

The Third Theatre

The Next Indian Government in New Delhi is likely to be a loose coalition, led by some unlikely bedfellows. Then in Indian parliamentary culture anything can happen because it is the biggest show-piece of democracy. Voters in India have learnt to live with electoral circus and political absurdity associated with it. The fact is that the vote has gained a powerful foothold in the people's imagination. Maybe, they are too scared to see the truth. Maybe, they view it as a weapon of the weak which it is not. As 15th general election is dangerously approaching the deadline alliance is the buzz word for all political parties, big or small. Even a minor outfit having no mass following worth the name and resources hopes somewhat against hope that win is as easy as issuing press statements. No doubt media people play a prominent role in shaping public opinion but they in effect dish out what vested interests ask them to do. In the final analysis stories, wild or imaginary would not have much of an effect if the electorate thinks something positive is not on the table. It is bargaining time for junior partners and it is bargaining time for voters also. Because nobody thinks election opens a real change for social security. After all it's all about a deal with the devil.

The decline of Bharatiya Janata Party [BJP]—the eternal communal villain in Indian politics—seems to have tempted the left, particularly the communist left, to float a third front with people like Chandrababu Naidu, Mayawati, Jayalalitha and others. And Sonia Gandhi's Congress being marginalised beyond recognition in its former strongholds of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, is in no less uncomfortable situation when it is the question of how to expand its United Progressive Alliance. The Gandhis have not really lost all hopes in getting back the left support after the poll. In other words many think left's idea to moot a third front is an indirect way to pressurise Congress to seek left support. The Marxist Left is as petrified as the Congress while searching for a scapegoat without much success. Nobody finds them open to new ideas, in any sphere, national or international. First front, Second Front and now Third Front—but all are ardent worshippers of the status quo. What people expect from the left is for it to decide if it's on the side of equality and justice or on the side of the advocates of inequality and injustice. Whether the dubious allies the left has chosen can deliver the minimal concessions needed by the people is open to question. Even for the left, not to speak of the right, what matters in making alliance—or breaking it—is opportunism, naked and simple. So Orissa's Biju Janata Dal, a long-time ally of saffron BJP, has become touchable in left-initiated third front. Chandrababu Naidu, once a saviour of the BJP dispensation at the centre, is now a trusted motivator of CPM-led third front. Having failed to wipe off Congress base in Andhra Pradesh, Naidu's Telugu Desham Party, has brought out a huge volume—a 333-page book—highlighting how Dr Y S Rajasekhara Reddy, Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, has violated six Acts to build his corruption empire. Also in circulation is a compilation of 173-page booklet detailing the meteoric rise of Chief Minister's son in business world within a short period. Surprisingly Mr Naidu has been silent about human rights violations of Dr Reddy and infamous 'encounter killings'.

Mulayam Singh Yadav's middle caste-oriented party—Samajwadi Party—otherwise the self-proclaimed crusader for the Muslim minority cause, has co-opted Kalyan Singh, former BJP Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, hopefully to strengthen secularism and weaken communalism. Hypocrisy thy name is Mulayam Singh who has kept Congress guessing all the time about his game plan.

Interestingly enough, Bengal scenario is more puzzling than ever before. Congress has long been tactically manoeuvring Trinamul Congress to increase its tally in this left bastion without really antagonising the ruling left. There is every reason to believe that Congress doesn't want to dislodge CPM-led left front from power. After all communists

of all shades have fathomless love for Nehru dynasty. The left does no longer raise the nuclear deal issue for which it withdraw its support from the Congress-run United Progressive Alliance government, as a token measure of their anti-imperialist, rather anti-American stance. Nor does economic bankruptcy figures in their propaganda blitz, albeit Oscar-winning *Slumdog Millionaire* song finds place in their poster-campaign. For them elections are reduced to theatre.

Though regional parties—now many states have more than one regional outfit with identical ideological and political orientation—cry themselves hoarse about discrimination and underdevelopment, they never really look serious about more federalism and state autonomy without which discrimination against a sizeable segment of population cannot be eliminated.

Despite so much furore in the media, the left's true desire to make a third front, and its capacity to do so remain ambiguous. They harbour at worst, pious views, yet have no intention of executing them. □□□