

M.N.ROY MEMORIAL LECTURE : 2011

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Democratic Transformation: An Impasse?

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I deem an honour to deliver M.N. Roy memorial lecture. I thank the Indian Renaissance Institute and the Indian Radical Humanist Association for inviting me to deliver this lecture in memory of great humanist and revolutionary M.N. Roy. I have read some of his works but do not consider myself belonging to his school. What I like the most that he was not dogmatic. He changed his political views as and when he faced the new situation.

I come from Baroda where renaissance club was active during my college days. I happened to attend a few meetings thanks to my teachers Rajni Kothari and Bhikhu Parekh. Both of them were active in the club. Raojibhai Patel, one time Royist and Radical Humanist was the spirit behind the club.

Democracy is the political system in which ‘people’ are the sovereign rulers (demos+kratia). The notion of ‘people’ has undergone changed in the course of history of democratic polity. Earlier slaves, women, and males without property and education were excluded. In the course of time, a liberal notion of liberty signifies freedom against authoritarian rule of monarch, oligarchy and also the power of the Church as ultimate moral authority. Gradually, the system has not only accepted normative principles of individual liberty but it has built up mechanisms to protect citizens against the tyranny and arbitrariness of the State.

Democracy is not the rule of and by the people, but also for the people – their wellbeing and happiness. In the Mahatma Gandhi’s vision democracy aims to build society in which each individual rule over oneself that is swaraj. The theoretical principle of a man as an exorter of another man has now very little normative validity. Similarly, vision of democracy has also changed with assertion from below –working class movements in Europe and North America, anti-colonial popular mass movements in the Third World and rise of Communist rule in Soviet Russia. Till the Second World War, notwithstanding expansion of suffrage, for many political theorists and statesmen the primary objective of the democratic system was to protect the interests of the propertied class. Gradually at least theoretically class connotations of democracy were eliminated in favor of ‘more universal’

conception of democracy on ‘an all-inclusive – social group consumers’ (Hanson2007:70).¹

In the Third World Countries like India, during the anti-colonial movement the notion of democracy got articulated to original notion of democracy – the rule of all the people rather than of the Western liberal notion of rule of the propertied class or Marxist notion of rule by the proletariats. At the normative level people are considered as partners in the system and not ‘*consumers*’ of the government decisions and the products. After Independence, India accepted co-existence of democratic system with growing modern market economy controlled by the propertied class. In the process the tension between the two has continued with incremental democratization of society. But I submit, with the neo-liberal idea of ‘end of ideology’ further expansion of democratization has been vitiated. This is the central argument of my lecture. I will discuss this further in the next section.

II

Theoretical Postulates

Let me briefly spell out my theoretical construct of democracy in the post-colonial society. Underlying assumption of neo-liberal economy that the Third world is now following, is the same that of the 19th century the Western Utilitarian philosophy. Accordingly, every individual by his very nature seeks to maximize his own pleasure without limit. For satisfaction of one’s wants each individual seeks to maximize his own wealth without limit. “One way of doing this is to get power over others. ‘Between wealth and power, the connexion is most close and intimate; so intimate, indeed, that the disentanglement of them, even in the imagination, is a matter of no small difficulty. They are each of them respectively an instrument of production with relation to other’. And again, ‘human beings are the most powerful instruments of production, and therefore everyone becomes anxious to employ the services of his fellows in multiplying his own comforts. Hence the intense and universal thirst for power; the equally prevalent hatred of subjection” (Macpherson 1977: 26). With such human nature, as constructed by neo-liberal thinkers, there is natural incentive in everyone to produce more to meet his/her never ending infinite wants. Gandhi strongly questioned this

¹ Here class has been defined in terms of strata and consumption rather than with reference to the relation of production. (Hanson 2007:70).

premise. So was M.N. Roy, though they had different approach.² The Mahatma rejected the idea of a man as an exalter of nature or other human being. Love and harmony is the core of human nature. According to him more and more wants do not provide happiness. As a spiritualist, he strongly believed that material things do not provide happiness.

One need not agree with Gandhi's metaphysical views and historical assertion on Indian culture (Shah 2011), but one cannot ignore his ethical position. That unlimited wants do not bring happiness.³ Happiness cannot be measured in terms of money and material. More important, material productions for consumption are not unlimited. As Gandhi often said that there is enough in nature to meet our needs but not over greed. In this context democracy is a system in which no one exploits others and everyone has adequate opportunities as well as means and freedom to develop one's own capabilities. Such social order can be built with trial and error, with struggles as well as by deliberation and negotiations among the citizens.

Democracy has now become a universal value. As the trajectory of democracy shows its dynamism it has generated democratic aspirations and hopes among the oppressed for egalitarian social order. The value of democracy, Amartya Sen rightly argues, "includes its intrinsic importance in human life, its instrumental role in generating political incentives, and its constructive function in the formation of values (and in understanding the force and feasibility of claims of needs, rights, and duties) (2007:89)". It is now accepted that in democratic polity 'interests' (social, cultural, economic etc) of all the citizens are at the center in its functioning. The system provides scope and necessary mechanism to participate directly or indirectly in decision making processes affecting their life chances. It is assumed that all the citizens have equal capabilities to influence political decisions in societal arrangements, identify priorities and objectives for the wellbeing of all. The rulers are their representatives and accountable to them for management of social affairs.

Democracy in substance does not mean number game, rule of, for and by majority. Nor it is a simple mechanism to elect the rulers and leaving the

² M.N. Roy believes that "the desire to be helpful to fellow-men is a more fundamental trait than competition and conflict. (1953:104)

³ Even Karl Marx also did not advocate the production of all kinds of so-called 'useful things'. He believed that 'the production of too many useful things result in too many useless people' (cited in Fromm 2003: 30).

representatives to take decisions by competing with each other for power without any moral policy for functioning and development of society.⁴ Democracy cannot be reduced to public institutions, or even to the principle of the election of rulers at regular intervals. In democratic system, management or governance is hinged on certain basic moral, social and political principles – not only to protect but also to enlarge secular and humane concern. Liberty, equality and fraternity are its core values. These principles have been evolved in the course of history and there is almost consensus on these moral principles. Though, their meanings vary among the democrats. These values are also interrelated and not either or. They encompass development of all the people. No one is excluded. Political institutions are mechanism to develop the *process* for the attainment of the objectives. Rules and procedures evolved from time to time in different cultures and situations have been evolved for their rational functioning. They change from time to time and in different situations and milieu. They are not sacrosanct and universal. However the functioning of these institutions has to be transparent so that people can gradually learn about the intricacies of the decisions, and judge and differentiate between right and wrong. As partners of the system, the citizens enjoy right to debate and deliberate on all public issues –prioritizing needs and facilities, resource mobilization and distribution of outcomes of the investment -, express and assert their critical views and have right to dissent without any fear. Value of dissent develops in the interactional processes. Decision makers – elected representatives as well as bureaucrats remain accountable to the people for their decisions and actions. The system can be effective in substance with the capabilities of the citizens at large to critically deliberate the issues and dilemmas involved therein at a given point of time, express their opinion and also respect the dissent view, negotiate with the opponents and able to challenge the dominant elite and ruling class/elite.

⁴ Some of the political theorists believe that democratic system is like a market in which politicians are entrepreneurs and the voters are consumers. In this system the former compete among themselves for power to woo the later. In this system the voters choose between the set of rulers periodically. 'The citizens' ability thus to replace one government by another protects them from tyranny'. According to Schumpeter 'the role of the people is to produce a government...the democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a comp struggle for the people's vote' (Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (London 1947, p.269). Number of behavioral studies endorse such view. For instance Robert Dhal. *Preface to Political Theory* (1956), *Who Governs?* (1961), Lazarsfeld and William N. Macphhee, *Voting* (1954). For critical analysis see Macpherson, C.B. *The Life and Times of Liberal Democracy* (1977).

These capabilities of course, are essential but need not be pre-requisite for democratic system. They develop in course of time with social, economic and intellectual empowerment of the people. Therefore it is an intrinsic onus on the democratic government as well as the elite to create environment and the system to develop capabilities of all the citizens so as people meaningfully participates in the decision making processes for common good.

At empirical level, parliamentary democratic system has moved to some extent in developing capabilities of the people – including a section of the deprived and exploited. It has widened political base than non-democratic system. It has become more inclusive than oligarchy or authoritarian system. Egalitarian democratic social order is an ongoing – perhaps never ending-long term process with ups and downs. It is not evolutionary natural process in Darwinian sense. It calls for constant intervention from all those who cherish this ideal for ‘common good’. In this process besides the state, civil society and alternative political formations play, can play, crucial role. Democratic politics in India is though bourgeois political system at present, the ruling classes cannot resolve systemic contradictions. It has a scope and potentialities to go beyond bourgeois framework when assertion from below grows. Objective of democratic system is to cater common good. This is a substantive aspect of the system.

III

Democratic System in India

Though India has accepted Westminster model of democratic political system, it has gone much beyond utilitarian philosophy of liberal democracy of the West. The Indian constitution and the political system are the product of popular mass movement (though dominated and guided by the upper strata of society). The Congress which led the movement was ideologically amorphous in its character (including feudal and conservative, sectarian, capitalists, modern educated liberals, socialists, Gandhians, anarchist etc.). However, social democrats’ version of the western liberal ideology, and Gandhi’s moral principles for *daridrananaryan*, rooted in his idea of Indian culture were guiding spirit in mobilization of the masses. As early as in 1934 the Congress declared that the party stood for “a genuine democratic

State in India where political power has been transferred to the people, as a whole, and the Government is under their effective control”.

On the eve of Independence there were four major tendencies of political thinking, sometimes overlapping on certain issues. They were (1) Gandhian and socialist; (2) Marxist–Communist; (3) Liberal and champions for pro-private enterprise; (4) conservative cultural (albeit Hindu) nationalist.⁵ Communist considered Independence as fake, and they rejected parliamentary democracy. Hence they did not participate in the debates on the constitution making. The Congress party represented all the tendencies in different degrees. Conservative and the business-industrialists did not spell out their world view and plan for India’s development. The Hindu nationalists were actively working for Hindu Rastra and against the proposed formation of Pakistan. The business-industrialists pleaded that the new State should play active role in encouraging development of industries. In 1948, looking to their capacity for investment and need for resource mobilisation, a section of them prepared a plan –called Bombay Plan –for the establishment of centralised planning, the imposition of rigorous economic controls, development of heavy industry, and introduction of radical agricultural reforms (Kochanek 1974:76). The Socialist Party prepared a draft Constitution in 1948 which demanded ‘extension of public ownership’ and State’s initiative ‘in restructuring the society and economy’. In 1946 Gandhian Kishorelal Mashruwala made suggestions for the Constitution. He pleaded that state should adopt ‘ a policy calculated to (a) remove caste...social inequality; (b) prevent social exploitation of masses, and (c) minority problems...’ Shriman Narayan Agarwal prepared ‘Gandhian Constitution’. It proposed that all the land be acquired by the State if necessary, and ‘every citizen shall avoid, check and if necessary, resist exploitation of man by man...’(all quotations are cited in Palshikar 2008: 152)⁶. None of these ideological tendencies pleaded for anarchy. All granted a need for state intervention⁷. They differ in the extent and nature of the state intervention.

⁵ However all of them were not the proponents of Hindutva as constructed by Sarvarkar.

⁶ Gandhi had written Forward to the document. He wrote “ There is nothing in it...inconsistent with what I would like to stand for.’ (Parshikar 2008).

⁷ In 22 thesis for radical Democracy, M.N. Roy says, “Planned economy on the basis of socialized industries presupposes a powerful political machinery. Democratic control of that machinery alone can guarantee freedom under the new order. Planning of production for use is possible on the basis of political democracy and individual freedom (56)”.

Following the Congress' commitment, Indian Constitution provides adult franchise irrespective of gender, creed, caste and education. It was with a faith that an average Indian has understanding of her/his interests and aspires to be free from yoke. It had been hoped that voting power would help people to assert their voice for freedom and equality. The 'spirit' in which the Constitution was drafted was to bring 'social revolution'. Of course, active members of the Constituent assembly (CA) had different vision of the revolution.⁸ Among other 'aims and objectives' of the CA related to integration of territories etc. important were to provide guarantees securing " (1) 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, subject to law and public morality; and (2) wherein adequate safeguards shall be provided for minorities, backward and tribal areas, and depressed and other backward classes". There was overall thrust for equality to all. Dr. Ambedkar said, "All of us are aware of the fact that rights are nothing unless remedies are provided whereby people can seek to obtain redress when rights are invaded...I do not understand how it could be possible for any future government which believes in doing justice socially, economically and politically, unless its economy is socialist economy (100)". Without referring to socialism or equality, Nehru said, "The first task of this Assembly is to free India through a new Constitution to feed the starving people and cloth the naked masses and to give every Indian fullest opportunity to develop himself according to his capacity (316)".

Dr. Ambedkar, several socialists and Gandhians wished that the draft of the Constitution should mention the nature of economic system (socialist/Gandhian) that the State should follow. But they did not insist. They did not want any controversy.⁹ Instead broad principles were spelled out in the Directive Principles to Indian State to foster liberty, equality, fraternity

⁸ There was consensus to avoid as far as possible controversial issues.

⁹ While agreeing with these objectives, Dr. Ambedkar warned that " All of us are aware of the fact that rights are nothing unless remedies are provided whereby people can seek to obtain redress when rights are invaded...I do not understand how it could be possible for any future government which believes in doing justice socially, economically and politically, unless its economy is socialist economy (100)." The Socialist party published a 'Draft Constitution' in 1948 demanding extension of public ownership. In the "Gandhian Constitutional proposal" Sriman Narayan Agarwal said, "All land shall belong to the State", key industries will be owned by the nation". See Suhas Parshikar (2008:152). Without using the term 'socialism', the "Draft Constitution of free India" prepared by M.N. Roy and endorsed by the Radical Democratic Party in 1944 pleaded for "large scale industries under collective ownership".

and justice. It has provided number of positive and negative rights to build society for the common good. Equality has been the common thrust of the provisions (Austin 1966). Important is, unlike the western liberal constitutions, the Indian Constitution has accepted the notion not only of individual right but also with certain proviso community rights; and also accepted affirmative actions with a view to provide helping hand to the traditionally deprived communities with a view to eradicate discriminations and the caste system. They hoped that in ten years' time with economic prosperity and equality the country will not need 'affirmative actions', as everyone will have enough opportunities to develop.

To strengthen the above provisions, some members emphasised that 'democracy needs to be extended from political to economic and social spheres' (Masani p. 92). Dr. Ambedkar reiterated the need for social and economic democracy. He eloquently reminded the members of the CA, " We must make our democracy a social democracy as well. Political democracy cannot last unless there lies at the base of its social democracy. What does social democracy mean? It means a way of life which recognizes liberty, equality and fraternity as the principles of life. These principles of liberty, equality and fraternity are not to be treated as separate items in trinity. They form a union of trinity in the sense that to divorce one form the other is to defeat the very purpose of democracy..."¹⁰

When Independence was declared deprived communities in several parts of the country perceived that they would now get freedom from servitude and expected 'better future' for their families. In Gujarat for instance tribals rejoiced the day of Independence that 'they would get their own rule'. They asserted to get their land back from those caste Hindus who grabbed it.¹¹ Thanks to the long drawn freedom movement, an average Indian began to imagine 'Swaraj' meant the rule for their betterment. Hence, in the course of time people began to understand democracy as the system to offer them 'equal rights' and to get their basic necessities for living and development from the government. This is what a recent survey by CSDS in 2007-2008 confirms, highlighting people's concept of democracy. For people democracy means equal rights and to meet their needs for their wellbeing. The country

¹⁰ See <http://parliamentofindia.nic.in/ls/debates/debates.htm>

¹¹ Such assertions were of course sporadic, particularly the places which had immediate history of struggles. Moreover we do not know the extent and nature of such assertions in different parts of the country because we do not studies.

has witnessed such expressions of the citizens both in their collective actions in the form of social movements as well as from elections after elections in the last fifty years.

Table 1: Most essential Attribute of democracy

Attribute	Percentage
Power to change the government	25
Freedom to criticise rulers	5
Equal rights	24
Basic necessities	45

Source: CSDS, State of Democracy in South Asia (2008)

IV

Changing Economic policy from Socialist to the End of Ideology

Indian constitution reflects the above perception and aspiration of Indian people. Preamble and Directive principles conceptualise the vision of Indian society to be constructed by the Indian State. It is a responsibility of the state power to translate the vision in practice. Social transformation cannot be attained overnight. It is a long drawn involving multiple processes. Political parties and their leaders are responsible to operationalize the vision through their political action within, through and outside the government spheres also. The process and direction depends upon their comprehensive world view in the form of ideological framework, understanding of the given socio¹²-economic reality, ability to operationalize their world view through policy, programmes, governance and also mobilization of the people in support for implementation of the programmes.

The Congress was the dominant political party which not only led the freedom struggle but also gained reign of power after the British left. Ignoring the demand of the socialists for fixing limit to profit and key industries, the first industrial resolution provided mixed economy to win confidence of the business community to boost up production (Kochanek 1968pp 166-167, Brecher 1959 pp 509-510). In 1949, Nehru’s effort to establish the Planning commission did not succeed because of certain anti-socialist forces within the party (Frankel 1978: 84). Later in 1950, Sardar Patel and Rajendra Prasad prevailed in deleting a passage from the original draft that would have defined the purpose of planning as “the progressive elimination of a social, political

¹² Social invariably include culture.

and economic exploitation and inequality, the motive of private gain in economic activity or organisation of society and antisocial concentration of wealth and means of production” (cited in Kochanek 140).

By the time of the first general elections in 1951, Nehru gained more space in the party as Sardar Patel died in 1950, Rajendra Prasad became the President of India and he replaced Tondon as the party’s president. Under his leadership, the Congress party reiterated to adhere moral and ethical values of ‘national life’. The party’s manifesto: rejected laissez-faire policy in industry, advocated co-operative enterprise. It promised freedom of the masses from exploitation and want; and to provide as priority basic material needs of food, clothing and shelter to be followed by the provision for cultural growth...it declared to attain the objectives by peaceful and legitimate means, and cooperation and the avoidance, as far as possible, of competition and conflict.

Nearly 45 per cent of the electorate exercised their right in the first election. The Congress won 45 per cent of votes and 364 out of 489 Lok Sabha seats. Among the parties left parties –SP, CPI, KMPP and other splinter groups – had the second largest chunk of votes. In 1953 Nehru attempted the Congress ties with PSP and KMPP. He on principle agreed with the agenda put forward by Jayaprakash Narayan which included redistribution of land to the poor and landless, nationalization of banks and mines, constitutional amendment weakening the protection for private property etc. (Frankel 1978: 107). But Nehru confessed his inability “as a prime Minister operating within the constraints of parliamentary government to give unilateral assurances of action on these issues (Frankel 1978: 107)”.

U.N. Dhebar, a Gandhian, the president of the Congress felt that the Congress objective as set earlier and declared in the 1951 Manifesto was vague and general (Raval Manu1994:228). In the **Avadi**, Madras Congress session he brought a resolution which stated that “ in order to realize the object of the Congress Constitution and to further the objectives stated in the Preamble and Directive principles of the State policy in the Constitution of India, planning should take place with a view to the **establishment of a socialistic pattern of society, where the principal means of production is progressively speeded up and there is equitable distribution of national wealth** (Cited in Kochanek1968: 175-176)”. Within the party Gandhian and socialists formed “ginger group” to “make this idea of socialism seep into the ranks of

Congressmen” (cited Frankel: 160). Sriman Narayan blamed the Congress legislators belong to the **landowning classes for ‘trying to put spokes in the wheel’**.(ibid). Later in 1959, the **Nagpur session** of the party resolved for agriculture strategy bringing institutional changes which advocated ceiling on landownership, the formation of ‘cooperative joint farming’ and ‘service society’.

With the Avadi resolution the business and industrial lobby and feudal interests who were already adversely affected in some parts of the country went into speedy action. A section of industrialists who were the authors of the Bombay Plan 1948 formed **the Forum of Free Enterprise** in 1956, and N.G. Ranga organised **All India Agriculturists Federations**, dominated by kulkas in 1958 vehemently opposing Congress policy for land reforms and increased priority to public sector. **Swatantra Party** pleading laissez faire economic policy came into existence. Press, dominated by business houses gave wide currency to the charge that ‘Sino-socialist minded planners’ were plotting for collective Indian agriculture. Feudal, business as well industrial sections rallied around the Swatantra party. Within the Congress the landed gentry that dominated most of the states was indifferent, opposed and sabotaged the Avadi and Nagpur resolutions¹³. Nehru had no gut and skill to discipline these forces¹⁴. He also gave in to the World Bank and consortium of aid donors who pleaded for ‘greater role’ to the private and foreign capital. Emphasis on **technological change** gain more importance over structural change in agriculture sector. During this period China’s suppression of Tibet revolt and inability of India to defend/support Tibet’s autonomy and then Sino-India war-a large scale Chinese offensive on NEFA and Ladakh boarder tarnished Nehru’s image. Food crisis added fuel to fire. Nehru died in 1964.

Lal Bahdur Shastri who had no popular base, no grip over the party and no commitment for ‘socialism’ succeeded Nehru. He was the ‘creature of the party bosses’. Dominant landed classes gained control over the party. He ‘took

¹³ In February 1959 the President’s address to the Lok Sabha did not mention the content of the agrarian policy adopted by the Congress in Nagpur. Socialists and Communists doubted the sincerity of the Congress. S.A. Dange said in the Lok Sabha, “... They (Congress leaders) are quarreling about it (agrarian policy). Even Hon. Ministers sabotage land reforms on the matter of ceilings... Their own organization talks of ceilings and their own ministers go denouncing it... What are we going to do with these gentlemen? They are in majority in the states. They are majority in the centre. If you pass a resolution about ceilings on landholdings, you cannot keep Ministers who are opposed to that in principle... You must remove those Ministers who opposed that. But here a peculiar situation exists. When suddenly the Hon. Prime Minister takes up an issue they start opposing it, then they pass it and say”. ‘It does not matter. Let him talk, we can sabotage him in action’” (Cited in Frankel: 166 fn.).

¹⁴ He tried to remove a few colleagues who were not committed to his ideals through Kamraj Plan. But there was very little impact at the State level as he had no ideologically committed party cadre who could confront the dominant landed class. (Kaushik 1986: 422).

exactly the opposite route than one charted by Nehru in the last years of his life. Conceding the virtual impossibility of transforming the rural power base of the Congress party in the support of the proprietor castes, **he abandoned the social goals of the planning and socialism** (Frankel: 246). After his sudden death Indira Gandhi became the Prime Minister. At that time she had no grip over the party or had any agenda for social engineering. Against her will, she was forced to appoint Morarji Desai, as the Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister. During this period Kamaraj, who was somewhat closer to Nehru's ideals for social transformation, had no comprehensive vision and charisma for mass appeal. He managed the party affairs by manoeuvring.

In the 1967 election manifesto the Congress reiterated the old policies, but urge to implement the policy was lacking in the leadership. Though the party won majority of the seats, its share in votes and seats declined significantly. It lost power in several states. The economy was in deep malaise with rising inflation (Shetty 1978). The elite of the OBCs had begun to assert their numerical strength in and outside electorate politics (Jain 1991). The rupee was devalued. Unrest among the have-nots was mounting in different parts of the country. Naxalbari movement was at its peak and various left and socialist parties launched a massive land grab movements mobilising landless labourers.

Within the party Indira Gandhi was experiencing discomfort with the established old guards. In public Congress president Nijlingappa attacked Indira's economic policies. With the support of some young leaders "Young trucks" she countered them. The party split in 1969. She resorted to populist rhetoric like 'Garibi hatao' (eradication of poverty). Interestingly political vocabulary got subtly modified, emphasis changed from 'socialism' and 'equality' to removal of poverty. The later has an emotional appeal for compassion and acceptable to all – liberal, radical, rich and middle class as well as to religious minded persons. To project herself as radical she declared nationalisation of fourteen commercial banks, nationalisation of insurance, abolition of privy purses of the erstwhile princely rulers and so on.¹⁵ This decision was enthusiastically welcome by the left and radical liberal intellectuals. To consolidate her position and capitalise the popular euphoria, she dissolved the parliament and plunged into elections in 1971. She co-opted

¹⁵ Inder Malhotra writes, "...she had no great interest in bank nationalization. But she was using this issue to safeguard her position." (1989: 117).

SC, ST and several OBC leaders to mobilise lower strata of society. Jagjivan Ram was made the President of the party and projected as a spokesman of the deprived communities. Her party won the 1971 elections with a comfortable (352 out of 518, and 44 per cent of votes) majority. India's role in Bangladesh war made her Goddess Durga in the imagination of masses (Masani 1976: 234-256). With her rhetoric she won over a large number of left - independent and some old time party card holders- as well as radical liberal intellectuals. Some of them got co-opted with government positions and some remained occasional advisors. The government appropriated left platform (Zoya 1994). In the electoral politics Praja Socialist (PSP) and Samyukta Socialist party (SSP) lost significantly¹⁶. She talked about structural changes in agriculture relations but very little were done at the ground level. She blamed judiciary, as an obstacle in realising this objective. Despite her popularity and control over decision making power in the party and the state, she had no skill and will to monitor landed and business-industrial interests who had hold over the local party and government machinery. And, she had neither capacity nor keenness to rebuild the party. While explaining her poor record in restructuring relation on land, she stated that 'one can only bully state leaders so much and no more (Carras 1980: 153).' At the same time she assured the propertied classes that their interests were not threatened by the reform. She explained that her programmes were actually aimed at the contentment of radicalism. They were meant to prevent Red revolution (Farnkel 1978, Masani 1975, Zoya 1994). With her populist measures and the support that she gained it was conveyed to the party that she was only the saviour of the Congress. Personalized regime was built by concentrating all power to her-self. (Kochanek 1976). This was the end of the internal democracy of the party.

In the 1971 elections the Congress gained support of all sections of society. There was overall 'consensus' among the cross sections of society for the 'radical' socio-economic policy of the Congress. A study of the voters by CSDS shows that "an overwhelming majority of the opinion holders show preference for radical values and goals such as the state's control over economy, ceiling on land and property, even if they may differ among

¹⁶ In 1963, Nehru appointed Ashok Mehta, the leader of the PSP, Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission. With this section of the PSP joined the Congress. That weakened the party. Its share in votes declined 6.81 per cent in 1962 to 3.06 per cent in 1967. It reduced to mere 1.04 per cent in the 1971 elections. Share of SSP also declined from 4.92 per cent in 1967 to 2.43 per cent in 1971. However the Communist parties not only maintained their share but has slightly improved both votes and number of seats in the Lok Sabha.

themselves about the choice of means to achieve them (Sheth 1975: 333).”¹⁷ But her government could not meet the rising expectations. Food scarcity and inflation increased hitting hard to average citizens. Economic crisis deepened. Unrest among the people took the form of street protests. The students’ movement in Gujarat and JP movement in Bihar provided opportunities to all the non-Congress parties and the forces to rally around against her. She could not control them and imposed Emergency in 1975. She warned people from the Red Fort, “Please do not expect magic remedies and dramatic results. There is only one magic, which can remove poverty, and that is hard work, sustained by clear vision, iron will and strictest discipline”. She had to lift the Emergency and badly lost in the 1977 elections.

Janata Government

The Janata government, though came in power with Jayprakash Narayan’s blessings, who was Gandhian socialist and Champion for the ‘Total revolution’, had no socialist agenda. There was no cohesive idea for economic development¹⁸. There was as strong lobby to abandon planning, hence the concepts of “rolling plan” as well as divorce between politics and development were floated. Economic growth stagnated further. With internal squabbles the party lost power. The net beneficiary was the Jan Sangh (later renamed as BJP). The Jan Sangh was organised and had committed cadre of RSS. The party had clarity about its mission. The party not only shared power but also through office it had spread its tentacles in civil society and state structure¹⁹. In the process socialists disappeared altogether. Their place was taken by the host of caste-ethnicity based political parties. Gandhians were left to themselves as helpless self-styled conscience-keepers, rested with NGOs.

New Avatar of Indira Gandhi

Mrs Gandhi again came in power in 1980. This was her new avatar. Her rhetoric for the removal poverty mellowed down. The poor however continued to see her as their saviour. But she had no idea and organisational capacity to mobilise them to resist the vested interests. On the other hand, sluggish

¹⁷ The study was conducted by CSDS. The questions were asked on the issues related to radicalism concerning with legislative measures and direct actions were : 1. Control over economy, 2.nationalization of banks, 3. Celling on land and property, 4. Protest behavior, and 4. Direct take over of land and property of the rich. (Sheth 1975)

¹⁸ Rudolph and Rudolph observe, “ The paradox of the Janata years was that its commendable policy performance in terms of ideas, programs, and economic indicators was obscured and then neglected by the demeaning political dramas enacted by its leaders (1987:172)”

¹⁹ The Jan Sangh was renamed as Bhartiya Janata party in 1980 and proclaimed to fall ‘Gandhian Socialism’.

industrial growth, decline in agriculture growth, international oil price hike, inflation, pressure from the World Bank and local industrial lobby to ‘decontrol and open up the economy’ made her ‘pragmatic’. Or accordingly to some scholars she moved ‘rightward’ (Manor 1988, Kohali 2009). The world economy was passing through recession. At this juncture the champions for the market oriented growth and liberalisation were holding power and influence²⁰. They argued that liberalisation was essential if growth is to be stimulated. Mrs. Gandhi began to adopt the policy of de-control for industries. Steel and cement prices were de-controlled and manufactured imports were liberalized. Her attitude towards IMF was changed and negotiated for large loan (\$ 5 billion). On the other hand, she was unable to raise additional resources from the propertied class, or ‘even to maintain a steady ratio of direct taxes to GDP (Ghosh 1998: 321). Moreover, as Manor observes communal themes and symbols of Hindu hegemony gained currency in her public speeches.

Rajiv Gandhi’s liberalisation

After her assassination in 1984, Rajiv Gandhi became the prime Minister. Novice in politics and surrounded by technocrats, he gave a call for “India’s march into twenty first century with computer”. He began his regime initiating the path of de-control the economy for ‘modernising’ India. His appeal for technology, efficiency and modern management attracted not only business circles but also urban middle class. His Finance Minister V.P. Singh moved a resolution before the AICC in 1985. In his opening remark he said,

²⁰ In October 1983 a conference of economists and political scientists was held on the 'Political Economy of Slow Industrial Growth in India' at the Center for International Studies, MIT. The scholars had different views on the causes of the 'slow growth'. Some argued that slow growth was because of 'democracy' which though provide “stable inequalities, democratic freedoms and maintenance of an element of national pride.”

In the third world, it was argued, 'economic rationality' works when authoritarian conditions exist; in democracies 'wasteful use of resources' is simply a way of achieving political stabilisation. Being a system of the latter kind, India's industrialisation, in other words, would at best 'muddle through' rather than 'take off'. See “Political Economy of Slow Industrial Growth in India”, Ashutosh Varshney, EPW September 1, 1984. The champions for the market driven growth argued against planning and the state intervention. As against this in India 29 economists –of different political shades, met in oct. 1985 and expressed their concern with the official economic policy, which according to them go against self-reliant and equitable development. Such policy would accentuate income inequalities, increase unemployment and undermine prospects of growth with equity and self-reliance. They pleaded that "rejuvenation of the Indian economy must be based on a substantial expansion of the home market for basic consumer and producer goods". A faster and more evenly distributed agricultural growth and increased public investment for agricultural and industrial growth were recommended as the essential pre-requisites of a meaningful growth strategy. Special stress was laid in this context on gainful utilisation of available resources. “Economists' Concern at Economic Policy Drift” BM, EPW, Oct. 26, 1985. Sukhamoy Chakravarty in his article “Development Dialogue in the 1980s and Beyond” (EPW Vol. XXI, No 52, December 27, 1986) argued that any attempt at a solution of the stagnant economy must be aimed both at increasing production and productivity on the one hand and substantial increase in the purchasing power in the hands of the poor. A clear understanding of this very basic point would appear to me to be essential, especially because the present day intellectual atmosphere is full of the theology of the market place, only in part due to disenchantment with the inefficiency of the government but to a much greater extent due to an erosion of belief in the ethic of equality.

“Bread, cloth and shelter were not everything of the economy”. The shift in economic strategy that was adopted was ‘necessary’ and ‘justified’. He argued, “The strengthening of the growth impulses of the economy, through absorption of modern technology and through appropriate fiscal and legislative changes, was imperative to sustain the tempo of industrial development. In the process of continued development, the policy instruments relevant to one stage cannot be treated as permanently sacrosanct. Nor are they ends in themselves (Cited in Kohali 2008: 215).” However V.P. Singh was sacked as the Finance Minister following the raids on several industrial houses for evasion of taxes. Subsequently in 1989 he became the Prime Minister of the National Front Government. He implemented the Mandal report, providing reservation to OBCs to counter BJP’s Ram Janma Bhumi movement and also to under play the policy of economic liberalisation.

The 1991 Structural Changes

In 1991 elections though the Congress did not get majority seats in the Parliament (36 per cent votes and 48 per cent seats 232 out of 521) it formed the government. P. V. Narasimha Rao became the prime Minister. Dr. Manmohan Singh, known economist, was appointed as the Finance Minister. The process of liberalisation was accelerated by declaring ‘new economic policy’ and new industrial policy. All the policy propositions and prescriptions laid down by the World Bank and IMF have now become an essential stock in trade of the Government of India's socio-economic policy and management. And the governments by other political parties Janata party with the United Front, BJP with national Democratic Alliance, parties at the state level such as SP, BSP, BJD, DMK, ANDMK, Akali Dal etc. etc. follow the same path. But none of them is honest enough to mention liberalisation as their economic policy in the election manifesto. All of them promise to give this or that benefits/justice to the poor, now called *aam adami* (common man). The Congress election manifesto of 1991 does not mention a word regarding its plan to move away from its oft repeated so-called ‘socialist’ policy to neo-liberal policy.²¹ Instead the 1991 Manifesto says:

“The Congress economic policies, programmes and plans were framed and implemented with the fundamental objective of promoting all-

²¹ In fact the party was responsible to amend the Preamble of Indian Constitution in 1976 which inserted the phrase to constitute India into “ Sovereign, socialist, secular Democratic Republic”.

round development, alleviating and eradicating poverty, securing social justice and promoting balanced regional development. This approach will continue.

“The Congress will restore fiscal balance in the budgetary system by drastically reducing wasteful expenditure, rationalising non-developmental expenditure and expanding the revenue base of the Government, particularly through a leaner, more dynamic and profit-oriented public Sector Deficit financing will be restricted to manageable limits.”

However the subsequent elections manifestos as the neoliberal policy gained consensus among the political class, highlight a need for higher growth, though do not mention about neo-liberal policy. For that “Industrialists, businessmen, exporters, importers and traders were given unprecedented freedom. They were liberated from out dated controls and regulations”. The party also promises for building “*Garib Ka Raj*...Today, the desire among large sections of our society is not just for a Swaraj on earth but also for Swaraj—for voice, for full representation in the institutions of governance, for social acceptance and for political power...The Congress has always been sensitive to these concerns. It has championed equal opportunity. It has consistently believed that equal access to the best education and health is the foundation of a truly egalitarian society.” All political parties pursue a strategy, what Rob Jenkins calls, ‘reform by stealth’. They use less transparent means. Jenkins compliments Indian political leaders for their skill “at playing upon the ambiguity of the reform process – in the context of an ongoing set of institutionalised relationships with economic elites –has helped to disarm potential opponents of reform, until it became too late to resist, or until some among them began to see its benefits (1999:59).”

VI

People’s expectations

Granting that average voter does not understand intricacies and jargons of economic theory/model, since she is affected by the larger politico-economic system in her everyday life, she at least understands the issues involved in the policy. As mentioned above the perception of voters in the 1971 National Election Study (NES), as D.L. Sheth shows that most of the voters (those who answered the questions), were in favour of ceiling on

land and property, and controlled economy by the state. Similar questions were asked in the 2004 polls (Suri 2004). The survey shows that overwhelming number of the voters were in favour of ‘ceiling on land and property’. Majority were also against privatisation of public sectors, down sized of government employees and unrestricted investment by the foreign companies. Such perception was found across the castes, economic strata and urban-ruler voters. Contrary to general belief projected by free-lance writers, journalists and political leaders, proportion against the ‘reform’ policy is very high among the educated – studied up to matric and college (Tables 2 and 3). It may also be noted that majority opined that economic reforms had benefited more to the rich; and employment opportunities have been deteriorated (Suri 2004).

Table 2: Perceptions of voters on certain issues related to policy on economic reforms

Issue	percent
Agree with, “There should be ceiling on the possession of land and property”	80
Agree with “Foreign companies should not be freely allowed”	56
Do not agree with “The number of government employees be reduced”	55
Do not agree with “Public sector factories and business should be privatised”	66

Source: Suri (2004)

Table 3: Perceptions of voters by education on certain issues related to policy on economic reforms

Issue	Non-literate	Up to primary	Upto Matric	College and above	N
There should be ceiling on the possession of land and property					
Disagree	13	17	20	22	4638
Agree	61	69	73	74	18418
No opinion	26	14	8	4	4056
Foreign companies should not be freely allowed					
Disagree	23	29	35	39	8160
Agree	27	40	46	53	10538
No opinion	51	31	19	9	8421
The number of government employees be reduced					
Disagree	31	42	47	56	11344
Agree	28	37	41	40	9529

No opinion	40	22	12	5	6238
Public sector factories and business should be privatised					
Disagree	34	49	55	58	12567
Agree	17	22	27	34	6384
No Opinion	49	29	19	8	8160

Source; Suri (2004)

By now all the state governments and the Central government have increasingly favoured privatisation and/or public-private partnership in certain essential services. These services are health, education, electricity, drinking water and public transport. In the 2009 Lok Sabha elections questions were asked whether these services ‘should be run mainly by the government or they should be run mainly by private companies?’ Among those who had expressed their opinion on these questions, nearly two-third voters believed that the government should run these services. They are also not in favour of PPP (Public Private Partnership). Some studies and number media reports show that at several places the people at the grassroots level has opposed through collective actions the efforts for privatisation of water and health services.

Table 4: Opinion on certain essential services such as water, electricity, public transport, health and education be mainly run by the government or be private companies?²²

N=6671

Who should mainly run the services?	Percentage
Government	72
Both Government and private	14
Private	14
Total	100

Note: Index of the five items, omitting ‘ Do not know’ answer.

VII

Political parties and political Class

We like it or not political parties are central to representative democracy. Theoretically they are based on political ideology – their comprehensive world view about the society to be constructed, their concept of common good and approach to deal with socio-economic and political problems. On

²² Following five questions were asked: Tell me whether (i) Schools should be run mainly by the government or they should be run by the private companies? (ii) Drinking water should be run mainly by the government or they should be run by the private companies? (iii) Hospitals should be run mainly by the government or they should be run by the private companies? (iv) Supply of electricity should be run mainly by the government or they should be run by the private companies? (v) Bus services should be run mainly by the government or they should be run by the private companies? NES, CSDS 2009.

that basis they articulate their political programmes and evolve strategies for governance. They compete among themselves for power to translate their political vision in practice. With this perspective, they articulate and give voice to public opinion, and also mobilise people on various issues confronting to society and nation from time to time. As mentioned above, after Independence the Congress which led to the freedom movement as a broad platform took the responsibility to form the government and later to fight elections. Gandhi who provided leadership to the Congress for many years advised that the Congress should be dissolved. He believed that most of the Congressmen were interested to get power for themselves and not concerned for the common good. It was the organisation of people with very diverse outlook and interests. But no one heeded the Mahatma's advice. The party however provided a broad framework and objective for the nation building. Accordingly, it contributed in the formation of the Constitution. In the mid 1950s, the Congress came out openly advocating the ideology for socialism, to build socialistic pattern of society through parliamentary democracy. As seen above, after Nehru's death though rhetoric for socialism continued the party particularly from 1980 slowly and by stealth followed neoliberal economic policy. Thereafter the party does not talk about socialism, but it does not declare that it had given up that ideology and follow 'market friendly' policy of neoliberalism. Though from the mid 1990s it talks about growth and more growth, it does not spell out its new economic policy in the elections. From the early 1980s it had slowly moved to appease Hindu sentiments and also of the minorities. Though it continues to proclaim that secularism is its creed, soft Hindutva is its policy and practice. BJP clearly stands for cultural nationalism –the culture proclaimed and dominated by Hindus. Like the Congress, BJP also does not spell out its neo-liberal policy, in practice it has followed the same economic policy laid down by the Congress in 1991. Except the Communist parties, no other political party in theory and practice opposed new economic reforms though some of them like SP or RJD occasionally talk against globalisation. In that sense there is no ideological differences among the parties as far as economic policy is concerned. Hence, increasingly the political discourse among the parties gets around accusation rather than logical rational arguments on political ideological ground. The parties get engaged in abusing each other almost in the *tutu tutu meme meme* manner that Congress would blame the BJP on this

or that corruption issue and the BJP would retaliate by citing counter examples of corruption by Congress leaders, or violation of norms, killing minorities and so on. They do not acknowledge their blunders and hence there is no conscious agenda to evolve the system to overcome their short comings in future. People do not get hope that the parties would improve and become more responsible and moral bound than the past.

After the formation of the new Congress under Mrs Gandhi's leadership in 1969, the party is ruled by Gandhi family and/or small coterie of so called High command. There is very little internal democracy, though dissent voices continue which occasionally come on the surface. In the last decade a space for dissent has been shrinking. The BJP also does not have internal democracy on many matters as it is controlled by RSS in its policy matters and sharing of positions. All other parties, except the Left run by one individual or small coterie. The parties have not developed institutional mechanism for recruitment, screening and training of the new members. More often than not the party positions and selection of candidates for various legislative bodies from local to the parliament are made through manipulation and for patronage rather than fair competition and commitment for the party. That is the reason number of elected and non-elected party members cross the party as and when new opportunities are available.

Election expenditure

In order to manage day today functioning of the party, various public programmes and elections at different levels political parties need fund. Generally it is expected that the funds come from members, supporters and sympathizers. But as most of the parties are not well organized at all levels, their source of funds from members and committed supporters is limited. Moreover, the elections are more competitive than the past. The number of national parties declined from 8 to 6 between 1989-2004, while the number of state parties increased from 20 to 36 and the number of registered parties doubled from 85 to 173 (Sridharan 2009). Competition and insecurity increase. The parties need huge funds to fight elections. According to the Election Commission's rules, in bigger constituencies a candidate can spend up to Rs. 25 lakh. In other constituencies, it varies between Rs 10 lakh and Rs 25 lakh. In the 2009 elections the prescribed limit was 25 lakhs for a parliament constituency. But this limit is by and large unrealistic. The

Election Commission estimated that on an average a candidate of the major parties had spent Rs. 10 cores in 2009 elections (Merchant 2011). Hence every one – few exception here and there, violates expenditure ceiling laws. Most election expenditure is illegitimate and is incurred in buying votes, hiring hoodlums or bribing officials (Ibid). The funds come from various sources –from corporate sectors industrial tycoons, local businessmen, small industrialists, builders and contractors, traders involved in illicit trade and also underground mafia. Most of the finances come from unaccountable sources. In 2009 the Congress reported total income of Rs. 496.88 crore and the BJP showed total income of Rs. 220.02 crore. A recent study of the tie between politicians and builders observes, “The quid pro quo goes like this: Politicians park their illicit assets with builders because ‘they require a place to invest these assets where they can avoid public scrutiny while earning a decent return’. Builders rely on politicians for discretionary policy favours (Kapur and Vaishnav 2011).” Jayprakash Narayan of Loksatta rightly observes

“One rupee election expenditure normally entails at least a five-fold return to the politician. To share five rupees with the political class, the rent-seeking bureaucracy has to recover about Rs.50. In order to extort Rs.50 from the public, there should be delay, inefficiency, harassment, humiliation and indignity worth Rs.500 heaped on the innocent citizens! To take the example of a major State, it is estimated that about Rs.600 crores (6 billion) has been spent by the major political parties in the recent general elections for Parliament and Legislative Assembly in 1999. This expenditure can be sustained only when the returns are of the order of at least Rs.3000 crores (30 billion), which in turn is translated as extortion of Rs.30000 crores (300 billion) from the public by the vast bureaucracy. The inconvenience, humiliation, the lost opportunities and the distortion of market forces are often worth ten times the actual corruption. Unaccounted and illegitimate election expenditure is thus translated into huge corruption siphoning off money at every level. In addition, this ubiquitous corruption alters the nature of political and administrative power, and undermines market forces, efficiency and trust on a much larger scale, retarding economic growth and distorting democracy. Cleansing elections is the most important route through which corruption and maladministration can be curbed.”

This explains the clout of rich on all political parties. Along with this muscle power also influence not only the electoral processes but also decision making in day to day governance. Fourteen per cent of the MPs (76 MPs) have serious criminal charges framed against them by a court of law.

Moreover, a recent study by Patrick French of the composition of the 2009 Lok Sabha showed that 156 MPs (28.5 per cent) including 78 from the congress (37.5 per cent) were selected as candidates because of their family connections. And, “nearly half of all MPs aged 50 or under, are hereditary – selected to contest a seat primarily because they are the children of politicians. Thirty-three of the youngest 38 MPs and every Congress MP under the age of 35 entered Parliament because of their birth (Cited in Jha 2011).” French concluded that “if you do not come from an established ruling family, you have almost no chance of progressing in national politics, unless you join an ideological party such as the Bhartiya Janata Party or the Communist party of India (Marxist), where lineage is not important (Cited in Jha 2011:40)”.

Gap in terms of economic condition, style of living and aspirations between the voters and the elected representatives has increased over the period of time. This is true not only for the general constituencies but also for the OBCs, Scheduled castes and Scheduled tribes representatives (Shah 1973). The representatives are socio-economically better off. They have developed urban middle class mind set and use jargons familiar with media, NGOs and bureaucrats. More often than not they function as broker mediating between their constituents and the state. Particularly in urban areas, over the last four decades patronage channels trade union organisations and party net work has been displaced by personal contacts. The main function of the political representatives –municipal councillors, MLAs and MPs – is to mediate between the state machinery bureaucracy and the needy people for getting their work done in not only in the government and semi-government offices but also court procedures and private sector (Benjamin 2001, 2006, Oldenburg 1991, Harriss-White 2003). Political actors work as brokers, fixers and mediators (Ward 2008). Moreover in 1993 the government of India introduced ‘Local Area development Scheme, under which each MP is entitled to use up to Rs. 2 crore per annum in her/his constituency for infrastructure development. The scheme is called MPLADS. Under the scheme MPs have spent Rs. 20957.25 crores from 1993 to 2009-2010. The money has been spent for providing drinking water, roads, sanitation, health, education etc. The highest amount has been spent on roads, pathways and bridges. Similar schemes have been adopted by all the state legislatures. Thus the legislatures have assumed executive

function in their constituencies. An MP said, “We are approached by electorates for troubleshooting. People, even better educated ones, do not bother about what we deliberate on in the Parliament; their sole concern and expectation from us is to help provide better infrastructure, if not creating jobs in the constituency we represent (cited in Girish Kumar and Landy 2009: 127)”. According to an analysis of the CPR, 48 per cent of the MPs did not participate in the winter session of the 15th Indian parliament. (*Hindu*, December 25, 2009). Thus preoccupation of the political leaders is management/execution of programmes and not the politics of policies.

Deficit of Trust

In the 2009 National Elections Study a respondent was asked how much trust he had on number of institutions. Among all the public institutions judiciary enjoys highest trust; whereas the political parties and elected representatives enjoy the lowest trust of the people. Besides those who had not given their opinion on this issue, more than one-third has no or very little trust on their representatives. The recent anti-corruption agitation by Anna Hazare bears out this.

Table 5: How much trust/confidence you have in different institutions?” Is it great deal of trust, some trust, not very much trust or none at all?”
N=7203

	Great deal	Somewhat	Not very much	Not at all	No opinion	Total
Judiciary	43	25	10	6	16	100
Central government	40	34	7	4	15	100
State government	39	34	9	5	13	100
Local government	37	33	11	6	14	101
Election commission	36	24	10	7	23	100
Police	24	27	15	18	16	100
Government Officials	22	28	19	14	18	101
Elected representative	18	30	19	15	18	100
Political parties	18	28	20	16	17	99

CSDS NES 2009

VII

Social Transformation: An Impasse?

The functioning of democratic system during the last six decades has brought certain positive transformation in our traditionally hierarchical society. Brahminical framework of social order has been de-legitimised. Rule of law, equal citizenship, social and economic equality have been codified in legal system and are accepted moral principles to be maintained and attained. In the process, political positions have no longer remained the sole prerogative of upper castes. In several regions their proportion in seat of power has sharply declined. Middle and lower castes with their numerical strength have challenged the traditional upper-caste monopoly over political positions. A tiny segment from the lowest social strata, dalits and tribals has also emerged as political elite and get some share in decision making of the state. They do play important, sometimes decisive role in formation of government. Similarly women though in a microscopic minority in number have also begun to share political power and assert their rights. With this, a circle of political elite has been somewhat enlarged. But at the same time religious minority communities in general and Muslims and Christians in particular have been marginalised. Their share in political positions has declined.

One of the most striking positive contributions of the system is that hitherto have not begun to assert for justice, rights and dignity. Their aspirations have risen for better life. They participate in electoral processes in larger number than their counterpart upper strata. They express their needs and expectations, and also ventilate their grievances and anger against those who hold offices. They assert for the change. They frequently replace one set of political leaders and parties and elect the others with a hope that the alternative would be better to serve their interests. It is now certain that no one party can take the electorate for granted as far as electoral choice is concerned. In that sense the elected representatives are 'accountable'. They are compelled to take consent of the people at least once in five years. The system has provided a space for dissent and that space is a hope for further transformation. In order to get votes once in five years political parties and leaders do resort to gimmicks and 'populist' politics including bribing poor voters with TV, Saree, utensils, cheap rice etc. A few – handful number of people and groups - do get some crumbs. Such mechanism perpetuates hopes among the

deprived that one day all will get share in benefits and improve their lots. Nonetheless they do see hope in the system for their betterment, if not emancipation.

Democratic system has also created various institutions such as Independent Judiciary, Election Commission, Comptroller and Auditor General, and Human Rights Commission. They maintain checks on each other's power. From the start the federal system and formation of new more states (units) based on language and region have moderated concentration of power with the Union government. The process has been further accelerated with the formation of the Panchayati Raj accommodating women and deprived castes in the system.

Freedom of association, speech and press do provide a space to express albeit in some extent dissent voice. The third pillar of democracy –the press and electronic media also critically investigate and interrogate all the institutions and political class. With the spread of literacy and education, mass communication system in non-government spheres provides democratic space for deliberation and dissent. Legal mechanism provides freedom to express opposite views and expose misdeeds of rulers. Pressures on the state are built for accountability of their actions. Several administrative mechanisms have been evolved for accountability, transparency and participation. People have now Right to get information about the decisions taken by authority and reasons thereof. The office holders are increasingly forced to become 'transparent' in their decisions and actions. These provisions and scope for assertion and institutional changes by themselves are not unimportant, though not sufficient. Panchayati raj (including urban local governments) with gram/ward Sabha has become important statutory bodies to prepare²³, oversee and implement programmes. All these innovatory mechanisms are undoubtedly very important, they have however so far made very limited impact on changing local power structure, notwithstanding the changes in caste and gender configuration in formal political offices.

In principle the citizens have liberty for the expression of their opinion and perception. But a large number of people do not have scope as well as energy, articulation and means to frankly express their opinion. Moreover those who have strong dissent voice hurting the interests of the dominant

²³ They can prepare plan and programmes within the given priorities, parameters and financial allocations prescribed by the State governments. In some states like Kerala the local bodies have more space to use their autonomy than most of the other states.

interests, have very little space in the media which is largely, not solely, controlled by the propertied classes. Not only that but often a majority sentiments and opinion violate liberty of the dissent expressions. Certain books, films, plays, paintings etc. are banned by a group of people. Artists and writers are public humiliated. The cases of M.F. Husen and Taslimma are well known. In such cases the State has remained a mute spectator or the party in violating individual's freedom. Critical voices against the State policies and approach on several issues like so-called 'integration' of the country –the policy on Jammu and Kashmir, North-East States and use of military, terrorism, Maoist movement etc. often get constrained because of use of sedition Law under the Indian Penal code by the State.

Institutional ethos and mechanism are increasing getting eroded for personal power and interests. Legal provisions and institutional mechanism are several times subjected to distortion, subverting democratic space. Democracy has become a game of few irrespective of caste, gender and religion who have or could manipulate muscle and money power to perpetuate their personal interests. For their power they ignore and break all norms of democracy. Criminalisation has increased in politics unabated. The present Westminster model of democracy has been manipulated to perpetuate dominance of the propertied classes. With following to neo-liberal economic policy the dominant classes have gained full command over the state socio-economic policies. The State has almost abdicated its responsibility towards building egalitarian society. With this u turn, it seems whatever changes that the present system could bring for social transformation have reached to plateau and now it moves towards diminishing return. As a result despite high economic growth unrest in society is mounting. Political leaders are now unable to handle contradictions of neo-liberal trajectory. Credibility and legitimacy of the political class as a whole irrespective of party are very low.

Despite economic growth, after six decades of democratic system only 40 per cent of the population enjoys basic amenities such as potable water, education and health. One fifth of the households still live in a state of 'abject', or a 'moderate' state of deprivation, such as drinking water, *pucca* (brick) house and literacy, not to speak of access to health services. The quality of these services and satisfaction with them are far from being at a desirable level (Srinivasan and Mohanty 2004).

In the midst of certain improvements in certain social service sectors there are also some disturbing reversals. IMR as well as MMR have almost stagnated in the last decade. The nutrition level and calorie intake of the poor have declined. 12 million people suffer from Vitamin A deficiency. Nearly fifty per cent of the children in age group of between 0 to 3 years suffer from malnutrition. 79 per cent of the children in the age group between six to 35 months are anaemic.

Only six per cent of the workers are in organised sector. Its proportion is declining with a 'flexibilisation' labour policy under liberalization (World Bank 1995, Breman 1995). Over a period of the last two decades the unorganized sector has generated more employment than the organized sector. The report of the National Commission for Enterprise in unorganised Sector (NCEUS), 2007 calculates that between 1993-94 and 2004-05 – that is in the decade when the neoliberal reforms of the early 1990s started to take off – the rate of employment growth declined significantly to 1.85% from the previous 10 years when it went up a little over 2% on average. Moreover, the employment growth which took place was nearly exclusively within the informal economy (Breman 2010). The downward trend is evident both in rural as well as urban areas in the first decade of this century. At the end of 2000, more than 40 million people were listed at Employment Exchanges. Nearly 60 per cent of the enrolled unemployed are educated. Though agriculture production has increased from 1961 to 2000, the numbers of Wages of the farm and non-farm sector workers in different parts of the country have not increased in correspondence with rising prices. Nearly 52 per cent of the workers –both salaried and casual workers- in the unorganised sectors do not get even minimum wages. Hence the purchasing capacity of such workers has remained as low as in the 1980s. Despite a surplus of 65 million tons food grains, some 320 million people go to bed hungry every night. Starvation deaths get reported in several states like Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. Inequality across the social/occupational groups has not declined, in fact, it has increased during the last decade (Dealton and Dreze 2002).

Literacy rate has gone up to 75 per cent. Enrolment in primary schools has also reached to hundred per cent. But all of them are not retained in the schools for many years. 28 per cent of the children get dropout before they complete IVth standard. Of the remaining 30 per cent are pushed out before

they complete VIIth class. In rural areas, over 51 per cent of the poorest are illiterate and minuscule 0.4 per cent have gone beyond higher secondary. On the other hand, among the richest, about 23% are illiterate but nearly 9% have completed post-school studies (Subodh Varma 2011). Notwithstanding the Right to education act, education system perpetuates and strengthens inequality. Only rich and upper middle class students get good quality education whereas most of the lower middle class and poor get education of inferior quality which hampers their life chances and upward mobility.

Along with this, discrimination based on gender and social status has also increased. There is a striking decline in female-male ratio among children, from 945 girls per 1000 boys (in the 0-6 age group) in 1991 to 940 girls per 1000 boys in 2011. Shockingly, one finds similar trend among the STs and SCs. A recent study observes, that thanks to the patriarchal norms of the higher castes, and sanskritization and detribalisation equality between female and male is getting eroded and discrimination against female has increased among the tribal people. (Atkins 2000, Maharatna 2011). Domestic violence to women shows no sign of decline. The practice of dowry has increased in various social groups where it never existed in the past. Similarly, atrocities against the dalits, tribals and minorities have increased. During the 1990s there was an average every year of 22,942 and 4376 cases of atrocities (including murder, injury, rape, kidnapping, arson etc.) per year against Scheduled castes and Scheduled Tribes respectively. The trend continues in the last decade also. These figures exclude unreported cases. Similarly the number of incidents of rioting, and killing Muslims have also increased at an alarming rate in the last two decades.

Economic growth in industrial sector has been high and has increased in the last two decades under neo-liberal economy. But high growth rate has not benefited the poor even to meet their basic human needs. It is by and large a jobless growth with increasing dismantling of the organised sector. Markets have not evolved safety networks for the workforce and a large section of the population is without social and economic security. Seeta Prabhu rightly observes, “Workers are thus bewildered by the state in which they find themselves when familiar structures are crumbling and new circumstances are overwhelming, threatening their existence at the very brink of survival (2001)”. Inequality has clearly increased substantially. The Report on ‘Human development in South Asia 2003’ (MHHDC 2004) points out that overall

focus of the Multilateral organizations working in the region is focused more on GDP growth and balancing budgets, than on the reduction of poverty. The governments have not adopted job creation as an explicit policy commitment. The governments have failed to improve the living conditions of the majority of the people.

During the last six decades of the economic growth few have accumulated wealth by dispossessed a large section of rural society. Many poor have lost their traditional resources of livelihood which used to provide them some relief to cope up with miserly. Common resources like common-land, forest and water have been increasingly grabbed by the dominant classes and musclemen. In the name of so-called development the State has also taken away land and habitat from large number of tribal and non-tribal farmers. They have been increasingly dispossessed. The victims have been forced to endorse the decisions of the government in the name of public interest. Alternative avenues though sometimes promised have remained on paper or provided to a few. Most of the other victims of the development have been left high and dry. Many fundamental promises that the Indian Constitution on which Republic is founded have so far remained unfulfilled.

Despite Constitutional and several legal measures against the practice of Untouchability, it still continues in different spheres in as many as eighty per cent of the villages in the country. The most widespread and blatant practice of Untouchability continues in the public secular sphere relates related to water and cremation/burial grounds, the bare necessities of life and death (Shah et al.2008). It is also prevalent in economic spheres (Thorat and Newman2010). Its presence both in rural and urban areas is very strong in private sphere. Educated dalits continue to experience discrimination in education and employment. On the other hand, stratification within the community has been sharpened. Small stratum of them has become a middle class. Some of them are co-opted by the mainstream society and politics. A few of them have also become champions of globalisation –capitalist market economy.

Ironically democratic system has been used to perpetuate the power of few to decide the destiny of all. The system has been reduced to electoral engineering that works as a safety valve for vast majority of people to ventilate their grievances and reinforce their faith that something better would be done to them by the new representatives. Majority of the people feels

helpless as they have no other way but to put faith in the system as a *fait accompli*. The policy makers follow the dictate of the multinational and domestic dominant classes for making economic policy which grabs their traditional sources of livelihood and security on the one hand and generate more and more unemployment and social insecurity. People have no democratic choice in influencing economic policy of the state.

The present day development model though originated in a section of civil society and followed by the state is in fact, as Lummis observes, “antidemocratic in several ways. It is antidemocratic in that it requires kinds, conditions, and amounts of labor that people would never choose- and, historically, never have chosen-in a state of freedom. Only by giving a society one or another kind of undemocratic structure can people be made to spend the greater part of their lives laboring ‘efficiently’ in fields, factories, or offices and handing over the surplus value to capitalists, managers, communist party leaders, or technocrats”. Nearly two decades back, Rajni Kothari (2005) rightly observed:

“Today the state is seen to have betrayed masses, as having become a prisoner of the dominant classes and their transnational patrons and as having increasingly turned anti-people. Nor has it provided the sinews of a radical bourgeois transformation from the dynamics of which a revolutionary alternative would emerge. The state in the Third World, despite some valiant efforts by dedicated leaders in a few countries, has degenerated into technocratic machine serving a narrow power group that is kept in power by holders of security men at the top and a regime of repression and terror at the bottom, kept going by millions of hardworking people who must go on producing goods and services for the ‘system’ for if they did not everything would collapse.”

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Overview

What we experience in the last five decades is the silent bourgeois revolution, to put it other way the propertied class has hijacked the system for their prosperity and power. Elsewhere and in India, the neo-liberal policy makers have followed three strategies in carrying out their agenda – ‘obfuscation’, ‘compensation’, and ‘divide and rule’ (Pierson 1995, Jenkin 1998). Reforms have been introduced gradually and by stealth without transparency. Several efforts in the form of rhetoric, populist politics and a few so-called pro-poor

programmes have made to pacify the deprived sections of society. The vast majority of the people are already divided by caste, religion, language, region and so on. These fragmentations have been reinforced with lollipops of reservations and other crumbs on the one hand; and playing divisive politics in the name of culture and nationalism on the other.

The present day democratic system is at the best, degenerated liberal bourgeois democracy and at worse, a façade of democracy to perpetuate capitalist economy and dominance of the propertied classes. It is the system of the few and for the propertied class ironically by the consent of the people. Despite genuine (?) concern for the inclusive growth, neo-liberal economy in its very logic -in which private profit is the guiding force – and the way it is functioning bound to exclude large sections of society. And it is more so when the world capitalism is under siege.
