**A split India**

BY A . G. N O O R A N I | 1/18/2020

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| FOR the last 50 years, India`s democracy has functioned as a split polity. Democracy restsontheconsentofthegovernedandona national consensus on the fundamentals of the polity. It is not enough that all political parties swear by the constitution of India. It is imperative also that they share the ideology on which the state was founded. That has all but evaporated since Narendra Modi became prime minister of India in 2014.  India was long governed by what is called a Nehruvian Consensus till his daughter, imperious to the core, split the ruling Congress in 1969. The excluded Congress faction made common cause with the opposition parties. In the 1971 general election, she won handsomely and ruled autocratically till she was defeated in 1977.  However, in the united front of opposition parties which defeated her in 1977, the RSS political wing, the Jan Sangh, acquired an important role. The erstwhile pariah now became `respectable`. It left the united front, the Janata Party, to form the Jan Sangh`s successor, the BJP which is in power today but with a dif ference. Having won only two seats in the 1984 elections, its second-in-command, Lal Kishan Advani, ef fectively sidelined the moderate Atal Behari Vajpayee.  Vajpayee served as prime minister from 1999 to 2004 when the Congress came to power with Manmohan Singh as prime minister. He lost to the BJP in 2014 but with a huge difference. L.K. Advani was eliminated by his erstwhile protégé Narendra Modi on whose watch, as chief minister of Gujarat, a pogrom of Muslims was staged in 2002. Advani foiled Vajpayee`s efforts to get Modi to resign as chief minister in 2003 only to be eliminated by Modi from the BJP leadership when he became prime minister in 2014.  India`s polity which had been split on ideological lines, once the BJP began its campaign for the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1989, now sharpened its ideological credo of Hindutva. Modi went one better. He openly became a staunch Hindutvaite and openly anti-Muslim.  The leader of the All India Majlis-iIttehadul Muslimeen, Asaduddin Owaisi, MP, openly asked Modi why he hated Muslims. Modi has donned and dof fed many caps during his tours of India. The cap he publicly refused to put on was the one commonly worn by Muslims which was offered to him by a Muslim. The BJP under his leadership did not award a ticket to a Muslim in the 2019 general elections to the Lok Sabha.  People were shocked when Modi appointed the head of a Hindu religious endowment as chief minister of India`s largest state Uttar Pradesh. He is Yogi Adityanath.  This `shining example` of secularism saidat a huge rally on Jan 14, 2020: `The Muslim population in India has increased manifold since 1947, it has gone up by seven to eight times. No one has any objection. If they, as citizens of the country, work for development, they are welcome. Their population hasincreasedbecausetheyhavebeengiven special rights and facilities. All possible steps were taken to ensure their growth. But what happened in Pakistan?` He added, `This new India does not cower, like the Congress did, before Pakistan`s atomic power. The neighbouring country is today fearful that it may end up losing even [AJK] after Article 370, which Jawaharlal Nehru wrongly introduced, was abrogated.  Thus, the political divide is now widened by a new divide along religious lines.  The Congress party is attacked as being pro-Muslim although its leaders Sonia Gandhi and son Rahul, ostentatiously visit Hindu temples. Modi and his cohorts attack critics as being pro-Pakistan and freely impugn their patriotism. That is the qualityof political debate.  What Arthur Balfour sagaciously wrote so many years ago is being realised by people now `Should anyone be inclined to regard this [his list of tests for a democracy] as an overstatement, let him seriously consider these lastqualifications for cabinet government; namely, if the divisions between parties are too numerous or too profound. Multiplicity of political parties is not the only vice that c an impair democr acy.  `Let the political parties be reduced to two (admittedly the most convenient number for cabinet government), but let the chasm dividing them be so profound that a change of administration would in fact be a revolution disguised under a constitutional procedure.` That would be enough to wreck parliamentary democracy.  A silver lining has appeared on the horizon in recent weeks to tell us that India`s secularism is very much alive. It is the protests by students, cutting across the religious and political divide, against Modi`s communal law amending the Citizenship Act. Students of the Aligarh Muslim University and the Jamia Millia Islamia in New Delhi did not lag behind. Police outrages on them drew universal support. Modi is not invincible.  The writer is an author and a lawyer based in Mumbai. |