

## BOOK REVIEW

Review by *Amarnath Sinha*\*

### IN THE QUEST FOR POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

**AUTHOR: Raju Parulekar**

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*In the Quest for Political Philosophy* by Raju Parulekar is a collection of short essays through which the author engages with the various dimensions in which the political presents itself in India. The topics of the essays are varied and range from society to politics to media, art and so on. Through his essays Parulekar grapples with the different shades of power, politics and morality and seeks a direction for the future of democracy.

At the outset, the author begins with the capacity of ideas. Ideas can be dangerous as they can bring down the established political power. Radical ideas can attract the youth as they have the power to transform the human condition for better. Power is never impenetrable. What comes after the existing centres of power are defeated is also a seat of power. But there is always an inherent danger as the new regime built on fresh ideas may also degenerate to another shackling power apparatus jeopardising freedom. In our times, globalisation is a universal all pervasive idea which ironically has still remained a philosophy of business and not of human emancipation.

The theme of how ideas survive, get established or decay runs through the essays. Parulekar describes the glorious days of the Maratha empire and seeks answers as to why was the glory lost? The historical short-comings, blunders and aberration which caused the demise are discussed and it is proposed that only a movement led by the Maratha people against their leaders can transform things. There is a need of mass cultural movement and in order to shake up the system people may even consider boycott of various sorts, a call which appears a little far fledged. To engage is often more productive in politics over boycott.

Two organisations – RSS and the Shiv Sena are discussed in separate essays. The author sees the roots of formation of the RSS and its growth to “The Muslim issue”. The author questions the basic position of the organisation which he feels has remained unchanged

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since its inception, i.e., the duty for protection of the Hindu culture which can only be done by organising them under one umbrella. But he questions – *In a land where Hindus are a majority, who are they to be saved from?* He questions the idea that because Hindus were not united they suffered at the hands of Muslim. He argues that, in fact, the lack of organisation / absence of one head among Hindus, worked in their favour during the invasions as there was no single authority to be defeated to turn it into the land of Islam. He feels that rationalism of Hinduism is the biggest hurdle before organisations like the Sangh and that is why they are not able to do much, other than organising reactionary events. He argues that the Sadhus and Saints promoted by the organisation can only take the community to the dark ages but he does not account for the reasons for its popularity or for the massive majority that its political wing enjoys today.

The other organisation Shiv Sena needs to be looked in a perspective which is devoid of fear, affection and hatred. It found its roots against the policies of the Congress. The Shiv Sena had managed to give voice to the suppressed political aspirations of the ordinary youth. A regional agitation converted it into a robust political party in the 1990s as it grew on Bala Saheb's inspiration. The author draws similarities between Bala Saheb and Mahatma Gandhi – both were staunch Hindu, extremely aggressive, dictatorial and had die-hard resolute followers, which any reader will feel, that such simplifications conceal more than they reveal.

The author is right in asserting that Sena's definition is *Hindutva is political*. Even though, Gandhi was truly Hindu he never used the term Hindutva etc. Bala Saheb often said that he did not believe in democracy and had the tendency to reduce complex problems to oversimplified solutions- if there is trouble in Kashmir, then why not send battle tanks? The author rightly feels that when you do not understand the depth of an issue then ----even though you can entertain the public and receive support from the middle class, the problems will not go away with such simplified suggestions. The problems of Maharashtra are nepotism, corruption, utter disregard for people, and lack of livelihood opportunities, which have remained the same leaving the common man hopeless.

Talking about the anatomy of the Thackeray family he says that the entire family--- revolves around the name of Bala Saheb. Even though the Shiv Sena was founded in the name of Marathi pride for the "Marathi Manus" there was an absence of philosophy or ideology and ethics of mortality in the organisation. While for Bala Saheb, the policy was 20 per cent politics and 80 per cent social work, it is not the same for the next generation. Bala Saheb who minced no words in criticising the Congress for dynastic raj of the Gandhi family, ironically, in his last days, himself appealed the Marathi Manus to take care of his beloved son and grandson Uddhav and Aditya. The author does not put much hope in Raj Thackeray, saying that he has been caught up in the warp of duplication and merely imitates Bala Saheb, and lacks political imagination. It is for the Maratha people to decide how to associate themselves with the Thackerays.

There is a dedicated chapter about the present Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi whose ascendancy is seen by the author as a potential revolution. The present regime is very different from the earlier ones. Under the present regime fiefdoms are not respected and efficiency is valued. The common voter expects results on the things which matter to

them. The author puts long wish list that the people expect from the Government. Many of the items of the wish list such as minimum government, maximum governance, a simplified tax system, attack on black-money etc some of which have already been taken up and implemented on a war-footing.

In the essay on *Woman, Market and the Politics of Sex*, he laments the objectification of women in the market situation which serves the business and market interests but robs the women of their dignity and respect. The author also delves on the issues of nudity and art and resents the suffocating atmosphere where art is misunderstood and creativity is crushed. He cites how M.F. Hussain was criticised by Hindu extremists which was nothing but hypocrisy and an attempt by groups to only focus on the purist part of religion. There are so many instances in the mythology which if painted or depicted would put many to shame but it is hypocritical for those who take a purist stand and try to dominate art and literature. The author shares some interesting observations, like he mentions that Hussain decided to re-locate to Qatar not due to religious extremism but due to tax issues. IT officers bothered him with strange questions about price of painting according to its size, and fluctuation of their price based on market situation. Talking about the media he observes that it has become like deluge, which is dominating and uncontrollable but hopes its exact role would be sorted out in times to come.

The author picks up an interesting co-relation – between efficiency and morality! He feels that efficiency can be a driving force but it can still exist with the immoral - such as a Chief Minister who may be efficient but thoroughly corrupt. An attempt is made to understand the complexities of morality in the history of human evolution. The learnings of the Upanishads have faded and blurred now alongwith progress of the mankind. Are we becoming a basic and primitive society that makes a moral judgement too often? Parulekar leaves us with that question, and many others.