

FUNCTIONS AND PROBLEMS OF INDIAN POLITY

SHRIRAM MAHESHWARI

Indian polity or political system is a subject of deep interest at all times, but at no time was its topicality more acutely felt than at present. The polity is under a new level of stress and that too from several quarters. One may even say that it is at the cross-roads at present, and which turn it is likely to take in the near future is not very certain. An understanding of the political system, moreover, is apt to yield important insights which may help in influencing its future course. All these suggest the importance of a dispassionate analysis of Indian politics.

ACHIEVEMENTS

A study of the country's political system, not unnaturally, may generate divergent views but one must look at it in a perspective. We Indians are often criticised for being more critical of India than we need be, and such a cultural trait warns us to keep our perspective right and undimmed. The political system has to its credit many gains and achievements the significance of which may not be minimised. India, today, is an important member of the international community, and its counsels receive serious attention in the various capitals of the world. It is one of the pioneers of the non-alignment movement, and today the non-aligned bloc claims a membership of no less than 100 nation-states in the world, which is a testimony to the vision and leadership India provided at that critically important early stage. Besides, India has managed its economy fairly well; at any rate, its record in this field has not been very disappointing as compared to many other developing countries even if it is not adjudicated as being very adequate. India ranks as the tenth most highly industrialized country in the world. One should also not overlook the fact

that while some Latin American countries are witnessing runaway inflation India has succeeded in bringing it down from the two digit figure to one digit one, which itself is a notable feat.

Furthermore, the infrastructure which India has succeeded in developing is bound to attract the admiration of the whole world. Today, India has a vast network of scientific and technological institutions and it possesses the third largest scientific and technological manpower in the world. Educational expansion has been equally impressive. Many of our scientists and technologists . . . indeed, experts in all areas of knowledge . . . are occupying responsible positions even in the developed countries of the world. Indeed, the country is not deficient in any field of skills and knowledge. The transport and communication system is well developed and so are other infrastructural facilities.

No less significant have been the political gains of India registered since 1950, the base line. The very unbroken continuity of the polity is itself an achievement: an aspect which readily acquires vividness and colour when remembered that in the third world Indian Constitution is the oldest one, and what is even more creditable, the constitution is a *functioning* one. Secondly, in spite of occasional ups and downs, India has enjoyed a fairly stable government both at the centre and in the states since the commencement of the constitution. What is most remarkable in the third world, India has enjoyed a fairly stable government both at the centre and in the states since the commencement of the constitution. What is most remarkable in the third world, India has established a convention of constitutionalism in the matter of change of government: the change is peaceful and strictly through the ballot. There have been three such occasions at the centre—in 1977, 1979¹ and 1980—and each time the successor government was installed peacefully and in accord-

¹Inviting Charan Singh to form the government at the Centre and letting his ministry continue on his failure to gain the confidence vote of the Lok Sabha raised some constitutional controversy, but does not weaken the thrust of the argument.

ance with the constitution. This has provided the necessary environment for implementation of successive five year plans and, besides, accorded operational legitimacy to the constitutional arrangements of the land. Above all, there has been a steady deepening of the political awareness of the people, and the democratic institutions have generally taken roots in the country at all levels.

FAILURES

This is not to suggest that the Indian balance-sheet has all gains to its credit, and failures and inadequacies have been practically nil or insignificant. India's achievements have certainly been many and impressive, but all the same have proved to be inadequate, and not very wide-ranging. The nation could have registered much greater progress and in many more areas of life. It is well to look at this side of the model also.

India's single greatest failing has been in that sphere which imparts completeness to life: the sphere of public ethics. There has been nearly total neglect of civic and moral education of the people, and a whole generation has grown to adulthood without it. Morality is plainly at its lowest ebb in the India of today, and hardly any walk of life remains unsullied by this deterioration. There is widespread lack of public honesty, commitment, sincerity and integrity in whatever we are doing, which has sometimes made others call us hypocrites. India presently functions in a state of moral anaesthesia.

A dwindling concern for the nation as a whole is another most distressing feature of the contemporary life. India was more of a nation during the British period than today,² and of late the process of unmaking a nation may seem to be more in evidence than that of making a nation. Besides, a loss of broader vision, imaginative insight, statesmanly fore-

²When Surendranath Banerjee wrote his reminiscences in 1925, the title he chose was *A Nation in Making*. That great public leader's contention, by implication, was that India was not yet an integrated nation but the process towards it had well begun.

sight, sagacity too, has, come to be clearly and painfully discerned in the thoughts and actions of leadership political, or otherwise. The parochialism was also a latent factor in the Indian psyche, but remained submerged during the first decade and a half of India's independence. With the disappearance of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and of leadership trained under the Gandhi-era the age of broad minds came to an end, succeeded by progressively poor replacements. Today, small men are seen strutting about and casting long shadows in most walks of life, whereas the really good and great are producing short shadows.

These are the larger failures impinging on all walks of life. One may proceed further to chronicle, even though briefly, the ill successes on the purely material plane.

India's single greatest failure has been its incapacity to control its population whereas it ought to have been considered as the biggest problem before the nation. The fast increasing numbers not only neutralise the gains from developmental efforts which are under way since the time of independence but also impose a heavy strain on the country's limited resources.³ Closely following is the distressingly wide economic anomalies in the society. There is more inequality in India today than ever in the past, and this owes itself directly to the model of growth and the economic policies which it has pursued. Even after the implementation of successive five year plans, the purchasing power is concentrated in ten per cent or so of the population, and the pattern of industrial production is largely dictated by such an unnaturally small number. Nearly half of the country's population continues

³According to the 1981 census, India's population stands at 68.4 million, and the increase since 1951 is as under:

| <i>Year</i> | <i>Percentage of Increase since the previous census</i> |
|-------------|---|
| 1951 | 13.3 |
| 1961 | 21.5 |
| 1971 | 24.8 |
| 1981 | 24.8 |

During 1951-81 the population of India increased from 361 million to 686 million, the compound annual growth rate being 2.15 per cent.

to live below the poverty line. India is a land where extreme affluence and extreme poverty co-exist, and even man's conscience has ceased to react to such distortions.

PROFILES OF POLITICS

Having discussed, very briefly, the larger social failures one may now move to the field of politics. But here the pattern of discussion would be to analyse the functions of the political system, delineate the major features characterising its functioning and then to highlight the problems it is afflicted with.

The functions of the political system had been woven and coded in the freedom movement of India and are articulated in the Objectives Resolution adopted by the Constituent Assembly on January 22, 1947. The Objectives Resolution promised, among others, to guarantee and secure "to all the people of India justice, social, economic and political; equality of status, of opportunity, and before the law; freedom of thought, expression, belief, faith, worship, vocation, association and action".⁴ These are orchestrated in the preamble, fundamental rights and the directive principles of state policy of the constitution. The political system, thus, derives its terms of reference, so to say, from the constitution, but one must not forget that the latter also leaves options and choices: the political leaders may emphasize certain aspects and keep others at a low key. This is another way of saying that the operating reality need not necessarily and in all its details conform to the constitutional values. But at the same time, the gap must not be a cause of embarrassment to the system.

The politics under the Constitution of India (1950), understandably, marked strong continuities with the past, and this continued to be the case until the fourth general election (1967) though the constitutional provisions of periodic elections based on universal franchise contained seeds of change and transformation. The political leadership of the freedom movement and hence of the Gandhi era was gradually thin-

⁴See B. Shiva Rao (ed.), *The Framing of India's Constitution*, Vol. II, New Delhi, Indian Institute of Public Administration, 1967, p. 4.

ning out for a variety of reasons—such as death, defeat in elections or demands of other dimensions—making room for new elements which the general elections based on adult suffrage began to throw up and whose strongest qualification lay in their acceptability by the newly enfranchised sections of the society. These sections, it may be noted, are those which have traditionally been occupying lower rungs of the economic ladder and are also, generally, illiterate. Indeed, under the impact of general elections held on adult franchise there has been a gradual but distinct shift, both spatial and vertical, of political power, but it was in the general election of 1966-67 that these new forces finally registered their ascendancy and triumph. The urban-based, upper caste dominated politics was getting increasingly vernacularised and thus becoming much more broad-based admitting within its fold vast numbers of hitherto untapped groups and sections of the population. Simultaneously, a distinct process of ruralisation of Indian politics has been in the offing; agriculturists have of late emerged as the largest occupational group in the Parliament.

The year 1967 may thus rightly be said to constitute a Great Divide in Indian political history. The general election held in that year signified a nearly complete disappearance of the older leadership and heralded the full emergence of the new one; and as a result, the representatives became very nearly like those they represent. This, as already mentioned, was inherent in the system. Under the constitution the source of political power became voting rights and the majority, and as such the hitherto neglected groups, which are economically backward, generally illiterate but which nevertheless constitute majority in the country were bound to come increasingly into power—or, at any rate, to hold balance of power in the immediate future. The fourth general election was followed and accompanied by some unusual features. Jawaharlal Nehru had passed away in the interval between the third and the fourth general elections and his place was filled up by leadership which had no such charisma, at least to begin with. It was also a period of economic hardship, for the country was in the grip of a severe drought. India announced devaluation of its currency which hit its economy

hard. Also, the parliamentary and assembly polls were delinked for the first time, which had the effect of pushing up the cost of election thereby highlighting the critical importance of money power in politics. The Second Five Year Plan (1956-61) characterised as it was by its industry orientation and huge public outlay had injected not inconsiderable black money into the market. The subsequent elections have dutifully reinforced these trends and made interface between politics and money power move intimate.

While a person ready to make sacrifices joined politics during the freedom struggle, in independent India politics became election-based: it is through election that one now graduates into politics. Elections, it is common knowledge, are becoming increasingly expensive, much beyond the capacity of most politicians, which inevitably makes them dependent on money bags. In short, politics which has emerged is linkage politics. The adoption of planning and of mixed economy pattern of development meanwhile has greatly expanded the patronage of the state, and the businessman, actual or aspiring, needs the politician to help him in getting licences, permits and quotas and other benefits from the government of the day, and in the process creating relationships of inter-dependencies and mutual benefits.

In short, electoral politics was beginning to produce its own logic and it became the seed bed of corruption involving the politician, the fund-givers and even the voters. Politics has been fast becoming amoral, if not immoral also at times.⁵

Being the ruling party, the Congress party shapes and controls the country's tone and pattern of politics, and it itself

⁵This kind of situation had emerged by the late sixties when the atmosphere became thick with talks about corruption in politics and administration. The probes made against two politicians, one being a state chief minister and other a central minister, served to confirm the existence of wide-spread corruption in the public life of the country. Yet the overriding belief at the time was that these lapses but aberrations and would pass away. K. D. Malviya affair was investigated by Justice S. R. Das. See *Lok Sabha Debates*, Third Series, Vol. XIX, No. 4, August 17, 1963, col. 964-5. The charges against Pratap Singh Kairon (Punjab's Chief Minister) were examined by the S. R. Das Commission of Inquiry; see *The Report of the Commission of Inquiry*, New Delhi, Manager of Publications, 1964.

was undergoing a fundamental change in its internal composition. Each election brought in new members; so did the two splits of 1969 and 1978. Its strategies of working and orientations deeply changed. But this is not to imply that other parties have stayed completely unchanged. Political parties in India display an extraordinary degree of homogeneity in their electoral behaviour: rigging of election, booth capturing, intimidation of voters and recourse to violence, mobilisation of anti-social elements, etc., have become an integral part of India's contemporary political culture. Moreover, the Janata party which remained in power at the centre during 1977-79 was behaviourally little different from the Congress party which it replaced scoring massive victory in the value-laden election of 1977. It would not be very wrong to say that all ruling parties are reproducing the Congress party's characteristic attributes in themselves. Politicians in India seem to look so much alike, for they are essentially the products of a common process which is autonomous of them. Political parties in a competitive system initially encounter a tension between their ideological goals and office (or power) goals, but steadily the goal of office comes to critically determine the party decisions and behaviour, which means that the structure of political opportunities within a political system affects a party's internal organisation, its leadership, its policies, its income, its capacity to attract voters, etc. This happens because political parties compete to control a process which they did not establish and which, moreover, could go on without them. 'Better led than dead', or even 'lesser red than dead' seems to be an apparently unavoidable option for parties including even the fiercely leftist ones.

IMPACT OF NEW FORCES

Consequently, the political system in India is of late finding itself under mounting stress, and what is more, there does not appear to be any signs of the pressures getting abated in the near future. First, the country's politics seeks to entrust more and more, activities and functions to the state. This is despite the fact that it is, in open, overly critical of bureaucratic incompetence and corruption. The politician

in India has a wonderful capacity to live with contradictions, and thus while disparaging public administration he continues to burden it with new responsibilities. The state is being looked upon for doing even the most trivial things and as a result, areas of voluntary efforts and cooperation are getting consistently shrunk and shrivelled for want of support and nourishment. Second, there is too much of demand being made on the country's political system with little attention being given to its capabilities and capacities. The consequence is that it has today become nearly unmanageable in terms of the system's handling capacity. In the third place, thanks to periodic elections held on adult suffrage, all sectors and layers of this huge chunk of mankind living in India have become increasingly politicalised though not equally and in wellrounded form but some have become more vocal and command bargaining power disproportionate to their numerical strength or even to their political significance. Politics is kept fanned up incessantly and today no decision is believed to carry finality with it. Fourthly, the politics which is practised in the country has become growingly ruthless and normless, and a belief has gone round to the effect that what matters in the world is success in total disregard of how it is achieved and by what means. Political violence has by now established itself as an integral part of the contemporary political culture. How different all this is from the purity of means and the cult of non-violence preached and practised by Mahatma Gandhi. Fifthly, the country's politics has been becoming increasingly ahistorical, being conducted too much in terms of the present and heavily discounting the future. In the process, it has singularly failed to examine the emerging problems in a long-term perspective. It has not been able to strike a balance between the 'unity' and 'diversity' factors thereby giving a free reign to diversity. Indeed, the contemporary politics of India is vividly centrifugal and fragmentary. India is acclaimed as a country characterised by unity amidst diversity, but little effort has been made to promote and reinforce unity. Rather, it is engaged in a risky game of institutionalisation of diversity with the consequence that, today, claiming a separate and distinct identity has become an ambition of an ever-increasing number of people in the

country. And, very often they succeed too. Sixthly, politics has become increasingly agitational, and what is more an impression has got created that it pays also—or, as some one said, it alone pays these days! It is an indication of the times that political crimes including union crimes have generally come to be treated rather lightly—and are even sometimes ignored or condoned. Seventhly, a steep deterioration in moral values also marks the politics of the country. Many, especially those who have entered it in the recent past, do not seem to have adequate preparation for the profession of politics or a spirit of social commitment. Generally, dedication and social purposiveness are low in a sizeable number of politicians whatever be their public postures.⁶ Political opportunism is a widespread evil debasing the country's politics. Widespread existence of political corruption may be cited as the eighth, but most serious feature of India's politics. Its roots lie in the electoral politics but has been fanned up by the governmental power of regulation

“Could you please give some reasons why you have joined politics” was a question which the present author put to the various candidates seeking election to the Delhi Metropolitan Council in 1977. Some of their replies are interesting and are being reproduced:

“I just joined; I did not plan the political career for myself. I was a public debater, which brought me to politics. But I have not regretted having come to politics. Financially, it has damaged me enormously. I have joined the Janata Party as I want to prevent bogus people from usurping the Janata Party. I am fighting against forces which rely upon falsehood and treachery. I am contesting the election with the J. P. spirit: do not cling to power but fight for truth.”

“I have seen my father serving the people through the medium of politics. Unless one has power to get certain things done one can't serve the people.”

“In order to be effective in his work one has got to have political power. This is why I am contesting elections.”

“I was and am interested in social work. During the course of my social work I had some experiences. Social problems can be solved only politically; hence I decided to come directly into politics. In 1962 I was nominated to the New Delhi Municipal Committee. My experience of NDMC was very satisfying. A social worker can maximise his effort by coming to politics.”

“A desire to serve the people has brought me to politics.”

“I have joined politics to help the poor and weaker sections of the

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and control of the nation's economy as well as phenomenal increase in public expenditure. The prevalence of widespread corruption among politicians is eloquently confirmed by each of the twenty-two commissions of inquiry set up by the centre and the states against individual politicians from time to time since independence. Another finding of these commissions is the collusion between the ministers and the civil servants in a large variety of shady activities. The emerging corruption is not necessarily in the form of money: it may be patronage. It is thus not very incorrect to say that a disturbingly large number of politicians and civil servants have learnt by now to accommodate each other in a wide variety of matters—at the expense of public interest.

Last but quite worrying is the ubiquitousness of politics in the India of today. Politics has become so possessive

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society.”

“I came to politics to solve the problems of the poor labourers living in the area.”

“I want to serve the people.”

“I am a trader as well as a social worker. I joined politics to solve people's problem.”

“I have joined politics and sought election at the request of the people.”

“My desire to solve the problems facing the Muslims has brought me to active politics. It is only through elections that problems can be solved. Politics gives power to me.”

“I was persuaded to join politics. Nor did I wish to contest the election. I was persuaded to fight.”

These make very interesting reading. First, all candidates proclaim to serve the people. If such a view is genuine the country should indeed consider itself to be very fortunate, having as she does a very large number of selfless citizens committed to public weal. Secondly, even persons engaged in social work feel that politics makes them more effective. The reader can draw his own inferences from the above replies, but two observations may not be very irrelevant here. Indian politics is deeply intermingled with hypocrisy, and a politician cannot publicly give up the posture of saintliness. Secondly, whatever may be its criticism in India political power commands enormous respect and attention in terms of producing result and therefore, almost everyone seems to be running after it. (See S. R. Maheshwari, *Electoral Politics in the National Metropolis*, New Delhi, Ritu Publishers, 1982, pp. 88-9).

that today it is apparently prepared to accept no boundary: with utmost obstinacy it continues to expand its area, and today it has come to project itself in most spheres of life with the consequence that there does not exist any de-politicised sector of activities in the country. It seems to pervade most areas of life: it superimposes itself on almost everything. Any one aspiring to be of some consequence in the country in any area of life must have political levers. An effect of such all sprawling politics is that it is stultifying and stunting the autonomous growth of other wings of life.

PROBLEM-AREAS

The Congress party,⁷ which spearheaded the national movement for independence, has remained continuously in power at the centre (except for a brief period of two and a half years) and in most states since 1947, which provided a uniquely stable framework for policy-making and administration in the country. For the first time, the Congress was defeated in the elections held in 1977, but it returned to power with a thumping majority in the election held in 1980. Though still the ruling party at the centre and in seventeen out of twenty-two states, the Congress appears to be in a weak health. Early in 1983, Party was thrown out of power in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, the states which were the traditional stronghold of the Congress. Indeed, the Congress does not appear to be organisationally very sound. None of the 25 Pradesh Congress Committees and the 327 District Congress Committees is an elected body; all these bodies are appointed ones. This is its serious weakness.⁸

Yet, there does not appear to be no other party which is strong enough to fill the gap if and when the Congress is voted out of power. This aspect acquires added seriousness for another reason too. Right since the first general election, the Congress party has been coming into power with less than fifty per cent votes, and as such a swing of, say, five per cent

⁷Reference is to what is presently known as the Congress (I).

⁸It is common for political parties to persistently avoid organisational elections, thus showing scant respect for internal democracy.

disillusioned voters is enough to knock it out of power. This entails far-reaching consequences for the country's political system, more so when analysed in the context of the following phenomena.

The Congress Party is giving way to what may be called regional parties and not to national parties. The National Conference, AIDMK and Telegu Desam are, today, ruling Jammu-Kashmir, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh respectively while Akali Dal is fluttering its wings in a menacing way in Punjab. These features, namely, the possible weakening of the present ruling party and the ascendancy of regionalism, are profoundly significant, and this provides the framework for the analysis of major problems which are likely to confront the Indian political system in the near future.

I

Regionalism as a factor in Indian politics was never totally absent, but its ascendancy is a relatively new phenomenon which is likely to subject the political system to an unprecedented level of stress. Regional parties have already established themselves in states like Andhra Pradesh, Jammu-Kashmir, Tamil Nadu, etc., and are likely to be increasingly assertive in the near future. New 'revolts' against the centre are not completely unlikely in the near future and the regional phenomena will in all probability be more assertive, fuelled also by the very style of the functioning of the Congress dominated system. Despite its safe majority in the states under its control, the Congress has itself introduced instability by its habit of centre-directed nomination of chief ministers as well as the frequent change of governments. Maharashtra has had three chief ministers since the last assembly election; Bihar, U.P. and Rajasthan two each. It is significant that the present ruling party in Andhra Pradesh, Telegu Desam, was voted into power early in 1983 as a mark of determined popular protest against the Congress party's style of making and unmaking chief ministers. On the positive side, the regional parties disseminate a feeling that they would be able to do something for their 'neglected' states by virtue of their unifocal loyalty and commitment. Regionalism has also

acquired its present intensity from the changes which have occurred in the economic sector of life in the states. The growth of capitalism in agriculture and the small scale industries has today given birth to a *nouveau riche* class whose mind, quite understandably, is confined to the boundaries of their respective states. Of course, it is reinforced by factors of culture and language.⁹ As already observed, the coming years are most likely to see an intensification of regionalism in India, which is apt to generate areas of tension and conflict in the political system.

II

It flows from the above that centre-state relations will most surely experience severely high levels of imbalance in the near future. This should not be surprising in the least, for states like West Bengal and Kerala have been demanding for quite some time a greater measure of autonomy for the states. Tamil Nadu had even set up in 1969 a Centre-State Relations Inquiry Committee under the chairmanship of R.J. Rajamannar to suggest appropriate changes in the constitution in this respect. Its 282 page report came out in 1971 but it proved to be still-born. The demand for restructuring of centre-state relations has of late gained momentum and has become much more organised backed as it is by states presently under the rule of non-Congress parties—Andhra Pradesh, Jammu-Kashmir, Karnataka, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, etc. The gravity of the demand has been recognised by the centre, reflected in its action to set up, in August 1983, a Commission under the chairmanship of Justice R.S. Sarkaria “to go into centre-state relations and recommend appropriate changes within the present constitutional framework”.

⁹Regionalism is countered by several changes taking place in the country. The whole class of professionals, technicians, managers, engineers, etc., which has emerged in large numbers seek or recognise no regional boundaries. The medium and higher level industrialists and traders have developed a stake in pulling down regional barriers. The Chambers of Commerce and industry and trade organisations, for instance want the sales tax to be replaced by excise duties. Similarly, many others seek unification of the national market.

The centre-state relations in India have always contained seeds of conflict, and this partly flows from the arrangements made in the constitution itself. The Constitution of India made the states deeply subordinate to, and dependent on the centre in various ways, which was a departure from the federal principle originally put forward under the Cabinet Mission Plan of May 16, 1946. One has only to cite Article 356 in proof of this contention: this Article empowers the centre to dismiss a state-level ministry and introduce President's rule. Indeed, the central government which emerges from the constitutional postulates is not only the Government of India but also the Government of the Governments in India. This is depicted in various ways. The constitution confers major programmatic responsibilities on the states, and as such both the components of development and regulatory administration are directly in the state's field of action. But the resource yielding powers are given to the centre, thereby making the states generally dependent on the centre for financial support. This was part of the larger scheme of keeping the states under the centre's discipline and even control. The imbalance between functions and resources has been persistently aggravated by the operational realities of the polity.

The dependence syndrome has become stronger with the adoption of planning in India since 1950 and the single party dominance system in the country. The resource base of the states, never very satisfactory, has even suffered abridgement by certain actions of the centre like merging of income-tax paid by companies with corporate tax and preempting to itself a large percentage of the draft on private savings and resources. There were other anomalies too. A state government is entitled to overdrafts up to 2 per cent of its annual expenditure at 13 per cent interest but for the central government there is no such limit, and the rate of interest is also 6.5 per cent! With the breaking up, or at least weakening of the Congress monolithic system, the states have been articulating their protests against the position they find themselves reduced to, and of late these protests are becoming louder and more persistent. Broadly speaking, the transfer of resources from the centre to the states may materialise along three channels. The first is the Finance Commission which lays down the

formula for the sharing of tax revenues; the second is the Planning Commission which allocates outlays for various sectors under Article 282 of the Constitution and the third is classified as 'other transfers by the Government of India'. Both the Finance Commission and the Planning Commission deserve a second look today. As is common knowledge, the Finance Commission is a constitutional body but the Planning Commission has been set up merely under an executive resolution. Yet the latter has emerged as a more powerful body, restricting, in practice, the scope and functions of the Finance Commission. This itself is a serious distortion of the scheme of things visualised by the constitution. Besides, the divisible pool of taxes which fall within the jurisdiction of the Finance Commission must be considerably enlarged, especially in view of the centre's practice of levying non-divisible surcharges on corporate taxes. The states should be given a greater share than what they are getting at present. The corporate tax and the surcharge on income-tax must be included in the divisible pool. Besides, they presently encounter many other handicaps also. Those not in the good books of the centre may find it very difficult to secure adequate resources which are presently commanded by nationalised banks, L.I.C. and other public financing institutions. The location of industries in states is also determined by the industrial policies and licensing procedures of the Central government.

What is more, the Finance Commission is presently one-sided in its approach. While it can examine the financial needs of the states it lacks authority to look into the financial requirements of the centre and to allcate funds to it accordingly. In other words, the centre obliges the states to accept a discipline from which it itself stands completely released! The anomaly must be removed. This points up the need for an Expenditure Commission to subject the centre also to a wide ranging scrutiny. Nor should one forget that the Central government has hardly set a good example before the states in the matter of husbanding of resources. In 1973-74 the total central revenue receipts were Rs. 5,072 crores while the revenue expenditure was Rs. 4,835 crores, yielding a surplus of Rs. 237 crores. In 1982-83 the expenditure was Rs. 18,227 crores against a revenue receipt of Rs. 17,130 crores.

The dynamics of development has significantly changed the framework in which the states now find themselves operating, thus signifying a need for re-examination so that they are enabled to have adequate powers as well as resources to meet their growing needs. The increasing resource constraints of the states have even been recognised by the successive Finance Commissions.

One must not necessarily conclude from the foregoing that the state governments are clean and honest in their dealings and deeds while the centre alone is at fault. They have themselves been harsh and unfair in dealing with the local government, both rural and urban, and thus have been reproducing the centre's image when interaction with the lower level government is involved. Many of the states have not taken planning very seriously; and do not plan within their resources or have not incorporated the needs of overall integrated development of the entire state. Many of the states have not yet constituted statutory planning bodies. But they go on demanding from the centre massive irrigation and power projects while those already in hand languish in their states uncompleted, entailing enormous cost escalations. Many of them have been negligent in managing their affairs prudently. For instance, the aggregate losses incurred by the State Road Transport Corporations were Rs. 62.35 crores in 1979-80 and are likely to touch the figure of Rs. 1,340 crores during 1980-85. The states' own mismanagement of their resources may produce an inclination in them to search for scapegoats. There is thus a fear of the centre-state relations getting turned into an anti-centre tirade, partly to cover up the inadequacies of the individual state itself. Soberly speaking, there is no basic incompatibility between a strong centre and strong states, and the governing principle in cooperative federalism should be: who collects the funds is not very relevant, for funds flow from the people; what is important is that the levels of government needing them the most must not remain deprived of them.¹⁰

The office of the governor must receive serious thought.

¹⁰For a detailed analysis see S.R. Maheshwari, *State Governments in India*, New Delhi, Macmillans, 1979, pp. 220-244.

The governor's powers to appoint the chief minister and to dissolve the state legislature must be standardised to keep him beyond criticism. The present mode of his functioning makes his behaviour questionable. Immediately after the election the locus of activities relating to formation of government presently shifts to New Delhi almost as a matter of routine. Of late, the legislators seldom elect the party leader: the latter descends, like manna, from the centre, and the governor awaits a signal from the centre. No less true is the abuse of power under Article 356—the proverbial mote in the states' eye. It is significant that in most of the 70-odd cases of President's Rule, Article 356 has been violated in spirit.¹¹ Over the years the governor has become an agent of the central government, and it is high time he distances himself from the centre and functions in a strictly constitutional manner.

III

The Indian political system is characterised by one dominant party surrounded by a large number of splinter or small parties many of which plainly fall in the category of regional parties. There is thus an absence of two party or three party system, and as a consequence the opposition vote gets split up, which has greatly benefited the Congress, electorally speaking. An effort was made in 1977 to evolve an alternative party in the name of the Janata party, but this coming together of various parties with the aim of defeating the Congress was artificial and did not last beyond 1979. The other parties have been weak and small but this feature did not cause much worry as the Congress party was always on the political scene to provide stability at both the levels of the government, especially at the central level. Today, all political parties including the Congress are in a state of disarray. Many of the parties are the lengthened shadows of individual politicians with little programmatic input. To curb mushrooming growth of political parties, the qualifying percentage of votes for

¹¹See S.R. Maheshwari, *President's Rule in India*, New Delhi, Macmillans, 1977.

recognition of parties must be raised. At present, a party which secures 4 per cent of the valid votes polled in a state is recognised as a state party while every party which performs this feat in four states is accorded the status of a national party. But there does not seem to be any political will in favour of such a move. A multiplicity of parties is thus likely to continue as a feature of the political scenario in the future as well, and all parties seem to be reconciled to it. This explains why the present emphasis appears to be on alliances rather than mergers. The alliance politics has been successfully practised by the communist parties, and the left-alliances have been successful in West Bengal and Kerala.

The formation of the multi-member United Front comprising the Janata, Congress (S), Democratic Socialist Party and the Rashtriya Congress, and the National Democratic Alliance of the BJP and the Lok Dal are indicator of how the political parties are gearing themselves for the coming election. But on closer analysis this would be discovered to be a pathetic endeavour of the opposition parties to prevent splitting up of their votes. It is premature to speculate whether these two alliances would evince an abiding urge to form a broader alliance. But the prospects do not appear to be very bright. While the opposition fragmentation gets countered by these alliances, the consolidation of the opposition does not seem to be in sight. In India, politics is not yet emerging as ideology or issue-oriented; it is deeply personality based. Or, to be more correct, politics in India is deeply election-oriented.

IV

Elections, the gateway to political success and power, are apt to be subject to exceptionally heavy pressures in the near future if the foregoing analysis is not completely wrong. Even otherwise, electoral politics is becoming increasingly ruthless and normless in India over a period of time, and the future is most likely to see only an intensification of such trends, not their reversal unless firm and resolute reform measures are taken. The growing role of money power and the 'muscle'

power as well as the mounting cost of elections should cause concern to all right-thinking citizens. The business houses with black money presently find an election a handsome opportunity to purchase political favours and no less true is the growing inter-face between politics and crime. Politics must be weaned away from such cankerous influences, and the necessary beginning has to be made with electoral reform. The election must be made cheap, and also free and fair. To reduce dependence on money power, the state should agree to subsidise contesting of elections and to this end set up an 'election fund'. As part of cleanliness in politics the political parties of the land must be obliged to maintain their accounts and get them properly audited, thereby letting the public know about their financial profiles.

The electoral administration is presently full of loopholes, which must be appropriately plugged. "Of the four pillars of Indian democracy, namely, the Supreme Court, the Public Service Commission, the Comptroller and Auditor-General of India and the Election Commission, the last is the weakest, both in conception and in practice. On closer scrutiny, it should be obvious that the strength of all these institutions, nay, of the constitutional system itself depends ultimately upon the integrity and independence of the electoral administration of the land."¹² The Election Commission has necessarily to harness the state level administrative machinery over which its control is anything but continuously effective—as is proven by its experiences at the time of the Jammu-Kashmir assembly elections held in the summer of 1983. The Election Commission of India needs to be strengthened constitutionally, administratively, financially and politically, failing which this body will be subjected to the greatest possible stress, entailing far-reaching implications for the entire polity.

A mention is often made of imbalances in the present voting principle in India which does not produce a close correspondence between the number of votes polled and the number of seats won. This is inherent in the first-past-the-post system, but a better substitute does not seem to be in sight.

¹²S.R. Maheshwari, "Election Commission: Weakest Pillar of Our Democracy", in *The Statesman*, June 18, 1982.

AGENDA FOR ACTION

It may not thus be too rash to conclude that the immediate future is likely to be of turmoil and tension to the country's political system. Many institutions of state are to face rough weather, and Election Commission, office of Governor, Planning Commission, all India services, etc., are prominently among them and are to bear the brunt of the forces and pressures likely to be released in the near future. The civil service, too, would find itself placed within a distinctly rough and tough environment, and pointed attention may be drawn to matters like postings and transfers, which are already threatening to become 'big business' in many states. Indeed, the practices being already observed in the sphere of public service are the play back, so to say, of the future scheme of things. Even what may be viewed as the basic assumptions of peaceful life are to find themselves under siege, so to say. The processes which are beginning to unfold themselves and are to unfurl themselves more completely very shortly will ultimately bring about significant changes in the political (and the larger social) system, putting it on a very different keel. The political system is likely to remain fully busy with these, recently released forces, endeavouring to absorb and accommodate them.

The next general election due in the year 1985 will thus be pregnant with import and meaning for the country's political system. One way of dealing with this not too distant future is to sit and wait idly till the events unfold themselves in 1985 till, in other words, the new forces burst on us with the celerity of a cyclone.

If this were to be the ideal pattern of response, the present conference would have served little practical purpose, honestly speaking. Another more sensible approach is to initiate a dispassionate dialogue on the nature and shape of the political system likely to emerge after the next elections and to get ready for that future. Changes to be demanded at that time are apt to be unacceptable to all concerned for the simple reason that these would be articulated and debated under the heat of the moment. It is immensely beneficial to inaugurate a statesmanlike discussion just now in a bid to

evoke a broad consensus and to initiate a process of change. Steps in this regard must be taken up within the present political framework itself to pave the way for its general acceptability in the future. The problems and issues identified in the present paper as well as many other views and suggestions not directly listed here but nevertheless pertinent may be examined with a view to preparing an agenda for immediate action.

The planning process as ordained by the Planning Commission requires to be restructured and reformed. It must be fully realised that a decentralisation of decision-making process is overdue and inescapable. The institutions likely to be subjected to heavy stress have already been identified in the present paper and consensus about their reformed structures and functions must emerge. The National Development Council must be made a more active body. The scourge of political defections must be dealt with firmly and swiftly, and the necessary legislation in this regard should brook no further delay. Corruption is nearly universal at present, and it must be checked—to avoid people's alienation from the system. Lokpal and Lokayuktas must be appointed at the earliest, and accountability must be enforced at various levels of administration.

Besides, there must be a large number of autonomous institutions which may mediate between the centre and the states. A time has come when such organisations should distance themselves from the government at the centre and evolve working relationship with both the levels of government in the country. Equally necessary it is to have a viable and effective third force whose counsels may receive serious attention of all parties and politicians.

The near future for India is likely to be a period of transition, politically speaking. The traditional equilibrium is likely to get disrupted beyond restoration in its original form, but the country would need some time to stabilise a new equilibrium. The transitional period is likely to be of a measure of strife and tension, but one must not underrate the resilience and hidden strength of the nation. India's finest hour is seen, experience has proved time and again when the clouds are thick and dark. It is not entirely

improbable for some future national leaders of India to emerge from what are presently the regional folds. The Supreme Court is already becoming assertive, taking initiative and showing concern in many new matters. The press is vigorous and exposing the dark spots in the nation's life. The signs of the hidden strength are thus already noticeable, holding promise for the future.