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The Indian Political Paradigms across Traditional Divides: An Evaluation

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Abstract: The political change that took place in 1947 began to move with the existing social structure on the basis of give and take. The new institutions and the new leadership offered economic opportunity, administrative patronage, and positions of power which drew the articulate sections of society into the modernist network. Even at this stage the caste associations and federation had the less pressing role and the upper tiers of each of the rival chains were recruited into politics and carried the whole network with them. It increased the importance of individuals and leadership took on a more positive note. But this all was limited to the leading two or three castes – well to do, educated and generally upper caste. The democratic experience, with intensely contested local, state and national elections, have socialised the Indians across the traditional divides. Likewise Nehru's concept of modernisation of Indian economy became sophisticated with highly vulnerable to disruption. The economic optimism which involved advances and hope now began to give way to serious doubts. In post-Nehru phase it was clear that the system which had seemed hitherto be sailing in tranquil waters, had entered a turbulent sea. The changed socio-economic position of India demanded a new type of leadership. Now, the social and economic cleavages that contained at lower level for so long tended to gravitate upward toward the policy process. And so this is not only the case of India but in most countries who obtained independence from colonial masters was bound to follow the prevailing traditional breakup of socio-political set up. Slow but gradual ups and down in daily life changed their attitude to political issues leading to an ultimate visible change in political framework itself. This India centered study will help in understanding the shift of political paradigms from traditional to modern and structure an effective solution to address the present ills.

Keywords: Indian society, Traditional, Consensus, Leadership, Party and Politics.

1 Introduction

Indian Compositionthis post-independent India presented itself as a new cultural bastion of several socio-cultural and political influences. The colonial experience also added to it a sudden sense of loss of self, the identity and transformation in language, culture, science and social and political thoughts. The long and arduous struggle to freedom provided a sense of responsibility to govern itself in future with a total reconciliation of its plural bases despite the setback caused by the trauma of partition (2). However, the social identity and religious differences persisted. This was not a national divide but the prevalence of what is political. When India became independent in 1947, the society was organised into an active, but declining feudal class, a small class of industrialists, a slender intelligentsia, which had influenced the intellectual and political life in the freedom struggle and millions of farmers (7). The broad masses followed their age-old traditions and were guided by their caste authorities, religious masters and elders of the villages. For these people institutions like, caste-less society, freedom of profession, democratic self-determination and individualism which were embodied in the Constitution remained totally unknown concept. Although many changes in style of life took place in the past and lead to an increased social interchange between groups which formally had retained a degree of separateness (3). A hundred year ago of India's

Independence, in 1853, Karl Marx in his article The British Rule in India, argued that England has demolished the total

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structure of the Indian society. Yet we observe that the loosening of the caste system has in no way paralleled the process of modernisation of the country (23). But after independence ancient ways of life were being changed, old customs are being replaced by new, and the individual gets a glimpse of the wider horizons of the modern world without having to tear up his, and his nation's past by the roots. The gains achieved by these gradual methods seemed modest.

Apart from this the Indian social order was not stagnant and passing through an evolutionary stage. As the villagers begin to improve their living conditions, they become eager to start saving through the rural credit system, and begin to have new wants which before they had either not experienced or had no hope of satisfying. Where once they could walk on foot in their villages, now they need bicycles to get around the community development area. The men want an extra shirt, the women an extra sari (6). In the process of change from a static to a dynamic society differences between the generations, between sexes, and between urban and rural areas are considerable. Tensions and social conflicts are visible signs of a disturbed traditional balance. Development, as has been said often means discontent. It is only when relatively stable societies are sought to be changed rapidly and profoundly that they begin to undergo ferment. Since 1947, tremendous social forces with the most far reaching implications had been at work in cities and the countryside. As early as the midfifties when the agitation over the linguistic reorganisation of states made its appearance, these forces released largely as a result of state social and economic action had begun to run their powerful course (1). Thus, on social side there has been considerable change in a progressive direction. Many members of the submerged and deprived sections of Indian society are now getting out of their traditional bondage and entering into the mainstream of society; and women now play a more prominent role in all activities, including the political and professional, than they do in practically most developing and even in some developed countries (25). The economic and political opportunities, both legitimate and otherwise, now available to its citizens have brought into existence a large, growing, and dynamic middle class especially not only in urban but also in rural areas, that did not exist in pre-independence period. The process of social mobility gathered even greater speed since independence in view of economic development, the spread of education, adult franchise and so on.

2 Economic Legacy and Five Year Plans

India viewed economic progress as an unalienable ingredient of the political development. As leaders turned away from the task of liberation, and came face to face with the harsh realities of the country's economy, for whose future they were henceforth solely responsible. The new Indian pattern which it described as "the Socialist Pattern of Society", represented an attempt to create a mixed economy which combined private enterprise with government planning, overall direction, and control as well as government initiative in fields that private entrepreneurs might not find attractive, and to subject both the plans and their implementation to the scrutiny of a parliamentary democracy Jawaharlal Nehru had made this policy more and added that in India there is no private sector and no public sector, but only one national sector. The Indian National Congress under the leadership of Nehru, elaborated its idea in the Election Manifesto of the 1951, on the eve of first general election and declared that the Party favoured a planned approach to economic development in order to make it possible for the people to live a good life. It emphasised the need for an increase in agricultural productivity and improvement in cattle breeding; stated that small and cottage industries would be encouraged; declared that there would be state ownership or control of basic industries and defined its objective as a mixed economy consisting of a public and a private sector, both of which were to be fitted into an over-all national plan. In first two five year plans the major goals had been to increase productivity throughout the country and to reduce social inequalities through improved living standards.

In post-independence phase India badly needed foreign capital to base and boosts the ravaged economy. A developing country, wishing to move towards the goal of prosperity required economic aid from outside the country and from world economic organisations. But the organisations and the countries, who offer economic aid, also dictate their own terms and conditions which may hamper the fulfilment of needs and requirement of aid receiving countries. This trend ultimately leads to economic imperialism which in long term, widens the gap between developed and developing nations and between rich and poor people of the country which is trying to provide and distribute all the resources to its people equally (5). A polity devises through painful experiences, and sometimes through joyful energy an operative work culture commensurate with the state's objective interests and designed to deepen its legitimacy. But the measures taken by the Government of India failed to reduce the dangerous unbalance in the ratio between food and population. A fourteen member team of US agricultural experts headed by Dr. Sherman E. Johnson, in a report published on April 20, 1959 declared that India is heading for a disaster. The team also called for an emergency programme of action to mobiliseIndia's resources of soil, water and manpower. It required that India's economic planners should assign top priority to agriculture. At the juncture the government realised that it must rebuild not only the strength of its people but also the strength of the soil.

In the circumstances, unfortunately the Third Five Year Plan (1961-1966) has failed on many counts. The targets of

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economic growth remained unfulfilled; although 104 billion rupees were invested as planned (Report, 1966). Even earlier the Second Five Year Plan (1956-1961) had not yielded the expected results. In the agricultural sector the progress was negligible. Bottlenecks in the supply of food for the population had set in. In the industrial area the list of failures was even longer. Prices rose and unemployment increased. The idea of Third Plan that a big plan would automatically lead to the maximum rate of economic growth proved to be wrong. It appeared that the Planning Commission viewed the whole question of economic development mainly from the expenditure point of view, but ignored the capacity for production and the sociological constraints. The already acute economic crisis was also aggravated by two successive bad harvests and the military conflicts with Pakistan and China. The economic crisis affected mainly the poorer sections of the society, whereas they should have got a greater share in the economic growth. The economic status of the agricultural labourers and factory workers, of the small and middle class peasants and of the salaried class hardly improved during the Third Plan period. On the contrary the business community, the landlords, the professionals and skilled workers, in other words the upper middle class benefited. In a pre-poll survey conducted in Delhi, Calcutta, Bombay and Madras by the Indian Institute of Public Opinion (I.I.P.O.) showed that the share of firm Congress voters increased till February 1966 despite the fact that the serious economic crisis had already started in 1965 (The Statesman, 1966). But within the next three months it dropped by 19 percent. It seemed that the economic crisis was perceived by the urban population only after few months had passed. As the election results clearly bring to light, this change in voters' behaviour prevailed in the States where the socio-economic conditions were worse.

3 Evaluation of Policy

When a republic comes to birth, it is the leaders who produce the institutions. Later, it is the institutions which produce the leaders. On account of socio-economic policy/initiatives of the government there appeared a general social mobility that had made the popular demand for performance. The social reality began to break surface in the fifties despite the Congress Party's monopoly of power and domination in it of a modernist and modernising leadership headed by Nehru. By the time of the second general election in 1957 it became clear that land-owning castes had become sufficiently influential at the state level to be in a position to block land reform. Although Nehru persuaded the Congress at Nagpur in 1959 to adopt a resolution favouring co-operative farming but he was not in a position to get it implemented. On political front too there were many icons like SardarPratap Singh Kairon of Punjab, BakshiGhulam Mohammad of Kashmir and BijuPatnaik of Orissa who were not particularly concerned with political norms as practised in those days. They subordinated the administration to their will; they were not averse to arbitrary use of power; they were not respectful of the independence of judiciary and the press and they were intolerant of criticism (8). And this was not the end of story. Rapid politicisation had inevitably led to attempts to subordinate every other institution to political control.

The economic ladder generated by independence and government support had led to a spurt of money power among the upper and middle classes and given them a position in society and an influence that far exceeded that exercise done by the professional classes in the pre-independence period. However, the development of the upper and middle classes was a by-product of modernisation. The tiny upper class at independence expanded quickly and moved into the political, administrative and business space vacated in the higher reaches by the British. The expansion of the middle class had been slower as the annual growth of the economy (27). It is made up of the middle and lower rungs of politicians and bureaucracy, small time entrepreneurs, most professionals, well-to-do farmers and unionised workers. The middle class are every influential in India as they are spread through all sectors-politics, bureaucracy, industry, services and agriculture.

4 Initial Political Perceptions and Model

With all the above, the infant Indian republic also faced sharp politicisation and a clear decline in the moral and intellectual quality of politicians. Labour unrest and indiscipline, frequently resulted in violence were a part of politicisation, through ironically enough the agents of the process, political parties had also suffered as a consequence. Imported ideologies – liberal democracy with its accent on the rule of law, independence of the judiciary and the press, sovereignty of Parliament, accountability of the executive to the legislature and indispensability of rival political parties, and Marxism with its emphasise on equality and social welfare and all that they imply by way of state control over, and intervention in, the economy – have been not only essential but predominant constituents of the modern language of Indian politics. As lower and lower sections of our once rigidly hierarchical society have become active participants in the political process and as politics has become one of the principal avenues for upward social mobility, the liberal intelligentsia, which had imbibed the British as well as the Gandhian concepts of public morality, has given place to men who carry no such burdens on their

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Conscience (9). As it has very appropriately been said by an analyst, 'In the fifties, we had many eminent men in public life who were every inch a gentleman. In the sixties we had many public figures that were every alternate inch a gentleman. Unfortunately in the seventies we had an unacceptably large number of politicians who were no inch a gentleman (26) Independence and elections brought a new class of politicians seeking power and money, while the expending power of government and controls increased the number of bureaucrats and gave them a money generating power they never had earlier.

It was in that kind of situation India witnessed the fourth general election in 1967 which revealed something more basic – a combination of social conflicts within the traditional caste hierarchy and widespread public discontent with the Congress itself around issues of rising prices, the highhandedness of both Congress bosses and officialdom, corruption, growth of large pockets of poverty, and above all, a leadership that had failed to inspire confidence in the people. The outstanding results of this election had been the collapse of the till date pattern of one Party dominance of the Congress. The fourth general elections to the LokSabha and the state assemblies held in February 1967 had a radical impact on Indian politics. The Congress Party had exhausted its mandate and lost its character and motivation as a party of social and institutional change. In the party there was a large-scale disenchantment, especially with its top leaders because of corruption and the lavish lifestyle of many of them. Many of the regional and local Congress bosses were perceived by the people as being devoted to loaves and fishes of office, political wheeling dealing and factional infighting (4). Although for rounding off the strategy of the electoral campaign the Congress put its political services into perspective and reminded the voter of the historical role the Party played for over eighty-two years and its consistent struggle to ensure for India an open, democratic and socialist society. This strategy, however, did not come up to the level of performance of Nehru who was extremely capable of raising questions of broad national interest, thus overplaying over local affairs. At the time it was clear that the Congress itself lacked the drive and cohesion for providing the nation with a stable and strong government. The result was a continuous power-struggle at all levels of Congress leadership and the rapid erosion of such Party discipline, confidence and comradeship as Congress had built up during the independence movement, and without which it could not hope to remain united.

The results of the Fourth General Elections showed that the Congress Party was no more an impregnable fortress that it once was and as a consequence it lost heavily both at the Centre and in the States. As against 361 seats which the Congress had won in the LokSabha in 1962 with 44.73 per cent votes, it was able to secure only 284 seats with 40.82 per cent of the total votes polled. Among the opposition, the Swatantra Party got the leading position with 42 seats as against 18 in 1962 and 8.54 per cent votes. Next to it was the Jana Sangh with 35 seats and 9.29 per cent votes. As a whole all the opposition parties of the time including CPI, CPM, SSP, PSP had done much better than ever before. From 133 seats in 1962 their strength had gone up to 236 in 1967, a remarkable increase indeed. However, despite the rise of opposition Party's strength India's Parliament was still without an officially recognised opposition Party which required minimum of one-tenth of the total membership of the LokSabha while Swatantra Party which led the opposition had only 42 members – 10 short of the required numbers (24). In this election the Congress Party retained comfortable majority at the Centre, it however, was in great loss in the majority of states, though it differed in its extent from region to region and it could be divided into four groups. In three States – Orissa, Bihar and West Bengal, the Congress lost more votes than the all-India average. The second group included Gujrat, Assam, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, where Congress performance was correspondingly to the all-India trend. In another group of three States – Andhra Pradesh, Mysore and Uttar Pradesh – the Congress losses were minimal. Rajasthan, Haryana, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir formed the fourth group, where the Congress share of votes slightly went up. The results of the election underlined the social and economic strains lay at the heart of the political change. For example, the fall in the Congress share of votes had catastrophic proportions in Orissa and Bihar where hunger and famine had been of very serious dimensions before the election.

5 Coming of Mrs. Gandhi and afterEffects

In January 1966 Indira Gandhi succeeded LalBahadurShastri as the next Prime Minister of the country and Congress fought the elections without Jawaharlal Nehru, who was the symbol of its unity, stability and progress. The new leader of the Party was Indira Gandhi and this was the first general election under her leadership which itself was yet to be firmly established. At the time Indira Gandhi took over the reigns of Administration, the economy was in recession and fast deteriorating. Industrial production and exports were declining. The rains failed for the second successive year in 1966, and the drought was more severe than in 1965, and led to galloping inflation and grave food shortages. Famine conditions prevailed in large parts of the country, especially in Bihar and eastern UP. As a result the year was known for continuous popular turmoil of economic discontent and political agitations provoked by spiralling prices, food scarcity, growing unemployment, and, in general, deteriorating economic conditions. In addition, 1966 also witnessed the beginning of the downslide of the Parliament as an

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institution. There were constant disturbances and indiscipline in the Parliament with some members of the opposition showing complete disregard for Parliamentary decorum and niceties.

The overall deteriorating situations in the country and Congress Party itself provided a fertile ground for the rise of 'right' and 'left' extremism. The widespread discontent among the masses was favourable for their election strategy. Both at national and regional levels the opposition parties began to form the United Front or a cohesive political unit, which could serve as a new restraint upon the Congress Party and provide an alternative to it. The development, in fact, was not a polarisation of Indian Party system, but instead there was scores of parties making appeals to such primordial factors as caste, religion, race, region, and language at the expense of secular values (5). For instance, the CPI(M), advised its State units to exploit and aggravate the prevalent discontent in order to mobilise the public in favour of the Party (The Statesman, 1966). The demonstrations in the streets and the go-slow tactics in the factories which were organised by leftist forces demonstrated their desire to radicalise the masses. At the same time they repeatedly created violent scenes in the LokSabha, so to say, as a corollary to these actions. On the other the orthodox religious forces – the RashtriyaSwayamSevakSangh (RSS), the Hindu Mahasabha, the SanatanaDharamaSabha and the Sadhu Samaj intensified their activities with the objective of pressing Government to concede their demand for a ban on cow-slaughter. Even Jana Sangh members cooperated with them and it appeared that secular democracy in India was on the brink of collapse.

In the elections of 1967 the ruling Congress Party and the opposition parties of the time had different objectives in view. The Congress aimed at winning the elections by an absolute majority in the LokSabha so that it would be legitimised to form the Government at the Centre. And by and large, the leadership appeared fully convinced to be able to reach this numerical power-level; however, it was not sure about the margin with which it would accomplish that task. On the other opposition parties were also knowing the fact that the Congress would not loose its hegemony at the Centre but its position in many States would be shaky. It is also to note here that the Congress had not formulated any official policy towards forming coalitions at the Centre or in any State, in case such an eventuality would occur. But the opposition parties had obviously reconciled that at the national level the position of the Congress could not be challenged seriously and therefore, they could not projected themselves before the electorate as a veritable alternative to the Congress. In the States the situation was different and some of the opposition parties offered themselves to the electorate as alternative parties to take over the reins of office. In the electoral strategy while Congress Party seemed to divert the voter from the critical socio-economic onslaught and remind him of the priority of political problems by expressing its doubt in the ability of the heterogeneous opposition parties to maintain law and order in the country, the opposition parties gave an all-out fight to the Congress but failed to prevent a split of possible anti-Congress votes in the country and also did not succeed in forming a viable alliance against the Congress at national or regional level. The striking fact was that the Congress popular vote dropped could not immediately be transformed into an alternative Government because the opposition was heavily fragmented. In this context the lack of organisational and ideological coherence and constitutional norms was a warning not to put too much faith in coalition Governments.

6 Conclusions and New Patterns

The election results revealed certain long-term trends with certain long-term consequence. Apart from general disenchantment with Congress because of the various factors, defection by the rich and middle peasants from the Congress camp played a major role in the Congress debacle in the northern states. They felt that their newly acquired economic position and social status, associated with control of land, was threatened by the projected foodgrains procurement policies, the land reforms, and other populist rhetoric of Congress. In contrast, in South India class and caste structure or configuration was different from that in the North and the large presence of Communists kept the rural landowners tied to Congress. In all fairness it can be said that problems of income inequality, regional disparity, urban and rural unemployment persisted as earlier. The level of social development was also considered slow. On the one hand, there was an acute inter-regional and inter-state disparity in socio-economic development. On the other, there is also a serious problem of intra-state disparity in economic and social development. In context of India's development policy and strategies, the role of the dominant social, political and economic forces in determining the process and nature of development cannot be undermined. The problem of inter and intra regional disparity is a problem that will affect not only the economc development but the social and political development of the country. The changing bases of our political society has become a major concern of our polity.

This apart, the year 1967 was the beginning of the politics of defection. The election broke Congress's monopoly of power in the states and was replaced not by a single party in any of the states but by a multiplicity of parties and groups and independents. Coalition governments were formed in all opposition-ruled states except in Tamil Nadu. Congress too formed coalition goverments in some of the states where it had been reduced to a minority, allying with independents and breakaway

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Groups from the opposition parties. These governments were ideologically heterogeneous; and the left-right or secular-communal divides were almost completely bridged in them. As a result all the coalition governments suffered from constant tensions and internal strains because of the heterogeneity of the partners. Most often, except in West Bengal and Kerala, the continuous bargaining among the partners was not on policies but on ministerial berths, patronage, and interest groups. Many of the governmental changes in the northern states were result of defections or floor crossings by individual legislators both party members and independents. Corrupt legislators indulged in horse trading and freely changed sides, attracted mainly by lure of office or money. The problem of defections was to become long term and perpetual because defectors, who changed sides and toppled governments for purely personal and often corrupt reasons, were seldom punished by the voters and were elected again and again. Political defections and consequently unstable majorities became a particularly malignant disease of the body politic (22). Some of the governments do not exist any more, though their consequences do; it is an old and not altogether untrue saying that the good that men do dies with them, but the evil that they do lives after them. In this wave anti-Congressism gained ground with these elections both among the opposition parties and a large section of the intelligentsia. Anti-Congressism as a political phenomenon was, of course, to be distinguished from opposition to Congress, which was based on differences in ideology policies or programme. On the other hand, anti-Congressism represented 'weariness with Congress and a hankering after almost anything else' (20). The high priest of anti-Congressism was RammanoharLohia who, in the words of Rajni Kothari, devoted himself to the mission of destroying the Congress monopoly of power by uniting all anti-Congress forces in the country (21). The anti-Congress intellectuals and the Socialists were willing to back any party from CPM to BKD to Jana Sangh in order to weaken Congress. The new change heralded the era of the greater importance of rich and middle peasants in Indian politics, their hegemony over the rural social, economic and political scene, and their dislike of Congress and Communists which persisted even later.

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