

ASOKE MEHTA'S IDEAS AND THINKING ON SOCIALISM & SOCIAL JUSTICE

Asoke Mehta is one of the chief exponents of democratic socialism in India. He has made some significant contribution to socialist thought in India.

Asoke Mehta can be remembered as a freedom-fighter, a stalwart of the socialist movement in India, an economist, a noted journalist and a philosopher. His role and contribution towards the democratic planning and trade union movement in India is remarkable and noteworthy. He was an erudite scholar, powerful orator, a writer and an essayist and an outstanding political organiser and leader.

6.1 Formative Period.

Asoke Mehta was born in 1911 and received his early education in Ahmedabad and Sholapur. His father Ranjit Ram Mehta, was an eminent educationist of his time and had great influence with the cultural circles of Gujarat. Mehta's grandfather was the Chief Engineer of the Ahmedabad Municipality and thus he had the opportunity to live in the industrial and urbanised environment from his childhood.¹ So Mehta imbibed industrial and urbanised environment from his childhood. According to G.S. Bharagava, "Birth and growth in industrial centres like Ahmedabad and Sholapur urbanised his outlook."²

Mehta's college education began at Bombay, and it was in that city that he came in contact with the nationalist and youth movements of his time.³ During this time Asoke Mehta became influenced and inspired by Gandhiji. He was profoundly impressed by Gandhi's principle of truth and end and means. In his student life he took keen interest in the Swadeshi movement and took part in political movements of that time.

Asoke Mehta's association with the trade union movement is a remarkable and important aspect in his life. V. Grover says that 'Asoke Mehta began his political career as a councillor of the Bombay Municipal Corporation and espoused the cause of workers and of common people in Bombay.'⁴ Later Mehta worked hard to organise the trade union movement in India. In 1946-47 Mehta rose to prominence in the Congress Socialist Party as well as in the labour movement. In 1939 he had been entrusted with the work of organizing the labour bureau in Bombay. It was at this stage that he learnt his first lesson in trade union field. Since then he took great interest in the labour movement.⁵

6.2 The Congress Socialist Party & Asoke Mehta.

Asoke Mehta is one of the founder members of Congress Socialist Party. The C.S.P. was formed in 1934. A group of young and socialistically inclined and enthusiastic radical leaders conceived the idea of constituting a radical socialist party which would function within the ambit of the Congress party and organisation for the furtherance of social and economic facilities and amenities to the people. The idea to have such a radical left party was conceived at the Nasik Prison. The prominent figures of the C.S.P. were Jayaprakash Narayan, Acharya Narendra Dev, Rammanohar Lohia, Asoke Mehta, Yusuf Meherally, Minoo Masani, A. Patwardhan, Kamaladebi Chattopadhyaya, P. Tricumdas, Sri Prakas, S.M. Joshi and N.G. Goray. Probably the youngest member of them was Asoke Mehta.

In Nasik Prison Mehta came into contact with J.P. and gradually he felt attracted to the personality of Jayaprakash Narayan. At the Nasik Prison, Mehta got the opportunity to be acquainted with Marxism. At prison cells Mehta studied Marxian literature and its theoretical formulations. The groups wanted to make a synthesis between Indian socialist thought, Western democratic values and Marxian ideals. Asoke Mehta did not like Marxism in toto. Jayaprakash and Narendra

Dev were influenced too much by Marxism. Mehta favoured western concepts of social democracy and democratic socialism than Marxism. Asoke detested purges and coercive measures he saw in Soviet Union. An author says ; "He was inclined more towards the European strands of socialist thought through the concepts of social democracy than towards Marxism."⁶ Another writer observes that Asoke Mehta along with Minoo Masani, M.L. Danwala and P. Tricumdas belonged to the Fabian socialist trend.⁷

The Congress Socialist Party wanted to end the imperialistic design and exploitation of country's wealth and resources by the British empire. Minoo Masani writes : "A socialist party in India today has two fundamental tasks - first, to help in the building up of a powerful national front against British imperialism; and secondly, to spread the idea of socialism in India and prepare the ground for its introduction once political power has been secured."⁸ Minoo Masani mentions the important role of the C.S.P. thus : "It was the formation of our Party that put socialism, till then a subject for academic discussion, on the political map of India."⁹

Asoke Mehta was an important leader of the C.S.P. After 1936. Mehta edited the Party's main weekly Congress Socialist when Lohia left the job as Editor. In 1939, Mehta was entrusted with the task of organising the labour bureau in Bombay. It was in early 1947, that Asoke Mehta came to limelight for his role in the trade union movement. He did a commendable job in the sphere of organising the trade union movement in India. He was instrumental regarding formation of a separate labour wing of the Socialist Party to be designated as Jind Mazdoor Sabha in 1949.

Asoke mehta was deeply influenced by Jayaprakash Narayan. Jayaprakash considered socialism as a complete theory of socio-economic construction. He stood for social and economic equality in life. Jayaprakash Narayan was of the

view that democratic socialism is preferable to revolutionary socialism. According to him socialism is a theory and technique of widespread planning to remove the inequalities and diverse problems and miseries of the people. Narayan wanted to make a synthesis between Gandhian ideals and Marxism.

According to Mehta, socialism is a science of new society as well as the vision of a new civilisation. Mehta pleads that socialism cannot be uniform in purpose and direction in all places. Mehta said : "Socialism represents a certain well-defined ideology ... It has certain definite meaning, and it must be comprehended in its proper sense."¹⁰ Asoke Mehta held the view that socialism would be established by democratic means and parliamentary methods. He repudiated the violent and coercive methods of the communists.

6:3 Asoke Mehta And Socialist Movement in India.

Indian Socialist thinkers were influenced and impressed by Marxism and its fundamental tenets but they sought to evolve a 'synthetic ideal of socialism' which would be congenial and conducive to the Indian culture, traditions and conditions. If we analyse the explanations and interpretations of Marxism by the Socialist thinkers of India, we would notice that they sought to evolve an independent way of thinking to usher in socialism in India. They wanted a synchronization and conglomeration of Marxian ideas with Indian conditions and circumstances. They sought to dilute and digest Marxism and to carve out an indigenous pattern which would be suitable to Indian conditions. Their goal was Democratic Socialism. Indian socialist thinkers wanted to make a synthesis between democracy and socialism. They urged to evolve a democratic way of life and their emphasis was on equality, individual freedom, social justice, economic growth and a just and humane social order. These ideals were the cardinal values of the socialist movement in India. Asoke Mehta, like other leaders of the C.S.P., was a champion of these ideas and values.

Asoke Mehta's vision of socialism can be dubbed as Democratic Socialism. R.A. Prasad rightly observes : "Asoka Mehta has been one of the greatest advocates, and probably one of the most consistent also, of the concept of democratic socialism in India."¹¹ Asoke Mehta's contribution is laudable as he did much to popularise the concept of democratic socialism and spearheading the socialist movement in India. Mehta observed :

"Socialism as we understand and strive to develop is neither a middle way between capitalism and communism nor efforts at softening certain harsh features of the one or the other, but a distinct alternative all its own ... Our socialism which has to be different in many ways, from the 'Social Democracy' of the economically developed countries, of the West, has thus a distinctive and to our mind, a decisive, role to play."¹² Asoke Mehta emphasised the need to develop a synthetic ideal of socialism. It was that vision of democratic socialism which was developed by him in his book 'Democratic Socialism.'

Asoke Mehta pleads that Indian socialism is democratic socialism and that democratic socialism is, in contradistinction to the socialism of the communists, limited. He argues, "In an under-developed country the openness of argument' will be about the speed of industrialisation, the rate of accumulation of capital, the strain and sacrifices to be imposed, they will be an aspect of the democratic choice."¹³ Moreover, he observes : "Discriminating socialisation is the distinctive characteristic of democratic socialism, because total or galloping nationalisation and political democracy cannot exist together."¹⁴ Mehta maintains that total planning is inconsistent with democracy. Mehta pointed out that foreign ideas or measures would not be of much help or advantage. He pleaded that solutions to diverse problems and ills would demand indigenous remedial measures which would be relevant and appropriate to Indian situations.

6:4 Socialist Unity At Stake C.S.P. And the Royists.

The socialistic leaders believed that in order to create a strong anti-imperialist and socialist front to launch a crusade against the British imperialism it was imperative necessity to achieve co-operation and unity with the like minded radical parties and labour organisations. They wanted to forge close ties with C.P.I. & Royists' group.

The Royists joined the CSP and were active within it from 1934 to 1936. M.N. Roy was very ambitious and he told the socialists that he would join the CSP if he was made its sole leader. The socialists were not willing to accept this demand and Roy became exasperated. He hatched a plan to wreck the CSP from within. The CSP leaders came to know this conspiracy and thus the unity process between socialists & the Royists was shattered. Minoo Masani called for immediate expulsion of the Royists from the party. Haitheox points out the Jayaprakash Narayan felt that Roy had acted in bad faith and that his behaviour had constituted a betrayal of the socialist cause.¹⁵ However, the communists did not leave the CSP did not take lightly the wreckage done to the party and they wanted to resign from the National Executive of the Party. In an attempt to secure the expulsion of the communists, Minoo Masani, Asoka Mehta, Achyat Patwardhan, and Rammanohar Lohia resigned from the CSP executive in May 1939.¹⁶

In this episode a rift arose among the leadership of the CSP. Asoke Mehta, Rammanohar Lohia, Minoo Masani & Patwardhan, did not like the conciliatory and soft attitude of Jayaprakash Narayan as exhibited. They felt that Narayan's vacillating attitude marred the prospects of CSP.

6:5 Tripuri Congress and the Socialists.

The most critical period for the Indian National Congress came in 1939. Subhas Chandra Bose sought another term as Presidentship of the congress

at Tripuri. Gandhi was opposed to it. But Subhas Bose got the support of socialists and other radical and left-wing groups. Pattabhi Sitaramayya got the backing of Gandhi and the rightist leadership of the congress. Subhas Bose became victorious and Pattabhi was defeated. Gandhi admitted that 'Pattabhi's defeat is my own defeat.' This led to the resignation of the members of working committee. But at the congress session G.B. Pant moved a resolution to the effect that President should appoint the working Committee in accordance with the wishes of Gandhiji.

Instead of left-wing consolidation, there followed a phase of melancholy disruption. Hiren Mukerjee writes :

It was in this unhappy context that one must view the unseemly tug-of-war between the left and the right in the Congress. The deadlock threatened the national interest, but neither side seemed to realise it. The defeat of Gandhiji's nominee in the Congress Presidential election rattled the great leader in a manner which was unworthy of him. Twelve out of the fifteen members of Bose's working committee, including paradoxically Nehru, resigned, in order, they said, to leave him a free field, but quite obviously to make his position untenable.¹⁷

Tripuri tangle showed CSP's vacillation. If the Socialists totally backed Subhas Bose then things would have been different. Socialists and the left bloc would get strengthened and its impact would have been far reaching. Though Minoos Masani gives his opinion thus : "The CSP was faced with a real dilemma As it happened, the Congress Socialist Party, caught between the two sides, held a balance of power between the Gandhians on the one side and what was described as the "Left Bloc" consisting of Bose's followers"¹⁸

The Congress Socialist Party was divided regarding the issue of extending the support to Subhas Bose. The majority members, also Asoke Mehta, felt it

correct at this stage to remain neutral. But their neutrality paid a heavy price for blurring the prospects of left-wing politics in India. Minoo Masani narrates the situation thus :

At Tripuri, before we could take our stand, we had a series of talks with Subhas Babu and with Nehru. Subhas, who was a down-to-earth politician, clearly wanted his own cabinet and his friends, who would include the Congress Socialist Party, to be in a majority in the Working Committee. He wanted us to cooperate, Jawaharlal Nehru, on the other hand, said nothing to contribute or advise. He was as vague as ever.¹⁹

In the Tripuri issue the identity and prouess of Congress Socialist Party got shattered. An author observes : "The CSP had to pay a heavy penalty for overlooking this fact. The rank and file of the Party not only revolted against the leadership, but also raised ideological questions. The CSP, which had already incurred great loss by communal disruptions, suffered antoher."²⁰

The Socialists tried to overcome the crisis evolving a compromise formula with Subhas Bose and Congress leadership. But Subhas Bose did not agree to that. Seeing Gandhi's consistent opposition Bose resigned from the Presidentship. It is lamentable that the socialists surrendered at this crucial crisis to the magnetic personality and leadership of Gandhi & the Rightist wing of the congress party. A writer says :

"At Tripuri, instead of rallying all the Left wing forces inside the congress under the leadership of Subhas Chandra Bose, The Congress Socialists revealed their incapacity to come to grips with a situation that demanded unity of purepose and action. Their vacillation described by Bose as a 'betrayal.'²¹

6:6 The First General Election and Asoke Mehta.

The Congress Socialist Party took the decision at Kanpur conference in 1947 that the word 'Congress' should be dropped. Some of the members of Socialist Party wanted severance from the congress organisation. After India won independence and Gandhi's disappearance from the Scene, Sardar Patel did not like the functioning of a Socialist Party with the Congress. Thus in order to give emphasis on socialism, the Congress Socialist Party decided to drop the word congress from its name.

The policy statement adopted at Kanpur emphasised democratic socialism for the first time. It distinguished between democratic socialism and totalitarian communism and asserted that there could be no socialism without democracy.²²

The Socialists were very optimistic of emerging as the national alternative to the congress. Lohia and Mehta were very keen to project the Socialist Party as the main opposition party in the first general election. Asoke Mehta felt that to emerge as a national alternative it was necessary to contest a large number of seats and field the candidate on a wider scale. So the candidates contested extensively throughout the country. The results were disastrous for the socialists. They only secured 12 Lok Sabha and 126 State Assembly seats.²³ The communists contested a fewer number of seats where their strength was great and they bagged a larger number of seats than the Socialist Party in the Lok Sabha. The Socialists got disillusioned and disgruntled to see the results of the election.

However, after leaving the congress the Socialists constituted a separate socialist party with democratic socialism as the goal. C.P. Bhambhri writes : "Ever since their birth as a separate party, the Socialists have been making efforts to have a programme and an ideology distinct from those of both the

Congress and the communists."²⁴

6.7 Economic Ideas and Thoughts of Mehta.

Asoke Mehta has an important contribution as an economist. He was the Vice-Chairman of the Planning Commission of India in 1964. His seminal contributions on planning & industrialisation, social and economic justice, nationalisation and social change and development of agriculture are important and plausible. His economic ideas and thought patterns are discussed and analysed below.

A. Mehta on Planning And Economic Growth.

Asoke Mehta has been one of the great exponents of democratic planning in India. He held the view that democratic method alone could be followed for planning in a democratic society.

Economic planning is mainly concerned with the elaboration of a growth strategy that devises and directs the development process towards the quickest realisation of the objectives postulated. Mehta says : "Economic planning in India faces not only regional diversity but cultural heterogeneity. It was Gurudev Tagore who had pointed out in our country all centuries exist side by side. This co-existence in time adds a new dimension of difficulty in economic development to which sufficient attention has not been paid."²⁵

Mehta observes : "Planning is a continuous process An economic plan is like a play. First, the characters appear in a sketchy way, that is, the objectives emerge; then slowly the characters take shape and the lines of dialogue emerge. Similarly, in the Plan, the inter-sectoral relations get established and the details of every sector are spelt out. A plan, like any piece of good administration, is at once an art and a science."²⁶ Mehta pleads : Crossing the threshold is of vital

significance. The essence of development lies there - moving from one plane to another plane of economic activity. All plans are important ... We are called upon to carry out a new kind of experiment, an experiment of reconciling democracy with development."²⁷ Mehta states that 'we want the co-operation of all concerned in the policy of economic development and transformation.' Mehta, however, seeks to widen the horizon of planning and tries to relate it highlighting social and economic reconstruction and rejuvenation. To quote Mehta : "If planning confines itself to tools and techniques and leaves intellectual and cultural issue unattended, not freer but harsher social life is likely to emerge in India ... Renaissance has always been the womb of a creative Revolution."²⁸ Mehta looked at planning from a broader perspective. He states : "Only a rapid tempo of development can maintain an accelerating momentum, check fertility, raise levels of living and assure political and social stability. Erosion of plan is therefore erosion of our hopes."²⁹ Mehta visualised planning as a method for ensuring economic growth. He asserts thus : "Economic growth is the ultimate solvent of our poverty, want, and gross misery. The growth, in our conditions, remains impeded without the widening social changes. Welfare of the people, I would like to emphasise, is the end result of growth and change and not a substitute for either of the two."³⁰

Asoke Mehta highlighted the importance of sound political leadership in a country for accelerating the path of development. He suggested that a developmental revolution has to be started. He opined that planning requires clarity of purpose and determined execution. These are the tasks of political education and organisation. He observed that administrative efforts and attempts regarding implementation and execution of the plans should be strong and administrative machinery ought to be competent and efficient. He pleads that the universities need to devote more time and thought to the problem of organisational innovation. To quote Mehta : "If technological progress and classical economic growth are the result of innovating entrepreneurship, rapid improvement in the

levels of work and output in the "diffused sector" is contingent upon organisational innovation. This is the area where political and cultural leadership can show its fecundity."³¹

Mehta says, "Economic growth, at least in countries like India, gets diluted and dissipated by unchecked population growth. So the developmental revolution requires well organised and wide-spread efforts at birth control. The fewer the births, the greater the improvement in the per capita standard of living, measured in terms of goods or services or both."³²

B. Mehta's Thesis of Compulsions of a Backward Economy.

In the special convention of the PSP held at Betul, Madhya Pradesh on June 14-18, 1953, Asoke Mehta raised the issue of 'political compulsions of a backward economy' and pleaded for cooperation of Socialist Party with the congress in the task of reconstruction of the nation.³³ In this thesis Asoke Mehta sought economic co-operation with the congress and was talking of finding "areas of agreement" with the Congress. Elaborating the compulsions of a backward economy Mehta stated : "The economic backwardness of India exerts inescapable compulsions on our policies. The backward economy had caused social stagnation, caste, communal and regional considerations and loyalties receive disproportionate support."³⁴

Mehta argued in his thesis that India had to be built on the basis of three elements, namely 'national integrity, democratic freedom and social change.' He felt that it was necessary to strengthen the forces that supported these principles and fight those which did not. The Congress and the PSP believed in these values while the communist and communalist parties did not.³⁵ So Mehta urged the necessity of forging alliance with the congress party.

Mehta contended that to remove the dilemma caused by compulsion of a backward economy, the imperative necessity is to bradbase the government that it gets power to move forward and to strengthen the forces of pluralism in authority and initiative.

In an underdeveloped country like India there was a danger that democratic and secular policies would get discredited because of the failures of the Congress Party. To avoid this, there were two alternatives, (i) programmatic agreement between democratic parties or (ii) delimitation of areas of agreement and disagreement. Asoke Mehta wanted the party to consider these alternatives in the larger interest of developing the nation.³⁶

C. Mehta and Economic compulsions of Under development.

Asoke Mehta says that any plan has to fulfil certain objective pre-conditions. Firstly, the plan must be consistent. Secondly, the plan must be acceptable to a majority.

Mehta states : "In countries like India, economic development demands proportionately larger investments and as the productive base of economy has to be built up the period of sacrifice and ansterity is likely to be prolonged. Side by side, there are social fissures that continually threaten to distort dynamic impulses."³⁷ He adds further : "As there are economic compulsions of underdevelopment, which cannot be wished out of existence, so are there political compulsions of democracy."³⁸

Mehta noted : "Economic planning in a backward country is at once more difficult and urgent, difficult because of the lack of data, of trained personnel, of capital and above all of the revelvant know how, and necessary because the entrepreneurs lack ability and their default has to be made good by the state."³⁹

Mehta asserted : "India is committed to economic planning, but there has yet not been the requisite clarity on the objectives, the internal co-ordination and its liaison with the politics of democracy."⁴⁰

Mehta intends to point out that it has been widely recognised that in countries like India that are short of the inert resources like land and capital, development depends on the effective mobilisation of manpower, that is on the full use of labour through appropriate patterns of organisation. Mehta pleads that popular enthusiasm is essentially the crux of successful economic planning a backward country. He maintains that popular enthusiasm is both the lubricating oil of planning, and the petrol of economic development a dynamic force that almost makes all things possible.⁴¹

Asoke Mehta says that a fruitful discussion of the economic development cannot take place if the process of growth is not analysed. He maintains that "it is true that in what is popularly known as mixed economy, the adjustment of public and private sectors is an important aspect of planning. The quintessence of planning lies in adjusting the rival claims of the sectors."⁴²

D. Mehta on Development of Agriculture

Mehta observes that the most important challenge concerns India's economic development with the need to achieve major changes in our production and occupational structure without disrupting the continuity of India's old culture and tradition. Mehta gives emphasis on the development of agriculture as India would seek to become self reliant. He says : "If we are to achieve our ultimate goal of producing far more agricultural products than Indian needs for its own use - our greatest potential for achieving export strength much more remains to be accomplished in the areas of land reforms, irrigation, rural electrification and more remunerative prices for our farm products,"⁴³ Mehta sought to

introduce a scientific revolution in agriculture. To that end he stressed emphasis on the nexus between agriculture and industry.

Mehta put emphasis on expanding India's export markets. He said : "A major area requiring foreign understanding and action is the creation of favourable export markets for India's agricultural products ..." ⁴⁴ Mehta was optimistic that 'India's big contribution of the economic life of the international community will come in the last quarter of this century.' ⁴⁵

Mehta visualised and envisioned a economic revolution which would overhaul the social and economic matters and would enhance the productivity. He told that the economic revolution is concerned with : how to prolong human life free from disease and disabilities, how to make it more productive and how to make it more creative. ⁴⁶

Mehta pleads that a revolution in agriculture is unthinkable in terms of something happening in agriculture alone. He says : "It is to be thought of as a series of interchanges between agriculture and industry with rising intensity, industry supplying the basic needs of material inputs for agriculture, agriculture feeding back its surpluses for the development of industry and industry supplying back the various consumer goods on which the agricultural surpluses can be spent." ⁴⁷ Mehta noted that with the simultaneous industrial and agricultural advance with a democratic mode of functioning India is moving towards an agricultural revolution.

Mehta emphasised on land reforms in India. He lamented that the progress in this field has not been spectacular. He suggested necessary administrative arrangements for supervising the land reform enactments. He deplored the conditions of the poor farmers and the landless labourers. He pleaded that attempts and efforts should be taken and policies should be translated into action to

enhance and upgrade their conditions. He also took note of the fact that a structure of reasonable prices for agricultural commodities, particularly foodgrains, should be there. Mehta, however, highlighted the plan for technical training of the farmers. He remaineded us saying, "It is time for us to realise that there is no short-cut to the agricultural revolution."⁴⁸

6:8 Asoke Mehta on Social Justice

Asoke Mehta was a staunch champion of equality and social justice. Mehta wanted to use the tool of planning as an imperative necessity to get economic property, growth and development, also to have an egalitarian society where social justice, equality and liberty will be the hallmark. He refers to the dilemma of development and says : "We have to face the dilemma ... and a common yardstick, a common rod of measurement is to apply to everyone."⁴⁹ Asoke Mehta put emphasis on social and distributive justice. He cherished the desire that the fruits of development should be equitably distributed to the masses. He stood against all kinds of inequalities, social obstacles and superstitions. He said 'no gross inequalities are permitted to exist' in society. He repudiated the system of social stratification in India. He sought co-operation from all stratas of society in social and economic development of the country. He wanted to root out all social ills and maladies and corruption from the society. He disliked the hegemony of upper class in subjugating the interests of the lower class of people. He wanted free development of human personality. He was also a champion of individual liberty.

Asoke Mehta viewed socialism as a device which would remove all social and economic inequalities and would register equal development of everybody ensuring social justice. He said : 'Where a nation is committed to the articulation of socialistic society ... the resulting imbalance in the economy has to be corrected.'⁵⁰ Mehta hoped that socialism would bring economic equality and a

just social order. He said : "The Socialist Party has consistently advocated a policy of economic equality and austerity. It has favoured planned production and workers participation in industry - a participation which would mean shouldering responsibilities with asserting rights."⁵¹

Mehta harped on the maintenance of freedom and rights of the people.' He mentioned : 'There has to be freedom of press, speech, assembly and association.' He gave utmost importance to democratic freedom. He stressed the importance of the role of opposition in democracy. Mehta looked upon socialism as a method for the furtherance of welfare and justice to the people. He exhorted the socialists to serve the people for the betterment of their conditions. He said : 'Economic equality and social security have become potent mainly through their efforts.' Mehta mentioned : "The less developed a country, the greater are the inequalities and stronger is the appeal of egalitarianism. In an affluent society, the appeal of equality ... tends to get blunted. In India, the surge of our situation itself will make the socialist appeal increasingly attractive for a considerable time to time."⁵² Mehta says, 'Inherent in socialism is the appeal of equality which turns it towards re-distribution of income.'⁵³ According to Mehta : "To give one's best and to seek the least in return, is the definition of dedication."⁵⁴

6.9 Asoke Mehta's Accent on Social Change.

Mehta gives emphasis on social change. He states that there is a nexus between economic growth and social change. Economic growth and prosperity has relationship with social change. The fruits of development have to be commensurate with the changing norms and ethos of society. Mehta says : "In India, if growth is pursued by itself, it will never gather strength. Its ambit will remain narrow and precarious The modern sector of the economy will reach limits of expansion if the traditional sectors do not grow, that is, expand and

modernism. If economic growth is to achieve sustained momentum, it will have to be stoked by social change."⁵⁵ Mehta continues : "In some countries economic growth opens up a margin of welfare and so permits muffling or delaying of social change. In India, the growth itself is a function of the change - the latter enables and triggers the former."⁵⁶ Mehta argues that there should be a bridge between old and new. He feels that the necessary societal changes are to be welcomed. The changes in scientific and technological sphere need to be accommodated and adapted to the changing requirements of the society. Mehta writes : "To challenge the old and articulate the new, is the essential intellectual prerequisite of economic and social growth. In our inherited culture there are many elements that enrich us and must abide. But to seek the fruits of science and technology one has to adjust oneself to the structure of modernity... It is necessary to impart freshness and fecundity to their cultural awareness."⁵⁷

According to Mehta, "Group affiliations and aspirations will always operate politics. But they have to be suffused with understanding, endowed with purpose and direction. That is the real essence of politics."⁵⁸ Mehta conceded : "Politics of scarcity can easily degenerate into politics of scramble. Such politics can only damage the poor; scramble would aggravate the difficulties and it is the weak and the vulnerable who would suffer the backlash."⁵⁹ Mehta wrote : "Politics of poverty implies a deeper understanding and specific orientation. It requires involvement in social change by closest association with those whom Gurudev Tagore called, "the lowliest and the lost." It is the return to the worship of God as poor as Gandhiji envisioned it."⁶⁰ Mehta pleaded : Given the key role of leadership in economic growth process, political change itself becomes an area of conscious action. Development that would enable poverty to be overcome requires interaction among political, cultural and economic factors.⁶¹ He asserts that even the narrow question of mobilising additional capital for economic growth is made possible only by a determined leadership.

Shaileja Upmanya observes : "India is a significant laboratory of political, economic and social development and change. It is a static society, with a political system grounded in orthodox and conservative traditions but the one paradoxically in the process of change."⁶²

6:10 Asoke Mehta on Democracy

On August 15, 1947, India appeared before the world more as a government and less as a state. The British rulers had primarily been concerned with the governance of the country and not with its unity and growth or the feeling of oneness. It was the Indian national movement that developed a common commitment to certain basic values, democracy and civil liberties, independent economic development, secularism, social liberation, equality and social justice - and these values were propagated by the cadres of the movement among the mass of the people, so that they became a part of the political culture of most of the politicized people, not only of the intellectuals.⁶³

The Indian State incorporated the cardinal values of justice, Liberty, decades later, socialism and secularism in the constitution of India. But India also inherited many social anachronisms, plurality of cultures, ethnic conflicts, political divisions and a backward agrofeudal economy. S.Upimanya observes that it was difficult for the state structures to cope with challenges coming from them.⁶⁴

Asoke Mehta was a great champion of socialism and democracy. He wanted to make a fusion between socialism and democratic methods. Mehta emphasised on the need of clarity on the fundamentals of socialism. He laid stress on developing pluralistic approach to various problems as he considered that "life's lotus is may layered and every petal is precious."⁶⁵

Mehta could not be swayed by the fundamental tenets of Marxism in toto

as he repudiated and criticised the 'purzes and regimentation' prevalent in Soviet society. Mehta was in favour of a pluralistic state and he severely criticised totalitarian state and the concept of proletariat dictatorship as he believed it perpetuates one-party rule. He finds many of the fundamental postulates of Marxism as inadequate and incorrect. Like Nehru, Mehta's contention was that democracy can exist and function only in a multi-party state.

Mehta gave importance on socio-economic and political reforms to achieve socialism. He was a votary of gradualism and democratic and peaceful methods. Mehta was influenced by the values of European Social Democracy. He argues that totalitarianism is a denial of the socialist vision, socialism can be realised only through the acceptance of democracy. At Pacharhi conference, 1952, Mehta stressed emphasis on parliamentary and democratic means. He said that the Socialist Party is committed to peaceful means for social change, He said : "Our experience of the national movement and the growing democratic awareness of the people democratic awareness of the people should embolden us to make this declaration."⁶⁶

Mehta stressed that the predominant spirit of socialism has been peaceful, not violent. Mehta plended that 'social revolution has to be democratic not only in its aspirations but in its every day expression.'⁶⁷

It must be admitted that Asoke Mehta has been one of the greatest exponents of the concept of democratic socialism in India. Mehta says that democracy is the very heart of socialism. He maintains that "We cannot conceive of Socialism outside the framework of democracy Democracy and Socialism together, and only as two together, make the ideal that we all seek to realise. The two cannot be separated."⁶⁸ Mehta opines that 'a pulsating web of democracy is the core of Socialism.'⁶⁹ He felt that in a developing society the main task is of initiating and furthering the development process which may involve

economic, social and cultural transformation.

It must be mentioned that Mehta put remarkable importance on the adoption of democratic planning in India. He is considered as one of great exponents of planning in India, next to Nehru. Through the tool of planning Mehta wanted to spread the fruits of development to the masses. He wanted to raise the standard of living of the people with the method of planning. Mehta also gave importance on decentralisation. He wanted to develop and reconstruct Indian economy by adhering to the method of democratic planning.

NOTES AND REFERENCES.

1. R.A. Prasad : Socialist Thought in Modern India, Meenakshi Prakashan, Meerut, 1974, P : 135.
2. N.C. Mehrotra : Indian Socialist Thinking, M.N. Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi, 1986, P : 195.
3. Op. cite. n, 1, P : 135.
4. Article entitled "Asoka Mehta : A Journalist, Economist and Dialectician Rolled into One," by varinder Grover, in 'Political Thinkers of Modern India : Asoka Mehta,' ed. by V. Grover, Deep & Deep Publications, New Delhi, 1994, P : 452.
5. Op. cite, n, 1, P : 136.
6. Op. cite, n, 2, P : 195.
7. Sonal Shah : Indian Socialists : Search for Identity. Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1994, P : 30.
8. Minoo Masani : Bliss was it in that dawn, Arnold - Heinemann, New Delhi, 1977, P - 130.
9. Ibid : P - 130.
10. Op. cite, n, 2, PP : 198-199.
11. Op. cite, n, 1, P : 240.
12. Ibid : P : 240.
13. Asoka Mehta : Democratic Socialism. P : 129.
14. Asoka Mehta : Studies in Asian Socialism. P : 226.
15. John Patrick Haithcox : Communism & Nationalism in India. Oxford University Press, P : 234.
16. Ibid : P - 234.
17. Hiren Mukherjee : India's Struggle for Freedom. Manisha Granthalaya (P) Ltd. Calcutta, 1986, PP : 207 - 208.
18. Op. cite, n, 8, P : 144.
19. Ibid : P - 145.

20. Asim Kumar Chandhri : Socialist Movement in India. Progressive Publishers, Calcutta, 1980, P :111.
21. Satyabrata Rai Chowdhari : Leftist Movements in India : 1917-47. South Asia Books, Calcutta, 1977, P : 177.
22. Op. cite, n, 7, PP : 42 - 43.
23. Ibid : P - 47.
24. C.P. Bhambri - Political Process in India.1947-1991. Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd, New Delhi, 1991, P ; 59.
25. Asoke Mehta : Articiel entitled 'Planning beyond Economis' in 'Political Thinkers of Modern India : Asoka Mehta,' ed. by Verinder Grover, Deep & Deep Publications, New Delhi, 1994, P : 63.
26. Asoka Mehta : Article entitled 'How to get the Best from Planning : Importance of Detailed Studies in 'Political Thinkers of Modern India : Asoka Mehta' ed. by V. Grover, Deep & Deep Publications, New Delhi, 1994, PP : 136 - 137.
27. Asoke Mehta : Article entitled 'Need to Reshape the Plan' in 'Political Thinkers of Modern India : Asoka Mehta' ed. by V. Grover, Deep & Deep Publications, PP : 18 -19.
28. Asoka Mehta : Article entitled 'Planning Reyond Economics,' in 'Polotical Thinkers of Modern India : Asoka Mehta' ed. by V. Grover, Deep & Deep Publications, New Delhi, 1994, PP : 66 - 67.
29. Asoka Mehta : Article entitled 'Population and Plan' in 'Political Thinkers of Modern India : Asoka Mehta' ed. by V. Grover, Deep & Deep Publications, P - 79.
30. Asoka Mehta : Article entitled 'The Politics of Poverty,' in 'Political Thinkers of Modern India : Asoka Mehta' ed. by V. Grover, Deep & Deep Publications, P : 95.
31. Asoka Mehta : Article entitled 'How to get the Best from Planning : Importance of Detailed Studies,' in 'Political Thinkers of Modern India : Asoka Mehta,' ed. by V.Grover, Deep & Deep Publications, New Delhi, 1994, P:134.

32. Asoka Mehta : Seven Pillars of Planning, in 'Political Thinkers of Modern India : Asoka Mehta,' ed. by V. Grover, Deep & Deep Publications, New Delhi, 1994, P : 185.
33. Krishna Sahai : Socialist Movement in India. Classical Publishing Company, New Delhi, 1986, PP : 191 - 192.
34. Ibid : P - 193.
35. Op. cite, n, 7, P : 55.
36. Ibid : PP - 55 -56.
37. Asoka Mehta : Article entitled 'Politics of Planned Economy,' in 'Political Thinkers of Modern India : Asoka Mehta,' ed. by V. Grover, Deep & Deep Publications, 1994, P : 154.
38. Ibid : P - 154.
39. Ibid : P - 154.
40. Ibid : P - 154.
41. Ibid : P - 157.
42. Ibid : P - 159.
43. Asoka Mehta : Art, entitled "Towards A Scientific Revolution in our Agriculture," in 'Political thinkers of Modern India : Asoka Mehta,' ed. by V. Grover, Deep & Deep Publications, New Delhi, 1994, P : 201.
44. Ibid : 202.
45. Ibid : 203.
46. Ibid : 205.
47. Asoka Mehta : Article entitled, 'Towards An Agricultural Revolution,' in 'Political Thinkers of Modern India : Asoka Mehta,' ed. by V. Grover, Delhi, 1994, PP : 232 - 233.
48. Ibid : P : 238.
49. Asoka Mehta : Article entitled 'Need to Reshape the Plan,' in 'Political Thinkers of Modern India' Asoka Mehta,' ed. by V. Grover, Deep & Deep Publications, New Delhi, 1994, P : 21.
50. Asoke Mehta : Article entitled 'Main Issues Before Third Plan,' in 'Political

- Thinkers of Modern India : Asoka Mehta,' ed. by V. Grover, Deep & Deep Publications, New Delhi, 1994, P : 41.
51. Asoka Mehta : Article entitled 'The Economic Consequences of Sardar Patel,' in 'Political Thinkers of Modern India : Asoka Mehta,' ed. by V. Grover, Deep & Deep Publications, New Delhi, 1994, P ; 107.
 52. Asoka Mehta : Article entitled 'Strategy of Development in India' in 'Political Thinkers of Modern India : Asoka Mehta,' ed. by V. Grover, Deep & Deep Publications, New Delhi, 1994, P : 335.
 53. Ibid : 335.
 54. Ibid : 336.
 55. Asoka Mehta : article entitled 'The Politics of Poverty,' in 'Political Thinkers of Modern India : Asoka Mehta' ed. by V. Grover, Deep & Deep Publications, New Delhi, 1994, P : 97.
 56. Ibid : P - 97.
 57. Ibid : P - 98.
 58. Ibid : P - 98.
 59. Ibid : P - 98.
 60. Ibid : P - 99.
 61. Ibid : P - 99.
 62. Shaileja Upmanyu : State in the Indian Political System, Rawat Publications, Jaipur. 1997, P : 108.
 63. Ibid : P - 132.
 64. Ibid : P - 9.
 65. Report of Eighth National Conference of the Socialist Party, Madras, 1950, P : 29.
 66. Report of the Special Convention of the Socialist Party, Pachmarhi, 1952, P : 37.
 67. N.C. Mehrotra : Indian Socialist Thinking, M.N. Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi, 1986, PP : 203 - 204.
 68. Asoka Mehta : Democratic Socialism, P : 127.
 69. Report of Eight National Conference of the Socialist Party, Madras, 1950, P : 29