DEMOCRACY IN INDIA
An Analysis of a Political Society in Transition, 1950-65

SUMMARY OF
A THESIS
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The nucleus of this work is to attempt an analysis of the working of democratic forces in modern India as related to various socio-economic factors for the period from 1950-65.

The ideals of democracy and of the Republic as embodied in the Constitution of the Union of India - adopted on the 26th of January 1950 - were not entirely new for this country. Ancient India had a rich tradition of democratic institutions, e.g. the sabhā, the samiti, the Gana, the Gaurājya, though these institutions were not national bodies but only the instruments of self-rule confined to small village communities of a particular region.

The concept of a democratic and republican form of the government, based on the working of political parties, principle of adult suffrage and General election as embodied in the Constitution is mainly an adaptation from the political systems of some of the western countries and is not fully indigenous in character.

The Constitution thus framed presented a paradoxical situation. The fathers of the Constitution - most of whom were westernised elites - eagerly adopted western political concepts and institutions and embodied them in the Constitution but failed to contemplate the suitability of grafting such institutions in
the Indian social structure, which has been basically rigid and static and has maintained its inherent character for the last so many centuries.

With the adoption of the Constitution on the 26th of January 1950, the political institutions as envisaged in the Constitution began functioning. The first General election was held in 1952 and the first popularly elected legislature at the centre named as Lok-sabha (the Lower House of the Parliament) came into being. Rajya sabha - the Upper House - was elected on the basis of indirect election, other parts of this political set up i.e. the President as executive head, the Council of ministers, the supreme Court as the highest judicial body, all started functioning in accordance with the provisions of the new Constitution.

The thesis is divided into three parts i.e. social, economic and political. Part one is further subdivided into four chapters entitled as "Response and Reaction ", "Indian Society in Transition ", "Instruments of Social Change " and "Education and Mass-communication " respectively. In all of them the attempt is to focus attention on the social factors operating in the Indian democracy. In an under-developed country, the social conditions greatly determine the political situation. An analysis of political forces divorced from the social factors would be unrealistic and meaningless and therefore this part of the work occupies somwhat larger portion.

A long drawn freedom struggle came to an end with the
emergence of independence based on the concept of self-rule. The
philosophy behind the freedom struggle was "good government is no
substitute of self-government". In such a situation the involve-
ment of the people in the governance of the country was imperative.
Therefore the need of public co-operation in all its schemes of
development was duly emphasized in the First Five Year Plan and a
conscious decision was taken to encourage the voluntary service by
giving financial assistance to voluntary organisations. For this
purpose the government set up Central Social Welfare Board, which
apart from its social welfare activities, chalked out a
comprehensive project for providing financial assistance to the
voluntary agencies. For some time it could enlist the co-operation
of many other organisations and it could generate a process for
bringing about a partnership between the government and private
agencies. But because of many factors viz., lack of proper co-
ordination, rigidity of bureaucratic behaviour, lack of trained
personnel and the absence of strong sense of devotion and selfless
service, the initial tempo could not get momentum.

Chapter two dealing with the "Indian Society in Transition"
analyses various social factors operating within Indian society. The
word transition has been used with a definite purpose and sense.
Indian Society has passed through a very slow process of change for
all these years i.e. from 1950-65, and this process started with
the adoption of constitution which contained provisions on the
Fundamental Rights, involving most sensitive aspects of people's
life like caste, language, religion, joint family and expression.
The Directive Principles of State Policy, though not justiciable are in the nature of guide lines for evolving a socio-economic structure. It also touched the problems of Backward Classes and untouchables by making special provisions for ameliorating their backward condition in various spheres. But even after about two decades since the Constitution was promulgated, the Indian Society has no manifest symptoms to indicate any revolutionary change; the appeal of caste, language, region and religion is as strong as ever. In fact the aspirations and the thinking process of Indian people if any thing has been narrowed as compared to the days of freedom struggle. The petty parochialism and narrow-mindedness has vitiated the national life all round. The demands for the division of already organised states (under the States Reorganisation Commission) on the basis of language, have been alarming. The question therefore arises, why it is so and why some thing better could not be done? There are many inter-connected reasons for it, but two reasons are obvious, firstly the lack of education and discipline amongst the people for behaving in a democratic political system and secondly, the efforts made by the Political Parties to exploit the narrow loyalties of the people for their caste, language and religion to secure votes. This tendency on the part of the Political Parties has done a great damage to the concept of national unity.

Chapter three, entitled as "Instruments of Social Change" deals with Social Legislation, Welfare programmes of Central
Social Welfare Board, Social and Moral Hygiene programmes and Family Planning Programmes. The title instruments has been chosen as these institutions have been used as tools for bringing about institutional changes in the Indian social set-up. All the Five Year Plans allocated increasingly larger resources for the various welfare projects covered under these programmes. But inspite of the vast coverage, these programmes did not penetrate into the life of the masses. They only touched the fringe. The failure of these programmes lies at three stages. Firstly, the general backwardness and illiteracy of the people thus affecting their responsiveness. Secondly, the lack of co-ordination between the various welfare organisations reducing their effectiveness and thirdly, too much emphasis on the planning rather on the implementation in the field thus affecting their usefulness.

Chapter IV deals with "Education and Mass-Communication". In the first part of this chapter the role of education in a democracy; a brief review of the educational pattern in pre-independent India, the contemporary educational pattern and the pattern of Technical and Professional Education, Social Education, Education of the Handicapped and Higher Education in the rural areas has been analysed.

In the second part of this chapter the problems of mass-communication have been discussed with particular reference to various medias like Radio, Newspaper and Films. It is unfortunate that the enormous rural population of India is still not in a position to benefit from the various communication medias, because
of their poor financial condition. The only way out which has been adopted by the government, is to provide Community Radio sets, free News papers and arrange the exhibition of Films; but there too the extent of coverage has been very limited and therefore the impact negligible.

The basis of the analysis of the first part of the thesis is the Indian Constitution, part III and IV of which relate to the Fundamental Rights and the Directive Principles of State Policy. The constitutional provisions on these matters tend to transform the existing pattern of the Indian society and to imbibe into it, the spirit of the new polity based on the principles of democratic and republican form of government.

The difficulties encountered by the government and society in this transitional phase form the backbone of the thesis to highlight as to how for the democratic form of government suits the genius of a traditional, underdeveloped, overpopulated, illiterate and static society and the repercussions thereof.

The second Part deals with the economic aspect of the political society in transition. It brings out the importance of planning for developing nations and the technique adopted for it in the development plans. The three Five Year Plans (upto 1965) and their ultimate contribution to the economic development of the country has been analysed in this chapter. The causative factors for not achieving the desired results from these plans have been linked up with the peculiar conditions under which Plans in India
Chapter sixth, devoted to the rural economy, is further subdivided into two parts: agricultural economy, dealing with Plans and agriculture, Community Development Projects, National Extension Service, Co-operative Societies, Land Reforms and Bhoomi Movement; Industrial economy, dealing with Small Scale and Village Industries, Handloom and Handicrafts Board, and Khadi and Village Industries Board. The impact of the operation of these various movements and organisations on the working of political system has been analysed in this chapter. And finally the employment situation in the villages has been assessed.

Chapter seventh, analyses the industrial economy of the urban areas and the allocation for industrialisation in the three Five Year Plans, with particular reference to Second Five Year Plan, in which the schemes for industrialisation were given heavy weightage. The employment situation in the urban areas has also been discussed.

Five Year Plans form the basis of this part of the thesis. Their implementation brings to focus the fact of close attachment of a political society in transitional stage with the economic situation in the country. Analysis of this part is closely linked with the first part, because social and economic factors are most crucial in a political system.

The Third Part confines itself only to the political aspect, dealing with the basis of the Political Parties in India, their
role in General Election, Adult Franchise and its pros and cons.

Democratic institutions rest mainly on the system of Political Parties and therefore it is essential that they should be efficient in their organisation and specific in their ideological content so that they are able to project a clear and unambiguous image of themselves to the people. But in India, it is not so. Ideology is just a matter of expediency with most of the Political Parties. Similarly, because of lack of clarity in their thinking and coherence in organisation, the behaviour pattern of the Political Parties is very confusing during the Elections. They try to appeal to electorate by invoking its loyalty to caste, region and language and not to its consent to their programmes contained in the manifestoes. And they succeed in it. They exploit the situation all the more as by and large the people are uneducated. The educated class of the Indian society - an insignificant minority - has a lukewarm interest in the practical politics. A large majority of the uneducated people who have the right to vote is in need of political education without which the discriminating sense is not feasible. Even after the three General Elections, held till 1965, the sense of selection and enlightened discrimination is still a rare phenomenon. The blame for such a situation is mainly on the political parties themselves.

Chapter IX bears the title, "Organisation of Political Democracy." In this chapter the organisation and working of democratic institutions at the rural level i.e. Panchayats,
Panohayat Samitis and Zila parishads, patterns of influence in rural areas and factions of leadership in the rural organisations; the working of Municipal Committees and Corporations at urban levels; of Legislative Assemblies at State level and of Lok-Sabha and Council of Ministers at National level have been analysed. Finally the role of India as a democratic country in the comity of nations has been discussed, with particular reference to the four objectives which she set for her foreign policy namely (a) Non-alignment, (b) Preservation of the freedom and independence of Countries and establishment of peace in the world; (c) Friendship with neighbouring countries and (d) Promotion of pan-Asianism and support for U.N. ideals.

This last part emerges as the finale of the whole situation. The close co-relation between the working of political organizations and numerous social and economic factors and the influence of various forces on the meaning of democracy at home and the image of India as a democratic country abroad, has been analysed.

Broadly, the conclusions which emerge on the basis of this analysis are:

(a) The political institutions incorporated in the Constitution are not fully in accord with the indigenous culture and tradition;
(b) General backwardness resulting from poverty and illiteracy of the masses does not permit an effective working of the constitution in its letter and spirit, thus having its adverse impact on the political situation abroad, and also limiting the pace of economic progress.

(c) Indian Independence in 1947 - when many other Asian nations were under imperial dominance - gave her an exalted opinion of her role as a leader of the under-developed nations of Asia. Psychologically it led to a policy of greater attention to international affairs as a leader of Asian nations, rather than devoting her energies to tackle the immediate tasks of economic regeneration at home. Obviously the pace of economic progress was much slower than required to meet the urgent needs of a developing economy, thus impairing the foundations of a sound polity.

(d) The Development Plans of India have been more of a theoretical exercise rather than effective instruments of field-oriented and need-based practical programmes. Large scale borrowing from foreign countries to finance not only basic capital goods industries, but even consumption - in the absence of a disciplined economic policy at home - has weakened the forces of self-reliance, and also affected the position of the Indian nation in international field.

(e) The education process at all stages has no direct co-relation with a conscious manpower planning or defined job
opportunities.

(f) Social-welfare programmes could not penetrate into the fabric of society and continued to touch only the fringe.

(g) The attention of the state has been more on the building up of economic infra-structure and not the human material which is a pre-requisite and the essential complement for economic progress and political maturity.