

CHAPTER-II

INDIAN POLITICAL SYSTEM : MAJOR CONTRADICTIONS

India stands for an ideal example of a plural society - a society that is divided by what Harry Eckstein calls, "segmental cleavages". Segmental cleavages, he writes, may be of religious, ideological, linguistic, regional, cultural, racial or ethnic nature.¹ A further characteristic, already implied by Eckstein's definition, is that political parties, interest groups, media of communication schools, and voluntary associations tend to be organized along the lines of segmental cleavages.² It has been a well established proposition in political Science that in a plural society, it is difficult to achieve and maintain stable democratic government.³ The root of this proposition may be traced to Aristotle's observation that "a state aims at being, as far as it can be, a society composed of equals and peers."⁴ Social homogeneity and political consensus are treated as prerequisites for, or factors strongly conducive to, stable democracy while deep social divisions and political differences within plural societies are regarded as responsible for instability and breakdown in democracies.⁵

As such, India, like other plural societies, has been witnessing a spurt of protest movements during the last four decades and these protests emanate mostly from the plural character of Indian society leading to the direction of ungovernability. The hopes and aspirations, envisioned during the freedom struggle and incorporated in the Constitution have turned bitter leading to a sense of despair and agony strengthening the already existing segmental cleavages. Thus, India has moved from stability to instability and has even acquired the reputation of a 'functioning anarchy'.⁶

Under the circumstances, an understanding of the genesis, nature, content, direction and impact of protest movements in India would inevitably require an analysis and understanding of the social, economic and political dynamics of the system involving the major contradictions operating at different levels. The root of dissent, agitation and protest can never be a sudden outburst; it is to be found in the dynamic

interaction of the various parameters of the system covering the social, cultural, ethnic, religious, economic and political dimensions.

SOCIAL CONTRADICTIONS :

By the logic of a plural society, India exhibits the heterogeneous presence simultaneously of modernity with tradition, relatively developed urban centres with all the modern facilities and amenities with the backward rural peripheries, all pervasive pressure and getting ascendancy in the recent years, of caste as a social phenomenon having large scale political penetration and leading to a situation characterised by caste hierarchy with pronounced equality, and rampant corruption at all spheres of the society. Undoubtedly, all these contradictions tend to impair the legitimacy of the political system.

In terms of population, India is the second most populous polity in the world. The beliefs and behaviour pattern of the vast mass of India's population are characterised by great antiquity, continuity and diversities and that also on a scale unmatched by any other political system.⁷ The Indian actually live in one country but in many centuries. For example, the scientists working in the most sophisticated Bhabha Atomic Research Centre at Bombay spatially coexist with millions of people plying bullock - carts in villages. These two may represent two extreme cultural polarities in their outlook and lifestyle and yet these may also be congruent in some respects.⁸ There have been great techno-economic achievements in the fields of science, technology and engineering but most Indians still continue to subscribe to beliefs whose philosophical foundations were moulded several centuries ago and whose ideational core has remained intact, despite momentous changes in the political realm and regular contacts with different and/or divergent cultural traditions.⁹

Observers like Morris - Jones¹⁰ and Weiner¹¹ have attempted to encapsulate the process of contradiction and adjustment that is going on by arguing that there are several "idioms" or "cultures" in fundamental conflict with each other. A modern idiom, according to Morris - Jones, centres in the ideas of the nationalist elite and in the

institutions in Delhi, a 'traditional' idiom is rooted in the kin, caste, and communal relations of village, locality and province. It has a complete social ethos and comes into politics not with a list of demands but with a way of life. A "saintly" idiom is characteristically Indian and is associated with Gandhi and his disciples involving selfless devotion to constructive work for the good of the society and immune from the mimicking of foreign models or from contaminated by the archaic superstitions and feudal practices of the Indian society.¹²

According to Weiner, in post-Independence India, two political cultures emerged at different levels of Indian society. One is rooted in the districts permeating local politics, local party organizations and administration. The second predominates in the national capital, is found among planners, many national political leaders, and in the administrative cadre. The first may be called an emerging mass political culture and the second, an elite political culture. While the mass political culture is an expanding political culture, the elite political culture is a defensive one and very critical of the emerging more popular mass political culture, its own creation.¹³

If one compares the characteristics of the two main political idioms of Morris-Jones with those of the two political cultures of Weiner, it becomes clear that the "traditional idiom" is the idiom of "mass political culture" and the "modern idiom", the idioms of "elite political culture". The first idiom and culture are found in the rural areas and the second idiom and culture in the cities. In fine, there are two basic and general pattern of political culture in India from the village to the national level denoting a distinct manner of political thinking and behaviour.¹⁴

Besides the modernity - tradition dichotomy, there exists the rural-urban divide. The urban areas actually monopolise most of the modern and basic amenities of life. The rural areas are left to the basic minimum, even less of the basic needs. In terms of education, health, marketing the products, and purchasing for sustained livelihood the rural areas have virtually no option but to look to the urban areas. The consequences become deplorable when the people of the rural areas cannot afford to go to the urban areas for education or for medical purposes. Under the circumstances,

they are left to the predistined option of remaining uneducated or half educated, unemployed or underemployed, traditional in outlook, and victims of traditional ways, of medical treatment by the 'ojhas' or the local quacks. However, during the last few years, the picture has started changing. With the revitalization of Panchayati Raj, the horizontal and vertical penetration of political parties in the rural areas, particularly in West Bengal and the policy of the Central government to allocate adequate funds for rural development and agriculture, the level of the consciousness of the rural people is expected to have become high and the rural people is supposed to feel integrated with the mainstream of the political system. But it cannot be denied that much still remains to be achieved. If the rural people are left to feel alienated and if the rural urban divide is allowed to continue it will not be a healthy sign for the integrity, cohesion and development of the system.

Another social contradiction that affects the social, economic and political system in a big way is the organization and persistence of the society on caste hierarchy and the constitutional declaration for equality. It is not surprising to note that caste - a homogeneous, endogamous social organization with distinctive rituals, especially those pertaining to a religious purity¹⁵ - has not disappeared from the society despite the termination of British policy of divide and rule; rather the new constitutional arrangements, may be unintentionally, have given a fresh lease of life to caste politicisation. A close examination of the social and political process in India reveals that, in a wider sense, caste ties have grown significant and every political party, including the Communists, have taken due note of it though overtly caste factor has been denounced by most¹⁶ of the parties and their leaders. In this connection, Kothari observes that a relative decline in the importance of pollution as a factor in determining caste hierarchy and the diminishing emphasis on the summation of roles as involved in the 'Jajmani' System, do not by themselves involve any basic destruction of the caste system but only a shift in the critical criteria of social awareness and the structural differentiations through which such an awareness is mobilized and organized.¹⁷ Thus, the process of transformation revealing certain notable changes in the Indian Social System does not at all mean end of caste framework.¹⁸

It was commonly argued before Independence, particularly by the British rulers of India, that parliamentary democracy was not suited to a society which was intensely divided into religious and communal groupings and whose social structure was imbued with an ideology of hierarchy rather than equality. It was also argued that caste Hindus and untouchable and other low castes could hardly be expected to work together as equals in a democratic political order. The former would continue to maintain, even under constitutional guarantee for equality the rigidity of traditional hierarchies and caste discriminations which would prevent the poor and disadvantaged low castes from participating effectively in the political process and social interaction.

Indian nationalists, however, argued strongly against such ideas. Thus, at Independence, though they resisted any efforts to create separate electorates for the low castes, the constitution and the government policies instituted mechanisms and procedures to ensure their full participation as equal citizens in the new order. These mechanisms and procedures included reservation of seats in the legislatures and other bodies, the maintenance of a list of low caste groups on a schedule entitling them to special privileges and preferential policies of all sorts, the abolition of untouchability, and the like. But these mechanisms and procedures have further aggravated the caste relationship in India and thus have provided fresh impetus to caste induced social tension.

True it is that the role of caste in Indian society has been decried as a fissiparous threat to national unity.¹⁹ But it has also been lauded as a channel of communication thus being conducive to societal integration. Rudolph and Rudolph observe, "By mobilizing.... jatis of village and locality in horizontal organizations with common identities, caste associations have contributed significantly to the success of political democracy by providing bases for communication, representation and leadership. They have taught illiterate peasants how to participate meaningfully and effectively in politics. Lower castes, whose large members give them an advantage in competitive democratic politics, have in many areas gained influence, access and power in state and society. With these at their command, they can change in their favour the allocation of resources, privileges and honours. Rather than providing the basis for a reaction,

caste has absorbed and synthesised some of the new democratic values.²⁰ This view of caste and caste associations has been shared by a number of social scientists.²¹

But, however, strengthening of the democratic values has, probably, never been the aim of the caste 'association'.²² In practice, the leaders of the caste associations project their interests as those of their castes and their interests are generally directed towards gaining or retaining or promoting their own political and economic dominance. Caste conflicts are thus more an extension of the conflict of interests of caste leaders. Such conflicts promote what Rajni Kothari calls, 'negative communalism'.²³ As such, violence in the name of caste is growing both in number and severity.

The division between the caste Hindus and the lower castes is not the only kind of problem posed by the caste hierarchy. In most villages, one or two large elite castes control most of the land and other resources, constituting what anthropologists call "dominant castes". After Independence, these dominant castes have often been able to control and mobilize the roles of their clients among the low castes, who are considered to constitute the "vote banks". Since Independence, the spread of conflict between these "forward" or elite castes and the backward castes has become a major source of social tension.²⁴ Leaders in the states have utilised "reservations" - the Indian version of affirmative action - as means to gain the electoral support of numerically significant backward castes. Higher castes, feeling that their interests are threatened have resisted these moves. The acceptance of the recommendations of the Mandal Commission extending the coverage of the reservations for the backward castes and the subsequent anti-reservation movement throughout the country is a case in point. In fact, once set in motion, those who have been mobilized have been difficult to satisfy or control. Conflict has often been the result.²⁵ The issue of the integration of the low castes as effective participants in a democratic political order and of caste conflict between the elite castes and backward castes have persisted throughout the the post-Independence period upto the present and have posed recurring challenges to the maintenance of an integrated society, an equalitarian polity, and non-violent mechanisms of conflict resolution.²⁶

Finally, of late, the society is experiencing unprecedented amount of corruption, moral degradation, and erosion in the integrity in the component parts of system, thus questioning the very legitimacy of the system itself. Previously, petty corruption at the bottom level of administration was within the limits of tolerance of the society. But the extensive level of corruption at the top level politics and administration like the Bofors payoff scam, Security scam, Hawala scam, Fodder scam, Urea scam and the like has virtually shattered the foundation of the trust of the society over politics. Excepting the left political parties, all the national political parties and their leaders have been indicted on charges of corruption. This has led to the distrust of the people to the politicians and the political parties. But this also signifies the institutionalisation of corruption and the elasticity of the social system to absorb the vice without much resistance. This is itself a contradiction in the social system of India - the contradiction between the rhetoric of moral considerations and the reality of moral degradation.

ETHNO-CULTURAL CONTRADICTION :

In the Indian political system, a major contradiction revolves around the ethnic and cultural domain - the contradiction between 'nationalism' - an attachment to the broad identity of being Indian - and a variety of what is called 'subnationalisms' - cultural, linguistic and ethnic - denoting narrow - loyalty or attachment to a particular culture or language or group as constituting primary identity. All these varieties of subnationalism actually lead to the regionalization of politics thus extending the contradiction to national integration and regionalism.

There are two schools of thought on the role and impact of these micro nationalistic variations. One school believes that the activities of the groups at micro level would certainly hamper the nation building process and consequently it would destabilise the balance of the state system.²⁷ The other school, does not find any reason to believe that micro loyalties are disastrous move of the human collectivities to thwart the very basis of the concept 'nation-state'.²⁸ Rather, these may contribute to the strengthening of the nation state.²⁹ Thus, it is argued that no contradiction

need to be perceived in describing India as a 'multi-national nation state, based on the principles of democracy, federalism and secularism.'³⁰

Viewed thus, it seems necessary to distinguish between 'state formation' and 'nation-building'. Most of the developing countries and India in particular emerged as states but they had yet to mature as nations. Maturity to a nation implies an emotional - affective attachment of an average citizen to one's own country transcending those based on his primordial attachments of religion, race, caste, language etc.³¹ This passage from a 'nation - in - the becoming to a 'nation in - the being' is the period of 'nation-building.' The coming into being of a nation-state implies a national consensus on the institutions and mechanisms of the state through which social conflicts get articulated and resolved. But before such a consensus is reached, more often than not, this period is likely to be characterised by internal strifes and conflicts over clashing values and interests, over issues of discrimination, exploitation and oppression. Hence, conflicts taking place within the state need not be interpreted necessarily as destabilising, anti-national forces bent upon destroying the country. On the contrary,, these should be considered as constituting the very stuff out of which a nation-state will get galvanized.³²

However, in spite of the optimism of the second school of thought, the Indian situation in the recent past shows something different. The reorganization of states on linguistic consideration has not contained the proliferation of regional movements. Rather, regional movements on ethnic grounds having secessionist as well as autonomy orientations have been going on with considerable intensity and as such, pose challenge to the very foundation of national integration and the nation-state itself. All these movements vindicate the divide between scular national identity and primordial regional identity. The institutional and procedural incapacity of the political system to tackle and resolve these conflicts further aggravate the perceived feeling of deprivation, discrimination and oppression of one group by the other. Logically concomitant option to this feeling further widens the gap between nationalism and regionalism and the alienation of the deprived section from the mainstream of the Indian political system. Thus, whatever may be the cause of their origin, these regional

movements pose threat to the national identity of India. The intensity of these movements is such that questions like "Is the Republic breaking up"? are raised.³³

The foremost threat to national integration comes from the North Eastern states, Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir, and to a limited extent, the activists of the Gorkhaland movement and the Jharkhand movement. From the North East, the threat is apparent from Naga National Council (NNC), National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN), Mizo National Front (MNF), Peoples Liberation Army (PLA), Peoples Revolutionary Party of Kanglei Pak (PRE PAK), All Tripura Tribal Force (ATTF), Tripura National Volunteers (TNV), United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), Bodo Security Force (BDSF), and All Bodo Students Union (ABSU), National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), Bodoland Liberation Tigers (BLT) and the like. Armed rebellion has been organised by these organizations and thus insurgency has been the most popular method for the realisation of the goal. It started with Nagaland as late as in 1956 and inspired the other disgruntled underground tribal leaders to demand sovereignty from the Indian State. It is argued that their ethnic cultural background is derived from the Austro Mongoloid origins and their territory has been subjugated by India. They claim that neither the Hindu norms nor any Indian traditional pattern match with the conglomeration of the myriad ethnic tribes in the region.

In Nagaland, the NSCN came into being in 1979 as a reaction to the NNC's (Pro-Phizo) acceptance of the constitution of India in 1975 as per the Shilong Accord. Since then, the NSCN has been carrying out an armed struggle to bring an end to Indian rule over the Naga people. Only recently, the NSCN has agreed to a moratorium to its armed struggle for the sake of negotiation with the government of India. The secessionist movement in Mizoram is led by the MNF which has been campaigning for a sovereign Mizoram since 1968. It has created tension between Mizos and non-Mizos and has gone to the extent of identifying the Mizos as non-Indians. In Manipur, Separatist movement is spearheaded by the Revolutionary Peoples Front (RPF) and its army wing PLA and PREPAK and its offshoots like the armed wing of PREPAK called the Red Army and the Kanglei Pak Communist Party (KCP) and KCP's Red Army. The declared objective of these organization is the formation of an independent Manipur. The RPF which appeared in May, 1989 is running a sort of government in

exile in Bangladesh. In Tripura, it is the TNV which is organising and leading the secessionist movement. The tribal extremists have also organized an armed wing called the Army of Tripura Peoples Liberation Organization (ATPLO). In Assam, the fear of the Assamese of becoming a minority in their own state led to the rise of the separatist organisation like the Lachit Sena in 1960s. Then, the ULFA came into being in 1979 - a direct descendent of the AASU which spearheaded the antiforeigner agitation in Assam between 1979 and 1985. The ULFA is the proponent of the sovereign Assam. 'It has vowed to liberate Assam from the exploitation of the centre which is treating the state as its colony.'³⁴ Within the State of Assam, there has emerged the demand for separate state of Bodoland spearheaded by All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) against Assamese chauvanism. The phases of the Bodo movement ascertain the inability of caste Hindu Assamese governing elite whether belonging to national or regional political parties to appreciate the aspirations of the tribals thereby pushing the leadership from softer options to violent methods (from Plain Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA) via All Bodo Students Union, Bodo Peoples Action Committee to Bodo Security Force (BdSF) and pushing the leadership from matured politicians to the young and militant blood. The whole situation has been emotionalised, bloodshed continues and ethnic divide continues to expand in a land known for its capacity to absorb people from various parts of the country belonging to various ethnic groups.³⁵ Another development in this connection to be noted in relation to the identity formation in this region is that recently, the rebel groups have formed some sort of a pan-Mongoloid federal set up called Manipur-Nagaland-Tripura-Assam Consolidation (MNTAC) for tactical coordination.

In Punjab, Sikhs were minority before 1947. To safeguard the Sikh position, the Akalis submitted a memorandum to the minorities sub-committee of the constituent Assembly demanding some statutory rights. As the demands were rejected the Akalis refashioned their demands as a cry for 'Punjabi-Suba'. Later, the efforts of the orthodox Akalis to mobilise the Sikh population under the slogan of a theocratic state- 'Raj karega Khalsa' gradually made an impact on the growing vested interests, and on the unemployed little educated rural youth.³⁶ As the Jan Sangh became a potential contender of Congress Hindu vote bank, the Congress, as a reciprocal move, started playing the communal card. This was the background of the emergence of Sant

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of Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwala and the demand for Khalistan - an independent sovereign state. The widespread terrorism and the resultant massive state repression are the factors that come in the way of the bridge between Punjabi identity and India's national identity.

In Kashmir, the fear of the Kashmiri Muslims (who constitute 95 per cent of the population of the valley) of cultural marginalization due to a process of state sponsored imposition of Sanskritised pan-Indianness along with manipulative politics of the ruling elites, impoverishment, unemployment, corruption and ad-hocism of the government, acted in favour of exclusivist interest and ideology.³⁷ The Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) leads the agitation in Kashmir Valley and demands a totally independent State of Kashmir.

As against these anti-Indian movements, the movements for Jharkhand and Gorkhaland do not pose serious threat to the unity of the country though they impair substantially the integrity of the society. Though ethnic movements in Darjeeling of West Bengal have a history of over eighty years the threat to the Indian political system actually came with the demand by the Communist Party of India (CPI) in April, 1947 for 'Gorkhasthan', an independent nation comprising Nepal, Darjeeling district and parts of Sikkim. However, this demand was in line with Soviet concept of right to self determination and the CPI being ideologically close to Soviet Union supported Gorkhasthan till 1951 after which they started propagating for 'regional autonomy'. Systematic demand for separate statehood for the district of Darjeeling and its adjoining areas surfaced via the Nepali Bhasa Movement, with the establishment of the Pranta Parishad in 1980(April) and the Gorkha national Liberation Front in July 1980. The basic thrust of the GNLF movement was for a separate state of Gorkhaland so that Bengali hegemony over the hill people could no longer be there. However, the GNLF movement was not basically a secessionist movement. It was the movement of the hill people with distinctive identity against the 'Bengali hegemony'. And the gap between these two identities has not yet been bridged even though partially, the demand of the GNLF has been fulfilled with the formation of the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council.

Similarly, the Jharkhandi demands should be viewed in the context of identity formation. Inconsiderate industrialisation and deforestation of the area have severely affected the life-style of the indigenous tribal population. Tribal movements in this area for preserving the distinctive tribal identity have also a long history. However, after the formation of the All Jharkhand Students Union in 1986, the movement has acquired a new dimension. A charter of demands published by the activists of the movement contains among others - demand for a Separate State within the Indian territory, stoppage of anti-people industrialisation and urbanization policies and uprootment of tribal population from this traditional homeland; inclusion of all tribal languages into the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution; acceptance of the old Panchayati System and the System of 'para-patti-majhi - pargana' in all social, religious and land questions related to the tribal population. An analysis of these demands indicates that these are related more to the intricate process of nationality formation - an identity which is to be different from the mainstream national identity. Thus, here also reflects the divide or contradiction between two attachments - nationalism and regionalism.

CONTRADICTIONS RELATING TO COMMUNALISM AND SECULARISM:

One of the most ominous aspects of the political crisis in India today is the conflict between professed secularism and communalism spreading hatred and inflaming passions in the name of religion. In recent years, these two ideals have reached to such a pass that the century old Indian tradition of communal assimilation and harmony have been subjected to major challenge acquiring truly explosive dimensions.³⁹

In common parlance, secularism is identified with three western connotations: a) separating man and society from the transcendental and divine; b) institutionalizing rationality through a process of displacing religiosity; and c) relegating religion to the private realm of human activity. However, all these connotations are shown to be conceptually untenable and impossible empirically.³⁹ As a way out of this conceptual impasse and empirical deadlock, secularism may be conceptualised as religious

pluralism - a societal situation in which different religious collectivities would not only respect one another in terms of their respective beliefs and worship patterns, but would be eager to enter into creative and critical dialogue so that they could empathetically understand one another and collectively shape a humane and just society.⁴⁰

In defining secularism in the Indian context, Donald Smith refers to three provisions that have been incorporated in the constitution of India : i) freedom of religion both individual and corporate; ii) citizenship based on equality of all individuals regardless of religious persuasion; and iii) separation of state and religion.⁴¹ Thus viewed, the secular state is a state which guarantees individual and corporate freedom of religion, deals with the individual as a citizen irrespective of his religion, is not constitutionally connected to a particular religion, nor does it seek either to promote or interfere with religion.⁴²

Communalism, on the other hand, is generally viewed as the degenerate manifestation of religion. It is believed to be a negative social force. Smith defines communalism as the functioning of religious communities, or organizations which claim to represent them in a way which is considered detrimental to the interests of other groups or of the nation as a whole.⁴³ Communalism thus includes an appeal to a common religious heritage - an appeal for politicised goal. It involves the politicization of religious rituals and symbols and religion becomes transformed into a political instrument. Communalism goes further and attempts to eliminate the natural heterogeneity which exists within the Hindu, as well as the Muslim communities, in India and transform the community into a unified political corporate group.⁴⁴ It stresses not merely Hindu or Muslim unity, but the antagonism between Hindus and Muslims. In socio-economic terms, W.C. Smith defined communalism as the ideology which has emphasized as the social, political and economic unit, the group of adherences of each religion and has emphasized the distinction, even the antagonism between such groups.⁴⁵

Communalism in India has been viewed from three different perspectives by different scholars. First, despite considerable variation in their treatment of the subject, the works of Bipan Chandra, P.C.Joshi and Asghar Ali Engineer may be clubbed as the left oriented perspective. Bipan Chandra⁴⁶ traces the growth of communal ideology and politics to the social framework provided by the colonial economy and polity. Colonial underdevelopment and crisis of the colonial economy resulted in widespread unemployment, which led to widespread scramble for jobs among middle classes. This helped communalism acquire its real mass base. To him, the Hindu-Muslim contradiction had no basis in reality ; it was not an efficient or real causation of communalism, the basic contradiction during the colonial period was between the Indian people and colonialism. P.C.Joshi⁴⁷, while discussing the causes which led to Muslim separation, utilises the model of 'cumulative causation'. For the Indian Muslims, the British colonial impact led to a setback in the economic and political sphere vis-a-vis the majority community. And this engendered in them the feeling of deprivation which ultimately prepared the ground for secessionist demands. Asghar Ali Engineer⁴⁸, viewing the subject from the Marxist perspective and also recognizing the great mobilizatory potential of religion, observes that communalism emerged during the struggle for independence and kept on going into higher and higher gear as the day of independence drew nearer and nearer. The explanation has to be sought, apart from other factors, in the socio-economic situation and socio-political climate in the country.

The second perspective is associated with the works of prominent Indian and Western sociologists and some historians who have tried to explain communalism through their insight into the social structure, cultural heritage and social change in India. Under the perspective come the studies of Louis Dumont, Satis Saberwal and Ratna Naidu. Louis Dumont's⁴⁹ cultural historical perspective shows that the more or less peaceful coexistence of the two communities after the Muslim conquest did not produce any "general ideological synthesis" and lack of this ideological synthesis created "lasting social heterogeneity of the two communities". Satis Saberwal⁵⁰ emphasizes the role of ideas and traditions, religious beliefs and institutions for understanding communalism. He establishes the linkage of religious ideas and symbols to the social structure. Naidu's⁵¹ work is more definitive and she explains

communalism in terms of politico-economic and cultural factors.

Finally, studies by Paul R. Brass,⁵² Joseph Rothchild⁵³ and Francis Robinson⁵⁴ treat the phenomenon of ethnic identities and ethnic conflict from political perspective assigning primacy to political determinants that is, to political elites, party organizations in mobilizing communal and/or ethnic consciousness among the competing groups.

The history of communalism in India dates back to the later half of the 19th century, although a few communal riots had taken place as early as 1781.⁵⁵ It was mainly because of the growth of consciousness that one community is being subjugated by the other and also because of the competition between these two people in economic field that their relations got strained in the later centuries. The British became cautious from the lesson they derived from the 1857 Mutiny and hence, adopted the policy of balancing one community against another for weakening the nationalist movement and perpetuating their rule in India. Besides, English education not only gave tremendous opportunities of employment to the Hindus, but it also broadened their mind to accept the challenges of new industrial age. Number of intellectuals came forth to reform the Hindu society on modern lines. As for the Muslims, the introduction of English education by the British for administrative and other purposes belittled the importance of the Arabic and Persian and adversely affected the position of the Muslim intelligentsia. As such, advancement of the Hindus in all walks of life and their rapid march towards monopolizing the administrative, industrial and commercial fields raised a fear among the intellectual elite of the Muslims that their own existence as a major group was in jeopardy and, instead of blaming themselves for their lagging behind in the race, the Muslim leaders started expressing the fear that the Muslims would be dominated by the Hindus in future India. Moreover, some of the revivalist movements among the Hindus like Arya Samaj, had a narrow Hindu basis and a negative attitude to Islam which led the Muslims to mobilise themselves on a corresponding communal basis.⁵⁶

Under the circumstances, no social movement of secular character came on the scene to bring these two communities together. Even the political movement of

national independence could not unite them. Besides, number of communal organization which sprang up gradually among both the communities, like the Muslim League, Jamiat-Ul-Ulema, Hindu Mahasabha and Rashtria Swayamsevak Sangh, alienated them further from one another. The creation of two separate states, namely, India and Pakistan, in 1947, could not solve the problems as, by that time, the cancer of communalism had spread its virus too wide and deep in the body politic of India.⁵⁷ The partition, as it was expected, did not put an end to communalism but instead, it proved to be the beginning of a series of new conflicts and problems on the basis of communalism.⁵⁸

The violent partition of the country and the Hindu-Muslim killings which preceded and accompanied it discredited for several decades the ideologies of both Hindu nationalism and Muslim separatism and made secularism appear the only possible basis for the modern Indian state. But more than four decades after partition, Hindu - Muslim communal division has once again become a central feature of Indian politics and vicious communal killings have been increasing in numbers and frequency and spreading geographically in recent years. The root of this phenomenon may be found in the varied perceptions prevalent in both the communities. The Congress Party which was the ruling party for a number of decades, has been looked upon by the conservative or extremist Hindus as a pro-Muslim party and this has made the Hindu communalism more aggressive in the post-Independence era. The Congress Party's, approval to the scheme of partition, Nehru's opposition to the revivalist tendencies among the Hindus, prominent positions assigned to many Muslims in political and administrative fields, reluctance shown by the Congress to initiate reforms in Muslim Personal law and, above all, the political alliance it entered into with the Muslim League in Kerala are the reasons why the Congress has a pro-Muslim and communal image among the Hindus. The helplessness of the Hindus in prevailing upon the ruling party to follow the harsh policy towards the Indian Muslims makes them adopt aggressive attitude towards the Muslims.⁵⁹ As a result, Hindu nationalism represented in the RSS and its "family" of organizations⁶⁰ - the Bharatiya Janata Party, Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Bajrang Dal - has reached a new peak of popular support and political importance.

Muslim solidarity as a counterforce has increased in recent years as well, as a consequence of the belief that the constitutional protection and the secular overtone of the Congress party have proved to be too inadequate to wipe out the Muslim fears about the growing Hindu communalism. Legislations passed by the states like Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Rajasthan on the Ban on cow slaughter, government's lukewarm attitude towards Urdu, less opportunities given to them or received by them in administrative or industrial fields, deliberate ineffectiveness shown by the law and order machinery at the time of communal riots⁶¹, shifting alliance of the Congress Party during Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi towards using the Hindu card for neutralizing the Bharatiya Janata party and winning the majority Hindu segments, and the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya - all these make the Muslims think that the Constitution is too inadequate a safeguard for them. For the Muslims in India, "The state has remained committed to secularism but the widely diffused communalism and the highly strung atmosphere of the country has made it impossible for the secular values and ideals to be realised."⁶²

As Hindu nationalism and Muslim consciousness have intensified, the secular ideology has been subjected to challenge from several quarters. Hindu nationalists consider it false, a 'pseudo-secularism', which has actually favoured the Muslims and other minorities. Muslims find that the 'so-called' secular state has not been able to protect their lives, property, and even their mosques against Hindu attacks. Many intellectuals who are neither Hindu nationalist nor Muslim separatist also now argue that India needs a new state ideology that recognizes religious pluralism and the importance of faith in peoples' lives, and stresses the message of tolerance said to be present in all Indian faiths rather than secular neutrality.⁶³

ECONOMIC CONTRADICTIONS :

The economic contradictions in India emanate from the disparity or contradiction between growth and equity, that is, economic growth on the one hand, and the pattern of distribution of the growth on the other. This has been the inevitable result of the contradiction between the rhetoric of welfarism and the reality of capitalism.

India is, besides being pluralist, a multi-structural society where one finds the coexistence of archaic feudal and semi-feudal relationships with pre-capitalist and highly developed capitalist social formations. The most important characteristic of Indian society is absolute unequal distribution of social and economic power in the various segments of the society. The largest cultivable land area is owned by a minority of people. And in the urban sector are found petty shop - keepers and small entrepreneurs in thousands overshadowed by the economic empires of the big industrial houses. In this social milieu characterised by absolute unequal distribution of power, the state in India operates.

After Independence, the public policy makers opted for rapid industrialisation of the country in the overall framework of economic planning and mixed economy. The pronounced objective of the policy was to raise the standard of living of the masses and to eradicate poverty and gross inequalities. The draft of the First Five year Plan stated that "It is essential that private enterprise should function in conformity with the social and economic policy of the state, recognize its full responsibilities, and cooperate in the implementation of such measures of control and regulation as are considered necessary....".⁶⁴ Similarly the second Five Year Plan defined the appropriate role of the private and public sectors in the economic and social development of the country. The plan document stated : "For creating the appropriate conditions, the state has to take on heavy responsibilities as the principal agency speaking for and acting on behalf of the community as a whole. The public sector has to expand rapidly.... The private sector has to play its part within the framework of the comprehensive plan accepted by the community."⁶⁵

The constitution of India also lays down the objective of harmony between economic development and social justice. The Directive Principles of State Policy enunciated in Article 39(B) and (C) of the Constitution, stipulates :

"The state shall in particular direct its policy towards securing i) that the ownership and control of the material resources of the community are so distributed as best to subserve the common good, and ii) that the operation of the economic

system does not result in the concentration of wealth and means of production to the common detriment."

However, the framework of economic development as provided by the Five Year Plans and the Directive Principles of State Policy have got distorted in actual operation. Today, despite over four decades of planning under the mixed economy, which was meant to reconcile 'growth' with distributive justice', the scenario of the national economy remains dismal.⁶⁶ Soaring prices, increasing unemployment, and the decreasing purchasing power of the rupee are visible and alarming symbols of the malady. Hence, India has witnessed growth and poverty, not growth eliminating poverty.⁶⁷ The root of this phenomenon may be found in the evolution of capitalism in India.

Capitalism in India did not emerge as a natural transformation from one stage to other, but it was a product of colonial development. The modern Indian state, like capitalism in the country, was established by the British to safeguard the class interests of the metropolitan capitalism. Thus, the indigenous capital found a powerful colonial state as an objective obstruction in its development. As a result, the Indian bourgeoisie involved itself in the struggle for transfer of state power from capitalist class of the metropolis to the bourgeoisie of the oppressed society.⁶⁸ The bourgeois-led Indian nationalism fought against imperialism, mobilised the Indian masses for struggle but did not allow radicalization of the mass struggle against internal and external oppressors and exploiters.⁶⁹

Thus, when power was transferred, the state power was handed over to the bourgeoisie and their political representatives and the state became the sole instrument in the hands of the bourgeoisie for their development. Thus the state was the only instrument to achieve development of capitalism in India and as such, it would not be a passive state but a very active and pre-eminent state subserving the interests of the exploiting class over the exploited.

The consequences of the capitalist path of development have been contradictory. On the one hand, the social base of Indian capitalism has expanded by bringing numerous social groups into the capitalist process. On the other hand, in spite of the Monopoly and Restrictive Trade Practices Act, indigenous monopoly capitalism has been strengthened as a leading group of the capitalist classes. Under the circumstances, 'politics in India has become an instrument to exercise power and use public resources for sectional and personal political advancement.⁷⁰ The road to political legitimation has been sought through electoral alliances based upon caste, communal, religious, linguistic and regional loyalties and identities, and the overall framework of universal adult franchise. There have also been some rhetorical forms like 'Socialism', 'Garibi Hatao' etc. of political legitimation. But the basic tensions generated by a distorted path of capitalist development could not be sustained for long. Similarly, the capitalist path of development has been under severe strains, impinging, in the process, on the vulnerable and deprived strata of the population and thereby leading to social tensions and conflicts of various sorts.⁷¹ As such, the coercive apparatus of the state has increasingly been used to manage the system.

Since the early 1990s, there has been a shift of policies from mixed economy with centralised planning to liberalization of the economy and its concomitant outcome - privatization and globalization. The combined policies of liberalisation of the import export regime, dismantling of state directed detailed planning, and export-led growth have been adopted with the pronounced expectation that such policies would lead to expansion and diversification of manufacturing capacities, increased employment and stimulation of agricultural production. These policies, like the capital intensive heavy industrialisation policies which preceded them, only expect that the conditions of the poor would improve through the general 'trickle down' effects of an expanded economy. But in reality, these policies offer no direct benefits to the poor. In fact, the Manmohanomics, as the New Economic Policy in India is popularly known, is the reflection of the interests of the India's emerging capitalist class. The capitalism in India developed under state protection during the last four decades has reached to such a stage that the domestic market is not adequate enough for its operation. Hence, it needs foreign markets. Similarly, under state protection, Indian capitalism has developed to the extent of competing with the foreign and transnational

capital.

Under the circumstances, one can safely conclude that the pronounced rhetoric of peoples' welfare as found in the Constitution of India and other policy documents have little implications for the reality. Rather, the reality is that the assets of the big business and industrial houses are ever increasing while poverty in India is not eradicated. So comes the contradiction leading to social tension and conflict.

POLITICAL CONTRADICTIONS :

Closely linked with the economic contradictions of growth and justice emanating from the inevitable outcomes of capitalism is the political contradiction centering around the principles of democracy and freedom on the one hand, and authoritarianism, interventionism, repression and hegemony on the other. An analysis of the composition of the personnel of the state system, its ideology, policies pursued by the government, the relationship between the ruling class and the state and the relationship between the rulers and the ruled clearly underlines the character of the Indian state. It is intolerant of all dissent, hostile to the demands of the toiling masses. It claims to be wedded to democracy, that is democracy with elite foundation. Its foundations are threatened then curbing freedom, enactment of anti-people legislation, ⁷² ~~asserting~~ ⁵ the opposition leaders, brutally murdering the dissenters or rebels, promoting extra-constitutional centres of authority, personalising power and imposing emergency - official or otherwise - is permitted under the cover of "national" interest.⁷² Given this, one would agree with E.M.S.Namboodripad that the state in India has run from 'crisis into chaos.'⁷³

An analysis of over four decades of the functioning of democratic, secular, federal and activist political system in India reveals its achievements and failures - failures ^a for outweighing the achievements. However, the most important achievement of the Indian political system is the holding of periodical elections on the basis universal adult franchise and at regular intervals. The impact of elections on Indian

society is claimed to have been qualitative, the percentage of voters' turn out has been extremely satisfactory, competition in politics has been legitimized. Participatory politics has raised the level of political awareness of the masses and government has become a critical factor in voter's life. Politicization of an indifferent and apathetic community is the first step towards democratic advancement of a society and elections have achieved this in India.⁷⁴

But there are negative forces which tend to blur the achievements of the democratic process in India. The appearance of democracy is different from the reality of democracy. Elections legitimize the wielders of political power but this does not determine the totality of politics.⁷⁵ In practice, the power coalition which weilds power in India consists of the exploiting classes, that is, the capitalist classes, landlords and rich peasants and their power goals are different from what they appear to be.

Since Independence India has been involved in building a capitalist society and in this basic task the political system is actively involved. The industrial policy of the Government of India recognizes the supportive role of public policy for the development of private corporate sector. All important infrastructural industries are owned and managed by the government and through infrastructural support the government has facilitated the growth of private corporate sector during the last decades. Similarly, the government mobilises national resources for industrial development and these resources are shared by the state capitalist sector and the private corporate sector. The nationalised banks, the LIC, the IDBI, the ICICI, and other financial institutions owned by the government provide financial resources for private capitalist enterprises. Moreover, the government controls the setting up of industries and thus has facilitated the development of private capitalism by regulatory, supportive and subsidy mechanisms. During the past four decades the expansion and diversification of private capitalism has taken place under the protective umbrella provided by the Indian government. The government legislation to check monopolies under the MRTP Act is just a formal intention than a reality. Under the circumstances, one can easily smack of the real and operational motive of this private capitalism and the Indian state vis-a-vis the needs and aspirations of the common people. The

logic of capitalism and capitalist development does not permit the state to look for the fulfilment of interests of the common people.

Ever since the heyday of the freedom movement, people were given hopes and promises of plenty and prosperity - even the rudiments of which remain like something fashioned in a dream out of reach of the bulk of the population.⁷⁶ The very development programmes initiated by the government have contributed to at least two kinds of imbalances in the society - the regional imbalance and the class imbalance. Thus, the post-Nehru era has witnessed a remarkably rapid escalation in confrontations between the government and the people all over the country. Whenever these confrontations tend to challenge the foundation of the existing order, the state - the instrument in the hands of the exploiting class favouring the maintenance of the existing order - intervenes with all its resources and becomes more and more repressive and authoritarian. Given this background, democracy in India remains a rhetoric, the reality is the repression and hegemony of the state acting on the behest of the ruling class. And hence, this contradiction of democracy and authoritarianism provides ground for social tension and social conflict thus paving the way for more organized protest movements.

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