

# Business Organisation and National Integration

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THE title of this article may appear rather curious, even odd, although, thanks to the recent happenings in U P, the Punjab, Bhopal, Jabalpur, Goreswar and Silchar, the entire country has now been actively exercised over the question of National Integration. Forces of disruption in the shape of casteism, communalism, linguism and provincialism have almost succeeded in reducing Indian Nationalism into a state of atavism. That after thirteen years of the end of foreign domination, a national emergency should force us to set up a National Integration Committee and that its deliberations should get precedence even at the highest level of policy-makers over so many issues of paramount importance is indeed a sad commentary on the present state of affairs. This unhappy development has also dispelled an illusion built up over many long years that the British administration had at least achieved one thing: "unity in diversity" and political affinity among the millions who inhabit this land. What the creation of Pakistan could not do the recent happening has done — it has made us painfully aware that our nationalism is a frothy effervescence, signifying nothing truly immutable.

## Get Down to Brass-Tacks

The question of National Integration can be dealt with at a high level of abstraction. But obstacles appear as soon as we get down to brass-tacks. It is our intention to

get to grips with one aspect of the concrete question, viz, the pattern of distribution of higher category of jobs in the private sector during the course of past one decade or so, when thanks to large-scale national outlay, industrial ventures have had a tremendous spurt.

Our indigenous pioneers in industry, keeping a respectable distance and with an inevitable time-lag, did exactly what the British Managing Agency Houses had been doing in this country for a long time. Most of the British industrial and commercial ventures in India are Scottish in origin. And it was no accident but a matter of deliberate policy that the executive and technical staff were mostly Scotsmen throughout their trading operation in India. The jute textile industry provides a typical illustration. From managing director down to the shop-floor assistant, each foreign employee has been and continues to be a Scotsman, more particularly a Scotsman hailing from Dundee or a nearby village. Exceptions are rare. Preponderance of Scottish influence in trade and industry is also reflected in the Chambers of Commerce and Industry. In one of the oldest Chambers of Commerce, in Calcutta, almost all the top foreign executives still happen to be the sons of Scotland. The higher public services did not — in fact, could not, because of public examination system — run into such narrow grooves. In the private sector, however, the

employment policy continued to be guided by the sectarian considerations of clan, community and region.

## Hang-over from the Past

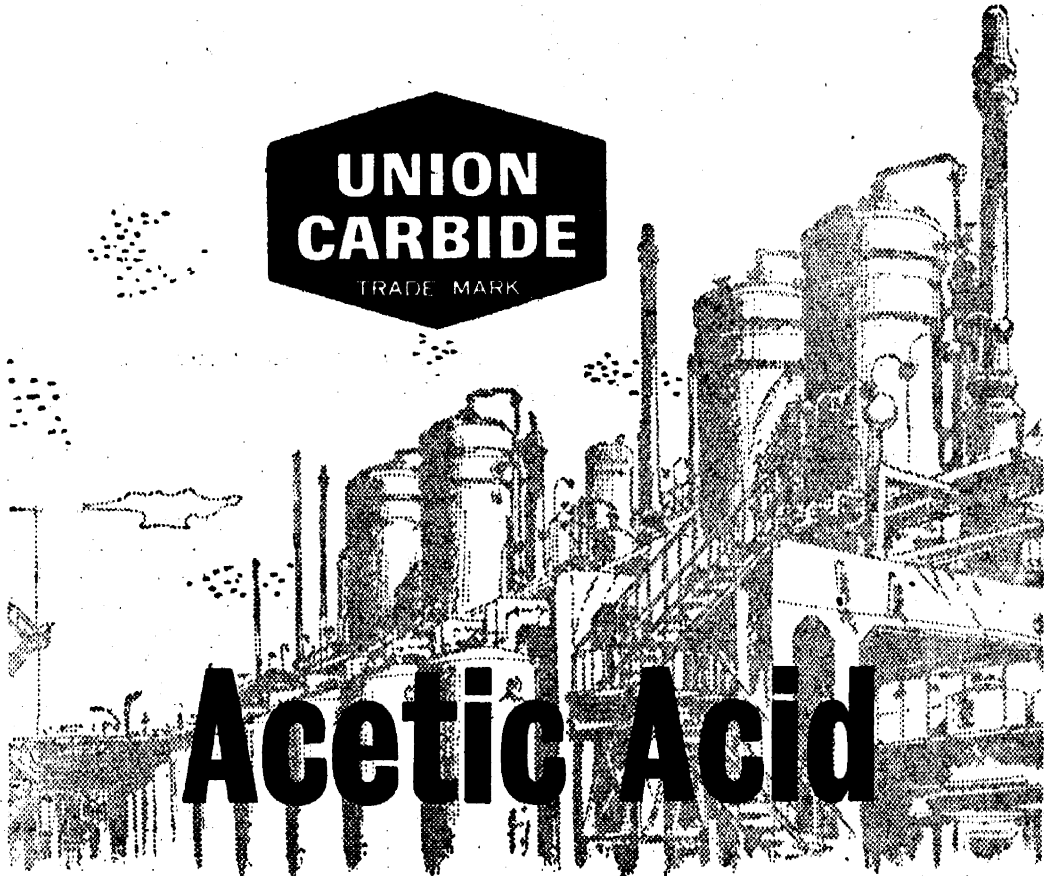
This aspect of colonial mercantile life found ready response in the policies of indigenous industrial and commercial organisations. An industrial empire built by a Parsee or a Marwari or a Bengalee or a Punjabi or a Chettiar, without an exception, continues to be manned in its higher and middle echelons by personnel belonging to the same community or province as the founder of the empire and this is true, even in branch offices or factories situated in far-flung parts of the country. The limit to this employment policy is set by two factors :

(a) Technical considerations, at times, competed entrepreneurs to recruit executives from outside the communal sphere, just as the Marwari jute mill owners in Bengal did a quarter of a century ago by recruiting Scottish experts, and

(b) The growing importance of contact, liaison and public relations work often leave the big bosses with no option but to employ such persons as are gifted with live-wire contacts at New Delhi or other State capitals.

The impetus provided by the huge outlay of the Plans has accelerated the polarisation of the recruitment policy, arousing an undercurrent of resentment among the non-privileged. That one is an Indian

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enjoying equality of status and opportunity" as held out in our Constitution is a mere legal fiction, the reality being the accident of birth, by which a person born in a community, advanced in business and industry can secure a life of affluence and ease in the private sector. In fact, a vicious circle has developed. A Jewish industrialist or a Borah business magnate has now an excuse for staffing his organisation exclusively with men of his community, since these persons are being denied employment opportunities elsewhere. It is, therefore, almost certain that had there been half-a-dozen Anglo-Indian industrial tycoons in India, there would be no exodus of Anglo-Indians to the U K, East Africa, Australia and Canada. In recent years, thanks to out-right purchase and often, surreptitious cohering of shares, many an established business house has passed into Indian hands and almost invariably the administrative set-up, (including Indian executives) has been replaced gradually by persons belonging to the same tribe as the Managing Agent.

#### Justification for Regionalism

In a certain sense, there is some justification for regionalism in recruitment policy. Subordinate staff with indigenous social and cultural ties and the facilities of local language, in addition to their lower salaries, can justifiably lay claim to a policy of recruitment of sons of the soil. Thus, an industrial house, to cite an instance, can surely recruit local Parsees in Bombay to man subordinate cadre of employees. By the same token, bright and eligible university graduates should get opportunity to seek employment in higher cadres in establishments situated in their home state. But, instead, considerations of caste, community and nepotism have gained a premium to such an extent that most of the Indian industrialists do not now-a-days hesitate to import people of their own tribes to places hundreds of miles away from their home towns to fill up high and low vacancies in preference to local talents. In short, they have followed in the footsteps of their Scottish predecessors. In the U K, however, such a parochial policy did not cause any embarrassment because of the vastly enlarged employment avenues offered by a far-flung empire.

in India, the reaction has become understandably vocal and even violent. In fact, in a very tangible way, the personnel pattern of business organisations has, during the past years, visibly contributed towards a feeling of national desiccation. The outcome would have been different had there been much greater social mobility than there is today. Evolution of a generally acceptable pattern of culture, language, and custom—not a complete merger but what is commonly known as "unity in diversity" — would have softened the harshness of a parochial employment policy. Had the captains of industry pursued right from the beginning, a policy of fair-mindedness in staff recruitment, chances are that we would have been spared much of our worries to-day. After all, the cancerous ramifications of a parochial employment policy are now writ large for all to see. Host of subsidiary and feeder industries — small and medium scale — and business, particularly on sales side, have sprung up around major undertakings and here also there is a pronounced tendency to patronise people of the same tribe as the "big bosses" of the major undertakings. There is, in fact, a "chain tribal effect" — there are tribal charity trusts, tribal education foundations, tribal hostels and so on. Indianism is thus a mere euphemism!

#### Parochial Outlook

Unfortunately, the public services generally free from this odium, are also likely to fall victim to this parochial outlook. In defence services, perhaps, preference is shown to those young aspirants for commissioned ranks who can claim relatives in the services. In the U K this has long been an accepted custom, possibly its trail is still there. But, in the present situation in the country, it would be a grievous error to entertain any such favoured treatment. The examination system has stood the test of time in regard to the All India and Central Services examinations and the Union Public Service Commission has, for all these years, steered clear of any influence or pressure. In the past, however, there used to be a lot of nepotism and favouritism even in Government employment — particularly in subordinate services in the Railways Central Secretariat, Civilian establishments of Defence Services and so on. It would be

difficult to believe that the system has completely been eradicated. A back-wash may still be there.

As we had occasion to mention earlier, we do not decry regionalism in employment particularly in subordinate services in both public and private sectors. While this is being followed in Government services, in the private sector, the tribal spirit is very much on the ascendency.

#### No Love for the Community

Some States, however, have started boosting provincialism in the guise of encouragement to regionalism. To cite an instance. However well qualified and eligible a person may be, he cannot hope to get employed as a Welfare Officer in an industry in Bihar, unless he can obtain a certificate from the State Labour Commissioner. The implication of this innocuous-looking rule is obvious. The agitation, which took a violent turn, over employment policy at the Nunmati refinery in Assam is another typical instance.

Recently, some have suddenly become conscious of an age-old phenomenon that crores of rupees go out of West Bengal every year by way of remittances to homes of non-Bengalees in service and business. It is not merely a symptom of the love for one's community but is fraught with dangerous possibilities damaging National Integration. The truly national objective should be to give a go-by to regionalism, casteism and tribalism in the recruitment to superior posts in the private sector of trade and industry. The whole of the country should be treated as a unit and objective unbiased tests should be evolved in selection of right personnel. Vested interests in trade and even in Government will most certainly oppose such a re-orientation of policy but the present crisis in our national life demands such a drastic shift in policy.

#### Employment Exchange Evaded

The Compulsory Notification of Vacancies Act is an extremely feeble measure to combat the demon of tribalism. Apart from the institutional inadequacy of the national employment service organisation which enables unscrupulous employers to evade the provisions of law with impunity — the scope of the enactment is manifestly inadequate to meet the challenge of anti-national,

recruitment policy. The fundamental requirement, as we find it today, is not merely to collect statistics of jobs falling vacant under different agencies but to infuse a spirit of fair-play and justice in the filling up of the vacancies.

We have, let us admit, argued

our case from a narrow angle in the perspective of the wider question of National Integration. We did "not pursue the line that with rapid industrialisation of the country, with or without special stress on labour-intensive industries, the optimum employment potential could be secur-

ed in a five-year period. For our purpose it is irrelevant whether the Third Plan would clothe and feed 15 or 17 million more people. Our object is humbler: a study of the recruitment policy pursued by business organisations and its impact on the question of National Integration.

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