CHAPTER VII

SOME CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS
CHAPTER VII

SOME CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

(i)

Introduction

JP was one of the most important personalities in Indian public life for more than forty years. This age which is known for its remarkable socio-economic and political changes had a decisive influence in shaping the personality and political ideas of JP. He was a remarkably handsome man who possessed the charm and prestige of a statesman. In the tumultuous course of his life he was instrumental in performing different roles at different periods in modern Indian history and politics. In the thirties he was a confirmed Marxist and a revolutionary who was in a hurry to bring about fundamental changes in Indian society. By the sixties JP had matured a great deal and intellectually he had come to firm conclusions about the destiny of India. These years were one of worry and impatience, the result of his eagerness to shape the India of his vision. He carried on a crusade for the socio-economic amelioration of the vast masses of India through his almost unlimited
capacity for sustained constructive work which made him a leader among men.¹

(ii)

JP's Political Ideas and the Human Predicament

JP had the immense capability to influence all those who came in contact with him through the stamp of his magnetic personality, total fearlessness, moral courage, intellectual honesty and compassion for humanity. He was so scrupulous that he recognised the right of his adversaries and fellowmen to be critical of his political ideas or philosophy. He also recognised the right of the people to demand accountability to public opinion for the substance and motives of his political action in terms of his revolutionary activities before independence and his initiation and participation in mass protest movements after independence in India.

JP's real strength lay in his honesty of purpose and high principles which earned the admiration of his countrymen. He was one of these few public figures who

renounced the luxuries of life in favour of a life of simplicity. All his actions were motivated by his desire to reconstruct the Indian polity in conformity with his vision rather than anything akin to self-aggrandisement or pursuit of political power as part of his personal ambitions. He was instrumental in saving millions of lives by his dedicated work during famines and other kinds of emergencies. It was no wonder that he earned the sobriquet as the keeper of the conscience of the nation. Thus, he entered politics not to subserve his careerist ambitions but with the noble mission of emancipating his countrymen from the shackles of economic servitude, political subjugation and social degradation. He took up this challenging task and made it a mission of his life. He looked upon the difficulties and problems of his people as his personal humiliation and set about the task to remove them with seriousness of purpose and determination.

His important role during the freedom struggle and after independence of India involved a practical and a philosophical justification of the fundamental right of the people for justice, equality and fair play. JG was of the firm opinion that in thought, speech and action there must be consistency and unity of purpose. To him, all politics had to be true
for there could be no politics without truth. JP was of the opinion that human motto should be to search truth and acquire it by doing certain service to all. Such a course of action would mean that every individual should sacrifice everything except the principles and truth as he perceived it.

JP was not an armchair intellectual or a political leader interested merely in theorising certain political or philosophical concepts as guidance for others for implementation. He set high standards for himself as well as for others in the fight for the cause of the people. In reality his political ideas were conceived and put into practice under different situational contexts and at different points of time. His extraordinary determination was such that he never compromised with evil under any circumstances. Sometimes this led him to champion lost causes but he had the satisfaction that he did not deviate from his cherished principles or ideals. In consonance with this belief, JP throughout his life was involved in fighting evil wherever it existed. For a revolutionary of his standing and a political leader of his eminence there was no scope for frustration in his life whatever the complexity of the difficulties. He visualised the
twin objectives of getting relief for individuals from government suppression and oppression as well as genuine freedom for the down trodden and exploited poor of the poor nations. Imbibed with such an exalted goal there was in JP the purity of heart and simplicity in life style. In essence, JP was against servility and dependence of his fellow countrymen. He took the philosophical position that human beings had to be self-contained and self-reliant, measuring up to the challenges by confronting them or rather than merely accepting them or conforming to them out of fear. This explained JP's compassion for the underprivileged who suffered gross violation of their self-respect, not out of a voluntary resignation to their fate but because of their degraded social status or weak economic position or religious bigotry or the burden of a reactionary social system with feudal traditions. He was against any kind of passive acceptance of this abominable condition of discrimination and loss of self-respect.

JP's sense of innate pride and faith in the nobility of human existence made him to oppose and fight archaic institutions that degraded and dehumanised human beings. He was of the opinion that political ideas and social
institutions must undergo radical change in order to create a sense of dignity in man. To a large extent such a kind of feeling in JP led him to a passionate fight against the forces of superstition and dogma, inertia and caste rigidities, which tended to diminish the polity of human beings through selective discrimination. It was in this kind of tradition that JP became a champion of mass protests with mass participation of the people.

JP also believed that man had the capability to be the master of his own destiny. Being an optimist he took the position that human beings endowed with the necessary intellectual and physical requirements could master the forces of nature. In conformity with such a belief, JP did not approve of any superstitions and dogmas, socio-religious practices, narrow social groups and institutions which hindered the all round progress of the Indian society.

In the public life of India, JP performed two important roles. In the first place, as a charismatic leader he was an iconoclast who could not compromise with immorality, political corruption, inequitous social structure and other ills of the Indian society. In the second place, as a sculptor he was keen to reconstruct a new Indian
society of his own vision. Like every other charismatic personality JP believed that he had in him the extraordinary quality to perform the divinely ordained task which Max Weber labelled as the 'Call'. However, it may be emphatically stated that since charisma was a part of individual quality so it was with JP and it persisted during his lifetime only.

In the early period of his public life, JP was deeply under the influence of Marxism. During his long sojourn in the United States in the twenties he read intensively and extensively the Marxist literature. The Communist Manifesto and Das Capital with their scientific and economic analysis of history, the romanticism of class war, the theory of surplus value, all these coupled with a persuasive attempt at the discussion of the course of human development made JP a convert to Marxian Socialism. Initially, JP accepted the argument that a social, political and economic revolution was possible in India through revolutionary violence or class conflict. But this initial

revolutionary fervour of Socialism in JP gave way to a new interpretation of Marxian Socialism which he adopted in his thinking. We have tried to demonstrate in the thesis that JP eventually reinterpreted Marxian Socialism as a system in a society saturated with socio-political and economic liberty. He came to believe that Indian Socialism must have its own roots, programmes, policies and ideologies. In this sense JP was thinking in terms of an indigenous brand of Socialism for India emerging out of a democratic socialist society. Hence, it may be stated that JP's early Socialism may be categorised as a Marxist phase while the later phase of Democratic Socialism can be traced to the influence of Gandhism. In essence, JP's Socialism was a product of the dual influence of Marxism and Gandhism representing two major schools of modern political thought.

In respect of Sarvodaya we have taken the position that it was a highly moralistic, philosophical and normative concept which the illiterate masses of India found it difficult to imbibe in their life pattern. JP's concept of Sarvodaya was utopian proclaiming an idealised goal of a society in which the best in the human spirit would manifest without let or hindrance. In our view, in a
society where the craze for power was a fact of life. JP's Sarvodaya could remain only as a contribution in the sphere of political ideas rather than as a panacea to the pressing problems of the Indian society. In a similar measure, JP through his concept of Total Revolution in league with mass movements made a serious attempt to bring about social, political and economic changes in the Indian society. But it must be pointed out that JP did not succeed in achieving the goals of his Total Revolution because capturing of formal positions of power and authority was not its intrinsic objective. Hence, in effect, JP's concepts of Sarvodaya and Total Revolution have remained merely as academic concepts incapable of being converted into revolutionary mass movements.

JP also developed a viewpoint of a Communitarian Polity or Society within the framework of a Partyless Democracy. We have argued as in the case of his other key concepts, that the communitarian set up of JP once again placed one sided emphasis by relying completely upon the essential goodness of man. It is our view that JP did not have an altruistic or proper conception of
human nature. This lopsided or one sided understanding of human nature by JP meant that he did not allow for the fact that human beings were capable of evil. If JP had a balanced understanding of human nature probably he would have modified some of his ideas in respect of the Communitarian Polity to make it a practical entity. Unfortunately, JP did not attempt to do this and hence the concept of Communitarian Polity has remained only as an ideal or a vision without the instrumentality to put it into practice. In respect of his concept of Partyless Democracy it may be stated that when analysed from the perspective of classical Western liberal democratic principles, it can only be categorised as a contradiction in terms. One cannot visualise a democratic polity without the party system which was an intrinsic part of such a set up.

(iii)

Hypotheses Tested in the Thesis

On the question of the various hypotheses that were posited by us in the first chapter of the thesis it may be asserted that our discussion has confirmed most of the formulations. In respect of the first hypothesis,
namely, indigenous political concepts or ideas had better chances of success than political ideas borrowed from the West and imposed from above. It may be stated that this has been confirmed by our analysis in the study. For instance, JP's earlier formulation of Marxian Socialism of the West could not command the allegiance of the masses of India for the simple reason that it was an alien concept without much relevance to indigenous social, economic and political conditions. But this raised the question as to why such indigenous concepts as JP's Sarvodaya, Total Revolution, Communitarian Polity and Partyless Democracy did not meet with much success. We can only state that certain other conditions required for the successful implementation of these indigenous concepts were not present in the Indian context. Hence, though these concepts were indigenous they did not succeed in reordering the Indian society because of other considerations.

In respect of the second hypothesis, namely, political ideas can be successfully carried into action only if the objective conditions in the society were favourable has been abundantly confirmed in the discussion of JP's key concepts like Sarvodaya, Total Resolution,
Communitarian Polity and Partyless Democracy. The social, political and economic conditions, the prevailing mood of the people, the high level of illiteracy and the lack of revolutionary consciousness were major causative factors for JP's failure to put most of his political ideas into practice.

The third hypothesis, namely, for the successful implementation of political ideas charismatic leadership was a necessary condition but not a sufficient condition in itself has also been confirmed in our study. JP indeed was a charismatic leader commanding the loyalty of millions of masses in India, but his charisma in itself could not ensure the successful implementation of his political ideas. Obviously, the pervasive impact of other factors like contingent circumstances, political consciousness of the masses and a basically backward agrarian society made it impossible for JP to put his major political ideas into practice.

The last hypothesis, namely, political ideas without a systematic and integrated political theory has less chance of success for the simple reason that the problems of a vast country like India are of a complex
nature. What was required was not a piecemeal approach but a comprehensive and integrated political theory which could bring about beneficial results. It is rather difficult to understand why JP did not develop an integrated political theory to grapple with India's social, political and economic problems.

(iv)

Conclusion

In conclusion, it may be pointed out that JP was not a political philosopher whose intention was to build a logical pattern of thought. Of course, JP was not dogmatic in his ideas since he always demonstrated eagerness to test their relevance in the context of the social conditions prevailing in India. He was an optimist who was very flexible in terms of tactics and strategies but very firm on his principles and goals. The central thrust of his political ideas hinges around the fact that he believed in a liberal democracy of his own conception in which individual freedom, dignity and self-respect could be secured in a meaningful sense.

JP was certainly a very highly complex individual subject to different moods at different times. Many a
times he was plagued with self-doubt though his convictions were firm. Even then he maintained his sense of balance and perspective. It was this quality which made it very difficult to probe into the complexity of his hopes and aspirations, motives and beliefs though one could not doubt the sincerity of whatever he did. JP's intellectual endowment was of a high order with clarity of thought as its hallmark. He had a vast knowledge of men and matters which also embraced different branches of knowledge. He had wide ranging interests which encompassed economics, sociology, political science, literature, science and history. His command of the English language was exceptionally good while his capacity for physical endurance was of a very high order until late in his life when he was afflicted by severe physical handicaps. JP was not a mere political agitator but a revolutionary of the highest order. His concern for the down-trodden masses of India was genuine which also was the best exemplification of humanism of a high order. He was a man who believed in ceaseless action and dynamic energy was part of his physical make up but yet he was contemplative at the same time. He was a true Indian who stayed long in the West to imbibe some of the values of the Westerner, an individualist par excellence who
eventually became a mass leader making a serious attempt to put his political ideas into practice. It was true that he did not succeed in a large measure in the mission of his life but it must be said to his credit that few other leaders of modern India have achieved success in solving the gigantic problems of India.

It is our hope that this thesis has shed some new light on the major political ideas of JP. This claim is made in the belief that we have developed a particular theoretical framework within which JP's political ideas were analysed in a systematic manner.