

FROM THE EDITOR

THE STRIPPER VERSUS THE CROOK?

A strange trend had begun to be noticed in Indian politics. Popularity earned in a field quite remote from social service or education could be traded for votes. That a candidate thus voted should prove a reasonably good legislator or even administrator is a different matter, a coincidence at best. But the trend itself raised many questions. The most easily earned popularity is earned through entertaining the public and the most popular field of entertainment is notorious for its dubious values. What will be the fate of a country when people from this field are voted to power in large numbers? If the kind of lifestyle they have exemplified becomes the model for all, what will be the shape of a country's culture? What will be the shape of a nation's politics if these people push into background those who are intelligent and are known for their ideas and capacity?

People who raised such questions have been suddenly snubbed. The bombshell for lovers of the democratic system of adult franchise comes from Italy. When this editor read the news for the first time in an evening tabloid, he thought it to be a joke perpetrated by some naughty chap who managed to sneak into a news-agency's teleprinter network a bit of his playboyish daydream. But the news continued to appear in the major newspapers, Indian and foreign. I quote from *the Newsweek* (29 June '87): "Many voters—male voters, at least—could not resist the charms of Ilona Staller, 36, a Hungarian born Italian bombshell better known as Cicciolina (Cutie). Running on the Radical Party ticket, the porn-film star and sometime stripteaser won a seat in Latina, a town south of Rome. Cicciolina campaigned in favor of love and sensuality and against nuclear power. She also posed topless in front of the Chamber of Deputies and, following her election, appeared in a similar fashion during a victory party attended by hundreds of male admirers and *paparazzi* in Rome's Piazza Navona. Her press agent announced that she planned to make a new movie: 'Cicciolina Goes to Parliament.' The reviews were already in."

An Italian author, Leonardo Sciascia, has interpreted the phenomenon in an absolutely unpretentious style, "Better a stripper in Parliament than another crook."

Perhaps he voices the philosophy of a large chunk of the voters. Perhaps voters in other countries are also subscribing to such a philosophy.

There is a disenchantment of the people with politics. But the face of the politician must be saved before it fades out totally, if we are to uphold the principles of democracy. The best way to do so is to educate the voters in general. They will naturally include the ones to be voted. But that is easier said than done.

The best course—and quite a practical one too—is to educate the candidates. There is no reason why it cannot be done. Just as men and women aspiring to act in films will do good to pass out of the Film Institute, those aspiring to contest elections should complete a diploma course in politics, theoretical and practical. There should be one difference between the Film Institute and this one. While a person going to join the films is not obliged to have come out of the institute, a person proposing to contest the elections should be obliged to come out of the proposed institute, to whichever party he may belong.

The theoretical part of the course in such an institute should give the candidate well-organised lessons in the principles of democracy, socialism, etc. and in the basic ideals of our constitution. The practical part should give them clear codes of conduct, impress upon them the fact that the sacred floor of the legislature is not an arena for free-for-all (and make him swear that he will not use it for such purpose) and so on and so forth.

We can reasonably surmise that since our would-be candidates move about among the poor masses, they have imbibed the quality of humility. Hence they should not mind undergoing such a

course. They need not appear for any examination and pass any test. Let them just complete the course.

Such a discipline may earn them our trust, a certain dependability. Politics must be taken more seriously. Its lost sanctity must be restored to it.

ON THE TIDES OF TIME

A STATUE TO THE JESTER

"I had rather men should ask why no statue has been erected in my honour, than why one has."

Cato, (234-149 B.C)

The rate at which we are honouring our leaders, both dead and alive, by erecting statues to them, this rising stone and concrete population may one day vie with that of flesh and blood.

Incidentally, the world's greatest builder of statues to oneself was Generalissimo Trujillo, the late President of the Dominican Republic. By the time he was assassinated on May 30, 1961, he had managed to build over 2,000 statues of his own. Meanwhile, some of them have been demolished and since his country now observes May 30 as a festive public holiday, there is little chance of the remaining statues surviving the zeal with which his countrymen may use their hammers on them.

But the news of one of the latest statues is a welcome one.

It is a statue with a difference. Riding a donkey on a picturesque square in the Soviet Central Asian City of Bukhara (Uzbekistan) smiles the indefatigable sage and jester, bald and bearded Mulla Nasruddin. Local legend says that the Mulla loved to loiter in this area, chitchatting with friends and passers-by under the shades of old trees on the lake

Research is yet to establish if there was ever a character like Nasruddin sometimes acting like a fool and sometimes like a sage. Probably there was an enlightened jester like our Birbal (of the legends, not of history) or Tenali Raman, who had charmed and intrigued those around him and posterity has shown its love for him by attributing to him the legacy of wit and wisdom generations old as it has done on the other few characters of that rare tribe.

Once the Mulla was appointed an honorary judge. Upon hearing the plaintiff he observed, "You are right." When he made the same gracious comment upon hearing the defendant, his clerk mildly pointed out to him that both the parties could not be right. "You too are right!" was the Mulla's benevolent last word on the occasion.

While the popular mind sees in the anecdote only a charming instance of the Mulla's naivety, the discerning -ones discover in it a subtle comment on the basic absurdity of man judging man! How much of truth do the facts before the judge reveal? We may remember an instance cited by Justice H. R. Khanna in course of his Shri Ram Memorial lecture some years ago: A lawyer asked a witness if it was true that he shares his lodge with a woman! "I do," confessed the witness. "I suggest that she is not your wife," said the lawyer. "Indeed, she is not," replied the witness.

"I put it to you that she is not your mother either," persisted the lawyer. "No, she isn't," replied the witness. "Can you say that she is your sister or daughter?" "No. I can't," admitted the witness. "Very well! I've no more questions" concluded the lawyer with a twinkle in his eye, confident that he had brought out a dubious aspect of the witness's character. But, "Wait a minute!" the judge directed the witness and asked him, "Who is she?" "She is my grandma!" was the reply.

A less alert judge could very well have gone without such a positive query and we know to what a conclusion the 'facts' would have led!

An unforgettable anatomy of mob-behaviour is presented by another Mulla anecdote: Once while the Mulla was walking with a friend, some people demanded a contribution from him for a feast. "Feast? Why? Don't you know that the Sultan is throwing a grand banquet just now for one and all!" asked the Mulla.

All those who heard him made a bee-line for the Sultan's palace. The Mulla looked on amused at his bluff, working so well. Then his face turned grave and he too prepared to follow them.

"What's the matter with you? Why should you run?" demanded his curious companion.

"Look here, friend, one may be wrong. Two, three or even four may be wrong. But don't you see so many of them running to grab the free dishes? Who can say if the Sultan is really not throwing a banquet, after all?"

How often our arguments and values change to suit our interest is the theme of yet another story. Once at a friend's house the Mulla saw some stuff which he mistook to be butter and asked his friend's wife for a lump of it. "My stomach is hot in order. Butter alone can set it right," he stated confidently.

"I'm sorry, this is not butter but a bitter medicinal froth..."

"Thank God.: Butter is so bad for one's stomach!" The Mulla sounded equally wise.

"Which of your observations is correct, dear, the first or the second?" asked the host.

"To be honest, if it were butter, my first observation should have been correct. Since it is not, the second is correct."

An unavoidable postscript:

Russia, however, is not the only country to claim the Mulla—the earliest legends about whom can be traced to 13th century, if not to an even older date. "Many countries claim Mulla Nasruddin as a native, though few have gone so far as Turkey in exhibiting his grave and holding an annual Nasruddin Festival... The Greeks, who adopted few things "from the Turks, regard Nasruddin quips as part of their own folklore. In the Middle Ages Nasruddin tales were widely used to deride odious authority. In more recent times, the Mulla became a People's Hero of the Soviet Union... Nasruddin shades off into the Arab figure of Joha, and reappears in the folklore of Sicily," says Idries Shah in *The Exploits of the Incomparable Mulla Nasruddin* (Jonathan Cape, 1966).

However, if Turkey had stolen a march over the rest earlier? Russia has done it now with a vengeance. Congratulations!

If the world will ever have a peaceful and prudent time, we will certainly have more statues raised to such characters—emerging from our folklore, legends and traditions of romance and chivalry and man's quest for true values. They belong to humanity.