

MR. CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member may continue next time.

HALF-AN-HOUR DISCUSSION

AMENDMENT OF CONSTITUTION IN ORDER
TO LOWER THE VOTING AGE

MR. CHAIRMAN: We now take up the Half-an-hour Discussion.

Shri C. K. Chandrappan.

The spirit of what you are going to say was discussed earlier. So, you be brief.

SHRI S. M. BANERJEE (Kanpur). Our contention is that they might accept it.

SHRI ATAL BIHARI VAJPAYEE (Gwalior). An ally of the ruling party!

SHRI C. K. CHANDRAPPAN (Teltcheri). Before going into the details of the matter, I would make a request to the hon. Minister not to give another evasive reply to this question because in August 1972 I myself had raised this question in the House by way of Half-An-Hour Discussion. As it is known to you, half-an-hour discussions are raised when Ministers give evasive answers. To a question whether there was any proposal before the Government to reduce the voting age, the Minister had answered that such proposals were under consideration, and when an half-an-hour discussion was raised, again the hon. Minister gave the same reply, a very brief but the same reply. But I would like to tell him that, in 1971, when his party faced the electorate in this country, they had made a promise that they would reduce the voting age to 18. You may remember, in 1967 when his party had been reduced to a minority in nine States in the country, analysing the election results the Prime Minister, Shrimati Indira Gandhi, said that one of the several reasons

for the defeat of the Congress was the disenchantment of young people and they would try to do something to rectify this. In 1971 they got, as they always put it, the massive support of the young people. And those young people who supported them naturally expected that they would be given a right to have a say in the future of the country. But that has been denied.

To reject one of the arguments put forward by Mr. Vajpayee, the hon. Minister had quoted the recommendation of a Joint Committee on amendments to Election Commission. He had quoted the recommendation to reject Mr. Vajpayee's proposal. But the same Committee has recommended

‘Having considered both the above viewpoints, the Committee decided that the voting age should be reduced from 21 to 18 years’

The Committee, therefore, recommended that article 326 of the Constitution might be amended accordingly. I would just ask him whether he is ready to accept that proposal of the Committee, because that Committee's recommendation was cited as something holy to reject Mr. Vajpayee's proposal.

Then the petitions Committee of the Fourth Lok Sabha also had recommended that voting right should be given at the age of 18.

I had been hearing the discussion which was taking place in the House on Mr. Vajpayee's Resolution when this point was also raised. Several members said that something very dangerous would happen if people were allowed to vote at the age of 18. It has been said that they are students at that age, they will not be able to study and all that. My hon. friend, Mr. Daga, has pointed out that at the age of 18, they are students and their studies would be affected.

What is the percentage of such students in the country? It is very small. Even after 25 years of independence, most of the people do not have the fortune of being in the schools upto the age of 18. So, don't worry about the students. The question today is whether you are going to accept certain realities which have been accepted more or less the world over. That is, the young people today want a greater say. They want to have a greater say on all matters, they want to have a direct participation and they do not want any more to be treated in a patronising manner. And when the Government say that young people are behaving in an irresponsible manner this is one of the ways by which you can share your responsibility with the young people. You can take them into confidence and you can give them certain right and you have also to accept the fact that in the present age, due to technological developments, due to spread of mass media, communications, etc., the young people today are not like the young people of the olden days; they are more enlightened, more educated, more conscious of their right and they want that their right should be accepted.

I will not make a long speech. We often cite the example of Britain, the Mother of Parliaments. In Britain two elections were held, that is, the recent election and the election before, on the basis of 18-year voting right. In the United States 18-year voting right has been granted. Our two neighbours, Bangladesh (where conditions are more or less similar to ours), and Ceylon have granted 18-year voting right.

I want a categorical answer from the hon. Minister. He was whispering to me that more or less the same answer I will get. I want to tell you of one thing. If you are today denying it, it is not like the denial of 1972. 'There is a different' context and meaning. Now the Election

Commission is in the midst of delimitation. They have appointed Committees and work is going on. If your intention is not to bluff young people, if your intention is that you will consider and do something, this is the time for you to grant voting rights. If you want it after a year or so, it is not practical for you to implement it in 1976. So, I will take it, if he denies now or if he says, it is under consideration, or many things are to be discussed, I would beg to submit to him, that it is not as an academic matter that I am raising this thing. If you say like that, you should remember, by that statement you are completing the betrayal of the young people which you have been doing for the last few years. I think it will not be pardoned and I would like to strike a note of warning, that there is going to be a very powerful united movement of the young people in this country which will be massive, which will be militant, they will adopt whichever course they may like for achieving this right before the 1976 elections.

So, taking all these into account, I would request the hon. Minister to say 'yes' or 'no'; let us be quite clear about it.

श्री मन्मथ चन्द्र डागा (पाली) : सभापति महोदय, युवक स्वभाव से आदर्शवादी होता है और वह न्याय का हिमायती होता है। जो बातें आप की जोइंट कमेटी ने तय कर ली हैं और इलेक्शन कमीशन ने उस को बारबर टालने की कोशिश की है, तो जो युवक का हौसला उभरा है, उन के दिमाग में नई बात आयी है, आप दे दें तो अच्छा है, नहीं तो ले लेंगे। अच्छा हो आप कह दीजिए, नहीं तो अधिकार वह मांग लेंगे। तो शोभा इस में होगी कि हां कह दें या कुछ टाइम दे दें। अगर मना कर देंगे तो दुनिया के तमाम लोग कहेंगे कि हमारे जवानों की जो इच्छायें उभरी हैं और विद्यार्थी लोकतन्त्र में हिस्सा लेना चाहते हैं और न्याय की हिमायती करना