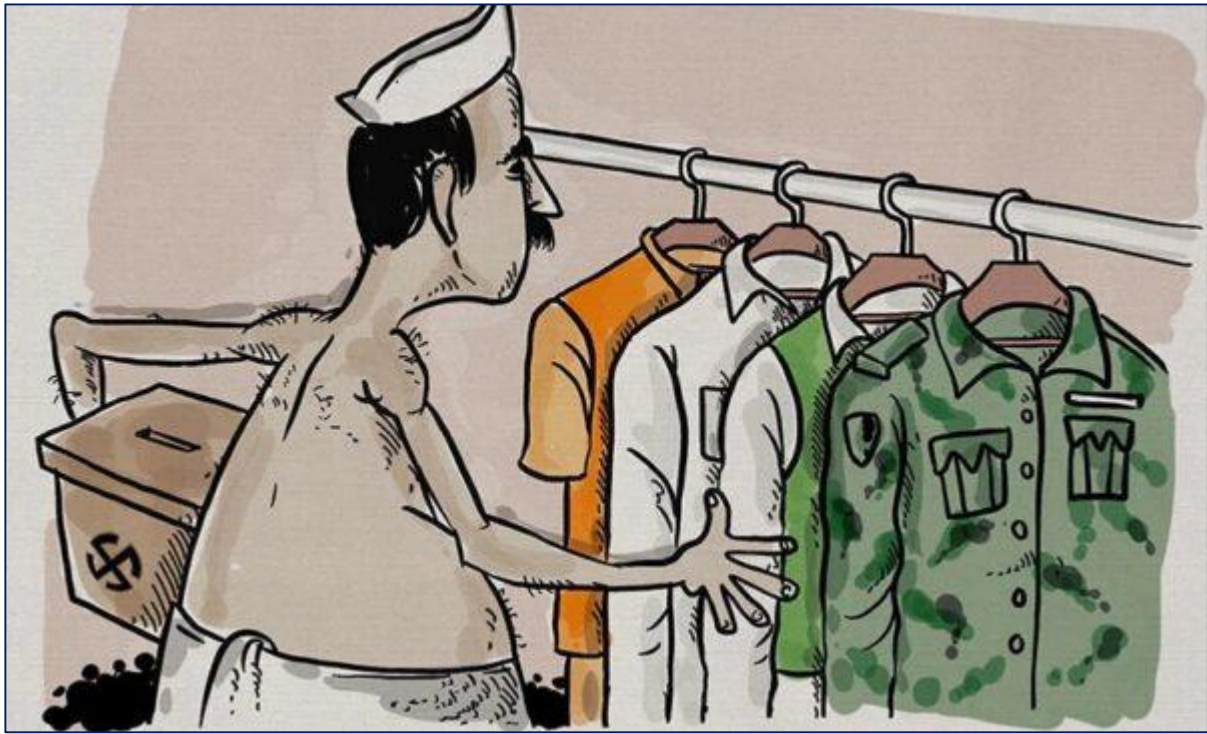


Ensnconced in defection spree is decadence of bourgeois vote politics



Political splits and defections in India have been common since the country's independence. Bourgeois parties like the Congress, Socialist Party and the Jana Congress were at the centre of early splits or defections. However, the defection politics became prominent in the 1960s, especially in 1967, when the Congress lost power in many states. It also saw its majority reduced in parliament. The grand old party was split into Indira Congress, Syndicate Congress, Congress for Democracy and so forth. Gaya Lal, an independent MLA from Hassanpur, Haryana, switched parties three times within a single fortnight—and three times in a single day, in 1967. He helped topple several governments in less than a year. His frequent floor-crossing gave rise to the famous phrase “Aaya Ram, Gaya Ram”. Bhajan Lal of the Congress was the Gaya Lal of Haryana in the 1980s, shifting parties several times to remain in power. Haryana has even been the birthplace of the term ‘farmhouse politics’ which refers to two distinct but related phenomena in Indian parliamentary political discourse: the strategy of confining MLAs to secluded estates to prevent defection or poaching, and the criticism of the leaders who govern remotely from private properties instead of official state offices. Currently, that is called ‘resort’ politics. Defections, of late, are mostly transactional exchanges driven by bribes, lucrative cabinet positions, avoidance of legal scrutiny or punitive measure for malpractices, malfeasance or misfeasance.

Arguments in favour of defections

Listen to what advocates of defection argue: Legislators should not be forced into blind obedience. If a party's stance shifts or its leadership becomes corrupt, representatives must be free to switch allegiance. When a party lacks internal democracy, defection might be the only available method for a lawmaker to express genuine dissent. In some cases, crossing the floor

is viewed as a moral protest to restore democratic values or realign with a coalition that is viewed to better serve public interest. Sounds mellifluous! But they do not corroborate to the stark reality where lure of lucre and power is evidently the sole determinant of such switching by retaining the seats as legislators. If they are disillusioned with the respective parties they belong to, they have every right to dissociate. But then morality demands they must resign as legislators and seek reelection on the tickets of the parties they have shifted to.

A wrecking spanner is thus being driven into the basic process of bourgeois parliamentary democracy in India. The country is shamelessly pushed into the dark side with many elected MPs acting in ways that do not reflect the will of those who sent them to Parliament. Instead, they reflect the will of those who are powerful enough to offer financial inducements to tempt them and/or make threats that scare them.

Buying legislators in lot is feature of market economy

Before 1991, opportunities to cream money off through public offices were limited to well-placed politicians and fixers. Local and district leaders did not have that lucrative enterprises of loot. But after globalization of Indian economy, even diminutive public offices became units to make quick money. From construction to mining, syndicates and networks built and nurtured by an unholy nexus of the greedy bourgeois politicians mostly belonging to the ruling parties, corrupt administration (municipalities, corporations and district bodies) and the pliant police force (which also gets a share of the booty), have become the order of the day in decadent moribund capitalist set up. These self-seeking bourgeois political leaders are tied to no ideology. Desertions occur, as in Maharashtra and West Bengal of late, to the opposition party only when the latter appears to offer better prospects for loot and power-mongering in an already overcrowded market.

Pattern changed after BJP's ascent to power in 2014

In a true bourgeois democracy, a party or an alliance gets to form the government if it has a majority. But defections and splits changed the equation often in independent India. The pattern has taken a distinct turn after the BJP was saddled in power in 2014. Its rise to power was propelled by the desertion of many of the Congress leaders who switched to the BJP to ride the new 'Modi wave' for greener pastures. With the Congress reduced to 44 seats in the Lok Sabha in 2014, many of the Congressites viewed no future in the party. These large scale desertions from the Congress proved crucial for the BJP to win elections in states like Haryana, Assam, Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh.

In Karnataka, where BJP had successfully carried out 'Operation Lotus' in 2008, a repeat happened in 2019 when 13 Congress MLAs defected to the BJP. Joined by three other MLAs from JDS (Janata Dal-Secular) and one from KPJP, they successfully toppled the Congress-JDS coalition government, helping the BJP return to power in the state it had lost in 2018.

Even when an opposition party could form the government, the BJP top brass moved the central investigative agencies like the CBI and ED to harass the opposition leaders and force them to cross floors. As the capitalist system itself has become out and out corrupt, anyone serving this system is bound to be corrupt. Only there is variance in degree of wrongdoings.

So, the bugbear of ED and CBI unnerves many who then seek refuge in the BJP to skirt punitive action.

Since 2014, ED is reported to have probed 115 leaders of the non-BJP parties. But once they joined the BJP, all the charges were either dropped or put on the backburner. The list is a long one. Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma, who joined the BJP from the Congress, West Bengal Chief Minister Suwendu Adhikari who deserted TMC to embrace the BJP, Narayan Rane of the Shiv Sena, Ajit Power of the NCP and many others, were absolved of all corrupt activities once they found berths in the BJP. Besides the Congress, the BJP also engineered split in Sharad Pawar's NCP (itself a splinter group of the Congress), the Shiv Sena, Aam Aadmi Party, the TMC and others. Using this tactic, the BJP helped topple the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government in Maharashtra in 2022. Shiv Sena leaders like Yamini Jadhav, Bhawana Gawali, Pratap Sarnaik, and others saw ED cases filed against them before they joined the pro-BJP Shinde camp of the Shiv Sena. Similarly, in the mutiny in the NCP by Ajit Pawar, several MLAs and MLCs had ED cases against them. So, it has been a common refrain that the BJP is a washing machine.

West Bengal episode

Using a slew of manipulative measures including deletion of 27 lakh odd names under the so called SIR, replacing the state bureaucracy with pro-BJP officials, deployment of 2 lakh paramilitary force tutored to carry out the orders of the BJP high command, spending huge amount of money obviously received from the monopoly houses, using pliant media to the hilt for widespread campaign and capitalizing on the mounting discontent against the misrule of the TMC government, the BJP registered a landslide victory in West Bengal in April election. And immediately, there was a rush of defection. The vulnerability of the TMC, which finished with just 80 MLAs, saw over 60 splitting away to form a separate group in the assembly. And the water spilled to the parliament also. 20 of the 28 Lok Sabha MPs of the TMC, became rebels, met the Lok Sabha Speaker, said that they had merged with a hitherto unknown regional outfit, the Nationalist Citizens Party of India, and sought recognition as a separate bloc in the House. They also said that they would be part of the ruling BJP-led NDA. The manner in which so many TMC MPs capitulated, crawled, and begged to join the BJP bloc, so that they could back the regime of PM Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah is a troubling sign of our times.

Maharashtra case

The same smash-and-grab model, which was earlier used to engineer split in the Shiv Sena (Uddhav Thackeray) some years back, is again being deployed by the BJP hierarchy.

There is something deeply troubling about the wave of defections sweeping India's elected representatives. In the latest episode, 6 out of 9 Shiv Sena (UBT) MPs are seeking to join the Eknath Shinde faction of the Sena, which emerged after an earlier split in the parent party and now sharing power with the BJP in the state. This group constitutes exactly two-thirds of the party's Lok Sabha strength, giving them the escape route that their crossover will constitute a merger under the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution, or the anti-defection law. Under the Tenth Schedule, a member can be disqualified if they voluntarily resign from their party or defy a party whip during a division of votes in the House. Engineered splits are now dressed up as mergers, letting groups defect without inviting disqualification. It also cannot be forgotten that many former Congress members of the state are now in the BJP, serving a force they once claimed to be ideologically inimical to country's interest.

Cleavage in AAP

In April, the Aam Admi Party (AAP) MPs in the Rajya Sabha had joined the BJP, reducing AAP's Rajya Sabha strength from 10 to 3. Notably, Raghav Chadha, the Rajya Sabha AAP MP was one of the sharpest critics of the ruling BJP, delivering fiery speeches that often led to intense face-offs and even his temporary suspension from the House before 2026. But the same Chadha shocked the political landscape by resigning from the AAP and crossing over to the BJP alongside a group of AAP MPs, declaring himself "the right man in the wrong party". He alleged that the Aam Aadmi Party has strayed from its principles, morals and values, and no more work for the nation or nation-building but for its own interests. Ok. But then how could he overnight be effusive in praise for PM Modi, he was a vocal critic of even months back, and Modi describe his as a decisive governance and strong leadership? The reason for the somersault might not be explicit but can be surmised. Tapped in the decoy.

Now, it is learnt that an all-out effort is being made by the BJP to orchestrate a cleavage in the Samajwadi Party (SP) on the eve of the UP assembly poll. UP Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya and minister Om Prakash Rajbhar claimed that 25 to 26 SP MPs are disgruntled and ready to break away. This is nothing but an aggressive tactic by the BJP to project vulnerability in the opposition camp. The buzz is considered by many as a 'mind game' in the defection-prone bourgeois vote politics. The surge in these crossovers, which has the cumulative effect of increasing the strength of the ruling BJP-led NDA in the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha, raises questions beyond technicalities.

Legal position in regard to turncoat politics

One might ask if such floor crossing is legally permitted. Let us turn to the legal position. The first anti-defection law was passed in parliament in 1985 during Rajiv Gandhi-led Congress government. The stated objective was "*to curb the evil of political defections motivated by the lure of office or other similar considerations that endanger the foundations of our democracy.*" Notably, the law did not make it illegal for elected representatives to switch parties. So, the defections continued unabated. In 2003, the anti-defection law was tweaked. Earlier, legislatures could switch parties without getting disqualified if they represented 1/3rd of the party's strength. This was changed to two-thirds. Additionally, the role of the speaker in a legislative assembly became crucial. The speaker was entrusted the responsibility of deciding on disqualification pleas filed by political parties against the defected members.

Unfortunate role of Judiciary

In theory, India's Judiciary could stymie the decline of the anti-defection law. Instead, it seems to be helping to kill it. In Karnataka in 2019 as well as in Maharashtra in 2022, the Supreme Court effectively froze the law, allowing non-BJP governments to be toppled and for the BJP to assume office. In 2022, the Goa bench of Bombay High Court also upheld the merger of 10 Congress MLAs with the BJP in spite of the text of the law stating quite clearly that mergers only apply to "original" political parties and not their legislative arms. Since the "original" Congress and the BJP have clearly not merged, the High Court's decision is befuddling to say the least. This judgment is the basis of the present splits in the TMC, AAP and the Shiv Sena.

Why is BJP so desperate in engineering defections

By engineering splits in regional parties and poaching their legislators, the BJP is seeking to strengthen its legislative muscle, enabling it to push through legislation that could alter electoral democracy as we know it. The referees, umpires, and administrators are metaphorically and literally under the control of the power pulling the strings from behind, as was seen in the functioning of the current Election Commission of India in the last five assembly elections. The recent display of the politics of overlordism by the BJP has an end game: redrawing India's constituencies and eventually realize the great Hindutva dream of One Nation One Election (presumably under a great "Hindu Hriday Samrat [emperor of Hindu hearts]").

An inflection points in the bourgeois democracy

This also marks an inflection point in the country's journey as a bourgeois parliamentary democracy when a few hard questions warrant to be asked. First, what is the point of elections when MPs or MLAs can be lured and purchased? Sure, it has happened in the past, but what is currently happening is on an unprecedented scale which is slated to change the very design of Indian parliamentary democratic system. Second, can one hypothetically end up with a single-party rule, not through military takeovers, elections, or revolutions, but by bribing one's way through the system, one regional party after another? It does not seem impossible, even though one would still like to believe that it is improbable.

Parliamentary democracy reduced to a transactional business

As we can see, political defections have reduced parliamentary democracy to a transactional business, overriding the mandate of the electorates. A measure of what amount of rot bourgeois democracy is plunged in in this dying phase of capitalism can be made from the swelling number of defections and floor crossing during recent period. It is evident that those getting elected based on people's mandate have no principle, no ideal, no scruple, not an iota of self-respect. They win as candidates of one party, taste power and then hanker for more power and more money. If another party promises them with what they have been aspiring for, as a bait, they readily switch side in utter disregard to people's mandate. They even do not bother to quit as legislators and seek re-election on the ticket of the party they have shifted allegiance to. Thus, in keeping with the prescripts of market economy in capitalist globalization, the bourgeois legislators have turned themselves into saleable commodities. Corrupt to the backbone, having no obligation to the people and guided by the sole objective of self-aggrandizement, these bourgeois politicians enter the arena of electoral politics. What they practise is "politics of material gains". If elected, they abuse their power to make money by defrauding the electorates and embezzling public fund. They feel no qualms for that. They stay with a party till the time another party offers them "better prospects" both in terms of money and power. And then they become turncoats in no time. All pre-poll unleashing of a bitter, fluent, and sustained torrent of angry criticism, blame, or abusive language against a rival party in the election are obliterated overnight and replaced by effusive praise, sometimes sycophancy of the highest order, once they desert their old party and land in the lap of the

hitherto considered rival party. Switching parties after winning constitutes an abject betrayal of that electoral mandate, a breach of voters' trust. Even a chameleon would feel envious of them. With such feature of defection being dominant in parliamentary democracy today, common people wonder why there is then so much fanfare over election, so much boasting of being 'largest democracy'?

Election has turned into a farce

When elected representatives abandon their parties—often driven by financial incentives, lust for power or pressure from state agencies—they subvert representative governance into a mechanism for retaining or seizing power. Citizens vote for a specific ideological platform and party manifesto. When a representative changes allegiances mid-term, the constituent's voice is essentially traded for personal or partisan gain. By transforming the legislature into a platform for engineering defection politics, the basic function of representative bodies—meaningful debate, oversight, and policy-making is crippled. Universal suffrage then becomes a superficial exercise as class interest of the ruling capitalists which can no more allow democratic, codes, ethics and practices lest that should speed up its inevitable collapse, dominates and manipulates power structure through a slew of measures latest being engineering defections.

Thus, parliament once hailed as sovereign by the exponents of bourgeois democracy and bearing footfalls of esteemed freedom fighters and revered nationalist leaders has now been turned into a shopping mall, if not an auction centre, by the ruling monopolists and their hirelings for free trading of members elected on people's vote but up for sale and floor-crossing against suitable price.

Sign is ominous

The sign looming over the horizon is too ominous to be overlooked or be given a passing glance only. All democracy and peace loving people must now step out and unite on a broad-based platform to resist this fascist menace and raise the demand of 'right to recall'— a democratic mechanism that empowers voters to remove an elected official from office before the end of their fixed term via a direct vote. At the same time, it cannot be forgotten for a moment that all such attempts to resist and thwart such abhorrent practice must be directed towards ultimate overthrowing the root of all evils, the capitalist system by revolution.