



Bharatiya Jana Sangh: A brief review

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Abstract

The study deals in detail about the foundation of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh based on 'Hindutva' and controlled by the RSS activists. The BJS resulted from a combination of a party less leader, Shyama Prasad Mookerjee and a leaderless party, the RSS. A brief account of the performance of the party during 1957-1967 has been presented.

Keywords: Bharatiya Jana Sangh, Hindutva, RSS, BJS

Introduction

The Bharatiya Jana Sangh (henceforth as Jana Sangh) resulted from a combination of a party less leader, Shyama Prasad Mookerjee and a leaderless party, the RSS. The constitution of the RSS has barred it from entering in politics as an organization. The constitution has, however, permitted individual *swayamsevak*s to do as they wished in political matters. Only officeholders of parties debarred from holding offices in the RSS.

The first issue of *Organiser*, published after the lifting of the ban from RSS on July 12, 1949, contained two articles written by C. Parameswaran and Balraj Madhok on urging the RSS to enter politics. These articles were followed by a series of articles in 1949 by "Kamal". Madhok called on the RSS to save the nation and opined that "it is necessary that the Sangh must give the lead to the country in regard to the political and economic problems of the country as well. It is essential for the very existence of the Sangh itself. Any institution or organization of the people which fails to guide its component parts about the vital questions influencing their lives is bound to lose the driving force which keeps any organization alive" (Baxter, C., 1969) [6]. This was the reasoning which put the RSS into politics. In its views, India needed *Bharatiya* culture and religion which could be flourished with the help of *Bharatiya* political and economic system. It was also viewed that the true guardian of *Bharatiya* culture was the RSS.

Among the young RSS activists, two members kept on writing about plans for a new political party. One of these was Balraj Madhok, who joined the RSS as a young man. His ability of writing and oratory served to launch and popularize the new party "Bharatiya Jana Sangh". The other was editor of the *Organizer* Keval Malkani who served as to publicize the philosophy of the yet-to-be-launched party. Malkani wrote an article entitled "Programme for a New Political Party" in *Organizer* which was a précis of a pamphlet he had written and published with an introduction by Mookerjee. Mookerjee commended the proposed program and said that to alive democracy, the existence of parties is must, otherwise it may degenerate into one-party rule and then into one-man rule. The program was adopted in large measure by the Jana Sangh. It

was the first time when Mookerjee and the RSS activists wrote together. Malkani that "The good government of Bharat... depends directly and fully on the formation of a nation wide party which will be as much revivalist of ancient values as it will be futurist in its targets. The new party should not depend on foreign values, attitudes and manners, since only national, i.e., *Bharatiya*, i.e. Hindu principles can make Hindus and Hindustan great" (Baxter, C., 1969) [6].

The proposed new party based on 'Hindutva' and controlled by the RSS activists was given an economic program developed by Malkani. This programme was largely a criticism of the Congress policy. Malkani saw *zamindari* as a form of private property. He suggested land reforms for the welfare of the peasants and an increase in agricultural production.

The word 'Hindutva' was used by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar in 1923 with specific meaning in his book entitled 'Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?' He had mentioned that "Hindutva is not a word but a history." To him, this history is connected to geography as well. To understand the significance of the term 'Hindutva', Savarkar invokes the etymology of the word 'Hindu'. According to him, the word 'Hindu' is derived form the Sanskrit word 'Sindhu', the name of the river. According to him, every person is a Hindu who regards and owns this Bharat Bhoomi -- this land from the Indus to the seas -- as his Fatherland and Holy land, the land of origin of his faith.

According to Savarkar, to be called a Hindu, three bonds are necessary. First, the territorial bond or *Rashtra* which is a primary requirement. To him, a Hindu is one who feels attachment to the geographical region extending from the Sindhu river to the Brahmaputra and from the Himalayas to the Cape Camorin. "A Hindu is primarily a citizen either in himself or through his fore fathers of Hindustan (the land of Hindus) and claims the land as his motherland. Secondly, the '*jati*' or the racial or blood bond. A Hindu is one who inherits the blood of the race. Savarkar felt that Hindus have developed a physiognomy and racial features that are in some respects different from those of the Germans, Chinese or Ethiopians. In his words, "We are not only a nation but a *Jati*, a born brotherhood. Nothing else counts, it is after all a

question of heart. We feel that the same ancient blood that coursed through the veins of Ram and Krishna, Buddha and Mahavir, -- courses throughout Hindudom from vein to vein pulsates from heart to heart. We feel we are a *Jati*, a race bound together by the dearest ties of blood and therefore it must be so" (Savarkar, V. D., 1989)^[3].

The third criterion for being a Hindu is *sanskriti* or culture. A Hindu is one who feels pride in the Hindu culture and civilization represented in common artistic and literary creations and in common rituals or festivals or other modes of collective expression. "We Hindu are bound together not only by the tie of the love we bear to a common fatherland and by the common blood that courses through our veins and keeps our hearts throbbing and our affections warm, but also by the ties of the common homage we pay to our great civilization." (Savarkar, V. D., 1989)^[3].

To Savarkar, 'Hindutva' included not only the religious bond of Hinduism but also the social, moral, economic aspects. So, 'Hindutva' is the notion of an organic socio-political body knit together by the three bonds of territorial belongingness, blood or birth and culture. His definition of 'Hindutva' provided a frame work for the Hindu Nationalism as followed by the B.J.S. Savarkar's 'Hindutva' has been reoriented by M.S. Golwalkar to the new environment that emerged in India after independence. Golwalkar's speeches and writings are collected in his "Bunch of Thoughts". His ideas were influenced by the formulations of Savarkar and the RSS tradition that he inherited. Golwalkar uphold the Hindu tradition and culture. After Golwalkar, Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya came as a creative thinker in the 'Hindutva' stream of thought. He however, made no attempt to define 'Hindutva'.

Malkani's industrial policy called for decentralization giving the reasoning that the concentration of industries in big cities affect the human health. He favoured the investment of foreign capital without any political or military strings attached to it. He called for a permanent seat for India on the Security Council of United Nations Organization (UNO) and also for closer relations with South-East Asia. Commenting on Pakistan, he said, "Bharat is one and no politician can or need make it two It can not therefore but be to the abiding interests of all that the country be made one..." (Baxter, C., 1969)^[6].

The programme drafted by Malkani was endorsed by Mookerjee, for the proposed new party. Shyama Prasad Mookerjee was one of India's most distinguished educators. He also acted as vice chancellor (1934-38) of Calcutta University. In 1929, he was elected to the Bengal Legislative Council as a Congressman but resigned in 1930 on the Congress decision to boycott the councils, and was elected again in 1931, as an independent. In 1937, he was elected to the Bengal Legislative Assembly from the University constituency. He became disillusioned with the Congress and opposed the Muslim League. Under the advice of Hedgewar and Savarkar, he joined the Hindu Mahasabha in 1939. In his first meeting with the RSS he was much impressed with the organization and discipline of the group. At the Mahasabha session in Calcutta in 1939, Mookerjee played a prominent role. He became president of the party due to Savarkar's illness. He continued to hold office in until his resignation from the party. He became Minister of Finance on December

11, 1941 in the Bengal cabinet of Fazl-ul-Haq. He resigned from the Ministry on November 20, 1942, in protest against the firing on Midnapur demonstrators. After his resignation he went personally to investigate a communal disturbance in Dacca.

In the 1946 elections, he was again elected to the assembly from the University constituency. He was also elected to the Constituent Assembly of India. On August 15, 1947, Nehru included Mookerjee in his cabinet as Minister of Industries and Supplies. Mookerjee retained his membership in the Mahasabha and his cabinet position during the aftermath of the Gandhiji's assassination. However he had resigned from the Mahasabha in Dec., 1948.

Mookerjee totally disagreed with Nehru on the question of Kashmir and the way the East Bengal situation was handled. He favoured a more rigorous reaction against Pakistan than the Nehru government was willing to accept. It was the East Bengal issue upon which Mookerjee resigned from the Nehru Cabinet. After the partition the Hindus continued to leave East Bengal. The year 1950 saw an increase in the number of refugees. In April, 1950, Pakistan Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan visited Delhi to meet Nehru. The meeting resulted in 'Nehru-Liaquat Pact' signed on April 8, 1950. On disagreement with the pact, Mookerjee resigned from the cabinet on April 19, 1950.

On the day, he made his resignation statement in the Parliament; he was received by a group of citizen of Delhi in the evening. The group presented an address to Mookerjee in which they appealed him to lead the country: "...your resignation has truly represented the otherwise unexpressed feelings of the people. This is sure to bring realism and health to our politics. One who shows the way in such critical occasions is a leader. The country needs such courageous leadership and we the citizens of Delhi are confident that you will now give such lead to the country as will not be based on lack of hope, self-abnegation and abject appeasement of the enemy" (Baxter, C., 1969)^[6].

To this appeal, Mookerjee did not make any commitment to lead or join a party. Between the period of his resignation and launching of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, Mookerjee was pressed to join the Congress which he had refused. On May 21, 1950 his home city Calcutta gave him a huge reception. His popularity in Calcutta was immense, as two hundred thousand people greeted him. He once again denied offering his own leadership in a new party appealed by his Bengali recipients. Instead he addressed his Bengali audience which was agitating about the happenings in East Bengal. He demanded "Hindu Homeland" which meant the repartition of East Bengal to provide a specified area of the province for Hindus.

A group of RSS activists and others met in New Delhi on January 16, 1951, to draw up an outline for a new party which included Balraj Madhok, Mauli Chandra Sharma, Hansraj Gupta, Dharma Vir, Mahashe Krishnan, Mahavir, and Balraj Bhalla. The group had invited Mookerjee for his guidance. He stressed the need of the formation of an all India party.

On May 5, 1951, Mookerjee formed the "People's Party" in Calcutta. The party adopted an eight-point program: "(1) United Bharat; (2) "reciprocity instead of appeasement" towards Pakistan; (3) an independent foreign policy

“consistent with Bharat’s paramount self-interest”; (4) rehabilitation of refugees with “suitable compensation from Pakistan”; (5) increased production of goods especially food and cloth and decentralization of industry; (6) development of a single “Bharatiya” culture; (7) equal rights for all citizens regardless of caste, community or creed and improvement of the standard of the backward classes; and (8) readjustment of the boundaries of West Bengal with Bihar” (Baxter, C., 1969)^[6].

On May 27, 1951, the Delhi group formed the “Bharatiya Jana Sangh” in Jullundur. In the meeting, Balraj Bhalla was elected as president, Mauli Chandra Sharma as vice-president and Balraj Madhok as secretary. The formation of BJS by the Delhi group was as per policy of the party to formulate it at provincial level first before giving it an all-India character. The geographical jurisdiction of this new party was largely confined to Punjab, the Patiala and East Punjab States Union (PEPSU), Himachal Pradesh, and Delhi. While, Mookerjee continued to be active in Bengal, he presented his views clearly in Calcutta to merge the “People’s Party” into similar organizations so that an all India body could be created. In the same line, the party was also launched in the national capital city. Similar party units were formed in many states.

On September 8, 1951, Mookerjee, Madhok and Bhalla convened a meeting in Delhi. The then existing units of Jana Sangh were represented in the meeting. A manifesto was prepared and an all-India meeting was declared for 21 October 1951. It was attended by 500 delegates in Ragho-Mal Arya Girls Higher Secondary School, New Delhi. On the same day, Bharatiya Jana Sangh was formed with Mookerjee as president of the party. He declared that: “We have thrown our party open to all citizens of India irrespective of caste, creed or community...the people must be united by a bond of fellowship and understanding inspired by deep devotion to the spirit of a common motherland...it is obviously for the vast majority of Bharat’s population to assure all classes of people, who are truly loyal to their motherland, that they will be entitled to full protection under the law and to complete equality of treatment in all matters, social, economic and political. Our party gives this assurance unreservedly” (Baxter, C., 1969)^[6].

After the independence, in the first Lok Sabha Election of 1952, the Bharatiya Jana Sangh contested 94 seats, out of the total 489 seats and won 3 seats with 3.06 percent vote of the electorate. Mookerjee won the South-East Calcutta seat by a substantial margin in a three corner contest. Durga Charan Bannerji won the Midnapur seat, the site of the disturbances in 1942 which had led Mookerjee to resign from the Bengal Cabinet. In Chittor (Rajasthan), the Jana Sangh candidate, Umashankar Muljibhai Trivedi won.

The BJS made slight gains in the 1957 Lok Sabha election over its performance in 1952. In this election, its representation had increased from three to four seats while contesting on 130 parliamentary seats. Its vote share increased from 3.06 percent to 5.97 percent. Out of two seats won by the party in Uttar Pradesh, Vajpayee won the Balrampur Lok Sabha seat and the Hardoi reserved seat was won by Shiv Din Drohar. In Bombay, the party won two of the seven seats it contested. The winners were Uttamrao Patil from Dhulia constituency and Prem Ji Bhai Assar from Ratnagiri seat.

In the 1962 Lok Sabha all sitting members of the BJS in

Parliament were eliminated from their seats in the house. On the other hand, the BJS achieved the status of “Official Opposition”. In this parliamentary election, the BJS marked its victory on 14 seats out of 196 seats it had fielded its candidates, with a slight increase of 0.47 percent in its vote share (from 5.97 percent to 6.44 percent). This general election brought a much stronger BJS, “ready to make its voice heard more frequently in the Lok Sabha and ... also in the Rajya Sabha. The party was to meet and to create issues in which its nationalist Hindu voice could be heard” (Baxter, C., 1969)^[6].

The results of the 1967 general election were startling. As predicted there was a slump in the Congress performance and rise in the case of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, SSP and some of the regional parties. This time, the two contesting members, Madhok and Vajpayee who had lost their seats in the preceding election, returned to the Lok Sabha with sound victories. In this parliamentary election, the BJS fielded its candidates on 249 seats and won 35 seats with 9.31 percent vote. In the 1971 Lok Sabha elections, the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, out of the total 518 seats, contested 157 seats and won 22 seats recording a loss of 13 seats than the preceding election with 7.35 percent vote of the electorate. Despite a loss of 13 seats, the BJS was still remained one of the largest opposition parties. Among the opposition parties, only the Congress (O) with 10.42 percent of the popular vote out-pollied its 7.35 percent.

Conclusion

The Bharatiya Jana Sangh resulted by the efforts of a party less leader, Shyama Prasad Mookerjee and a leaderless party, the RSS. Disagreement with Nehru on the question of Kashmir and handling of the East Bengal situation Mookerjee resigned from Nehru cabinet to form a new party. The party aligned itself with Hindutva and associated with RSS. After the independence, in the first Lok Sabha Election of 1952, the Bharatiya Jana Sangh contested 94 seats, out of the total 489 seats and won 3 seats with 3.06 percent vote. The BJS made slight gains in the 1957 Lok Sabha election over its performance in 1952. In the 1962 Lok Sabha all sitting members of the BJS in Parliament were eliminated, while it achieved the status of “Official Opposition”. In the 1967 general election there was a slump in the Congress performance and rise in the case of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh.

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