are encouraged with the statement of their General Secretary, Acharya Giriraj Kishore that- When the stones are ready it will not need much time to put together the temple. This has caused embarrassment to the Prime Minister who does not appear to be in a position to keep the leaders of Sangh Parivar under control.

The outburst of Kalyan Singh, the former BJP Chief Minister of U.P. against the party leadership over his expulsion from the party on December, 9, 1999 that - "the party had signed its death warrant" was his natural reaction. However, his assessment of mobilising the non-Yadava backward castes in the state continues to haunt the minds of the party leaders. Though, they are confident, that Kalyan Singh will meet the same fate of S.S.Vaghela, the set back of the party during Lok-Sabha election in the state has prompted the leadership to search for a formula to counter Kalyan Singh, who is likely to sink with the BJP in next assembly election in the state.

Of late, a larger section of government employees, educated middle class and intellectuals who were a force behind Vajpayee in Lok-Sabha election are found critical of him for initiating constitutional amendment on reservation issue. They are surprised to see the Prime Minister reviving the politics of reservation, which is hardly a solution to fill up the wide gap in education, health facilities, unemployment, and other basic needs of the social sector. This was not the part of the manifesto of the NDA on which the election was contested. By reviving this contentious issue, the BJP might loosen its grip on upper caste voters further, who were found to be swinging towards Congress in U.P. during the last Lok-Sabha election.

Instead of inspiring the electorate for nation building exercise, it is unclear why the BJP is taking up issues which aggravate social disharmony when there are more pressing issues to be dealt with. If the country can wait for the court verdict on issue like Ayodhya, what was the urgency for Mr. Vajpayee to initiate constitutional amendment for neutralising the judicial verdict on reservation issue? This will hardly benefit the deserving candidates, as the creamy layers will again usurp it. The Sangh leadership, which had floated a Samajik Samarasata Manch to counter the fall out of the implementation of Mandal Commission report is known to be unhappy with the recent decision of the Vajpayee government on reservation. This perilous trend, which is likely to affect the BJP adversely in future, demands right concept in governance. The dominant pole should therefore, be cautious against the trap of its adversaries both from within as well as from outside, who might be interested to pursue their own

hidden agenda in the name of social justice. Vajpayee, who has reached the highest position of his political career, is also expected by party cadres to shoulder a larger responsibility to place the BJP, of which he was the founder president at the right place in history.

National Democratic Alliance is a laboratory for a country of pluralistic society like India. The experiments that are expected to be carried out on the basis of the experience of over half a century of governance are to put in place a political order that will last the next fifty years. All the political parties have more or less accepted the reality of coalition politics. By pursuing piecemeal amendments in the constitution, the BJP in its search for a viable political order, appears to be floundering. In going for short term gains in vote banks by tinkering with social engineering, the party will lose its credibility on its claims of being a party with a difference.

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