

FROM THE EDITOR

WHERE THE THIEF IS

We often hear the pronouncement that politics is the last resort of a scoundrel. It is not possible to say when the word originally used by Johnson, "patriotism", was replaced by politics, but when we quote it, we do so not only with cynicism, but also with a certain satisfaction that we are not "doing" politics.

Politics need not be the last resort of a scoundrel; it can be very well his first resort. It could also be the first or second or the umpteenth resort of anybody other than a scoundrel.

True, since "doing" politics is likely to culminate in the doer getting hold of power and since power satisfies so many hungers, the purely ambitious and even the wicked aspire to political success. But most of those who take to politics are normal people, inspired by some idealism or at least with the unobjectionable intention of making a career like any other career. But such a man, like the average one, has in him a mixture of possibilities both good and bad. If his idealism is recognised he will feel encouraged, he will prove a more enthusiastic champion of his ideals. If his basic motive is suspected at his earliest slip, he is disappointed. He either feels like withdrawing himself from politics, or becomes determined to go the whole hog to vindicate his position.

Meanwhile other forces keep working. He is surrounded by the vested-interest. Through flattery or by catering to his passions, these people reduce his idealism to pragmatism. Then, there is the other law: power exercises its own spell. Though we have discounted the value of the saying linking politics with scoundrels, we cannot discount the fact that there are very few whose visions are not blurred by power. Those who can keep their heads steady, must be yogis—the real ones. There are no possibilities of such ones taking up politics in the near future. If any half-backed yogi enters the arena, it is likely that he will sacrifice his poise to the intoxicatives pleasure of power.

Here comes the role of the public vigilance which, in the present situation, is practically limited to the role of the press.

A large section of the press seems very keen to expose incidents and characters where they smell a rat. In thus projecting their vigilance, they forget to analyse their own minds and their own conduct: whether it is love for truth or love for sensationalism (when not pure allegiance to their merchant-employer who has his own axe to grind) that is motivating them. If we exaggerate one's slip, if we attribute motive where there is none, if we imagine lie where there is only the politician's natural instinct to defend himself, we are destroying much that is good in him. Remember, he is an average man with both the possibilities: we are checking the development of the good possibilities in him. In other words, we are no better than his flatterer. Both are equally damaging to him.

You can kick out some politicians from power, but those waiting in the wings are no angels. As long as our behaviour does not change, the politician will not change.

There is a Chinese anecdote: A man believed that his neighbour's son had stolen his money. All the movements of the boy appeared to be those of a thief. Then he found that this money had not been stolen. All the movements of the boy appeared to be those of the innocent.'

ON THE TIDES OF TIME

EAST FARTHER THAN THE WEST!

In order to find temporary shelter in a Zen monastery one must win a victory over one of the inmates of the monastery in an argument about the Buddha.

The argument ran either through words or through gestures and signs. A certain traveller on his way from one town to another sought shelter in a monastery, but was cornered in an argument with the manager of the institution. At least that is what he thought- He braved the darkness and the cold and reached a friend's house.

Upon the friend enquiring why the monastery did not admit him, he confessed that he had been defeated in an exchange of signs carried on silently.

"How did the argument go?" asked the friend.

"I showed one finger, symbolic of; the Enlightened One the Buddha. The manager of the monastery showed two fingers, implying that the Buddha as well as his principles both deserved our reverence. Then I showed three fingers indicating that we could enlarge the scope of our approach to include the Buddhist brotherhood too, thereby upholding the triple principle of the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha! But the manager instantly shook his fist at me—emphasising the fact that all this comprised only one basic truth—in the ultimate analysis. Well, I accepted defeat and left the place."

The host, however, had his reservations about the accuracy of the traveller's reading of the situation. After the guest's departure in the morning, he went to the manager of the monastery and broached the topic of his silent dialogue with the traveller at night.

"Oh that brute!" burst out the manager. "As you can see, one of my eyes is bandaged and I manage with only one eye. The fellow began insulting me by raising one finger, pointing out that I had only one eye as if I was not aware of my temporary deficiency myself! But, in order to be courteous towards him, I showed two fingers indicating that Providence had been merciful towards him and he had both the eyes intact! Look at the fellow's impudence! Instantly he showed three fingers to mean that between us we had only three eyes! Who won't get angry at that? I shook my fist at him and the fellow fled. But my fist will be ready for him if he appears here again."

This Japanese Zen story appears to me highly significant in regard to the relation between India and South-East Asian region. Somewhere there lies a basic lacuna in the communication between the two and the Indian gestures generally receive an interpretation that is far removed from the intended meaning.

A visit of mine to one of the countries of this group had coincided with the visit of one of the high officials of India's defence service. The gentleman told a reporter that India was not interested in the military muscle of the region. What the official meant was, India was so much sure of the friendly and peaceful nature of these countries that she had no reason to feel concerned about their strength. But I heard murmurs: "Why is the chap here if he is not interested in our condition?"

A South-East Asian educational project required a number of books, hundreds of copies of each, from India. The benevolent Indian order-supplier was pleased to collect such editions that were cheap and packed them in a simple manner to protect the buyer from paying high freight. The consignment arrived damaged and the books, as a prominent educationist informed me, came out not only of their uncanny parcel bags but also their covers. The organisation spent more money in getting the books bound again than they spent in buying them. The reaction was : "What do the Indian think of us? Are we beggars?"

The impact Indians had built in the whole of this region hundreds of years ago—projected in the Ramayana tradition and the magnificent monuments and rituals and place names—is still the only influence worth recounting. The modern times have failed to reinforce that deeper rapport. That there is no antagonism for India is hardly any argument. The promise of a friendship and an exchange for which history laid down a great basis and which could be vibrant exemplary continues to remain a promise.

Works of modern Indian literature are absent at any of the numerous attractive bookshops of this region. The American and the British reader knows more Indian authors and understands them better than the South-East Asian reader, just as Indians who can name at once fifty contemporary Western writers can hardly pronounce the names of the foremost writers of these countries. Yet excellent writing is going on in this region.

Conferences and seminars cannot achieve anything in this regard. What can? That is the question.