CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION: A UNIFIED THEORY OF POLITICAL ALIENATION

The present study began with the theoretical and empirical concept of "alienation" for sociology. Eversince Karl Marx popularised this concept the debate over this concept has been going on during the past two or three decades. A rich amount of theoretical and empirical work has been produced not only by philosophers, psychologists, economists but by political sociologists also. This debate produced a good member of theories seeking to explain the attitudes and objective conditions of political estrangement of the people in given societies. Mention here be made of only such theories as: mass society theory, social disadvantages theory, personal failure theory and the political isolation theory. Out of the corpus of alienation theories only four of the above have been selected for empirical testing in the present research work for the specific reason that the present study is concerned with the estrangement from politics in society. The focus of the study is the Meerut City Constituency. Although Meerut City is not a metropolitan city, it has many characteristics of a mass society to which different professional groups are exposed in day-to-day life. As has already been pointed out, though an old city with traditional outlook, it has become highly industrialised and modernised with the growing pace of urbanisation. A good number of heavy
industries have come up, the number of educational institutions have enormously grown. In 1967 Meerut University was established with the L.I.R.M. Medical College as its Constituent College, the number of degree and post-graduate teachers in its various affiliated and constituent college has rapidly increased. The Bar has also expanded almost three times during the last ten years or so. With facilities for medical education, the number of doctors has also considerably increased. Thus, there are mainly four professional groups in the city: teachers, lawyers, doctors and industrialists. Meerut City has always been an arena of intense political activities, ever since the days of Meerut Conspiracy Case. Today, there are six Assembly seats and one Parliamentary seat. Teachers have always been associated with the politics of the city. Similarly, lawyers as everywhere, have been among the prominent politician in the city.

It was visualised that for an analysis of the attitudes of political estrangement of these professional groups particularly the first three of the above, there is a possibility that the gradual political alienation of some of these professional groups may be accountable to their exposure to mass society characteristics. Alternatively it is also possible that individuals belonging to these professional groups may suffer from certain social disadvantages on account of their personal failure. These social disadvantages or personal
failures may account for their varying levels of political alienation. Their attitudes of political alienation may also be accountable to their subjective feelings and objective conditions of political isolation. As it is happening elsewhere in the country, in Meerut City also there has been many ups and downs in the popularity of the Congress. Also these has been the emergence of some other political parties in the City, particularly Lok Dal (under the inspirational leadership of Ch. Charan Singh). In 1977, when the Janata Party was formed with the alliance of some of opposite political parties it also swept the politics of the city. Although Lok Dal is now not a part of Janata Party these two political parties exist side by side. The Bhartiya Janata Party (formerly known as Jan Sangh with its strong linkage with the RSS) has also exercised a considerable influence on the politics of the city. A good many teachers owe their allegiance to this party. There have been occasions when teachers, lawyers and doctors have contested Assembly or Parliamentary elections of the city and there are also cases when they have entered in active politics.

It is much on these accounts that a study of political alienation of these three professional groups - teachers, lawyers and doctors - as may be considered as relevant so far as Meerut city constituency is concerned. In Western U.P. the politics in Meerut City is considered to be a barometer of its politics.
Studies in the area of political alienation are not wanting but the greatest problem has been the determination of its objective indicators. Different indicators have been used in different studies. However, there has been no consensus about these indicators. Also, there has been a great dearth of reliable and valid instruments to make an adequate estimate of the attitudes of political estrangement of different strata of the society. Still further, such studies of political alienation are wanting that have gone beyond a mere analysis of the political behaviour of the citizens. For example, a good many studies in the area of political alienation have been conducted with reference to the political behaviour of the people. Little effort seems to have been made by political alienation empiricists to develop a unified theory of political alienation on the basis of their empirical findings of voting behaviour studies.

The premise of the present study is that, if we really wish to understand the political behaviour of the citizens, whether in terms of their political participation, political responsibility, political interest and political efficacy, we should not only be satisfied by objectifying these aspects of political behaviourism but also go a step further in analysing the influence which each of these aspects, singly or in combination, influence the conditions of political estrangement of various categories of people.
For purposes of an analysis of the various conditions of political estrangement of the people, particularly the three chosen groups in Meerut City constituency we have developed a new definition of political alienation based on the above four objective conditions of the relationship between politics and society — political participation, political responsibility, political interest, and political efficacy. For purposes of estimating the level of political alienation of these three professional groups we have developed a measure of political alienation as based on our definition. This measure was developed with the help of a good number of items specifying each of the four aspects and after a thorough exercise of item-analysis. The measure was then validated and reliability tested with the help of known statistical technique of scale construction. It is hoped that this scale would be useful for any study of political alienation in any given political and cultural settings.

The importance of the present study lies in the fact that the entire analysis of the results has been made within a theoretical framework. The theoretical framework comprised of the four theories of political alienation as hinted above. Not only an attempt has been made to test the validity of each of the theories of political alienation but an effort has also been made to develop a unified theory of political alienation.

This study of four social explanations of political
alienation has empirically confirmed that partially, both the social disadvantages and political isolation theories and valid explanations of the attitudes of political estrangement among the three professional groups. The conclusion reached at after these two theories had been compared and combined is that these provided complementary and roughly equally powerful explanations of estrangement from politics. No attempt was made at either of these points, however, to integrate the two theories. In the conclusion, an attempt shall, however, be made to combine them into a unified explanation of political alienation and thus clarify the manner in which these two theoretical approaches may complement each other.

We began with the assumption that experience with a social object and attitudes toward that object are normally highly interrelated. That is, if an individual's relationships with a salient social object are for the most part viable, adequate to meet the demands placed upon them, and non-restrictive for other social relationships, he will tend to hold positive attitudes toward that object. On the other hand, if these relationships are weak and transitory, inadequate to satisfy the demands of either the individual or the social object, or they do restrict his interactions with other salient social phenomena, his attitudes will frequently be negative. Such negative attitudes toward a
first utilised to divide respondents into "high" or "low" categories of overall political assimilation. The Index of informal Relationships and the Index of Voluntary Association Participation were then employed in combination to classify respondents as either "mass men" or "organised men". "mass men" are those persons who fall in either the "low" or "medium low" categories on both of these indexes, while, "organised men" are those people who are either "high" or "medium High" on both indexes.¹

Cross-classifying these two dimensions produces the following four categories: (A) high political assimilation and organised men, (B) high political assimilation and mass men, (C) low political assimilation and organised men, and (D) low political assimilation and mass me. Again both theories would predict low frequencies of political alienation in category: (A) and high frequencies in category (D) while their predictions for the two middle categories would differ: mass society theory would expect more political estrangement in category (B), while political isolation theory would expect people in category (C) to be more extensively alienated from politics.

The results of this analysis, presented in Table 5.7.

¹All persons who did not satisfy both criteria for one or the other of these categories were excluded from this analysis.
influencing their lives, which is very difficult to ignore in this age of mass communications, and which they are periodically expected to participate. Given these conditions it would be most surprising of individuals facing socially imposed disadvantages and limitations and did not direct whatever attitudes of alienation they held toward the political system.

In essence, it may be argued that the same reasoning which underlies the political isolation theory or estrangement from politics may also provide an interpretation of the social disadvantages explanation of political alienation. In both cases, the fundamental theme is the association between estranged attitudes and social relationships which are in some way insufficient or inadequate. The social disadvantages theory is somewhat more complex than the political isolation theory, in that it involves the additional thesis of displacement of alienation from the total society to the political system, but the basic reasoning remains the same.

If two theories such as these are concerned only with different aspects of the same basic social process, then their explanations should be both complementary and additive. We saw in an earlier chapter that their powers to explain alienation from politics are indeed additive, since in combination they account for more variance in political
alienation scores than does either theory separately. But how are the social disadvantages and political isolation theories complementary. Our proposal is that either theory by itself is inadequate to explain a relative absence of political estrangement, but that both theories are necessary to account for a widespread prevalence of these attitudes. In other words, individuals who either hold several advantaged positions in the social structure or who are highly assimilated into the political system will not tend to be politically alienated. Either condition alone will normally prevent the person from experiencing alienation from the political system. On the other hand, political estrangement will predominate among those individuals who both encounter social disadvantages and are poorly assimilated into the political system.

On the basis of this theoretical position, we should predict that estrangement from politics should be rather strongly correlated with political isolation among persons who possess several social disadvantages. Among persons occupying advantaged positions in the social structure, however, lack of assimilation into the political system should be only weakly associated with alienation from it. In the first case, individuals are "predisposed" toward political alienation by their position in the total society, so that the strength of their ties with the political system will be the crucial factor in determining whether or not they are politically alienated. In the second case,
individuals are "isolated" from political alienation by their social opportunities, so that they are not likely to experience political estrangement regardless of how isolated they are from the political system.

We may now conclude that the social disadvantages and the political isolation theories of political estrangement are both complementary and additive. Any attempt to explain attitudes of alienation from the political system in terms of social forces must take into account both the theoretical approaches. As a reminder that they are in effect two aspects of the same basic social process, and hence ought to be viewed as one unified theory, we suggest using the compound phrase "the social disadvantages and political isolation theory" of political alienation.

While this research has provided considerable empirical support for the "social disadvantages and political isolation"—a theory of estrangement from politics, it has failed to confirm the mass society theory and most aspects of the personal failure theory. It may be added here that mass society theory of alienation, though largely not supported by our findings, finds partial support in respect of one of its indicators, namely voluntary association involvement. Again, the indicators of city residence (present) and spatial mobility as related to political alienation, also lend partial support to mass society theory. But this partial
support is not so significant. So far as personal failure theory is concerned we have observed that largely it is not supported by our data. When this theory is studied in relation to the social disadvantages theory, we find that these two theories compete with each other in their influence on political alienation. However, it has been observed that while both exercise their respective influences on political alienation, social disadvantages theory is a superior predictor of political alienation than the personal failure theory.

For the mass society theory, we discovered that the apparent correlations between political estrangement and four alternative measures of voluntary association participation as well as between estrangement and informal social relationship, are all totally eliminated when indicators of the social disadvantages and political isolation theories are controlled. The argument may be raised that the mass society theory might have been operationalised with other variables, but it cannot be denied that lack of informal social ties and failure to participate in voluntary associations are the features of a mass society which are most frequently mentioned and discussed by social scientists. To partially counter this argument, we also noted that in Meerut City neither frequent spatial mobility nor short-term residency - two other commonly cited characteristics of mass societies - are systematically associated with alienation from the political system.
Finally, the point may be stressed that the various indexes of political assimilation should not be reinterpreted as operational indicators of mass society. Since the degree of assimilation - isolation between individuals and the political system is theoretically independent of the nature of the societal organisational structure. Political isolation may, and, in fact, does occur in pluralistic societies as well as in mass societies. The mass society model may be a useful description of present and of future societies, but it does not appear to offer a valid social explanation of alienated attitudes toward the political system in the case of a mixed rural society like that of Meerut City.

In regard to the personal failure theory it may once again be mentioned that we found that although disadvantaged opportunities for social interaction imposed by the structure of the society are associated with political estrangement, failure to achieve one's life goals is not a correlate of alienation in most cases. In the Meerut city study three variables postulated as being objective indicators of success in life, as economic status (as determined by the level of incomes), career occupational mobility, and the generational occupational mobility — were all discovered to be entirely unrelated to estrangement from politics, once controls were applied.

It appears further from our data that the personal
failure theory is probably inaccurate in claiming that failure to attain life goals is the dominant factor associated with alienation from politics. Socially imposed disadvantaged for social life and isolation form the political system are the crucial phenomena emerging from this research, and whether or not the individual objectively or subjectively achieves his goals in life is apparently irrelevant for explaining attitudes of political alienation.

Now it may be reemphasized that this study may be considered as a significant pointer to the analysis of political estrangement, because the variables used in the study represent the "social disadvantages and political isolation theory, which together account for about two-third per cent of the total variance in mean political alienation scores. Our unified theory does at best explain about seventy two per cent of the variance in political alienation. Many other social factors may also be influencing people's attitudes toward the political system. In addition - as forcefully demonstrated by McClosky and Schaar (1965) - a host of psychological factors are undoubtedly extremely important in determining which particular individual will experience attitudes of alienation rather than other psychological states such as aggression or self-denial.

Many other aspects of political alienation also remain to be explored. This research, as have all previous studies,
focuses primarily (though not exclusively) upon attitudes of incapability toward the political system. Very little is known at this time about attitudes of discontentment in relation to politics or any other sectors of social life. In particular, are these types of alienated attitudes as highly related to social-structural disadvantages as are attitudes of incapability, or are they more evenly distributed throughout the social structure? To what extent are they influenced by political isolation? And how are attitudes of discontentment toward the political system related to attitudes of incapability?

In a different vein, we are pitifully lacking in knowledge about consequences for the political system of widespread attitudes of estrangement. Much attention has been given by social scientists in the past few years to various extremist political movements, but only two small studies by Sokal (1964) and Templeton (1964) - have attempted to explore possible linkages between political alienation and support for extremist politics. Alienated attitudes may prove to be a crucial variable in theoretical explanation of all types of social movements.

We shall end this study with a generalisation which is sweepingly speculative but which perhaps offers some insight into the essence of alienation. Like so many other social phenomena alienation poses a complex paradox for man, not just a simple Hindu and non-Hindu problem. The paradoxical
nature of alienation may be seen in whatever forms it takes, including estrangement from the political system, the total society, a particular community or formal association, a primary group or one's own social roles. On the one hand, attitudes of incapability and discontentment may reflect, perpetuate, and stimulate severe strains in an individual's relationships with any social object, which in turn may seriously hinder or impede his ability to act responsibly or rewarding toward that social object. On the other hand, these same attitudes of incapability and discontentment may be individuals to challenge and attempt to change existing social orders which they find intolerable. Alienation, then, may produce either destruction of social organisation through immobilisation of action, or evolution of social organisation through stimulation of necessary change. What direction these consequences of alienation take in any given situation is of course the resultant of many diverse social forces, not the least of which is our understanding or the process of alienation itself. Hopefully this study has moved us somewhat closer to that goal.

Finally, a conclusion of our findings is warranted in respect of the applicability of the social disadvantages isolation theory of political alienation among the three professional groups that have been studied in the present work. Although the generalisation proposed above is valid in the
case of professions only, some particular remarks are but
necessary for each of the professions included in the study.
First of all, it may be commented that for each of the
variables of this study - demographic, mass society, personal
achievement, and political assimilation - , while the influence
of these variables has been empirically examined with
reference to each of them separately and in various combinations
of these variables, an effort has also been made to examine
their relative influence on each of these three professions
by applying controls of all these factors separately and in
combination. It has been concluded that while the social
disadvantages theory is largely valid for professions as a
whole, indicating that professions constitute the single
most important predictor of political alienation, it has been
found to be more valid in the case of doctors. In all the
three professional groups, however, those belonging to the
lower-economic status groups, having a low class self
identification, those having less education were more strongly
associated with attitudes of political alienation. Our findings
indicated that whether a person was engaged as a teacher or
as an advocate or as a doctor, those who occupied more socially
disadvantaged positions in life were the more estranged from
politics.

The various demographic factors did not exercise a
significant influence on attitudes of political estrangement
so far as each of the three professions separately were concerned. The influence of the sex factor almost disappeared when other factors were controlled except in the case of lawyers. Among lawyers females tended to manifest relatively greater political alienation than their counter-part males. The influence of age factor varied differentially with respect to each of the professional groups. Similarly, the social disadvantages theory found strong support in the case of lawyers only when factors like education and economic status were taken into account. When other demographic factors were controlled caste appeared to be a very strong predictor of estrangement from politics. In the case of teachers and lawyers, it is not true as it is in the case of doctors.

We have observed above that in the case of all the three professional groups taken together the political isolation theory was a most powerful predictor of political alienation. In the case of each of the three professional groups it was found that it was more valid in the case of doctors than in the case of teachers and lastly in the case of lawyers. Thus, when all the three professional groups are considered separately the situation is rather altered. The political isolation theory is more true in the case of doctors, and least is the case of lawyers. In fact, it is the additive power of political assimilation indicators that account for the greater prevalence of political alienation
among the each of the professional groups. When both political isolation and social disadvantages theory are compared with respect to the attitudes of estrangement from politics in each of three professional groups, inconclusive results are found indicating that partly both are true and more true in the case of doctors. These observations go to confirm our general observation made above as a whole.