Chapter - IX

CONCLUDING REMARKS
Although Unity is the universally accepted law of nature, we have a tendency to run after uniformity in every walk of life, political, economic, social. The problem of democracy in India is also a creation of such a tendency. Despite it being a common knowledge that the age of European civilization is not more than two thousand years, and the Asian, especially Indian civilization, is much older than the European, we want to shape ourselves after Europe. In this context the views of eminent Western philosopher Will Durrant on Indian civilization in his 'The Story of Civilization, Vol I: Our Oriental Heritage, is relevant. He eulogises Indian civilization and practically scolds the contemporary students for their inadequate knowledge about India. Prof. Durrant writes: "Here is a vast peninsula of nearly two million square miles [undivided India]; two-thirds as large as the United States, and twenty times the size of its master, Great Britain; ...one fifth of the population of the earth; an impressive continuity of development and civilization from Mohenjodaro, 2900 B.C. or earlier, to Gandhi, Raman (C. V. Raman), and Tagore; faiths compassing every stage from barbarious idolatry to the most subtle and spiritual pantheism; philosophers playing a thousand variations on one monistic theme from the Upanisads, eight centuries before Christ, to Sankara, eight centuries after him; scientists developing astronomy three thousand years ago, and winning Noble prizes in our own time; a democratic constitution of untraceable antiquity in the villages; and wise and beneficent rulers like Asoka and Akbar in the capitals; minstrels singing great epics almost as old as Homer and poets holding world audience to day; artists raising gigantic temples for Hindu gods from Tibet to Ceylon and from Cambodia to Java, or carving perfect palaces by the score for Mughal kings and queens — this is the India that patient scholarship is now opening up, like a new intellectual continent, to that Western mind which only yesterday thought civilization an exclusively European thing."

The civilizational distinctiveness is naturally reflected on Indian culture. "Culture means the total accumulation of material objects, ideas, symbols, beliefs, sentiments, values and social forms which are passed on from one generation to
Indian culture is unique in that it is both material and spiritual at the same time, or in other words, a synthesis of the two. Historians could not definitely date the starting of Indian culture. But from the data gathered by historians and researchers it is known that "...When the Indian people first appeared on the horizon of history, they have acquired a developed form of material culture. The Rg-Veda, their first written record, ... gives us the picture of a people who have already settled down to a life of agriculture, village handicrafts, and village organization, and who exhibit a good deal of the love of life, of poetry and of war." There is another historical finding according to which Indus Valley Civilization is pre-Rg-Vedic. Even so, that civilization also manifested a highly sophisticated urban culture. Following the science of anthropology Swami Ranganathananda observes that when a group of people successfully establish a material culture it finds enough leisure to devote to the development of mental culture. And spirituality is the other name of mental culture because it enriches the inner self of man. Thus is India the material and the spiritual are inseparable.

Dr. E. P. Chelysheva, a Marxist Soviet Indologist, also very beautifully describes the nature of Indian culture: "Since ancient times lofty life-asserting humanistic ideas have formed the foundation of India's world outlook. These ideas have been expressed in a religious philosophical form which as they developed paved their way in constant struggle against the scholastic, ascetic and passive contemplation of the world. It is these ideas that infuse many of the works of Vedic literature, the ancient Indian epics, the greatest writing of Kalidas and the democratic poetry of the bhakti...... It is hard to understand the distinction in the development of the humanistic basis of contemporary Indian culture without taking into account the influence exerted on it by the religious philosophical ideology widespread in India..."

Dr. Chelysheva emphatically says that no political movement (in his words 'communist') can crystallize and advance if the leaders of the movement ignore the ground reality of the country. In an interview with Swami Purnatmananda he
observed—India is a country of religion—country of spirituality. As a Marxist he believed that, a communist should analyse the character of the ground reality of a country. If religious sentiment naturally prevails in the bulk of the people of a country it should be taken into account. A real communist should understand that as the so called religion can be instrumental in creating communal disharmony by the reactionaries, similarly real religious consciousness can inspire men to dedicate themselves to the work for human welfare. Therefore, to understand the national ethos is the primary condition in sketching any scheme for national reconstruction.

India, a plural society though, is characteristically different from other plural societies. She is a multi-racial, multi-caste, multi-tribal, multi-religions and multi-linguistic society and this multiplicity is, again, interlaced sometimes vertically, sometimes horizontally. Under the numerous sub-cultures flows the sublime national culture—the culture of spirituality which binds all in a communitarian society. It is for this reason the temporal power could never subjugate the whole of India under its feet. The Britishers did it but they too very intelligently left the age old civil-society undisturbed. It was by this they could rule India for about two centuries. They could stay longer because they imported to India elements of modern Western politics and constitutionalism such as judiciary, administrative rules, legislature besides modern education, health services, science and industries. All these they did, no doubt, in their colonial interest, but it cannot be denied that the Indians were also benefitted. But the benefit did not reach all. What the Britishers carefully avoided was the work of enlightening the people; they developed an Indian elite to imbibe the Western socio-political and economic culture. Actually, they wanted India to be a hinterland of England. However, intellectuals and social reformers like Raja Rammohan Roy, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Swami Vivekananda, poet Rabindranath Tagore relentlessly tried to reorient, as was natural, the Indian culture by synthesizing the traditional Indian values and modernity of the West. This definitely was not palatable to the foreign rulers and they therefore always tried to create hurdles directly and indirectly.
The Indian political leaders remained busy in making the country free from the foreign rule ignoring this subtle but very important thing. As a result different sections of freedom fighters could not develop a comprehensive idea of freedom. Gandhi's indigenous notion of 'Swaraj' was not acceptable to all. Yet no serious debate was initiated on the subject. As a result, driving away the foreigners from power was vaguely taken to be the meaning of freedom. And by democracy was meant forming the Government on the basis of universal adult franchise. When the Britishers withdrew from India through negotiation and the country was partitioned on religious line indirectly by accepting M. A. Jinnah's 'two nations' theory (The Hindus and the Muslims form two different nations) independent India was drawn into myriad problems. The leaders were faced with the problem of refugee rehabilitation, the problem of constitution-making and choosing a democratic political structure, the religious problem created by the partition and above all economic reconstruction. As there was no prior plan, programme and preparation the ruling elite, to whom the power was transferred by the Britishers, tried to settle issues by eclectically taking methods from different countries, notably the British, the American and the Soviet—British politics, American management and Soviet economy. Indian tradition and culture were altogether ignored as there was no attempt to know what the common people need and want.

The Westminster model of democracy was adopted in the Constitution, for it was felt to be in consonance with the different British India Acts of Reforms. Picking up beautiful ideas from the Western garden of thought a magnificent Preamble to the Constitution was manufactured as an expression of the philosophy of the constitution but the product looks more Western than Indian. Gandhi might be called over moralistic, but Subhas Chandra was definitely not that, yet both felt and argued that future political structure and pattern should be basically Indian. Even the congress socialists, who began with a Marxist party thesis and later turned to democratic socialism, all along demanded the free India be founded on Indian tradition and culture. Yet the politics was modelled after the British structure.
A foreign tree was implanted without preparing the soil. The Indian leaders did not care to take into account that in England and America constitutional liberalism precedes democracy. Constitutional liberalism is their tradition, and therein lies the root of their political culture. Constitutional liberalism means freedom from all sorts of coercion—be it by the state, the church or the society. Constitutional liberalism conjoins two ideas—Liberalism, that stresses on individual liberty (The philosophical root of individual liberty lies in ancient Greeco-Roman thought) and constitutionalism, that puts the ‘rule of law’ at the centre stage of politics.

In Western Europe and the USA constitutional liberalism was developed to protect individual life and property as also the right to religion and freedom of expression. As a safeguard to these rights powers of the government has been restricted, as have been established the principle of equality in the eye of law and equal protection of law, independent judiciary and tribunals. The church has been separated from the state. In the West, constitutional liberalism indulges no compromise on certain basic issues, like protection of inalienable rights of the individual, limitation of government powers by law and protection of individual rights by law. These are the corner stones of the political culture of Western democracies. "... No people has ever been known to govern itself and none ever will. All government [in the West] is oligarchical..." Actually the governments in the West are “Government of the people by an elite sprung from the people.” People there are happy for whichever political party comes to power would not encroach upon their rights.

But India is a different story. Long period of foreign rule stood, as already stated, in the way of making people socio-politically conscious; they had no viable economic footing either. Modernism was a Greek word to the common men; even the elite took it to be synonymous with Westernism. Therefore overnight democracy far from being a boom turned out to be a burden. The second generation political practitioners in India have no training in democracy. They perorate on participatory democracy without knowing the meaning of it. The situation has
further been vitiated by the entry of the communists into the political scene. The communists believe in democratic centralism and capturing power by hook or by crook. The untrained practitioners of democracy have also started treading the communist path. As a result, there is vote, no democracy; there are corruptions of different magnitude and violence but no values.

JP has rightly said that the problem of democracy is a moral problem. This is especially true for India. Because ours is an altogether different culture. JP points out: "The moral qualities and mental attitudes most needed for democracy are:

(1) concern for truth; (2) aversion for violence; (3) love of liberty and courage to resist oppression and tyranny; (4) spirit of cooperation; (5) preparedness to adjust self-interest to the larger interest; (6) respect for others’ opinions and tolerance; (7) readiness to take responsibility; (8) belief in the fundamental equality of man; (9) faith in the educability of human nature."\(^{10}\)

Interestingly whatever JP has said are not new to the Indian minds. They are in the Vedas, the Upaniṣads, in the teachings of Buddha, Chaitanya, Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda and poet Rabindranath Tagore. These are universal values of human life. Therefore what we need today is to build up a political culture on the basis of these values. These would form the bedrock of Indian democracy.

Notes and References

6. Chelysheva, E. P., Swami Vivekananda—The Great Indian Humanist, Democrat and Patriot in Vivekananda Centenary Memorial Volume edited by Dr. R. C. Majumdar, sponsored by The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, p. 507.


9. Ibid.