

Chapter-4

Modern Indian State and the Problems of National Integration, Federal Autonomy and Personality-Institution Dichotomy

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MODERN INDIAN STATE AND THE PROBLEMS OF NATIONAL INTEGRATION, FEDERAL AUTONOMY AND PERSONALITY-INSTITUTION DICHOTOMY

There are many serious problems and challenges before the Indian state today. Some problems are the result of its colonial past whereas some other problems are basically due to the backwardness of the Indian economy. The social configuration of India itself leads to some challenges and threats. But when we take a holistic view it becomes obvious that the problems and the challenges that exist before the Indian state today cannot be studied in isolation. Every problem, challenge and threat is the outcome of various factors though one factor might be playing a dominant role in its origin and sustenance. In this chapter we shall confine ourselves to three such challenges that the Indian state is facing today:

1. The challenge of national integration
2. The challenge of federal autonomy and
3. The challenge of personality-institution dichotomy.

Since this study is an effort to study ancient India and particularly the Mauryan India from a political perspective, therefore, I have confined myself to the three specific challenges which exist before the modern Indian state and which to some extent though in a different form were present before the Mauryan state also. While studying ancient Indian history one can easily observe that though it might be having some similarities with modern India in the area of politics and culture but it had less similarity in the field of economy. We know that in ancient and medieval civilisations there was no clear cut demarcation between the political power and the economic power. It was only in the modern era and with the advent of capitalism that we find separation of political power from economic power. As a result of this capitalism could accept political equality but at the same time might reject economic equality. State was considered to be belonging to the

people and the notion of popular sovereignty formed the core of political discourse in the modern democratic era. Since in ancient India, particularly during the Mauryan era, there was no such demarcation between the 'political' and the 'economic' therefore, it is neither possible nor desirable to make economic issues in ancient India as area of analysis and research.

In ancient India we generally find the communal ownership of land which was the primary means of production. All land was considered to be owned by God (*sabe bhumi Gopalki*). King had the right of taxation and the farmer was the cultivator. But none of them had proprietary right over land. In modern India first of all Britishers introduced the system of private ownership of land through various settlements like the Ryotbari, Mahalbari and Zamindari. As a result of this now land, the prime means of production, came under private ownership. The system of private ownership of land still continues in modern India which is quite different from ancient India.

In ancient India we generally find the absence of currency system in trade. Trade was based on the system of exchange or barter in most of the cases. Due to absence of currency system trade was localised which acted as a hurdle in the emergence of a Pan-Indian economy. But in modern India first of all the Britishers created necessary conditions for emergence of a pan-Indian economic system. After Independence, this Pan Indian economic system operated on the basis of Nehru-Mahalanobis model. In this model great emphasis was put on the public sector which was described as the commanding heights. Planned model of development was its noticeable feature and self-sufficiency was its goal. In 1991 this Nehru-Mahalanobis model of development was replaced by the New Economic Policy which is popularly described as the Rao-Manmohan model of development. The three pillars of this New Economic Policy are liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation. Now in the new and changed scenario, development through the market forces is the main focus of the economic policy.

The nature of planning itself is changing. Now instead of self-sufficiency and import-substitution interdependence and export-promotion are the goals of economy. Thus, it is neither possible nor desirable to compare the ancient Indian economic system with the economic system of modern India. Therefore, the present study is confined basically to the political aspect and particularly the three problems that India is facing today:

1. The problem of national integration.
2. The problem of federal autonomy.
3. The problem of personalised politics and institutionalised politics

4.1 The Issue of National Integration

National integration has been a very serious and prominent challenge in all the developing countries including India. For a proper analysis of the concept of national integration it is necessary to know the meaning of certain concepts. The first and foremost concept is the term integration itself which may be defined as “a process of becoming whole.”¹ In other words, “an integrated whole is one in which all structural aspects and parts, fit together with at least some minimal amount of unity or mutual compatibility.”² Furthermore, “integration is the name for the state of relationship between parts of the system.”³ It “has to do with the interrelations of units.”⁴ Thus, “an integrated society is one in which established institutions and rights and values associated with them are generally accepted.”⁵ These definitions generally present the static character of integration with its main focus at maintenance of the system. But in reality while concerned with the process of becoming whole, integration is also directed towards an orderly change within the system.

The above deliberations on the concept of integration make it evident that the term is contextual. One may talk of the integration of a small group, society, culture, nation or of the entire world. In each case, no doubt, integration

“contributes to the maintenance of the social system as growing concern with respect to the properties of cohesion, boundary maintenance, procedural and functional efficiency, and adaption to change in environing situation.”⁶ However, with every increase in area or type of integration, the mechanism to attain the goals of integration changes, leading to the greater complexity in the meaning of the term.

The term national integration tends to be obscure in the light of varying definitions of nation and nationalism. The minimum requisite for nationhood is considered to be the people living in a compact geographical area with general cultural unity. They form a nation by accepting a particular political order and forming a state. Language, race, religion and history are additional factors which generally strengthen the bond of nationhood. According to J. P. Narayan⁷ nationhood is made up of tangible and intangible elements, the latter constituting much the larger part of it. The most essential tangible elements of nationhood are:

1. A well-defined territory
2. Political unity represented by a constitution, common citizenship and a government
3. A workable medium of communication.

The intangible elements are:

1. An attitude of mind which makes it natural and normal for every citizen to regard loyalty to the nation as being above sectional and group loyalties
2. An attitude of mind which makes it natural and normal for every group and section of the nation to subordinate its interest to national interests;
3. An attitude of mind which makes it natural and normal for the nation to think of the interests of every citizen and of every group and section of the nation.

On the other hand certain theorists have treated the nation to be a mental construct than being a community whose 'essence' or identity is fixed. Marxism explains it as a 'bourgeois concept.' Marxism believes that class struggle is the motor for social change. Success of the revolution depends on the intensification of class struggle. But the ruling class counters the threat of social revolution by emphasising on inter-class solidarity, and the ideology of nationalism is used as a means to this end. Thus, Marxists describe nationalism as a 'bourgeois concept' and a 'false-consciousness.' Eric Hobsbawm described nations as 'invented traditions' while making an analysis of the phenomenon of nationalism from a modern Marxist perspective. Hobsbawm maintains that a widespread consciousness of nationhood in the late 19th century was consequent upon the invention of the national anthem and national flags and the extension of primary education. Thus, Hobsbawm concludes "in short, for the purpose of analysis, nationalism comes before nations. Nations do not make states and nationalisms but the other way round."⁸

Benedict Anderson described the nation as an 'imagined political community'. According to Anderson the nation is an artifice constructed through the education, the mass media and the process of political socialisation. The national community, he argues, is a particular kind of cultural creation: an imagining of an abstract common tie of citizenship that extends uniformly across the territory uniting the members of "even the smallest nation." Although most members of a nation remain unknown to each other, "in the minds of each lives the image of their communions."⁹The formation of nation depends upon both the objective and subjective factors. The objective factors include such identities like the language, religion, race, traditions, culture and so on. They are objective realities. But only these objective realities in themselves do not create the nation. Ultimately it depends on the subjective feeling of becoming a nation. That is the main reason why there are different foundations for a nation at different places. For example at some place or time region might be playing dominant role during

the formation of a nation where as at some other place or time it may be the language. According to Achin Vanaik:

“thus nationalism can refer to the ‘idea of the nation’ – the beginnings of a national identity or consciousness which then spreads. This is a subjective definition which, however, has strong objective foundations both cultural and non-cultural, for example, capitalist modernisation, growth of communications, erosion of traditional identities, emergence of new forms of cultural representation, and so on.”¹⁰

But though nations necessarily need the two components – objective base and subjective awareness – and both are important for a nation, the subjective consciousness in the form of belongingness or togetherness is more important in the formation of a nation. Objective elements are always there and important for the formation of nationhood, they are not decisive. It is the subjective element which is key to the emergence of a nation. The nation emerges and demises with the emergence and decline of this subjective consciousness.

As such, the term national integration refers specifically to the problem of creating a sense of territorial nationality which overshadows or eliminates subordinate parochial loyalties. The concept of national integration is quite comprehensive. It covers all dimensions – political, economic, social, cultural, legal, educational and psychological. That is, it does not merely support the existence of a strong and viable nation-state; it also aspires for social, economic and cultural integration. Above all, it desires emotional integration of the people. Thus, it comes to involve a value system as well.

4.1.1 The Indian Context

The idea of nationalism has two different connotations – ‘Western’ and ‘Eastern’ – having their relevance in the process of nation-building. So the idea of

national integration has its two broad varieties. In other words, there are two public policy forms and strategies for achievement of the goal of national integration. The first is the elimination of the distinctive cultural traits of the minorities into some kind of or what the leaders in power call- 'national' culture which is invariably the culture of the group in majority. It may be defined as national assimilation, though in the context of a particular country it may have the appeal of something like 'Americanisation', 'Germanisation', 'Vietnamisation', and the like. The second is the course of having 'unity in the midst of diversity'. Here we find synchronisation or ordering of national loyalties without eliminating subordinate cultures. The case of national integration in India falls in the latter category where instead of assimilation or absorption of the minorities, the ideal of 'unity in diversity' has been adopted. In India the ideal of 'integration' does not imply 'absorption'. The purpose is not to have unity at the cost of surrendering diversity. What is really required is that there should be unity in the midst of diversity. Let the people with their own religion, caste, language, culture and the like exist and yet they should harmonise their varying loyalties in such a way that the country is strengthened. The essence of national integration in India is not assimilation but is a two-fold strategy involving the elements of bringing unity in diversity but at the same time protecting diversity in unity. "Indian nation builders, therefore, adopted a strategy of transformation that was open, democratic, and based on acceptance of diversity and dissent. This was at once bold and necessary: bold in design but necessary because there was no other way of building a nation out of these diverse elements."¹¹ Thus, national integration in India may be summed up to signify a condition of unity in diversity in which both the components are equally valid and mutually interdependent.¹²

Viewed thus, the concept of national integration, as given by the secularist and democratic leaders of the country, is quite different from one given by the communalists and the sectionals. It does not imply 'Hinduisation' of the people as described by the leaders of the Hindu Maha Sabha, nor can it have any

reconciliation with the 'Islamisation' of the country as suggested by the leaders of the Jamat-e-Islami. However, one may not easily object to the case of the 'Indianisation' of the people if this term is understood in the proper perspective like asking and expecting every citizen of the country to be "Indian first, Indian second, and Indian last."

4.1.2 Forces of Integration and Disintegration in India: the Historical Roots

India has inherited both the elements of unity and diversity from the remote past. The mosaic of Indian federalism is composed of 'segments' constituting language and dialect groups, religious communities, denominational sects, castes and sub-castes, tribes, regional and sub-regional configurations, ethnic formations and defined culture patterns. It makes a case for diversity but alongwith geographical and ethnic diversity the forces of integration have also been at work.

Geographical Setting

As far as the geography of India is concerned the Himalayan mountains have effectively separated India from the heartland of Asia. The Indian peninsula is surrounded by the Bay of Bengal in the East, the Indian Ocean in the South and the Arabian Sea in the West. This works as one of the major natural boundaries of India. In between the peninsula and the Himalayas lies the Northern plain. Although there are many natural barriers within the subcontinent, "they do not serve to prohibit political, cultural and economic intercourse."¹³ Thus, geography has been a source of fundamental unity and has given a distinct identity to the people of this region which could be easily distinguished from the people inhabiting other parts of world.

Ethnic Diversity

One of the major sources of diversity owes its genesis to the protracted process of peopling of the sub-continent from various Himalayan passes at different points of our history. The Negritoes, the Proto-Australoid, the

Mongoloids, the Mediterraneans, the Brachycephals and the Nordics are the six major racial groups constituting the present population of India who immigrated into this country at different points of time in descending order.¹⁴ The other sources of diversity are varna, caste, religion, region and language.

Besides cultural and ethnic diversity, the political and economic integration of the country has been fluid and superficial. Politically, during the rule of the Mauryas and the Guptas in the Ancient period, and the rule of the Turks and the Mughals in the Medieval period, several successful attempts were made to unite North and South India into one political system. But the success of the rulers of this period was superficial and transitory as the direct and personal relationship between the local chiefs and people were strong enough to counter any indirect and impersonal authority.

Economically also, different parts of India did not form a single unit and were not interdependent on each other; in particular the interdependence between the cities and the villages was minimal. Although India had several prosperous trade centres and port towns which had their own authority, they were not organically linked with Indian villages or the life of the majority of the Indian people. Instead, the prosperity and ostentation of the towns presented a sharp contrast to the poor living condition and simplicity of the villagers. But the forces of integration were also at work in history. Though the geography of India gives it a distinct identity and there are many natural barriers the process of adjustment, accommodation and assimilation operated on the social, cultural, economic and political planes covering every walk of life of our ancestors.

Thus, we find both the forces of integration and disintegration operating in Indian history which have their impact on the process of national integration. According to Rasheeduddin Khan¹⁵ the problem of national integration in India stems generally from a combination of four determining factors:

1. The continental dimension of the Indian polity which by its size and complexity is heterogeneous, and basically different from an 'insular' homogeneous polity.
2. The existence for centuries of a plural society in terms of culture, religion, language, region, economy and urban- rural dichotomy.
3. The federal structure of government and administration that has an in-built system of checks and balances between localism/regionalism and federalism/nationalism, and
4. Democratic decentralisation (Panchayati Raj) of participatory functional politics.

4.1.3 The Growth of Nationalism and National Integration in India

The growth of nationalism was a by-product of British colonial rule in India. With the consolidation of British rule in India, we also see the emergence of socio-religious reform movements and the beginning of the 'Indian renaissance'. The movements for social and religious reform were an effort to orient the people to the changing material conditions and to new ideas. The social and religious movements of the 19th century appealed to the people of India in the name of rationality and humanism. They attacked the caste system, polytheism, ritualism and the degenerated status of untouchables and women. They talked of rationality and humanism on the religious plane and advocated equality, dignity of labour, freedom and fraternity on the social plane. In fact, they endeavoured to correct the wrongs of the past. Moreover, it was a call for reintegration of Indian society in the light of the changed situation and new Western ideas such as liberalism, humanism, equality, liberty and fraternity. Thus, the spirit and the principles of the movements became the basis of several constitutional reforms in the pre – as well as the post-independence period. Even though the religious movements generally did not have a secular character, all the religious movements (whether of the Hindus, the Muslims, the Sikhs or the Parsis) tried to interpret their religion

in the light of rationalism, humanism and equality. Therefore, the basic thought of all the religious reform movements were the same. This indeed facilitated the cause of integration in India and the rise of Indian nationalism was a sequel to the social and religious reform movements of the first half of the 19th century.

The development of India as a nation is the result of a combination of several other factors and forces during the British period. The exploitation of India by a common enemy was the most dominant factor which gave the nationalist forces in India a common identity and programme. The commercial interests of Britishers made it imperative for them to have a uniform administration as well as link the important parts of India through rail, road, post and telegraph systems. A network of communication and transport facilitated quick and easy movement for the countrymen, as also it made the self-sufficient and secluded regions of the country, both economically and politically, interdependent.

The very presence of foreign rule in India gave birth to the nationalist forces. Initially, as mentioned above, efforts were made by the social and religious reformers to correct the ills of our own society in the light of Western thought and knowledge. The early nationalists and reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy also advocated the introduction of English as a medium of instruction in the schools and colleges because they knew well the role this language was going to play in future for the growth of nationalism. The spread of English language brought the Indian intelligentsia closer by giving them a link language and filled them with nationalist and revolutionary sentiments and also brought them closer to the nationalist activities of the world.

4.1.4 Problem of National Integration in Post-Independence India

The main challenges to national integration in post-independence India are linguism, communalism, casteism and regionalism. Let us look at these issues in some detail.

4.1.5 Language

India is a multi-linguistic nation with several well developed languages which are rich in grammar, expression and literature and have their own distinct script. Multi-linguism is, therefore, one of the primordial facts of the Indian polity. There are four major linguistic families covering the major languages of India.¹⁶

1. The Austric (Nishada) family,
2. The Dravidian family,
3. The Sino-Tibetan family, and
4. The Indo-European family.

Apart from these four major language families many other linguistic formats and vocabularies from languages spoken from around India have been absorbed. Thus, there is vast linguistic diversity in India. But the big commercial centres, markets, people in *kāravānas* both of army and trade, sacred pilgrimage and religious practices have tended to favour a common language which could be understood and spoken by all in the bureaucracy, army, business and priesthood. For example Sanskrit, Persian and English have been the link languages of Ancient, Medieval and Modern periods, respectively. The appeals of such link languages, however, were limited to the elites in different fields. It hardly mattered for the common masses as to how the elite of a particular linguistic group conversed with the elite of other linguistic groups. Rather, no link language was allowed to become the language of the common masses, as mere adoption of a link language symbolised a special status and widened the opportunity of employment for those who knew it. Such limited interaction of the elite of different parts of India gave full scope to the regional languages to develop and flourish.

In a multi-linguistic nation like India, the issue of language was associated, throughout, with the national movement. The problem was greatly accentuated

after independence, because, apart from many other factors, language became a powerful source of politics. For instance, the politicians in Tamilnadu have been successful in propagating chauvinistic language sentiments among their people in order to grab power in state politics.

4.1.6 Language Issue and the National Movement

In multi-linguistic India the issue of language played a very important role during the national movement. By the time the British got their stronghold in India, Persian continued to be the language of administration and courts. Around 1830 Urdu was substituted for Persian as the language of courts and administration in Bihar, North-Western and Central provinces. This was the time when English language got the upper hand as Lord Bentinck accepted Macaulay's minute in favour of English as medium of instruction in 1835. By the end of 1830, "English and Indian languages had already replaced Persian in the proceedings of the law courts. Thus, both education and law courts created two separate levels of social operation, the upper reserved for English, the lower for the vernaculars."¹⁷

Language Issue in the Pre-Independence India

During the fourth quarter of the 19th century, when the nationalist sentiments grew the question of national language became a matter of controversy throughout the nationalist movement. The place of Urdu was gradually taken by Hindi in *Devanāgarī* script in the Northern provinces long before the people of India started struggling for national independence. Many early nationalists considered Hindi to be a potent force which could bring the people of India together. The most dominating factor behind the assertion of Hindi as the national language was that it was spoken by the majority of people living in India. Moreover, the geographical location of Hindi speaking area brightened the prospects of Hindi to be a link language as these areas form the central part of India.

It is interesting to note here that since the middle of the 19th century, the case of Hindi as national language has been pleaded by several associations, reformers and leaders of non-Hindi speaking areas. “Keshab Chandra Sen, a Bengali leader and Dayanand Saraswati, a Gujarati leader, while working in different regions of India considered Hindi to be a potential language of national communication.”¹⁸ It is also interesting to note that the earliest Hindi newspapers were started in Bengal and Bhudeb Mukhopadhyaya, an eminent Bengali writer, was largely responsible for introduction of Hindi in the law courts and schools of Bihar.¹⁹

Within the supporters of Hindi, there were two dominant viewpoints regarding the structure of Hindi. The first viewpoint supported Sanskritised Hindi in *Devanāgarī* script. The *Nāgarī Prachārini Sabha* and the *Hindī Sāhitya Sammelana* supported this viewpoint. It had its popular base in the North Indian Hindi belt. The second viewpoint advocated mainly by Gandhi, Nehru and others, believed in the “*Hindustānī*” form of Hindi which was less Sanskritised and borrowed more words and concepts from Urdu.

The *Nāgarī Prachārini Sabha* was established in Benaras in 1983. The *Sabhā* pursued a conscious policy of purifying Hindi by borrowing all possible words from Sanskrit to do away with the Persian and Arabic words. The supporters of Hindi felt that the separate identity of Hindi language could be preserved only through the promotion of Sanskritised Hindi. They argued that Sanskritised Hindi would be easier to understand for the non-Hindi speaking people as well because most of these languages had been influenced by the Sanskrit language and used plenty of original or deformed Sanskrit words. Later on, this deliberate attempt to purify Hindi was associated with communal sentiments in North India.

Hindī Sāhitya Sammelana had strong roots in the North Indian Hindi speaking area and there were many distinguished leaders like Madan Mohan

Malaviya, P. D. Tandon and Swami Shraddhananda who were in favour of promoting 'pure' Hindi as against the 'mixed' *Hindustānī*.

The other attempt to make Hindi the national language was made by Gandhi. Initially he followed the line of B.G. Tilak on the question of national language. He believed that only Hindi with *Devanāgarī* script could be the national and link language of India. But he rejected both the Sanskritised Hindi and Persianised Urdu and described his conception of Hindi as '*Hindi-Hindustānī*' or simply '*Hindustānī*'.

Gandhi considered that there was only one language spoken in North India which was written in two different scripts namely, *Devanāgarī* and Urdu. He never agreed with those who considered Hindi and Urdu as two different languages. He was in favour of the use of both the scripts for *Hindi-Hindustānī* till the time "when there is absolutely no suspicion between Hindus and Muslims...when all causes for distrust between, the two have been removed."²⁰

The case in favour of *Hindustānī* was also advocated by the followers of Gandhi, like Nehru, Rajendra Prasad and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad. Like Gandhi, they were also confident of the potentialities of *Hindustānī* to become the national language. For instance Nehru had written in 1938 that:

"the dominant language of India is *Hindustānī* which is already spoken by a huge bloc of a hundred and twenty million people and is partly understood by scores of others. Already due to talkies and radio, the range of *Hindustānī* is spreading fast. The writer of this article had occasion to address great mass audience all over India and almost always, except in the South, he has used *Hindustānī* and been understood."²¹

Such a view was shared also by Rajendra Prasad who believed that there were no structural differences between these two languages. He states that:

“structure which is the real framework of language is still common to both forms of languages known as Hindi and Urdu. The difference mainly is in respect of a portion of vocabulary only.”²²

But despite the efforts of Gandhi and his followers the case of popularisation of the *Hindustānī* form of Hindi was defeated in the Hindi speaking area itself. In the decade of 1940's owing to the increasing distance between the Hindus and Muslims, the distance between Hindi and Urdu had also widened. Despite numerous attempts made by Gandhi, “ultimately his hope of reconciling the Hindu and Muslim interests in one unified India was rudely shaken when India was divided in 1947, and his dream of making *Hindustānī* the national language of India was largely shattered when the Congress decided in the Constituent Assembly that Hindi would be the official language of the Federal Government of Independent India. In addition, no Hindi state within the Indian Union accepted Hindustani after independence. All of them chose Hindi as their official language.”²³

Language Issue in the Post-Independence India

Despite the acceptance of Hindi as the official language of the Republic by the Constituent Assembly of India and its further recognition by the Hindi-speaking states, the language issue has remained unsettled. In post-independence India the language issue took a different turn. Now instead of the Hindi-Urdu conflict what emerged was a conflict between Hindi and English on the one hand and Hindi and regional languages on the other hand, particularly those spoken in the South India like Tamil and Telugu. Till 1960, the language issue mainly revolved round Hindi and English. So long as the memory of the freedom struggle and its commitments were fresh in the minds of leaders of different parts of India, there was no sharp public reaction or mass mobilisation against Hindi. The non-Hindi speaking people were taking interest in Hindi, especially in the *Hindustānī* form of Hindi, even in the pre-independence period. The leaders from non-Hindi

areas had been emotionally committed to replacing English by an Indian language. Moreover, after independence, for three successive elections the Congress party had won overwhelming majority in most of the states. Congress leadership convinced the anxious non-Hindi speaking people and their leadership that the promotion of Hindi would not take place at their cost. In Nehru's own words:

“I do not wish to impose Hindi compulsorily on any state which does not want it.”²⁴

The death of Nehru, however, precipitated the language crisis. The Constituent Assembly had allowed English to continue as Associate Official Language of India alongwith Hindi for the next 15 years. It meant that in 1965, Hindi would become the sole official language of the Union. The Hindi leaders were growing impatient to give a farewell to English and establish Hindi as the lone official language of the Union. Several ministries of the Union government started preparing for the linguistic change-over the next year. Some of the Union government ministries were instructed to the effect that the Union government's correspondence with the States would be in Hindi, and in the case of non-Hindi speaking States, English translation would accompany this. Some other ministries notified that routine circulars after January 26, 1965, would be in Hindi.²⁵

This was seen as linguistic chauvinism by the non-Hindi speaking people. The Jana Sangha and the Samyukta Socialist Party gave their organisational support to such chauvinistic sentiments. Although non-Hindi speaking people from different parts of India raised their voice against this, it was among the Tamilians that the resentment was most intense. The then Congress government did not address the issue with seriousness as was required. Due to the failure of the Congress government to address the issue prudently and effectively, the 'Hindi Protest Movement' passed into the hands of non-Congress political forces. Thus, with the help of non-Congress leaders, the 'Madras State Anti-Hindi

Conference' was organised on January 17, 1965. The participants of this conference were led by the D.M.K. and C. Rajagopalachari. It was decided by the Conference to treat January 26, 1965, as the day of mourning. Two workers of D.M.K. burnt themselves to death publically. This incident of self-immolation raised anti-Hindi feelings even higher.

To make a compromise between the supporters and the opponents of Hindi the 'Three Language Formula' was accepted as a middle path. However, the issue was finally settled by the Official Languages (Amendment) Act, 1967, and it was decided that English will continue to be the Associate Official Language of the Union for all the non-Hindi states till the time they themselves opt for Hindi.²⁶

The provision made under the Official Languages (Amendment) Act, 1967, and the 'Three Language Formula' has reduced the possibility of conflict on the basis of language. The formation of states on linguistic basis already solved a major linguistic crisis which had strong historical roots. Only at times now is the issue of Hindi or national language raised. If, at all, any language problem is still unresolved, it is the problem of the minority language. Often demands are made for inclusion of a particular language in the 8th schedule. In a multi-linguistic country like India, the experience of 60 plus years of independence has given us the confidence to face the language issue and solve them through negotiations. Although there have been strains, tensions and some violent incidents off and on, the country has arrived at solutions through the working of accepted democratic norms.

4.1.7 Religion

Religion is a very crucial factor as far as the national integration of India is concerned. There are six major religious communities in India accounting for a substantial population in the country as a whole.²⁷ Historically, religion has never played a predominant role in the governance of the state in India. Whenever attempts were made to introduce religion as a principle of administration, it failed.

Still, religion directly or indirectly, influences our politics to some extent and in its accentuated form, it leads to communalism and violence and then poses a serious threat to national integration.

4.1.8 Communalism: The Conceptual Framework

In quite simple and positive terms, communalism could be defined as a person's attachment with the good of his or her community. However, in the realm of politics it has a very sinister implication in view of the fact that it "is generally associated with a narrow, selfish, divisive and aggressive attitude on the part of a religious group."²⁸ Communalism is also viewed as "Competitive desecularisation" as Achin Vanaik puts it:

"but it is among other things a process involving competitive desecularisation (a competitive striving to extend the reach and power of religions), which – alongwith non-religious factors – helps to harden the divisions and create or increase tensions between different religious communities. Here greater importance is granted to religious forces, religious identity, religious competition, religious ideologies and to religious imbrication in popular, folk and elite cultures."²⁹

Bipan Chandra³⁰ views communalism as an ideology which spreads a communal belief system.

Implicit in the meaning of communalism is, therefore, a sense of blind loyalty towards the community that may go to the extent of subordinating one's higher loyalty to his or her nation or society as a whole. Instead of having an attitude towards a particular religion enlightened enough so as to circumvent any possible feeling of orthodoxy, it leads to the inculcation of wrong orientations that have their manifestation in the form of fanaticism or religious orthodoxy. As such, communalism refers to the attitude of the people and their groups when they

“place their loyalty to the community above loyalty to the body politic to which they belong, or else when they develop active hostility towards communities living within the same body politic.”³¹

According to Rasheeduddin Khan:

“adherence to religion and religious system is not communalism. Exploitation of religion is communalism. Attachment to religious community or religiosity is not communalism. Using a religious community against other communities and against a federal nation is communalism. Communalism is conversion of religiosity into political bellicosity. Communalism is the enemy of progress, democracy, secular culture and federal nation-state building on rational scientific lines. Communalism envisages a religious community alone as a base and universe of its political ambition and action. For a communalist, religious community is the only relevant and valid category in politics and in state affairs. Communalism is a political orientation that recognises religious community and not the nation or the nation-state as the terminal community – the final point of political allegiance. Therefore, communalism is a political strategy opposed to nationalism as a process of unifying multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-lingual communities”.³²

Communalism in Pre-Independence India

Communalism is essentially a modern phenomenon. In pre-independence India, the growth of communalism was basically the result of the British policy of ‘Divide and Rule’ which the colonial rulers consciously pursued and the relative socio-economic backwardness of the Muslim community. “To check the growth of a united national feeling in the country, they decided to follow more actively a policy of ‘Divide and Rule’ and to divide people along religious lines, in other words, to encourage communal and separatist tendencies in Indian politics. For

this purpose they decided to come out as ‘champions’ of Muslims and to win over to their side Muslim zamindars, landlords and the newly educated.”³³

As a result of this conscious British policy, Muslim League was formed in 1906 and Separate Electorate was granted to Muslims by the Government of India Act, 1909. Both the Britishers and the Muslim communalists raised the issue of Hindu majoritarianism which would put the Muslims of India under the subjugation of the Hindus.

The British policy of ‘Divide and Rule’ could succeed because the Muslims were relatively backward, educationally as well as economically. Their participation in trade and commerce and also in industry was low as compared to their religious counterparts in India. Because of their educational backwardness, the Muslims also lagged behind in government services and other modern professions such as law, engineering and medicine. Due to their socio-economic-educational backwardness a fear among the Indian Muslims developed that they would be discriminated by the majority if nationalism and democracy succeeded. This has been sincerely expressed by Nehru:

“there has been difference of a generation or more in the development of the Hindu and the Muslim middle classes, and that difference continues to show itself in many directions – political, economic and others. . . It is this lag which produces a psychology of fear among the Muslims.”³⁴

Besides the relative educational and economic backwardness of the Muslims, the way Indian history was being presented in the 19th and in the first half of the 20th century gave intellectual support and legitimacy to communalism. It was during the era of Militant Nationalism and the rise of Revolutionary-Terrorism after the partition of Bengal in 1905 that the Hindu religious symbols were used on a larger scale.

It is not that organised communalism was spread only by the Muslims. A section of the Hindus too were communal in their outlook and the formation of the All-India Muslim League was soon followed by the setting up of the Hindu communal organisations like the Hindu Maha Sabha and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh.

It is difficult to enumerate here all the events which took place between the rise of military nationalism after 1905 and the creation of Pakistan in 1947. What can be said is that the communal groups and parties that talked of separate Hindu and Muslim nationalism never took active part in the struggle against foreign rule. Such groups and parties represented nothing but the vested interests of their upper classes.

Communalism in Post-Independence India

In independent India there are a few political parties which subsist by encashing the bitter experience of the past. The Hindu communalist political parties propagate that the Hindus are the aggrieved party. It is said by them that the Hindus have been ruled by the Muslims for seven hundred years and during that period they were subjected to sufferings and humiliations. The Hindu communal organisations today, also give a call for unity among Hindus for otherwise, they believe that India would be further partitioned.

The memories of the past also promote communalism among Muslims. S. Abid Hussain explains communalism among the Muslims in independent India in the following words:

“the same movement of religious communalism which had started shortly before 1947, had temporarily subsided after partition . . . its fundamental idea . . . is that true Muslim society can exist only in a country where the government is in the hands of Muslims and is carried on according to Islamic law.”³⁵

Apart from typical notions about the state which is based on certain religious interpretation, Muslims in India fear cultural and political domination by the Hindus. That is why the parties which assure the Muslims that their separate cultural identity would be allowed to remain intact, get their support. Sometimes the issue of recognising Urdu as the second official language in a Hindi speaking state becomes so acute that it leads to communal tensions and even riots.

We may identify three broad varieties of communalism in India.³⁶ First, there is the communalism of the majority community manifesting itself in the form of movement for Indianisation, *Bhāratīyatā* and *Hindutva*. It proposes a common life-style or culture for all people of the country belonging to any community, caste, tribe, denomination and the like. In the views of its protagonists, Hinduism is not a religion, it is a civilisation, a culture of this country called *Bhāratvarsha* or *Āryāvarta* and, hence all people of this country must adopt the same way of life. It may be labelled as ‘assimilative communalism’. Achin Vanaik³⁷ critically analyses the attempts made to situate the threat of Hindu communalism in a fascist paradigm and points out important similarities and dissimilarities between the two. Second, there is the tendency on the part of some minority religious communities to define themselves as ‘nations’, not as ‘communities’ and even to go to the extent of demanding a separate and sovereign ‘homeland’. This should be designated as ‘secessionist communalism’. Lastly, invoking religion as the source of social discrimination and economic disparity, special treatment is demanded from the state to uplift their socio-economic conditions by some religious collectivities which may be called ‘welfarist communalism’.

4.1.9 Caste

An account of the role of caste in Indian politics forms part of a very important as well as interesting study. The term ‘caste’ is often used to denote large-scale kinship groups that are hierarchically organised within a rigid system

of stratification.³⁸ Caste being a ubiquitous institution and a steel-frame of Hindu society is rightly considered as a system where society is immutably graded and divided. The main characteristics of a caste are the belief in a common origin held by all the members, and the possession of the same traditional occupation. It may perhaps be defined as ‘an endogamous group, or collection of such groups, bearing a common name, having the same traditional occupation, claiming descent from the same source, and commonly regarded, as forming a single homogeneous community.’³⁹

4.1.10 Role of Caste in Indian Politics

Caste in contemporary Indian politics plays a very important role behind the facade of parliamentary democracy. According to M.N. Srinivas:

“caste is so tacitly and so completely accepted by all, including those who are most vocal in condemning it that it is everywhere the unit of social action.”⁴⁰

The political behaviour of people is influenced by caste considerations as is quite evident at the time of distribution of election tickets and composition of ministries. In India caste is an important factor to influence the voting behaviour of the voters. While selecting a candidate for a particular constituency, it is calculated whether he or she would be able to get the support of his or her caste or not. Caste plays an influential role during the preparation of the list of a party’s office-bearers. According to Rasheeduddin Khan:

“while the form of our politics is secular, the style is essentially casteist. In a wide range of social and economic activity – in admission to schools and colleges, in student politics, in employment opportunities, in the distribution of benefits based on discretionary power in the three tier Panchayati Raj, and even in bureaucratic decisions caste considerations play more than a

marginal role. No account of voting behaviour, the legislative proceedings or even ministerial appointments would be complete unless considerable attention is given to this factor.”⁴¹

4.1.11 Integrative and Disintegrative Role of Caste

According to Rajni Kothari:

“caste provides to politics on the one hand an ongoing structure of divisions and accommodations and on the other hand a cohesive element which absorbs tensions and frustrations through its intimate particularistic channels”.⁴²

Caste plays both an integrative and disintegrative role in politics. It is integrative because the castes have given up their localised character. “They are in a sense vehicle for transcending the technical political illiteracy, which would restrict political participation”.⁴³ There is clear-cut correlation between castes and elections which leads to democratisation of the masses. “One important consequence of caste mobility, and politically, perhaps most significant, has been the expansion of the area of political mobilisation, consensus building and interest articulation and aggregation.”⁴⁴ The formation of various Backward Castes Commissions for the reservation of seats in government services are nothing but the reflection of politicisation of caste affiliations.

But when caste plays a disintegrative role it becomes a serious threat to national integration. Whenever the interests of two dominant caste groups clash in the modern democratic set-up violent incidents take place. The low caste groups now resent and retaliate whenever they are subjected to feudal atrocities. The result is bloody caste war. Caste conflicts hamper the cohesion and peace of society. Caste cultivates and invigorates the evil of caste patriotism by putting group loyalty above merit and competence and narrow selfishness over public wellbeing jeopardising the effectiveness of government’s vital functions. In its

most perverted form caste discrimination leads to the inhuman practice of untouchability. In India “the movement for change is not a struggle to end caste; it is to use caste as an instrument of social change. Caste is not disappearing, nor is ‘casteism’ – the political use of caste – for what is emerging in India is a social and political system which institutionalises and transforms but does not abolish caste.”⁴⁵

4.1.12 Region

Regionalism is one issue that has apparently caused the greatest threat to national integration. Regionalism is defined as politicisation of regional sentiment. To have a conceptual understanding of the term regionalism, let us first see the meaning of the term region.

Region generally means a large tract of land, a more or less defined portion of the earth’s surface specifically distinguished by certain natural features and climatic conditions. The essential point is that a region is characterised, more than anything else, by a widely shared sentiment of ‘togetherness’ in the people, internalised from a wide variety of sources and, what is more, a ‘separateness from others.’ The concept of regionalism draws sustenance from the factors of geography, topography, religion, language, culture, economic life, customs, political traditions and shared historical experiences. The term regionalism has its wider and narrower connotations. In the former sense, it covers the case of a movement directed against ‘centralism’; in the latter sense, it refers to the attachment of the people with interests of a local significance and in that respect it becomes analogous to localism or sectionalism.

In India the most important factor responsible for the growth of regionalism has been regional imbalance and regional disparity. The unequal development of different regions of India owes its genesis to the colonial past. The British did not have much interest in India’s development, least be said of equal development of all the regions.

The unequal development of different areas within the country became the major cause of popular movements after independence also, no matter what form they took. Since a detailed description of the movements mainly caused by the regional disparities is beyond the purview of this work, suffice it to say that unequal regional development is one of the major challenges to national integration in India.

4.2 Federal Autonomy

In a plural society having a multiplicity of languages, religions, regions etc., federalism offers a viable solution and institutional arrangement for co-existence of various pluralities. Alongwith the institutionalised arrangement of federalism in the state system, federal nation-building also comes as a complementary phenomenon. What one finds in most multi-ethnic states is a continuum between those who at one end will not accept anything less than independence and full political sovereignty and those at the other end who favour complete assimilation of various groups in the majority or so-called mainstream culture. Both these viewpoints i.e. demand for complete autonomy and pressure for complete assimilation evoke strong resistance. Federalism in such a situation becomes the most suitable institutional way to avoid fear of cultural domination by one social group and feelings of frustration among ethnic minorities, for it legitimises the existence of both nationalism and regionalism. It provides for the co-existence of centripetal and centrifugal forces and permits the contrarities of centralisation and decentralisation, of desires for unity and diversity, for attachment – both to the nation and the region. Federalism is a method by which these countervailing forces are balanced and preserved. While political processes are allowed to operate within sub-national units of the federation, they also intermesh with the national political process.

4.2.1 Federalism: The Conceptual Framework

Federalism implies a dual polity in which the powers are distributed between the union and the units and both are autonomous within their respective spheres. Usually all matters of common national interest are left with the Central government, while matters of local importance are entrusted to the State government. As both the Union and the State governments draw their authority from the same source viz., the Constitution, none of them is subordinate to the other.

In a federal system, the government powers “are divided between a government for the whole country and State governments in such a way that each government is legally independent within its own sphere. The government for the whole country has its own area of powers and exercises its authority without any control from the governments of the constituent parts of the country, and these latter in their turn exercise their powers without being controlled by Central Power. Neither is subordinate to the other; both are co-ordinate.”⁴⁶ In this system, it is easier to maintain a harmonious relationship among the diverse elements in terms of religion, language, ethnic origin, culture, habits and ways of living and forge unity which is very essential for maintaining national solidarity. “Federalism, conceived in the broadest sense looks to the linkage of people and institutions by natural consent, without the sacrifice of their individual identities as the ideal form of social organisation.”⁴⁷

4.2.2 Characteristics of a Federal System

There are so many modifications in the application of the federal principle that it is very difficult to point out some common features of the federal system in general. Nevertheless, some basic characteristics and operational principles common to all federal systems can be identified. These are:

1. ***A written, rigid and supreme constitution*** – Federalism rests on the principle of dual sovereignty and, therefore, it requires the existence of a written, rigid and supreme constitution. A written constitution establishes the federal relationship (relationship between the federation and the units) in written form that outlines the terms by which power is divided or shared in the political system. Rigidity of the constitution ensures that the constitution can be altered only by an extraordinary procedure in which both the federation and the units have equal say. Supremacy of the constitution means that the constitution is binding both on the federal government and the state government. Neither of the two governments should be in a position to override the provisions of the constitution relating to their power and status.
2. ***A division of powers*** – An essential feature of every federal constitution is the division of powers between the federal government and the governments of several units forming the federation. It is called the ‘federal principle’ or the method of dividing powers so that the Central and the Provincial governments are each, within the allotted sphere, co-ordinate and independent.
3. ***A dual set of government*** – In a federal system there are two sets of government; one at the Centre and the other in the States. Both are autonomous.
4. ***A free and fair judiciary*** – A federation must possess an independent judiciary which can act as the interpreter and guardian of the constitution.
5. ***A bicameral legislature*** – All federations have a bicameral legislature – the lower house representing the people and the upper house representing the units.

4.2.3 Federal Nation Building

The essence of federalism lies not in constitutional or institutional structure but in society itself. Federalism is more than statism. It is an explanatory term representing the larger phenomenon of state and society building. Federal nation building reinforces the importance of federalism in holding a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-lingual, multi-religious and multi-regional society together within a federal union, based on the simultaneous operation of two mutually correlated principles of self-rule and shared rule. Federalism has appeared as the essential principle for organising heterogeneous societies into a viable pattern of political sharing of power, by reconciling the twin processes of political unification and social diversity, of commonality for certain purposes and specificities for others. Federalism is a political structure of ‘unity in diversity’.⁴⁸

The Indian Scenario

The essential minimal features of a federal system, i.e. distribution of powers, supremacy of the constitution, written constitution and authority of courts are present in the Indian Constitution. The Constitution establishes a dual polity. The dual polity consists of the Union at the national level and the States at the regional level, each endowed with sovereign powers to be exercised in the field assigned to them, respectively, by the Constitution. The powers of the Union and the States are clearly demarcated through the Union list, the State List and the Concurrent List. The Constitution is written and supreme. Enactments in excess of the powers of the Union or State legislatures are invalid. Moreover, no amendment which makes any changes in the status or powers of the Union or the States is possible without the concurrence of the Union and the majority of the States. Finally, the Constitution establishes a Supreme Court to decide dispute between the Union and the States. It is because of these basic federal features that our Supreme Court has described the Constitution as ‘Federal’.⁴⁹

4.2.4 Uniqueness of Indian Federalism: Incorporation of Some Unitary Features

There are some striking unitary features in the Indian Constitution which have forced the critics to describe it as a unique federation. These are the specific powers on the basis of which it is asserted that the fundamental postulate of a federal polity that the Central and the State governments functioning under it are co-ordinate authorities, each independent within its own sphere, is so greatly modified in the relationship between the Union and the States that the Indian Constitution is not entitled to be described as a federal Constitution. Dr. K.C. Wheare holds that the Constitution established a system of Government which is almost quasi-federal, utmost devolutionary in character; a unitary state with subsidiary federal features rather than a Federal State with subsidiary unitary features.⁵⁰ Sometimes the Indian system is also described as ‘definitely unfederal or a unitary constitution’⁵¹ or as a ‘federation with strong centralising tendency’.⁵² The unitary features may be listed as follows:

1. The Indian Constitution describes India as a Union instead of describing it as a federation. In the Constituent Assembly debate Ambedkar had clearly said that:

“the use of the term ‘Union’ is deliberate....I can tell you why the Drafting Committee has used it. The Drafting Committee wanted to make it clear that though India was to be a federation, the federation was not the result of an agreement by the states to join a federation and that the federation not being the result of an agreement; no state has the right to secede from it. The federation is a Union because it is indestructible.”⁵³
2. The distribution of power is highly unfair from the federal point of view. Though the Constitution provides for a division of powers between the Union and the States this division is tilted in favour of the Union for various reasons:

- a) the number of subjects in the Union List is almost double the number of subjects in the State List. The Union List consists of 97 subjects whereas the State List consists of 47 subjects
 - b) over the subjects of the Concurrent List both the Union Parliament and the State legislatures have the power to legislate but in case of any conflict between the State law and the Union law, the Union law prevails over the State law⁵⁴
 - c) residuary powers are vested in the Union⁵⁵
 - d) governor of a state, who is the representative of Centre has the power to reserve a bill passed by the State legislature for reconsideration of the President of India and the President in such a situation has the power of not giving his assent to the State bill⁵⁶
 - e) the State legislature can never legislate over a subject of the Union List but Union Parliament may legislate on a subject of the State List in certain conditions like:
 - when the Rajya Sabha passes a resolution in this respect⁵⁷
 - when National Emergency is declared on the basis of article 352⁵⁸
 - when two or more states make a request for the said purpose⁵⁹
 - to implement some international treaty or covenant⁶⁰
 - when President's rule is imposed in a state.⁶¹
3. The distribution of revenues between the Centre and the States is of such a nature that the States have to depend largely upon the charitable assistance of the Centre.
 4. There is no perpetual guarantee regarding the existence of any State as such. The Centre may redraw the political map of the country in the ordinary course of legislation.

5. When we look at the process of Constitutional amendment, we find that the States have a very limited say in the amendment procedure. It is only with regard to certain provisions having their connection with the federal framework of the Constitution where the ratification by half of the States, and that too by a simple majority of votes in the Legislative Assembly, is required.
6. The Union government has the power to issue directions to the State governments which the State governments must invariably follow. Its implication is that the failure of the State government in this regard shall be treated as the breakdown of Constitutional machinery and that shall enable the President to take over the administration of that State under Article 356 of the Constitution.
7. The emergency powers of the President are so sweeping in their effect that the very nature of the Indian political system can be transformed from an incidentally federal into a purely unitary system of government.

Besides these features some other unitary features may be listed as:

- Unequal representation of states in the Rajya Sabha
- Executive authority of the States not to impede or prejudice Union administration
- Single citizenship
- Single constitutional system
- Single civil and criminal law and procedure
- Single higher public services
- Integrated judiciary
- Presence of Centrally administered areas known as the Union Territories
- Appointment and removal of governor by the President
- Special powers of President regarding welfare of Scheduled Tribes and Backward Classes

4.2.5 Actual Functioning of Federal System in India

The real nature of Indian federalism cannot be understood unless we focus our attention on the actual working of the Constitution in the last 60 years. It is generally believed that till 1989 the actual functioning of the federal system in India by and large strengthened the Centre. Some of the factors responsible for increasing powers of the Centre may be listed as below:

- Dominance of the Congress party at the Centre as well as in a number of States. The first phase of post-independence party system in India has been termed as the ‘Congress system’ by Rajni Kothari⁶², the ‘one-party predominant system’ by W. H. Morris-Jones⁶³, and the ‘predominant party system’ by Giovanni Sartori.⁶⁴
- Strengthening of the Centre through various amendments of the Constitution.
- Various pronouncements made by the Supreme Court of India
- Introduction of planned model of development and creation of the Planning Commission.
- Liberal use of emergency powers, particularly the use of Article 356.

Some scholars in India have argued that the unitary bias of our Constitution has been accentuated in its actual working, by two factors, so much so that very little is left of federalism. These two factors are:

“(a) the overwhelming financial powers of the Union and the utter dependence of the States upon Union grants for discharging their functions; (b) the comprehensive sweep of the Union Planning Commission, set-up under the concurrent power over planning.”⁶⁵

The eminent scholar, K. Santhanam, observes, “India has practically functioned as a unitary state though the Union and the States have tried to function formally and legally as a federation.”⁶⁶

But another group of scholars reject this conclusion which supports the theory of strengthening of the Centre. Achin Vanaik looks at the frequent use of Article 356 as frustrating response of a weakened Centre. “The much more frequent use of President’s Rule to dismiss State governments is taken by some as evidence of greater centralisation of authority. But it is more plausibly interpreted (not the frequency with which it has been resorted to) as a frustrated and inadequate response to persistent regional pulls on a weakened Centre.”⁶⁷

Some other facts also lead us to the same conclusion. “At the state level, the regional languages are becoming more important in administration, education and in the print media. The greatest number of newspapers and periodicals are in the regional languages, then in Hindi, followed by English.....The delinkage between Lok Sabha and Assembly elections work against the Centre and has helped to deinstitutionalise the co-existence of different parties at the Centre and in the States.... The very fact that the Sarkaria Commission was appointed in June 1983 to inquire into the Centre-State relationship and to evaluate State grievances is itself an indication of how the Centre has had to take more serious account of State pressures.”⁶⁸

Whatever may be the situation before 1989, after 1989 the actual functioning of Indian federalism has certainly diluted the powers of the Centre in comparison to the powers of the States. The most important factor behind this shift has been the collapse of an All India party system and the emergence and electoral success of regional parties in various states.

The 1990’s witnessed a significant transformation in the Indian polity, including a decline in the role of the Government of India. The two most notable dimensions of this change are political federalisation and economic liberalisation subsequently mutually reinforcing each other. Decline of Congress’s control over the economy was prefigured by the decline of the national party system. One-

party majority governments, the norm until 1989, were replaced by federal coalition governments in which regional parties play an important role.

Economic liberalisation diluted the role of the Planning Commission. The permit-quota-license raj has been increasingly replaced by a market economy in which the private sector must by conscious design play a larger role than the public sector. Political federalisation is the result of collapse of the all India party system or the weakening of the Congress party and emergence and electoral success of regional parties in various states. The 1980's accelerated the process of the Indian political system's adaption to the sub-national regional pressures for a more federal polity. The economic liberalisation and political federalisation subsequently mutually reinforced each other.

Rudolph and Rudolph maintain that "India moved from a command economy to federal market economy".⁶⁹ They further observe, "by the end of the 1990's state chief ministers became the market players in India's federal market economy".⁷⁰ They have approvingly quoted Raja J. Chelliah, who observed the same fact in 1995: "the relative spheres of the activities of the two levels have been thrown in a flux. The scope of real decentralisation of economic power has been greatly increased and new vistas have opened up for creative and innovative activities by the sub-national level government."⁷¹ This new trendsetting has made the State governments important economic actors instead of the Central government, and is becoming an unstoppable phenomenon. The old system of Centre-State relations had evolved into a system of 'Centrally-sponsored schemes' and 'Central sector schemes' which were implemented by the State governments and financed by the Central government.⁷² The Central government is unburdening itself and asking the State governments to take responsibilities for economic development.⁷³

Indian federal constitutional arrangements are undergoing a sea change under the impact of the New Economic Policies (NEP) of the 1990's. The pillar of

the NEP is the “rolling back of the state” and a central role for market mechanisms in the national economy. India’s centralised political system was integral to the system of economic planning in which the State governments were led by the Central government. The new economic regime of the 1990’s demands an effective role of the State governments in the process of economic reforms. Therefore, contemporary political federalisation and growing importance of States cannot be interpreted autonomously. The politics of the day has to be interpreted on the basis of the changing nature of the economy. In India also, the root of this political federalisation actually lie in the policy of economic liberalisation and it can be explained properly only in the light of economic factors.

4.2.6 The Issue of Federal Autonomy

We saw that the founding fathers of the Indian Constitution went for a unique system where they accepted the basic elements of federal polity along with certain unitary features. The history of Constitutional development in India suggests that there were both ‘centralisers’ and ‘decentralisers’ in the Constituent Assembly. The ‘decentralisers’ included C. Rajagopalachari, who thought that the solution to ‘centrifugal interests’ was to concede greater autonomy to the States. To centralise was ‘both ridiculous and alarming’.⁷⁴ A careful reading of Indian Constitution makes it clear that Indian Constitution does not oppose State autonomy. But actual functioning of the Constitution clearly indicates certain areas of dispute between the State on the one hand and the Centre on the other. To have a clearer insight into the issue, let us first see what is meant by the concept of State autonomy.

State autonomy does not mean independence or sovereignty of the States. It indicates non-interference of the Centre in the prescribed domain of the States. The right of the States to work independently in the prescribed area is called autonomy. Time and again, States complain of encroachment of their rights and

violation of their autonomy by the Centre. The demand for provincial autonomy can be split into four parts:⁷⁵

- Enlargement of powers through a change in the Constitution,
- Evolution of conventions by which the Centre would refrain from exercising its powers infringing State autonomy without the consent of the States,
- Dissatisfaction with the existing financial relations, and
- A shrinkage of autonomy resulting from planning.

Today in the light of the New Economic Policy the issue of federal autonomy mainly revolves around the economic issues. In short, Centre-State conflicts and inter-State tensions are now primarily focused on economic and political not cultural issues. The political issues include State demands for an extension of the subjects of the State List, abridgement of the Concurrent List and vesting residuary powers in the States. Other issues are appointment, removal and role of governor, reservation of bills passed by the State legislature for reconsideration of the President by the governor, imposition of Article 356 and the institution of an All India Service. But the heart of Centre-State dispute is the financial relationship. The States are unhappy with their share of taxes and levies collected by the Centre, with the Centre's monopoly of certain elastic sources of revenue such as income, capital, company and wealth taxes and most excise and export duties, and with their own dependency on the Centre for discretionary loans and grants. The States would like the statutory component of compulsory disbursement by the Centre to increase substantially.⁷⁶

Today the increased demand for provincial autonomy is the result of the newly emerged economic situation the complementary phenomenon to which is political federalisation. Many new issues and concerns about Indian federalism have emerged with such demands as the dismantling of the control mechanism of

the planning phase where the Central government was the sole distributor of resources and the executor of policies and programmes of development.

The present day concern over widespread intra-societal conflict – variously described as regional, ethnic, multi-nationalist or ethno-nationalist – within India and in many other parts of the world – has prompted fresh consideration of federalism as one of the approaches or strategies for management or resolution of the problems. Rasheeduddin Khan maintains:

“for continental polities like India and China, which have, on the one hand, a distinct and unified civilisational unity, on the other, diversities of culture, social composition, belief patterns and language/dialect group etc. probably a more valid term is not Nation-State but Federal Nation-State.”⁷⁷ And “a federal nation is a mosaic of people in which unified political identity is reconciled with socio-cultural diversities. Its hallmark is unity of polity and plurality of society. It is a conglomerate of segments whose diverse identities based on ethnicity, language, religion, region etc. are nevertheless united politically into territorial sovereignty.”⁷⁸

In India, unity itself is a federal concept. It is certainly not the unity of a unitarian polity. It is the unity born out of the inter-dependence of diverse socio-cultural entities that pass through the stages of competition, conflict and reconciliation and realise that in mutual confrontation they might themselves destroy each other, while in reciprocal co-operation they can thrive jointly and severally.⁷⁹ Therefore the concept of federal autonomy does not go against the spirit of the Indian Constitution as long as it not take the form of separatism.

4.3 Personalised Politics Versus Institutionalised Politics

The issues of personalised politics and institutionalised politics have been a very interesting area of analysis in the modern Indian political discourse.

Generally the institutions like parliament, bureaucracy, judiciary and political parties are considered to be an indispensable part of modern democratic regimes and democracy cannot operate in the absence of these institutions. Public demands are effectively converted into policies, decisions and outcomes through these institutions. Therefore, institution-building is one of the primary concerns of democracy. The strength of democracy depends upon the strength of its institutions. In the absence of a systematic authority link between the state and civil society, tendencies towards centralisation and powerlessness are generated. Without parties or other political institutions, the link between the leaders and their supporters is very weak. Elections are won on general, non-programmatic issues and in such a case it becomes very difficult to translate such general mandates into policies. In such a condition though the formal authority of the state increases, its actual power declines. For example, Indira Gandhi, who was largely responsible for the deinstitutionalisation of the Congress party when she needed institutional support to implement her programmes, had to face the problem of absence of institutions through which the programmes could be implemented. Programmatic failure, in turn, contributed to her political decline. Besides Indira Gandhi, other Indian leaders have also ended up creating a very similar personalistic, centralised and top-down political system. Non-Congress leaders, such as the actor turned-politician M.G. Rama Chandran in Tamil Nadu and N.T. Rama Rao in Andhra Pradesh came to power on the basis of their charisma. But due to pursuance of personalised politics though they directly made contact with the masses, ultimately they marginalised the institutions. As a result of this marginalisation of institutions their own power could not be institutionalised. They concentrated power in their persons, appointed loyal minions to positions of power, and continued to rule as long as their personal popularity could be maintained.

The wider prevalence within India of a tendency towards centralisation and personalisation of power clearly indicates that certain broader political forces in

contemporary India encourage the rise of leaders who rule on the basis of personal popularity and who, in turn, following the logic of personal rule, tend to concentrate power and create a system which is featured by dependent appointees.

Politics in India is often described as personality politics, a characterisation which appears to have several meanings. “Most generally it connotes a towering figure around whom much of power dynamics revolve; it also suggests that competing political figures vie for ascendance mainly on the grounds of personal issues. Another assumption is that an avowed ideology might be a façade, from behind which insults and accusations are hurled, the real targets of which are personality flaws. Personality politics also means, on the part of the masses, an attitude of hero worship (or its opposite) towards public figures. These attitudes are often reflected in expressions like ‘who after Nehru?’, ‘only Indira can hold the country together’ etc. But the phrase ‘personality politics’ always means that substantive issues, those that really matter to the well-being of the people and the country at large, are subservient or peripheral or marginal.”⁸⁰

4.3.1 Some Insights on the Background of Personalised and Institutionalised Politics in India

In modern India the formation of the Indian National Congress in 1885 may be marked as the beginning of the era of the political party. But since its formation in 1885 the Indian National Congress remained an organisation of Anglicists with a very narrow social base till 1920 when Gandhi revised the Congress and tried to institutionalise it. In the Nagpur Session of the Indian National Congress in 1920 two important decisions were taken:

1. Use of regional languages in the proceedings of Congress and
2. Institutionalisation of Congress from village level to national level

Thus, Congress committees at various levels – Village Congress Committee, Bloc Congress Committee, District Congress Committee, Provincial Congress Committee and National Congress Committee were formed.

But though the Congress party was sufficiently institutionalised after 1920, Gandhi played a decisive role in the formulation of its policies no matter who was the President of the Party. In 1939 Subhash Chandra Bose was elected as the president of Congress despite Gandhi's support to his opponent Pattabhi Sitarammaya. But under the influence of Gandhi, Bose had to finally resign (though Gandhi formally did not ask Bose to resign) and he was replaced by Rajendra Prasad, an ardent supporter of Gandhi. But though Gandhi had tremendous influence over the policies of Congress he never damaged its institutional base. In every village, bloc, district and province Congress committees worked autonomously. They were dominated by the local elites and workers and no efforts were taken to impose leadership from the top.

In post-independence India Nehru emerged as the most powerful leader of the Congress party. Though Nehru wielded a charismatic personality and during the General elections 'strengthen the hands of Nehru' used to be the popular slogan, the institutional base of the Congress party was not weakened. Nehru himself was a great democrat by temperament and though he had the opportunity to become a dictator by virtue of the popular support he had, he encouraged democratic norms and institutions to flourish. While Nehru was definitely 'the first among equals', the fact is that the Cabinet government during this early period was a reality, parliament functioned as an important deliberating and debating forum, the opposition was treated with respect, the Congress party had internal democracy and an identity independent of the government, chief ministers of states often possessed independent political bases, and such other state institutions as the Constitution, the civil service and the judiciary enjoyed a degree of non-partisan integrity. There were thus important institutional checks on the

personal power of Nehru. Further, it is also important to recognise, however, that political struggles in this early stage primarily involved a relatively small group of the elite, specially nationalist and other rural and urban elite. The large majority of the Indian population, specially those in villages, were not as yet actively mobilised political actors. Members of dominant castes and other influential 'big men' in villages were thus often able to sway the political behaviour of those below them, namely, the middle and lower rural strata. As these rural elite were incorporated into the fold of the Congress party via patronage links, India's democracy took on the appearance of a relatively well-constructed, elitist democracy in which competing elites managed to work with each other, and into which the elites professed a hope of actively incorporating India's masses.⁸¹

4.3.2 Beginning of Personalised Politics: The Deinstitutionalisation of Congress Party

In Indian politics, the rise of Indira Gandhi to power signifies the growth of personalised politics. After the sudden death of Lal Bahadur Shastri in 1966 Indira Gandhi was sworn in as Prime Minister. At that time there were two centres of power in Congress. The organisational wing of Congress party was controlled by the 'Syndicate' (the old Congress leaders) and the parliamentary wing was controlled by the 'Indicate' (Indira Gandhi and her supporters). By 1969, Indira Gandhi was ready to challenge the 'Syndicate' who in their view had been her patrons and benefactors and continued to think of themselves in the same role. As the first move to get rid of 'Syndicate' she engineered the defeat of N. Sanjiva Reddy who was the officially nominated candidate of party for Presidential election by unofficially backing V.V. Giri, an independent candidate. She also successfully defied the 'Syndicate' by endorsing the socialist agenda for the party. In 1971, she called for an early or mid-term poll. It was politically very significant because it delinked the parliamentary elections from State assembly elections. Now Mrs. Gandhi was able to exploit her comparative advantage as India's only

national political personality. Delinking also made it easier to turn the election in a plebiscitary direction by identifying one known personality with one appealing slogan, “abolish poverty.”

In this way Indira Gandhi’s victory over ‘Syndicate’ proved to be the beginning of party deinstitutionalisation. In this era of personalised politics personal loyalty, not party commitment, became the touchstone for preferment and promotion. The simultaneous rise of plebiscitary and personal politics under Mrs. Gandhi’s guiding hand obviated the need for an organisation capable of articulating with society, serving and leading the political community, and fighting elections. The rise of plebiscitary and the demise of mediated politics resulted as much from unintended consequences of ad-hoc actions as from design or conspiracy. As Indira Gandhi became Congress’s most vital resource, the key to political power and personal advancement, the party and the person tended to become one until, in the rich prose of party president D. K. Barooah, the phrase “Indira is India, India is Indira” could be spoken to a grateful but anxious party following. As the myth of Indira Gandhi began to inspire and diminish India, the party that she led lost its institutional coherence and elan.⁸²

Congress’s deinstitutionalisation was accelerated and deepened during the meteoric rise of Sanjay Gandhi but his sudden death ended the story. Today in the era of coalition politics though the personalised style of politics is not much popular at the Centre but in some states it exists in various forms.

4.3.3 Impact of Personalised Politics and Deinstitutionalisation of National Party

In the decade of 1970’s and 1980’s due to the deinstitutionalisation of the Congress party and the growth of personalised politics, a unique phase of Indian democracy began about which it is said that India entered into the era of plebiscitary democracy without entering into the era of representative democracy. Now the leader was directly able to address the masses and in regard to creating

the vital link between the leader and the followers – the party largely lost its relevance and organisational effectiveness. It became a prisoner of the leader's personality and influence. The obvious result was development of a type of patrimonial politics. The main features of this type of politics were:

- Nomination of state chief ministers by the top party leader or the High-Command instead of their election by the members of State legislative assembly. The established method of selecting them on the basis of support in State assembly parties and the Congress committee was overrode.
- Party matters were put at low priority. Party organs at the Centre, State, and district levels fell into disuse, and those who ran them became persons of lesser consequence unless they were thought to have Mrs. Gandhi's ear or enjoy her favour.
- Absence of independent personality in the Cabinet. Party leader did not feel comfortable with political peers and independent colleagues, neither trusting them nor inspiring their trust.
- Ideological commitment was reduced and the personal agenda dominated.
- Development of personal loyalty.
- Dismantling of intra-party democracy. Organisational elections in the party were suspended. Mrs. Gandhi used her plebiscitary endorsement by the people to by-pass the party. The result sealed the fate of intra-party democracy. It also ended the party's reliance on the organisational wing to conduct and win elections.

In a democratic country like India the rise of personalistic populism is a puzzle. What may be the reasons behind the development of this phenomenon? Basically it was the result of growing mobilisation and fragmentation. From its colonial rulers India inherited a traditional and backward society. When such a society was fused with modern democratic structure certain new problems arose. "India faced the unique problem of implanting liberal democracy in a

predominantly rural society. In the history of every other longstanding and enduring democracy, the consolidation of its structures and norms, in particular, universal suffrage to include women, racial, ethnic and religious minorities, comes only after urbanisation-industrialisation (including industrialisation of agriculture) has already substantially or fully taken place. India institutionalises a liberal-democratic society in a predominantly agricultural society.”⁸³ Introduction of democracy in a highly rigid and inegalitarian social structure has slowly but surely unleashed diverse patterns of mobilisation. These activities started intensifying sometime in the 1960’s and have continued over the last two decades. A major consequence has been the difficulty in forging moderately consensual authority: the more fragmented the political society, the more difficult it has become to form a democratically constituted, coherent centre of power. This political context, in turn, has encouraged personalistic populism. Leaders who promise a little something to everyone, even if vaguely, and those who possess personal appeal – or as it were, charisma – often emerge powerful in a setting of political fragmentation.⁸⁴

Then, what are the impacts of erosion of autonomy of the institutions and strengthening of personalised power? First of all, though the state gains formal authority, it loses effective power and control leading to the crisis of governability. During the Indira Gandhi era, the Indian state – like the old regime before the French revolution – gained formal authority but lost power, as the government loosened the state’s connections with society by making them tenuous and arbitrary. It also ends the autonomy of the institutions because institutional autonomy depends on the viability of professionalism, which becomes increasingly at risk in the face of populist and personalistic politics. Rudolph and Rudolph put it in the context of deinstitutionalisation of Congress party. “The deinstitutionalisation of party was accompanied by the erosion of the autonomy and professionalism of state institutions. During the Indira Gandhi era, India’s political capital was depleted as the independence, professional standards

and procedural norms of the parliament, courts, police, civil service, and federal system gave way to centralisation based on personal loyalty.”⁸⁵ Moreover, personalistic and populist rule, in turn, tends to be inherently centralising and deinstitutionalising and does not offer a long-term solution to the problem of building democratic authority. Because power lines link diffuse masses to a single leader, the person at the top is not as constrained by coalitional pressures as are other democratically elected leaders. Of course, such leaders must respect the socially powerful, but they also possess a considerable degree of freedom, not in social restructuring, but in creating a top-down political system. The more the second and third-tier officials of the polity come to be appointed from above, the less independent power exists within the polity and the more centralised becomes the top of the political pyramid.⁸⁶

In a vibrant democracy the popular demands and needs must be converted into government plans and policies and they should be implemented effectively. But in India growth of personalised politics arrested this phenomenon. According to Atul Kohli:

“personalistic control in India has proven hard to translate into power to achieve policy goals. This was true of both redistributive and growth goals. In both cases, our analysis has suggested, leaders needed a political instrument to translate their goals into outcomes, but such an instrument was missing. Instruments such as parties could have helped bring together leaders and supporters into a durable ‘power bloc’. This institutionalised power, in turn, could have been used to pursue specific goals.”⁸⁷

Thus, we discussed three important issues of Indian politics namely the issue of nation building, federal autonomy and personality-institution dichotomy. It would be interesting to see whether we could revisit ancient India specially the Mauryan polity for providing some solutions to these challenges or not.

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