

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

India is hailed as the largest democracy in the World. Nevertheless, it remains a puzzle to many as to how democracy, essentially being a European import, can take roots in an otherwise inhospitable soil of India. It is a truism of sorts that Democracy came to India as the Modernizing elites who largely under the banner of the Congress Party led India to victory over colonial power, had preferred the democratic system of Governance primarily following the British model. In any case, Nehru dominated the proceedings of Indian politics until his death in 1964. However, his pious intention was not eventually backed by concrete economic initiatives. Even genuine economic endeavours under taken by the Nehru Government, could not be implemented because of social notables riding piggyback on whom Congress used to win elections. Therefore, the failure of the anti-poverty commitments of Nehruvian State is a fair enough indication of Governance deficit.

Nehru's death had debilitating effect on the Congress Party. 'The Congress system' came, for the first time, under severe strain. Congress's pro-industry and urban bias image proved very costly. Succession issue also fuelled the crisis which eventually spiraled out of control. The electoral set backs congress suffered around the time, needed elixir to be injected into the organization for toning up the party Indira Gandhi, after being emerged victorious in the factional feud, adopted populist measures to rejuvenate the Party.

Initially, she was successful in arresting the organizational slide but eventually, she could not sustain it. Rather, she had to impose National emergency in a bid to cling onto power. However, victory of the Janata Party which was essentially a queer amalgam of political parties of different shades and colour, was very short lived. The late sixties witnessed the collapse of the 'Congress system.' The emergence of Charan Singh Championing the cause of rural India and pitching for a pro-farmer tilt in economic policy was also a watershed development in Indian Politics and economy. The otherwise impeccable record of procedural democracy in India had also had its share of blemishes in the imposition of National Emergency during Mrs. Indira Gandhi's rule which were marked by a process of suppression of institutions leading to 'de-institutionalization'.

Indira Gandhi's populist posturing aimed at the lower classes could not be sustained for long. Soon, it was to be replaced by the pluralization of polity around caste, ethnic, tribal and gender identities. The bureaucratic offices and legislative chambers of national level politics were being increasingly pre-occupied by the politics of Religious revivalism and economic liberalization since the 1990s. The combined effect of Emergency and Post-Emergency rule, as well as the ascendance of rural voice, has no doubt, led to the undermining of certain institutionalized forms of politics. Nevertheless, Democracy has improved its stature in India as Dipankar Gupta argues, "Democracy in India has aroused a whole new set of expectations, resulting not only in the aggravation of Certain existing conflict situations, and in the creation of new ones, but also, on the positive side, allowing for the emergence of new Political classes. Thus while the dream of 1947 has soured to a certain extent it is incontrovertible that our democracy is no longer an experiment but has struck deep roots, and in this process, turned the soil over in several unanticipated ways." (Dipankar Gupta, 'Political sociology in India – contemporary trends', Orient – Longman, New Delhi. 1996. pp. 75-76).

In any case, the rejection of Congress in the 1989 election was the result of cumulative failure of the regime on practically all fronts, not just because of the communal polarization. Thus the socio-economic setting facilitated the emergence of 'Hindu nationalism' as a dynamic force in Indian Politics. However, crystallization of countervailing social forces and political currents released by Mandal recommendations were no less dynamic by bringing caste division and explosive caste conflict to the forefront of national politics which have, no doubt, played a decisive role in forcing the project of the Hindutva Movement to re-allocate its priorities for the time being at least. Further, the popular mobilizations especially by the 'backward castes' with emancipatory objectives, yearned for capturing State Power. The democratic up-surge has forced political actors to pay more attention to the needs and preferences of the ordinary citizens. Economic reforms was introduced in India in 1991. It set in motion some contradictory forces in Indian politics. On the one hand, it calls for downsizing the state resulting in abdication of welfarist obligations towards the vulnerable segments of society. On the other hand, Democracy has unleashed forces that has endeared the state to the common people as the possible protector from social and economic wrong-doing. The state is, no longer looked upon

as patronage dispensing authority. Rather, state is viewed as the protector and custodian of peoples' rights. However, the retreating state as part of the panacea of "Good Governance" package, stands to erode its legitimacy if it fails to live up to the aspirations of people. Articulation of demands or claims through the prism of caste, community, religion and region has become the modus operandi of almost all mainstream political parties. Against this backdrop, the social movement activism has a huge purchase in the polity in terms of drumming up support for Rights-based articulation of demands and claims of ordinary people who are otherwise caught in the cobwebs of low literacy, poor health and low skill base making them further incapacitated to take advantage of "opportunities" unleashed by the forces of economic reform. So, the road ahead lies in nourishing and nurturing democracy through institutional politics as well as social movements activism of democratic character in order to re-invent Governance from a "Given" category to a dynamic one originating from within the womb of India's socio-economic reality mirroring the aspirations and preferences of the vast majority of the population.

In seeking to pursue this Research undertaking, I have been indebted to quite a few persons. First of all, I have received generous support from my friend, Dr. Debasis Datta, Deputy Controller of Examinations, University of North Bengal, in all possible way for taking this study forward. I won't like to belittle his contributions towards my study by just giving him customary thanks. Dr. Rajeswar Mishra, an ex-faculty with the A.N.Sinha Institute of Social Sciences, Patna and presently, a development consultant of national standing, remained a constant source of encouragement for me. I would like to thank Prof. Mishra for encouraging me so profusely by extolling the "virtues" in me as a researcher which re-energized and helped me to stay focused for all these years. I have been also immensely benefited by the insightful comments and incisive logic of analysis of Prof. Deytish Chakraborty, Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science, University of North Bengal, whenever I had an opportunity for sharing my ideas with him on my research topic. So, I would like to record my gratitude to him for tightening some "loose-ends" in my thinking process. Besides, I am also indebted to all my teachers in the Department of Political Science for their invaluable encouragement and comments on different dimensions of the subject under study.

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My parents could not survive to see the completion of the study. But their blessings are always with me.

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