



## The Bharatiya Jana Sangh as a part of the Janata Party

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### Abstract

The present study has explained in detail the merger and experiences faced by the BJS in the Janata Party. The party's alignment with JP movement, the controversy over the 'dual membership' and the split of the BJS from the Janata Party has been discussed widely.

**Keywords:** BJS, janata party, dual membership

### Introduction

In 1972, the Congress government had experienced a rapid fall in its popularity due to its inability to carry out its promises and confront the economic crisis. In such an opportune time, the Jana Sangh reoriented its populist tactic to get into the mainstream politics and gain popularity without betraying its identity inherited from the RSS. This was due to the convergence of its populist-activist strategy with that of the Gandhian movement of Jaya Prakash Narayan (JP) who shared his concern with the Hindu nationalists for political decentralization and reshaping society.

"The integration of the Jana Sangh in the legitimate opposition was accelerated when the government's attempts to curb the 'JP movement' culminated in the imposition of a state of emergency. Many opposition leaders were imprisoned under the emergency, and the Jana Sanghis among them found themselves coming to terms with some of their former rivals" (Jaffrelot, C., 1996) <sup>[2]</sup>.

The BJS in this period had adopted activist strategy in which the party workers participated in various demonstrations related to various socio-economic issues like rise in price. Vajpayee in his speech on 23 April, 1973 remarked that "the party would not hesitate to encourage people to break those laws which, in its view, tended to keep basic commodities scarce. He even expressed sympathy for those who looted government fair price shops to get food for their families" (Andersen, W. K. and Damle, S. D., 1987) <sup>[6]</sup>. This rapid change in the tactics of the party had unseated many conservatives including Madhok. He left the BJS and formed his own party.

The agitational method of the BJS was expressed by a series of *satyagrahas*, such as; agitation against price rise and on the cause of the scheduled castes. The party leaders raised their voice in Madhya Pradesh against the tax increases, in Rajasthan against unemployment and inflation, in Maharashtra against rise in bus fare, and in Delhi against increase of fare of railways. Thus Jana Sangh became adept at organizing street protests in 1972-73.

This was also the time when the RSS under the leadership of Balasaheb Deoras (took charge from Golwalkar) launched

various mass public relations campaign. The Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) and Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh assisted RSS in accelerating these campaigns. Deoras even called Narayan "a 'saint' who had come to rescue society in dark and critical times" (Andersen, W. K. and Damle, S. D., 1987) <sup>[6]</sup>. Under these circumstances, the RSS and the Jana Sangh came together to participate in the JP movement. This gave the Jana Sangh an opportunity to associate itself with a well-known leader and a popular movement (total revolution).

The 'JP movement' marked the culmination of a phase of socio-political agitation that was manifested in Gujarat which was suffering from economic crisis and corrupt leadership. In this period, the RSS students wing (the ABVP) also played an active role and tried to link the students' agitation against price rises. The agitation gained momentum in the form of 'JP movement' in Bihar. In December 1973, the executive committee of the Bihar ABVP met in Dhanbad, decided to launch a Gujarat-style agitation along with the Socialist Youth Wing. This led to the formation of a *Chhatra Sangharsh Samiti* (Students Struggle Committee) in Patna on 17 Feb. 1974. Its action plan was about the living conditions of students as much as with the development of 'Bharatiya Education'. The RSS network was deeply involved in this movement. K.N. Govindacharya (RSS *Pracharak* of Patna) was one of the instigators of the *Chhatra Sangharsh Samiti*. This Samiti was dominated by the Hindu nationalists.

There were many other instances when the RSS had worked in association with the JP movement. JP presided at a mourning ceremony in memory of Golwalkar on 5 June 1973. The basic reason for the rapprochement between JP and the Hindu nationalists was that both of them regarded social reform as a priority in comparison with work in the politics. Whereas, the RSS tried to get benefited from the patronage of an eminent leader, 'JP' tried to get benefited from the network offered by the RSS.

JP in the process of social mobilization, however, slowly lost and realized that his Gandhian base also begun to erode. Faced with the weakening of his movement, he had accepted the unofficial support of some political parties, such as; the Bharatiya Jana Sangh. The 'JP Movement' benefited the

Bharatiya Jana Sangh, as it had allowed the party to get back in the *sangathanist* network and to get integrated with the legitimate political opposition through an activist campaign. In April 1974, the Bharatiya Jana Sangh officially embraced 'Total Revolution'. In September 1974, in the first training camp held at Hyderabad, Advani and Vajpayee justified the "Bharatiya Jana Sangh's support for the 'JP movement by citing the 'Total crisis' which was affecting the country culturally, as politically and economically.

In November 1974, JP favoured a nationwide agitation against Indira Gandhi and directed his activists towards winning over the political parties. The Bharatiya Jana Sangh who was still anxious to integrate itself into the legitimate opposition was forced by the new political strategy of JP to consider the risks of diluting its identity in a movement. However, in 1974, it gave its approval to the merger, "under the auspices of Charan Singh, of the BKD, a fraction of the Socialist party, the Swatantra Party and four other small groups within a single Bharatiya Lok Dal (BLD), but refused to participate in it. Eight months later, the Jana Sangh resolved in favour of a form of unity within the opposition" (Jaffrelot, C., 1996) [2].

At the end of November 1974, 'JP' held consultations with the political parties in Delhi, which resulted in the formation of a National Coordination Committee consisting of twenty leaders representing the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, Congress (O), BLD, Socialist Party and Akali Dal. On 6 March, 1975, a march proceeded to the Lok Sabha to hand over a 'Charter of Demands'. The BJS was trying to present itself as a motivating force of the 'JP movement'. This was a difficult time for the BJS as on the one hand as a front for the RSS, it had vocation to represent the Hindu Nation and on the other hand, as a political party it was obliged to make compromises to integrate itself in legitimate politics to gain power. The winning of by-election of Bhopal and assembly elections of Gujarat under the banner of the Janata Front (Congress (O), BLD, Socialist Party and BJS) further strengthened the JP campaign.

On 25 June, 1975, the opposition parties formed a Lok Sangarsh Samiti (LSS) under the leadership of Morarji Desai. JP announced a *satyagraha* to force Indira Gandhi resign. It received support from all the opposition parties. In response, Indira Gandhi proclaimed the "State of Emergency" on 24 June. On the night of June 25/26, 1975, Indira Gandhi ordered the arrest of the principal opposition leaders and on 4 July, 1975 she pronounced a legal ban on the RSS and the Jamaat-e-Islami.

The experience shared by the principal opposition leaders in prison promoted unity and also the integration of the Hindu Nationalists in the 'legitimate opposition'. However, in order to get complete unity it was necessary for the parties, especially the BJS, to become fully integrated in a new organization. Charan Singh relaunched the idea of an amalgamation of the four main opposition parties in 1976. In March, 1976, he made the necessary deliberations and a proposal involving the dissolution of the various parties and their coming together in a new grouping was formed. It was in the process of amalgamation that the Jana Sangh in 1977 abandoned its separate existence. It was not only because of the particular combination of circumstances created by the emergency, but also on the account of the specific conditions

of its integration with other forces in the wake of the 'JP movement'. The party leaders resolved to conceal "the more aggressive features of their Hindu nationalism—for example, its attitude towards the minorities. Instead they emphasized less important parts of their doctrine, namely decentralization at the village level and the primacy of civil society in comparison to the state" (Jaffrelot, C., 1996) [2]. These were the changes in BJS policies which pushed it closer to the JP movement.

Following the announcement by Mrs. Indira Gandhi on 16 January 1977 that election would be held in March, the BLD, the Congress (O), the Socialist Party and the Jana Sangh regrouped in the form of Janata Party. Its National Executive Committee included six representatives of constituent parties with Morarji Desai as Chairman. The Janata Party's influence was reinforced by the admission of Jagjivan Ram and his new party Congress for Democracy. In this election, the alliance won 295 out of 542 seats in the Lok Sabha. The results showed a sharp increase in the fortune of the former Jana Sangh, whose candidates won 93 seats, equal to 31% of the Janata Party's entire representation. Despite these results, the ex-Jana Sangh members accepted their under-representation in the government headed by Morarji Desai and were given only three ministerial posts; A.B. Vajpayee (External Affairs), L.K. Advani (Information and Broadcasting) and Brij Lal Verma (Industries). The ex-Jana Sanghis probably contented to this sacrifice as a mark of goodwill, because they regarded the Janata Party as the means by which they could join the mainstream of Indian politics. It was felt that the Prime Minister, Morarji Desai, had a Hindu traditionalist outlook and in the process a section of the Janata Party might develop a political culture similar to that which Sardar Patel and his colleagues had represented in the Congress Party after the independence.

The emergency had also brought the Hindu nationalists and the Muslims closer, as both were imprisoned together. During the emergency, in Delhi, they suffered in the name of improved urban sanitation. In mid-April 1976, resentment against demolition works in Muslim quarters of Turkman Gate (old Delhi) and a "campaign of forced sterilization" led to a riot which was suppressed bloodily. These events persuaded Imam Bukhari (of Jama Masjid) to join the Janata Party, who then spoke in favour of lifting the ban on the RSS. This new harmony created fraternization between activists of the Jamaat-e-Islami and the RSS.

After the 1977 elections, the rivalry between Morarji Desai and Charan Singh was set in motion. Both wanted the seat of Prime Minister. JP and Acharya Kripalani, who were invited to settle the matter, decided in favour of Morarji Desai. On this account, both Charan Singh and Raj Narain felt cheated and started objecting the policies of the government.

From time to time, certain Janata Party leaders demanded the Ex-Jana Sanghis to disassociate from the RSS, citing article 5 of the Janata Party's interim constitution that membership of the party was incompatible with that of any other political or communal organization. But the hostility of the Jana Sanghis towards any debate on this subject prevented discussion on the matter. Desai settled the question out of hand by declaring the RSS a cultural organization. This was criticized by members of the Congress and the CPI in the Lok Sabha. Even within the

Janata Party, there were efforts to raise again the question of Hindu communalism in political debate.

In November 1978, Raj Narain demanded that any ex-Jana Sangh minister (at center or in state), who took part in RSS meetings should be dismissed from the Janata Party. This had deepened the rift between two factions of the party. Charan Singh and his faction emphasized very strongly on the theme of secularist legitimacy. The strategy of the Charan Singh and Raj Narain faction was to weaken Morarji Desai by attacking his ex-Jana Sangh's allies. In March 1979, Raj Narain called for the dismissal of Vajpayee and LK Advani from the government. This campaign was supported by members of the ex-Socialist Party to some extent. Madhya Limaya denounced the 'dual membership'.

The controversy over the dual membership reached up to such a level that in early 1979, Vajpayee warned that the Jana Sangh might pull out of the government and the party if the critics of the RSS had their way on this question of dual membership. The members of the Jana Sangh group still expected to retain their strong bargaining position within the Janata Party.

The Janata Party's national executive, held on 4 April, 1980, rejected by a vote of 17 to 14 Desai's compromise over dual-membership issue and opted for the hard-line stand, thus compelling the Jana Sangh members to leave the Janata Party. Reacting to the Janata Party's demand and decision to delink with the R.S.S., the Jana Sangh group made it clear that it was unacceptable to them. Thus, Bharatiya Jana Sangh was compelled to leave the Janata Party. Resultantly, A.B. Vajpayee, L.K. Advani, Nanaji Deshmukh and several other members of the Jana Sangh left the Janata Party. A national convention was held in New Delhi on October 14, 1979 to formulate a new political party.

### Conclusion

A rapid fall in the Congress government's popularity in 1972 due to its inability to carry out its promises and confront the economic crisis gave an opportunity to the Jana Sangh to get into the mainstream politics and gain popularity without betraying its identity inherited from the RSS. This was due to the convergence of its populist-activist strategy with that of the movement of Jaya Prakash Narayan (JP) who shared his concern with the Hindu nationalists for political decentralization and reshaping society. The experience shared by opposition leaders in prison promoted unity and also the integration of the Hindu Nationalists in the 'legitimate opposition'. However, in order to get complete unity it was necessary for the parties, especially the BJS, to become fully integrated in a new organization and the Jana Sangh in 1977 abandoned its separate existence by merging in Janata Party. After its merger in Janata Party, the BJS won 93 seats, equal to 31% of the Janata Party's entire representation. The controversy over the dual membership reached up to such a level that the Bharatiya Jana Sangh was compelled to leave the Janata Party.

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