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ANTI-DEFECTION LAW MUST BE MADE MORE EFFECTIVE

What is needed is the political will; all parties should look at the law afresh



KALYANI SHANKAR

lections and defections go together despite a stringent anti-defection law in the country. The law proves ineffective as legislators are lured by money and position. Lawmakers skirt around the rules, find loopholes to their advantage, and defy them. In last week's Rajya Sabha polls, Rajasthan's BJP legislator Shobharani Khushwaha, Congress's Haryana MLA Kuldeep Bishnoi, and JD (S) lawmaker from Karnataka Srinivas Gowda are classic examples. Cross-voting occurs even in presidential and vice-presidential elections. Vice-President M. Venkaiah Naidu recently commented that the anti-defection law must be amended to rectify the loopholes. Naidu, also the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha, said there was no clarity about the time-frame for the Speaker or Chairman of the Rajya Sabha to decide on anti-defection cases. "There are certain loopholes in the anti-defection law. It allows wholesale defection. But retail defection is not allowed. Amendments are required to plug the loopholes," Naidu said. Instead of formally "crossing the floor" or voting against their party in a confidence motion, they resign from the party. Some of them come back in the bye-elections. In the past, there have been some bizarre cases. Gayalal, an independent MLA in Haryana, first joined the Congress Party in 1967; by evening, he shifted to the United Front, and within nine hours, he rejoined the Congress. What was more, he returned to the United Front within a fortnight. This case is known as 'Ayaram, Gayaram' in polit-



ical circles. The 2003 amended law prescribed the penalty for shifting political loyalties: the loss of membership and a bar on becoming a minister. The law has been contested in courts multiple times. Under the anti-defection law, unlimited powers are given to every political party to put down dissent or an alternative view. However, recent developments in many states show that it does not check defections. To keep the flock together, parties often play resort politics by shepherding them to some resort, sometimes outside the state. Defectors have shown this trend many times-Rajasthan (2020), Maharashtra (2019), Karnataka (2019 and 2018), and Tamil Nadu (2017).

In March 2020, Jyotiraditya Scindia and 22 Congress MLAs resigned, resulting in a Government change in Madhya Pradesh. In Rajasthan, six BSP MLAs merged their party with the Congress, and in Sikkim, 10 of the 15 MLAs of the Sikkim Democratic Front have joined the BJP in 2019. The list goes on. Initially, the decision of the Presiding Officer was not subject to judicial review. The Supreme Court struck down this condition in 1992. The apex court intervened again in July 2019 when ten Congress MLAs and two Maharashtrawadi Gomantak Party MLAs defected to the BJP and were rewarded with ministries. The court prescribed a maximum of three months for deciding on anti-defection cases in 2020. Parliament needs to look at the law afresh because of the continuing trend of horse-trading. The Supreme Court observed recently, "It is time that Parliament has a rethink on whether disqualification petitions ought to be entrusted to a Speaker as a quasi-judicial authority when such Speaker continues to belong to a particular political party either de jure or de facto. Parliament may consider amending the Constitution to substitute the Speaker of the Lok Sabha and Legislative Assemblies as an arbiter of disputes concerning disqualification under the Tenth Schedule." The Presidential polls were announced last week, and there are apprehensions about crossvoting. The best way is to tweak the law. Defectors should be barred from holding public office for a reasonable period, and the vote cast by a defector should be considered invalid. The electorate should also have a right to recall the representative. Resort politics should also be banned. (The writer is a senior journalist. The views expressed are personal.)

Ipta: A revolution that redefined art, culture

It began as the cultural front of the Communist Party of India's cultural front but excelled in its own right

aving committed a plethora of gargantuan blunders from the late 1930s, the Communist Party of India in 1942-43 took itself to a near non-acceptable position in India's politics. By opposing the Quit India Movement, supporting the Muslim League's Pakistan demand, castigating Netaji Bose, slamming other Congress leaders, and supporting Britain's war effort after Russia was attacked by Nazi Germany, it was fast losing its mass base, especially among the educated urban middle class.

Puran Chand Joshi, the general secretary of the CPI who was busy in making a nexus with Muslim League, slowly understood that enough is not done to make a strong base of the party among farmers, daily wage-earners, and factory workers. He felt that for mass awakening and implanting the idea of communism, the shortest route is cultural entertainment through which a message of nation building can also be sent across.

It was at this time that Joshi played a masterstroke that no one ever thought of in Indian politics. Understanding the scope of capturing people's interest in cultural entertainment, he formed a cultural front of the CPI on May 25, 1943. A bunch of extraordinarily talented creative minds, young in age and over energetic in spirit, assembled at the Marwari Vidyalaya Hall of Bombay and formed the Indian People's Theatre Association (Ipta). It included poets, singers, musicians, theatre workers, cinema directors, music composers, shadow artists, and painters from across India but largely from Bengal, Bombay, Assam, UP, Punjab and Andhra Pradesh. It was a culturalpolitical unit of CPI.

It was the first of its kind in India. The name of the organisation was given by Homi Jahangir Bhaba the noted scientist. Jawaharlal Nehru congratulated the initiative by sending a message.

The idea of Ipta was not an overnight thought that crossed Joshi's mind; it had a long history dating back to June 1935.

On June 21, 1935, an Anti-Fascist International Conference of cultural activists was held in Paris in which the Indian writer Mluk Raj Anand, who was later associated with Ipta, took part. Its replica conference was held on April 19, 1936, in Lucknow under the chairmanship of Munshi Premchand. The conference saw the birth of All India Progressive Writers' Association and it was fully backed by the CPI.

In 1937, another cultural front named the League Against Fascism & War was formed in Calcutta and in 1941, as soon as the Soviet Union was attacked by Germany in the Second World War, another intellectual front of intellectuals named Friends of Soviet Union also came up.

Though many non-communist cultural workers joined these organisations, they were all largely motivated and mobilised



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by the members of CPI and the socialist party.

Many other such groups were formed in Bombay and even one Dutt, Tapas Sen. Musicians: Pt Ravi by the name Ipta came up in Shankar, Salil Chowdhury, Sachin Bangalore in 1942.

congress of the CPI, Joshi worked for an amalgamation of all these cultural fronts and asked the workers to take the cultural heritage of India among the masses. Ipta workers were asked to shape up pain and pangs.

Ipta's purpose was a cultural resurgence of mass struggle against It was born as the voice of the downtrodden but with the purpose of promoting the CPI's political by a political ideology. agenda. It had its first head office in Bombay which was later shift- Shantaram, Saddat Hasan Manto, ed to Calcutta in 1946. The motto and Dev Anand were never official of the organization was 'People members of Ipta, all of them were Joshi was its first president. Chitta many levels. Prasad, the famous artist, designed the logo of Ipta that features a man and women, apart from making beating the drum, symbolising the oldest form of communication in India.

The time was ripe for Ipta to come to the street as Bengal was city of moving skeletons. Then cyclone. These all inspired a group of young talented artists to express their creativity with a strong social message. 'Bhukha hai Bangal' was one of the earliest street plays produced by the Punjab squad of Ipta. by mingling with common people, It created a massive sensation in the Hindi belt of north India.

Ipta soon attracted a galaxy of young talents. There were writers like Ismat Chugtai, Krishan Chander, Mulk Raj Anand, Prem Dhawan, Bhisham Sahni, and

Manik Bandopadhay. Theatre personalities: Shambhu Mitra, Habib Tanvir, Prithviraj Kapoor, Utpal Dev Burman, Timirbaran. Poets: In May 1943, during the first Shailendra, Kaifi Azmi, Sahir Ludhianvi, Majrooh Sultanpuri. Singers: Hemant Kumar, Bhupen Hazarika, Hemanga Biswas.

Then there were film directors: Ritwik Ghatak, K.A. Abbas, Chetan Anand, Basu Chatterjee, their creative expression in simple Rishikesh Mukherjee. Dancers: language and tell the reality of Uday Shankar, Zohra Sehgal, Bombay's Marine Drive on the common people's life, exposing Kameshwar. Actors: Balraj Sahni, occasion of the Marathi Stage Deena Pathak, Harindranath Centenary Festival. Such was the Chatterjee, A.K. Hangal, Karuna Bandhopadhay. In a nutshell, some social inequality and oppression. of the finest talents in the field of art and culture enthusiastically joined Ipta, though it was backed

Though Raj Kapoor, V. Theatre Stars the People'. N.M. very closely associated with it at

These superbly gifted men their career in their respective field, had the dream of a classless, socialistic society for a new India which was awaiting its freedom.

One of the earliest works of devastated in a manmade famine Ipta was the music composition of 25, 1947, said, "The message of and the city of Calcutta became a Iqbal's famous poem 'Sare jahan se Hindu Muslim unity was the cen-Achha' by Pt Ravi Shankar. Ipta came the Japanese bombing and popularized this song by singing it at all its functions, street plays and Friday by the Indian People's conferences, making it almost a Theatre Association." national anthem.

> out its live performance on streets way platform, etc., its stage for performance, gathering a huge crowd. By doing things unconvention-

made waves across India. In Bombay and Calcutta's industrial zones, Ipta became hugely popular with its street plays, theatre and pro-people songs. In their presentation, they tactfully inserted political messages and a huge number of people were influenced. By the end of 1944, the CPI, which was a marginalised party not long ago, again gained ground.

ally and in a most creative way, Ipta

SOMEN SENGUPTA

It performed in almost all public functions, especially in success that The Times of India wrote on May 10, 1944, "There was nothing pointless or unnecessary in the performance at the People's Theatre. With the limited facilities at their disposal the organisers achieved much."

The heading of the news item was crowned with 'Real Thing.' The message of every single presentation of Ipta—whether it was street play, shadow dance, poetry, cinema, choir, or painting—was about communal harmony, socialism, concord, cosmopolitan culture, and social awareness.

'People's Theatre Show: Unity Main Theme, a report published in The Times of India on October tral theme of a programme on variety entertainment staged on

Meanwhile Ipta entered the From the beginning, Ipta took world of cinema as well. By 1946, Ipta members had done two films. Neecha nagar, released on walking on pavements, travelling September 29, 1946, was directed in local trains, and assembling at by Chetan Anand. The other was marketplaces. Ipta used the mar- Dharti ke lal; released on August ketplace, factory gate, slums, rail- 30, 1946, it was directed by K.A. Abbas.

> (The second part of the article will be carried tomorrow)

POINTCOUNTERPOINT

WE ARE NOT COMPROMISING ON ANY ISSUE INVOLVING THE HONOUR OF PROPHET MUHAMMAD. — BANGLADESH INFORMATION MINISTER HASAN MAHMUD





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How CPI's politics sapped Ipta of its vitality

A major reason for decline of lpta was the CPI's tight control over its cultural units which were forced to do propaganda

pta entered the world of cinema. By 1946, Ipta members had done two films. Neecha nagar, released on September 29, 1946, was directed by Chetan Anand. The other was *Dharti ke* lal; released on August 30, 1946, it was directed by K.A. Abbas.

Music of both the films was scored by Pandit Ravi Shankar. Prominent Ipta members Shambhu Mitra, Tripti Mitra, Zohra Sehgal, Krishan Chander, Kamini Kaushal, etc., were all part of the films. While *Dharti ke* lal, based on the Bengal famine, got some positive reviews, Neecha nagar got a raw deal. The Times of India said, "The story of Neecha nagar is the corniest chestnut of the Indian screen: Rich vs Poor, Capital vs Labour...." But the film, based on a story of Maxim Gorky, won a Grand Prix award at the Cannes

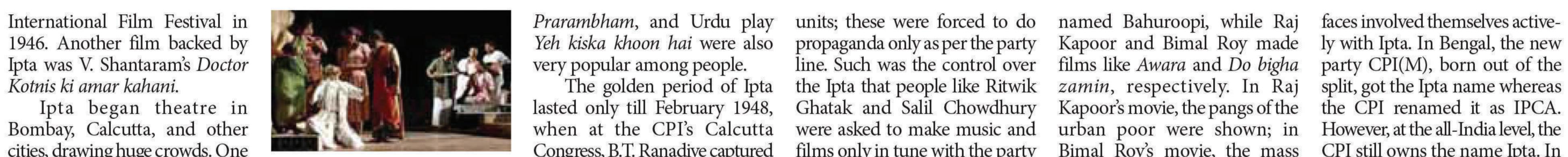
SOMEN SENGUPTA

(The view expressed are personal.)

1946. Another film backed by Ipta was V. Shantaram's *Doctor* Kotnis ki amar kahani.

Ipta began theatre in Bombay, Calcutta, and other cities, drawing huge crowds. One of the earliest Ipta productions was based on Ismat Chugtai's story. People realised that these productions were redefining the language of the Indian stage. It was a cosmopolitan, cultural revolution, something no other political party had thought before in India. In that sense, P.C. Joshi's initiative was indeed a watershed in Indian politics.

From the beginning Ipta's theatre was very distinctive; it was sophistically crafted. With exceptional stage designs, light and of



Indian stage performances, blending the styles of Marathi tamasha, Bengali Jatra and Assamese jhumur in a single format. In Punjab it took the theme from folklore.

The play *Nabanna*, a Bengali production based on the Bengal famine written by Bijon Bhattacharya, rocked Bengal and Assam. It was first staged on October 24, 1943, in Calcutta. In the next few years, more than 40,000 farmers and mill workers watched it. No Ipta production a confluence of various forms of Desha sathi, Telugu play tight control over its cultural

Yeh kiska khoon hai were also very popular among people.

when at the CPI's Calcutta Congress, B.T. Ranadive captured power by sidelining P.C. Joshi.

Randive not only discarded Joshi's reformist line but reduced Ipta activities as much as he can. He gave a call for an armed revolution against the Nehru gov- ema, dance, music and theatre. ernment. The party was immediately banned in West Bengal and Andhra. It was the time early, as cultural surge emergence when Ipta started disintegrating. had just started; it was giving the

As the party was banned, CPI a huge mass support. there was suppression of its cultural front. The party too ignored out of Ipta, its former members its creative aspect. According to did not discard the dream of a and commercial theatre gradual-Basu Acharya, a Marxist schol- classless society. They carried the ly took over. After 1964, except could beat the popularity of ar and researcher, one of the spirit of Ipta without its affiliation. Balraj Sahani, Kaifi Azmi, Habib people's hearts. Ipta theatre was Nabanna. The Marathi play major reasons was the party's Shambhu Mitra formed a Tanveer, Shabana Azmi, Javed ry will be incomplete without

were asked to make music and films only in tune with the party line. As a result, talented people like Sachin Dev Burman, Ravi Shankar, Shambhu Mitra, and Salil Chowdhury started moving to the world of commercial cin-

Acharya thinks that Randive was wrong to call a revolution so

However, even after coming

Bengali group theatre group

propaganda only as per the party Kapoor and Bimal Roy made ly with Ipta. In Bengal, the new line. Such was the control over films like Awara and Do bigha party CPI(M), born out of the The golden period of Ipta the Ipta that people like Ritwik zamin, respectively. In Raj split, got the Ipta name whereas lasted only till February 1948, Ghatak and Salil Chowdhury Kapoor's movie, the pangs of the the CPI renamed it as IPCA. urban poor were shown; in However, at the all-India level, the Bimal Roy's movie, the mass CPI still owns the name Ipta. In migration to cities and then reverse migration were very nicely captured. Needless to say, both the films got a huge reception in Moscow where they were treated as Ipta works.

Though Ipta was active till the CPI suffered a split in 1964, it was not even its shadow of the 1940s. Meanwhile, the cultural spectrum of India saw a sea change, as the entertainment of mass popular cinema, film music Akhtar, etc., only a few popular Ipta's contributions.

2017, Ipta celebrated its 75 years in Patna with a big festival with theatre, song and street plays.

The Bombay unit of Ipta is still very active. They regularly perform theatre and street plays. In other states IPTA is now more on paper than stage.

The emergence of Ipta in the mid-1940s inspired people to fight against famine, riot, war, partition, brutality with which the naval mutiny was suppressed, the Tebhaga movement, etc. It gave Indian culture a galaxy of talent-