

D.V. Gundappa

INDIA'S POLITICAL PROBLEM

a possible line of Solution

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By

D. V. GUNDAPPA

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FOREWORD

This Note (Pages 1-8) represents one among the many efforts now going on in India to find a way of solving the stalemate in our national politics.

Not that the writer has anything original or striking to contribute. He is a student; and to the student belongs the duty of thinking and keeping thought going. Of course the thinking must be to the purpose.

The Note was meant in the first instance as an aid to discussion with an American friend. Two days later the writer was able to read reports of the debate (30th March) on India in the British Parliament. A debate so careless of the feeling in India and so self-complacent could serve only to increase bitterness in India. The mistake of over-estimating one's strength and carrying a challenge too far is one into which the ruler of an empire may fall as easily as the leader of a popular party.

Mr. L. S. Amery's speech deals mainly with four points: (1) Mr. Gandhi's responsibility for the disturbances, (2) the failure of the Cripps mission, (3) the doubtfulness of the the British type of democratic governance as a model for India, and (4) the need for an Indian effort at agreement.

The first point is a matter on which the last word can be said only by an independent tribunal, and it is not connected with our immediate purpose.

On the second point, this Note already contains a word of comment. The background furnished by Mr. Amery to the Cripps fiasco is imaginary. On the other hand, he has said not a word to show that the defects seen by India in that scheme are not there.

The third point, namely whether India may not adopt some other type of democracy than the British, is obviously premature at the present stage. India has never been unwilling to study various types so as to select and adapt features from them suitably to her own conditions and capacities.

When opportunity in the form of a constituent body is made available, she may surely be expected to examine the Swiss model recommended by Mr. Amery and also the American and other models. India may kindly be trusted to have so much common sense.

As for the fourth and last point, namely an Indian settlement of India's internal differences, that can be looked for with confidence only when there is no outside hand here to meddle and upset and when every party is made to realize that it must somehow or other make up and get on with the rest, not having any external support to count upon.

Thus, after the Parliament's debate, the proposals set out in this Note stand not a bit affected and indeed strengthened further.

The stale and tiresome self-complacency of Mr. Amery's speech is relieved by just one introspective passage—that in which he doubts whether the British have themselves “realised sufficiently clearly and vividly the vision of a united commonwealth.” That is a question of interest to India too. Is Britain cherishing the ideal of a commonwealth, (instead of an empire) and does she want India there? If she does, is Mr. Amery's way the most useful one? The answer, if he cares for it, is to be found in the short line which immediately precedes the two lines which he quoted from Francis Thompson:—

“The angels keep their ancient places ;
Turn but a stone, and start a wing!
 ‘Tis ye, ‘tis your estranged faces
 That miss the many-splendoured thing.”

“Turn but a stone, and start a wing!” Cast off imperialism and emancipate India ; your dream of a commonwealth will then be soon a reality of this world.

So believing, the writer has added a plan of action at the end of the Note (Page 9).

D. V. G.

April 2, 1943.

INDIA'S POLITICAL PROBLEM

The Scope of this Note

In this Note are outlined proposals for what the writer believes would constitute a fair and practicable settlement of India's political problem. He is one of those who, without being members of the Congress organization, share the ideals of that nationalist body. Those ideals are (1) the Unity of India, (2) the Independence of India, (3) Democracy or the People's Government for India, and (4) a humane Internationalism as the mission of India. The writer would also submit that he has honestly endeavoured to study Britain's case from the point of view of the Liberalist or philanthropic school of Imperialism. It is his sincere belief that taking the framework of the Government of India Act of 1935 as the basis and incorporating therein the essence of the offer made through Sir Stafford Cripps a year ago, it will be possible to evolve therefrom, with additions and amendments here and there, a form of settlement which, while serving the purposes of Indian Nationalism, will also be unexceptionable from the point of view of the declared intentions of the British Government.

From Empire to Commonwealth

Mr. Winston Churchill has avowed himself as not the Prime Minister to liquidate the British Empire. But to persist in the attitude of non-possumus in regard to that which constitutes the very substance of the Empire is for him not the way to escape the unwanted role. If he will not strive to make the situation in India better, it is bound to grow worse from day to day, imperilling the future of the Empire in that process. If Mr. Churchill would save the Empire, let him at once set about to rid it of imperialism, to transform it into a Commonwealth of equal-statured nations, to change the nexus from a chain imposed into a garland willingly to be accepted. The world has no use for imperialism today. India will not stand it any more.

The Cripps Offer

The Cripps proposals came as a mixed gift. In its definition of the status proposed for India, it was good and acceptable. But in its offer to found and recognize more statal entities than one in this country, it was clearly fraught with mischief. And it was discouragingly distrustful in the instalment of power it held out as earnest of what it promised for the future. A revision of the Cripps proposals under the last two heads is what is now called for.

The Religious Minorities Problem

There is need for saying a special word about the attitude properly to be adopted towards the claims of a group or organisation which has taken religion as its basis,—whether Hindu or Moslem or any other,—and would on that ground ask to be counted as a separate political entity. The modern state is a secular, non-religious institution. It need not and will not concern itself about the religion of its citizens except to the extent of protecting the freedom of every one to follow whichever religion he chooses. Like the literary or artistic pursuits of the individual, his spiritual faith and devotions are a purely subjective or “private” matter in the eyes of the State; and it avoids all occasions of direct contact with that matter. We must not allow denominational or sectarian differences to interfere with the integrity of the country’s political and civic life. To say this, however, is not to rule out a policy of liberal concessions and safe-guards to re-assure minority groups and secure their steadfast confidence. The principle that should always be maintained intact is that of a secular State with secular citizenship. Such had in fact been Britain’s policy till some 35 years ago. A deviation from it was initiated in the time of Lord Minto; and a complete reversal of it is seen in the Cripps scheme. This is the gravest defect of that scheme. It is this that has confirmed the worst suspicions of nationalist India in regard to the self-perpetuatory tactics of Britain’s imperialism.

The Indian States' Problem

The Indian States are another bugbear. There are some 562 of them, some large and endowed with resources, others too weak and tiny to survive. Whatever the circumstances of their origin, they have all alike secured for themselves the right to exist in exchange for the undertaking given by them to stand as props of the imperial fabric. When Britain has made up her mind to dissolve imperialism, it will be her clear duty to advise the States to find their place in the national polity. That this problem is a complicated one is true. But it is not true that it has no solution or that it must for all time be admitted as an excuse for denying to India what is due to her as a whole. There are Princes of great patriotism and enlightenment who appreciate the significance of the recent changes in the world-scene and would gladly become sharers on equitable terms in the national life of their motherland. The people of the States, to a man, are nationalistic and democratic, eager for responsible government and for free all-Indian citizenship. The task of adjusting the claims and interests of the States and their Princes and their subjects in the new order, without injustice to any among them, is not at all an impossible one; and a plan towards this end was indeed placed before Sir Stafford Cripps when he was in India last year. All that is now needed is Britain's forswearing of imperialist designs in India.

THE PROPOSALS

The British Government should without delay make an announcement of policy and programme on the following lines:—

1. *Unity & Independence.*

His Majesty's Government, with the consent and authority of Parliament, undertake to establish, within two years after the cessation of hostilities, an INDIAN UNION, comprising the Provinces of British

India and the Indian States, which shall be an independent, autonomous and impartible sovereign State, "associated with the United Kingdom and other Dominions" in the British Commonwealth, "but equal to them in every respect and in no way subordinate in any aspect of its domestic and external affairs" (This paragraph is adapted from the Cripps draft.)

2. Provisional National Government

For the duration of the War, a Provisional National Government shall be constituted under the Governor-General, with a Cabinet of Ministers who will all be Indians selected by him from the important political groups or parties in the country—and as far as possible from the Central Legislature. They will be subject to scrutiny and guidance by the legislature, but not liable to removal by its vote. Except in regard to certain matters connected with Defence and War-effort specified in a schedule referred to below, the Governor-General shall ordinarily be amenable to their advice.

3. Defence and Military

The Provisional National Government will have charge of all matters including Home Affairs, Finance, Foreign Relations, Defence and Military; but it will exercise jurisdiction jointly with the Government of the United Kingdom over such questions of Defence organization and Military administration as are of extra-Indian interest—that is, such questions as are of consequence to Britain and her Allies in the War. There will be a schedule of such extra-Indian matters; and when a question arises whether a particular matter falls within the schedule or not, the decision of the Governor-General shall be final. The Governor-General however shall furnish full information to the Cabinet regarding every scheduled matter under his consideration and shall consider its opinion thereon, but without prejudice to his right to decide the matter in his own discretion.

4. *Provincial Governments - Popular & Composite*

Simultaneously with the creation of the interim Government at the centre, there will be revival of popular ministries in the Provinces (provided for in the 1935 Act); but at the time of their revival, the Governor will require the person invited to become the Chief Minister to recommend for appointment as ministers at least one person who is a Mussulman (in a Province where the Mussulmans are a minority) and one person who is a member of any other minority community. (There is provision for this already in Section VIII of the Instrument of Instructions to Governors.)

5. *Constitution-making Body*

Immediately upon the cessation of hostilities, the Provisional National Government shall set up a Constituent Committee to frame a constitution for the INDIAN UNION. For the formation of such a Committee, if the Government has before it no plan agreed to by the Congress, the Muslim League, the Hindu Mahasabha, the States' People's Conference, the principal organizations of Sikhs, Parsis, Indian Christians, Anglo-Indians and other communities which own India as their homeland and of other important political groups and parties in the country, the plan suggested in the Cripps scheme will as far as possible be adopted—that is, the entire body of members of the lower houses of Provincial Legislatures in British India, as elected thereto soon after the close of the War, will vote together as a single electoral college and return about 1/10th of their total number; and to that number (about 150) the Indian States will add their representatives (about 50) "in the same proportion to their total population as in the case of representatives of British India as a whole, and with the same powers as British Indian members." (Cripps) Where a State has a house of legislature elected wholly or partly, its representatives should as far as possible be persons returned by the electorates, or at least by the popular

section of the legislature. In other cases, the States will be requested to see that their representatives are selected as far as possible from among their popular leaders. To the total number of members thus formed (about 200), an addition of not more than 1/20th of that number may be made by the Governor-General in his own discretion, to set right any deficiencies as regards interests or faculties.

6. *Minorities*

The Constituent Committee will, so far as may be practicable, use the federal scheme in the Government of India Act, 1935, as the basis for the constitution to be framed by it. It will have power to consider representations made by European commercial and business interests and also proposals like that of Pakistan submitted by communal or linguistic organizations. It should be instructed, among other things, to provide in the constitution, in a form not prejudicial to the national Unity and Independence of India, any safe-guards that may be deemed to be necessary for the due protection of the religious liberty, the social usages, the special civil rights if any, the linguistic, educational and cultural requirements, and any other special interests of specified minority groups. These safe-guards may include guarantees as regards the proportion of seats for the minority groups in the legislatures and provisions for the constituting of arbitration boards (including international tribunals) to decide non-justiciable cases of extreme difficulty and also for the appointment of special agencies to look after the welfare and progress of backward or undeveloped sections of the population. Such arrangements may also be made liable to periodical scrutiny and revision.

7. *Self-Determination*

The question whether the formula of self-determination should be applied to any territorial part of India or to any class or community of persons till now regarded as an integral part of the Indian People,—if raised before the Committee,—should be left by it to be decided by all-Indian self-determination—that

is, by a plebiscite of the whole of India, the people of all Provinces and States and of all classes and communities voting as one single constituency on that issue.

8. *The States*

In considering the special circumstances and the special requirements of the Indian States, the Constituent Committee may appoint a special sub-committee, with co-opted legal and other necessary experts, to examine the Treaties, understandings and usages existing between the States and the Suzerain Power and to suggest a new Treaty to ensure a constitutional position to the Ruling Princes and guarantee their reasonable rights and privileges, to define the relations between the States and the Government of the INDIAN UNION, and to make the full rights and privileges of all-Indian citizenship, including the right to the rule of law and progressive democratic government, available to the People of the States.

9. *British Interests*

The Government of the United Kingdom may refer for the Constituent Committee's consideration any matter "arising out of the complete transfer of responsibility from British to Indian hands" (Cripps), including any special undertaking or obligation which that Government considers that it has to discharge in respect of any interests in India. The Committee, in making recommendations thereupon, will specify those matters (such as trade and commerce, shipping, foreign investments in India, etc.) that are, in its opinion, fit to be the subject-matter of separate treaties to be drawn up after negotiation between the two countries.

10. *Implementing the Committee's Scheme*

As soon as may be possible after the Constituent Committee has finally made its recommendations, His Majesty's Government will accept and implement

the constitution so recommended, subject only to such treaties as may remain to be entered into as the result of negotiations between the two countries in respect of trade relations, contracts of service and other similar matters specified by the Constituent Committee.

Conclusion

It need scarcely be stated that no attempt has been made in the above proposals to be either exhaustive or final. Many of the suggestions are provisional in form and detail, and may admit of alternatives. But the broad lines of approach therein indicated are, it is hoped, such as deserve to be accepted by both the Government and the Congress and other political parties as a practicable basis for negotiation. Negotiating with nationalist forces in an atmosphere of freedom and goodwill is for Britain the only way, and that the surest way, of saving for herself the friendship of this country for her world-tasks. Imperialism had its day, and some of it was a time of sundry services to others too. But that day was over long ago. Britain today has to rise to a larger and higher conception of her duty to the world; she has to strive towards a world-federation of nations and States for the peace and well-being of all mankind; and in order to be able to achieve this larger purpose, she must let India rise to her full stature as an ally and collaborator.

D. V. GUNDAPPA

BANGALORE CITY

March 30, 1943.

MODE OF ACTION

It is not difficult to set out in words what we like to see done. *Who is there to do it, and how?* These are the difficult questions.

All parties are today angered—some despondent, some defiant, some desperate, and none in the mood to re-start negotiations. Our position must remain hopeless unless some public men come forward who, thinking of the contry's fate, will put the promptings of prestige in their pockets and go suppliant before all parties,—some Key-bearers of Calais ready to go "naked in their shirts, bare-legged, with halters round their necks," before our proud Edwards. It is the writer's earnest hope that there are a few such servants of the public in this country in whom the sense of patriotic duty is strong enough to overcome any sense of personal humiliation which experience may provoke. The hour calls for the services of such gentle-spirited peace-makers.

The following is the plan the writer would submit to them:—

(1) The Viceroy should first be consulted as to his willingness to help in the convening of a Conference, more or less on lines herein suggested, to explore ways towards an agreement—agreement not as to the features of a permanent constitution, but only as to the limited question of the form and nature of the promise to which Britain should be persuaded to commit herself immediately and the minimum of confirmatory action that should accompany that promise, all postponable details being put off till after the War. All will be well if the Viceroy agrees to help the Conference move even provisionally. But if he is opposed, the idea may be dropped indefinitely; for frankly, the prospect of co-operation from many of the parties will depend to a large extent upon the attitude of the Government.

(2) If the Viceroy would help, the negotiators will, on that basis and on any fair and reasonable conditions attaching to it, approach the leaders of other parties for co-operation.

(3) If the Congress and the Muslim League (or either) stand out, the idea need not be dropped. The remaining parties may go on with the Conference in the hope that the two parties will remain neutral to watch with an open mind and decide their course at a later stage.

(4) When the negotiators are satisfied that there is enough sympathetic response forthcoming, as judged both from the number of the responding parties and their relative importance, the Viceroy will be requested to convene the Conference without delay.

5. The membership of the Conference will be as follows:—

Deputed by	(1)	the Congress	3
" "	(2)	Muslim League	2
" "	(3)	Hindu Mahasabha	2
" "	(4)	Depressed Classes Organizations	2
" "	(5)	Sikh Organizations	1
" "	(6)	Parsi "	1
" "	(7)	Indian Christian "	1
" "	(8)	Anglo-Indian "	1
" "	(9)	Liberal Party "	1
" "	(10)	Justice "	1
" "	(11)	Azad Mussulman "	1
" "	(12)	Chamber of Princes	2
" "	(13)	Other Princes	2
" "	(14)	States People's Organizations	2
" "	(15)	Trade Union "	1
" "	(16)	Government of India	2
			Total 25

6. The Conference will have power to increase the membership up to 30 if necessary; to revise the number of seats assigned above to any party; and to invite any party not named in the list. It should be clearly understood that a party which has joined the Conference will not withdraw on the ground that its request for additional seats was not granted.

7. The Chief Justice of India will be requested to be the Chairman of the Conference.

8. The Conference will itself frame the rules necessary for its business.

9. The main business of the Conference will be to prepare a scheme of settlement (like the one in this Note—pages 3-8) providing, among other things, for (i) the immediate declaration of the status of Independence for India as one undivided State; (ii) a fully Indianized and, as far as possible, democratized War-time Cabinet at the Centre, with popular ministries in the Provinces; and (iii) a Constituent body to frame the constitution for the All-Indian Union after the War. It will be understood that the Conference is to take these three basic points (stated more fully in the Note) as settled and not open to question and give its attention only to details within that accepted framework.

10. The scheme as finally presented by the Conference will be communicated by the Viceroy to His Majesty's Government for being endorsed and promulgated. On its being promulgated, all parties will co-operate unreservedly in the tasks and purposes of the Government (including the War) in accordance with that settlement. The parties joining the Conference will indeed be bound to do so.

Help should come from the Government in the form of (1) releasing Mr. Gandhi and his colleagues from detention so as to create the proper atmosphere, (2) participating in the Conference proceedings through its nominees, and (3) agreeing to accept the recommendations of the Conference.

It is of course to be understood that after their release the Congress leaders will not resume political agitation when the Conference work is in progress.

Given goodwill on every side, there is no reason why this plan should not succeed in producing a scheme that will solve India's political problem and bring peace to her and strength to the Allied War-cause.

It is hardly necessary to say that a good deal of preparatory work will have to be done by the negotiators in the form of informal, friendly talks and correspondence. Everybody can see how deeply disheartening must have been the experiences of even such eminent men as Sir Tej Bhadur Sapru, Dr. M. R. Jayakar and Mr. C. Rajagopalachari as negotiators. But as Gokhale used to say, some among our public workers should be content to console themselves with the thought that their lot is to serve the good cause by their failures.

Postscript

After the above was set in type has come the news of the Viceroy's refusal to permit Mr. C. Rajagopalachari and a few other distinguished public workers to see Mr. Gandhi for talks as to ways of settlement. That refusal and the form of it are bound to prove a new irritant that will spread resentment wider and deeper and therein provide grist to the mills of those who would see the Indo-British tie snap. But in the case of others, to give way to irritation and depression is to lose morale and impair the capacity for judicious action; and that, any one could see, is to play into the opponent's hand. At this moment, the story of the historic burgesses of Calais is the lesson for us.

The writer would claim that the *modus operandi* suggested above meets the points raised in the Viceroy's reply to Mr. C. Rajagopalachari.

April 3, 1943.

D. V. G.