

M.N. Roy Memorial Lecture

**Nature of Political Crisis in India
and Future of the Indian State**

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FOREWORD

M.N. Roy, revolutionary philosopher, founder of the Indian Renaissance Institute and architect of the philosophy of Radical Humanism, was born on March 21, 1883 and passed away on January 25, 1954. Ever since his birth date was accurately ascertained, the Indian Renaissance Institute and the Radical Humanist Association have been arranging each year on the anniversary of his birthday a lecture by an eminent authority on a topic of public importance.

On the 94th birthday anniversary this year, the Roy Memorial Address was delivered at New Delhi on March 21, 1981, by Shri Girilal Jain, Editor of *The Times of India*. The full text of the Address is published in this pamphlet.

The object of this lecture series is not to give a resume of the ideas of M.N. Roy but to present new thinking on a critical topic. This, I believe, is an appropriate mode of perpetuating the memory of a revolutionary thinker who was always opposed to ideological orthodoxy, who became alienated from communism because of its spirit of blind conformism, and who would have liked his own ideas to be critically appreciated but never sanctified.

I am grateful to Shri Girilal Jain for having agreed to deliver this Address. The views expressed by him are controversial but he has spoken on a subject of great importance and I am sure that the reader will find his Address interesting as well as thought-provoking.

Delhi, 21-5-1981

V.M. TARKUNDE

Nature of Political Crisis in India and Future of the Indian State

Girilal Jain

FRIENDS, we meet here today to honour a man who dared challenge generally accepted concepts and frameworks. M.N. Roy, as we know, began his political career as a fervent nationalist. But he lived to question the validity of the very concept of nationalism, not only of Indian nationalism as it was developing under the influence of Gandhiji whom he regarded as an embodiment of India's cultural backwardness. In the context of Europe itself, the birthplace of nationalism, he came to equate nationalism with fascism. Similarly after having been an ardent Marxist and a communist—he was one of the founding members of the Communist International—he came to question first communism as it had developed in the Soviet Union under Stalin and then Marxism itself.

Roy devoted the later years of life to shaping a new philosophy of life which he called radical humanism and a new approach to politics. In both intellectual and moral terms it was a heroic effort. We cannot but admire his courage in rejecting a great deal of what he himself had thought and propagated. We cannot but admire his relentless search for truth which led him to go against the two most powerful intellectual currents of our age—nationalism and Marxism—and to take up cudgels against such powerful figures as Gandhiji at home and Stalin abroad.

Many of us present here are familiar with these aspects of Roy's life and thought. We have discussed them for years. But I wish to make a departure from this approach to Roy. I wish to submit that Roy had a lot in common with Gandhiji whom he strongly and persistently criticised. He shared Gandhiji's unceasing search for truth. He, too, believed not only in the innate goodness of man but also in his capacity to govern himself without the aid of the party system which is the cornerstone of democratic governments as we have known them in our times. There were, of course, fundamental differences between them.

Unlike Gandhiji, Roy did not idolise village India. And while Gandhiji condemned the post-renaissance Western civilisation, Roy admired it and regarded it as man's greatest achievement despite the rise of Fascism and Nazism in Italy and Germany, once the birthplaces of renaissance and reformation. Even so they had a great deal in common. Both were, for example, very much the products of the British Raj.

Both took the law and order produced by the Raj for granted as if it was part of the natural order of things in India which it clearly was not. They wanted to change the institutional framework. But I doubt if it ever occurred to either of them that in reality the scope for manoeuvre available to them and other would-be reformers and revolutionaries was rather limited. It is possible that they over-stated their case in order to command attention among the intelligentsia which had been trained to think within the British intellectual and institutional framework. But there is no evidence to show that they were aware of the limitations which the reality of the Indian social structure imposed on those who would manage the affairs of the country in the wake of independence. Else Gandhiji would not have suggested that the Congress should dissolve itself as a party and Roy that all parties can be dispensed with.

Gandhiji and Roy were not alone in not paying sufficient attention to the country's need for a viable state and the difficulties inherent in the Indian social structure in producing and sustaining such a state. Most of us are inclined to think that way. Indeed, it is rarely that one comes across a serious discussion of this problem. This has been especially so since the emergency in June 1975 in view of the understandable emphasis on individual liberty among the Western-educated intelligentsia. But while the concern for liberty is understandable, the indifference to the problems of running the Indian State is not. I am aware that I am treading on the tender corns of many of my friends here. But I shall be unfair to them and myself if I do not indicate that I regard their approach as being partial and inadequate. Liberty can never survive, much less prosper, without order.

There have, of course, been exceptions. India has produced men like Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar who were fully cognisant of India's needs for a strong state. That is why they provided for emergency and supersession of state

governments by the Centre in the Constitution. Nehru also persuaded Parliament to enact the preventive detention law in the early fifties, though the problems facing the State then were not half as critical and intractable as they are today. I am not unaware of, and insensitive to, the evil effects of these illiberal features of the Constitution and of the preventive detention law of which MISA as repeatedly amended during the emergency was an extreme form. But I am unable to dismiss as illegitimate the motivations which lay behind these enactments.

It is also enlightening to read the proceedings of the Constituent Assembly. Dr. Rajendra Prasad, for example, objected to the draft constitution on the ground that it was based on some western models and ignored the Gandhian model based on the concept of self-reliant and self-sufficient village republics. But for the fact that Nehru and Patel were sufficiently in command of the ruling Congress party to be able to assure its endorsement for the draft Constitution produced by the experts, we might not have got a constitution worth the name and been plunged into a disaster at the very start of our career as an independent country. Democracy could have been aborted if inner party democracy had been given full play in the ruling Congress party. I cannot overemphasise my view that democracy is inconceivable in our country without a strong leadership and a western-type institutional framework.

At this stage I would wish to make a few general observations. First, rudimentary state becomes a necessity as soon as two or more tribes come to live in the same territory. They need an agency to regulate their relations. This rudimentary state has in history been invariably the product of conquest. The stronger tribe imposes its will on the weaker tribe or tribes. But it has to win their acquiescence, if not support, in order that the rudimentary state lasts and fulfils its elementary function of assuring security against outside attacks by hostile tribes and internal peace. These functions make it necessary that members of the ruling group place themselves above the dominant tribe as well to some extent.

Secondly, only small and isolated tribes can manage without a state of some kind. They continue to live "close to nature". Everyone depends on chase or fishing or the gathering of fruits and roots for survival. If agriculture develops, it remains utterly

rudimentary. This limits their numbers. There is hardly any division of labour or exchange of products among such groups. Some such tribes still exist. Indeed, it is by studying them that we have come to understand, even if partially, the state of affairs before the growth of civilisation and the state.

Thirdly, one major distinction between a primitive and advanced society is that in the former customs regulate life and in the latter laws. Custom has often been described as an "unwritten law". It is, to begin with. We are, for example, all familiar with the development of the customary law in England. But the two are different. Custom is evolved; supported and enforced by a whole society and as such it tends to be rigid unless it begins to be codified and in the process becomes subject to modification to suit the changing needs of society. Law, on the other hand, is the product of the state, however rudimentary either the law or the state.

Indeed, as R.M. McIver has noted in his famous book *The Modern State*, "the early growth of the state depends on the transformation of customs into laws." State-made laws are by definition not only more flexible but also more progressive because they are the handiwork of the more forward-looking, active and enlightened members of a society and they are far easier to change. It follows that societies governed wholly by custom must tend to stagnate and that societies governed by law have greater scope for change and growth.

Let us now apply these propositions to ancient India. In India, as elsewhere, different tribes came to live in close proximity with one another. As elsewhere, they produced states of different sizes, power and competence. As elsewhere the stronger of the tribes imposed its will on others in a particular geographical area. But for some reason or reasons which remain obscure despite all recent investigations, the tribes retained their identities. The modern *jatis* are tribes of yore. This fact distinguishes India from all other civilised societies, though it will be ridiculous to suggest that these are wholly homogeneous. A Bavarian is very different from a Rhinlander or a Prussian in Germany.

No model ever conforms fully with the reality. But we have to visualise models for the sake of clarity. In fact, without such models we cannot think in conceptual terms, much less conduct a discourse of any kind. Now if we visualise two extreme models—the European one where allied tribes merged sufficiently to be

able to form in course of their historical development reasonably homogenous nations and the African one where social development by and large got frozen at the tribal stage—India would fall somewhere in between them.

The tribes in India did not merge to form a homogenous entity even on the scale of a present district. In fact, even kinship groups within a tribe retained their identities in the form of *gotras*. But they not only established a functional relationship among themselves but also accepted a system of beliefs and practices and hierarchy of values and also castes, with the result that they could be said to belong to a larger community and culture. This is the reality behind the vague talk of "unity in diversity". It means that the tribes and sub-tribes survived with their customs, gods and goddesses under the larger Brahmanical overarch of theological concepts, beliefs and ritualistic practices.

These propositions could have been challenged before the development of sociological studies beginning with the later part of the 19th century when it was widely believed that the *varna* system was primary and the *jatis* secondary in the Hindu social scheme. It is now widely acknowledged that the hundreds of *jatis* are the foundations of the Hindu society and that the *varna* system is essentially a framework which, on the one hand, fixes the pecking order among the *jatis* and, of the other, legitimises the continuance and expansion of the caste system. Among others, Louis Dumont in his *Homo Hierarchicus* and Iravati Karve in her *Hindu Society* have clinched the issue. Those interested in the subject would also do well to read Alfred Lyall's *Asiatic Studies* where he has described the expansion of the Hindu society in the 19th century through the incorporation of hundreds of surviving tribes as new castes.

We do not know how Hindu society took the shape in which it has been known for the last 2,500 years and more. We do not know how the people known as scheduled castes today came to accept their status as untouchables. All we can say is that the process must have involved a lot of violence over a long period of time and over the whole of the peninsula. Dr. Ambedkar has produced some theories on the subject but these are in the nature of speculation with little hard evidence to sustain them. We do

know, however, that by the time of Lord Buddha and Lord Mahavira in the sixth century B.C. Hinduism had more or less crystallised in the form in which it has survived till today.

It has not been a closed system. It has witnessed considerable speculation and a series of movements since. Indeed, this intellectual flexibility accompanied by a limited amount of social mobility has been Hinduism's greatest strength. Without it the broad framework might not have held as well as it has. Even today the Hindu society has not found it necessary to throw up a powerful revivalist movement in order to preserve its identity.

I am not competent to accept or reject Roy's view that Buddhism was a cultural-intellectual-social revolution which failed. Similarly I am not in a position to opine on the validity or otherwise of Ananda Coomaraswamy's view that the philosophic foundations of Hinduism and Buddhism are the same and that, indeed, the two stand essentially for the same value system and objectives. But it is not necessary for me to go into these issues for my present purpose. Revolutionary or not, Buddhism was banished from the land of its birth. Hinduism reasserted itself with redoubled vigour.

The Hindus produced states and even empires. But my limited knowledge of history leads me to believe that Hindu society in pre-Muslim India was largely ruled by custom and not by law.

Manu—there are supposed to have been 12 Manus according to some experts—codified the customs and is known as the law-giver of the Hindus. But was there a machinery of the state which could alter them to suit the society's changing needs? I doubt. In his book on the Hindu society, K.M. Panikkar took the view that one of its greatest weaknesses was the absence of a state capable of reforming it in conformity with the changing needs of the times.

In order to validate our claim to the right of self-rule in the 19th century some of our historians produced impressive works on the Hindu theory of the state. Most of them took the view that unlike in Europe the State did not lay claim to dominate the lives of the people and that it administered "dharma", clearly a euphemism for the prevalent customs, and that the Brahmin interpreters of "dharma" wielded enormous influence in the Hindu state. This was clearly a response to the challenge facing us in the 19th century when we felt called upon to prove that we

were capable of governing ourselves in a democratic manner and to cite evidence to show that our forefathers had demonstrated such a capacity in the past. Unlike today, the right to national independence rested on the claim to sustain a democratic form of government. But assuming that this assessment of our past is reasonably accurate, it only validates my assumption that the Hindu society was ruled by custom and not by law deliberately fashioned to sustain, not to say bring about, social change.

It was perhaps not necessary for the state to impose the "dharma" by force once the "mlechhas", (outsiders beyond the pale) had been subjugated and compelled to accept their lowly status as untouchables. But that could be the case only if the hold of custom was sufficiently strong and the society was able to fashion some means of reconciling conflicting interests and values. Indeed, this is not a disputable point. One could be free from social obligations imposed by custom only in death or "sanyas" (retirement into the forest). Only the sanyasins were above the caste system as Louis Dumont has shown in his *Homo Hierarchicus*. In life there must have been innumerable deviations from the norms laid down by society. There always are. Indeed, it is a matter of pride for the Hindus that they can cite scriptures in support of any action they may wish to take or proposition they may wish to urge. But that only shows that the system was not wholly closed at any time. It does not prove that it was not pretty rigid. Perhaps it allowed flexibility at the periphery to accommodate new tribes and practices in the caste structure. It is interesting to note that *tantra* is still a living faith in north-east India, the worship of Kali among the Bengalis being only its best known and most popular expression.

Of late sociologists have sought to establish that Hindu India was by no means the "changeless India" that it was made out to be by British historians and thinkers and that it provided for social mobility. Clearly it did. The Brahmin priests invented "respectable" genealogies for conquering tribes like the Raiputs, among the last to come to India, in order to legitimise their rule and accommodate them within the system. Like the Jats, the Rajputs could well have been given a much lower status if they had not managed to carve out independent kingdoms for themselves. The Jats were placed just above the untouchables up to the first decade of the present century.

I do not wish to join the controversy regarding the origin of the Aryans and their contribution to the development of the Hindu society. But on the basis of the available evidence it seems to me to be beyond dispute that Sanskrit was the first language to acquire a pan-Indian sweep, that it was not the language of the common people in any part of the country, that it did not grow out of any one of the popular languages and that instead these were influenced by it. It, therefore, set the elites as a part from the common people as Persian and Arabic in the medieval and English in the modern periods of Indian history. This is clearly another special feature of Indian society which has not received the attention it deserves. I have used the "elites" advisedly because I believe that the hierarchical caste-dominated Hindu society did not produce an intercaste stable ruling elite for even a region, not to speak of the whole country.

Islam had exhausted its revolutionary potentialities by the time it came to India and as it happened, apart from Sind, Islam came to India not through the Arabs, the inheritors, preservers and promoters of the Greco-Roman-Byzantine cultural heritage but through the Turkic people from Central Asia. It won millions of adherents, especially among the *Sudras* (low castes). In certain areas entire artisan castes went over to Islam. It also produced Hindu-Muslim elites well versed in Arabic and Persian languages. As a result of the challenge and impact of Islam there arose the Bhakti movement among the Hindus, of which Sikhism was the most important result. But essentially Islam failed to change the Hindu society, especially in the countryside where over 95 per cent of the people lived. If anything, Hinduism became more rigid in the attempt to protect itself from an alien culture and religion. Islam also did not produce an effective all-India ruling elite because Muslim rulers failed to unify the country on a long-term basis. The last great Mughal Emperor, Aurangzeb spent the last 25 years of his life trying to subdue the Deccan. He could not even return to the capital in Delhi.

Some of us have speculated and continue to speculate on whether some Indian group like the Marathas and the Sikhs could have succeeded the Moghuls in Delhi and extended their rule all over the peninsula if the British had not imposed theirs. I regard it as idle speculation not only because history took the turn it did and the British imposed their rule but also because neither

the Marathas nor the Sikhs displayed the skills necessary for running an empire of India's size. India had collapsed into anarchy and would have stayed in that state if some European power had not arrived on the scene to produce and sustain order. Britain happened to be that power.

The impact of the British rule has been the subject of learned discussion for decades. It is not necessary for me to go into this subject at any length. But I would wish to recall a few common-places. The British united India as it had not been united ever before. They effectively linked various parts of the country with one another through rail-road links so that for the first time geography ceased to be a barrier to India's unification. They established a uniform administration throughout the land and a system of modern education with English as the medium of instruction at the university level.

They thus created some of the necessary conditions in which the concept of nationalism which they also brought to this country could take roots and prosper. One of these necessary conditions was the rise of a class of Western-educated people who could think in national as opposed to caste, local, regional and communal terms.

The distinction was not absolute. Even individuals who had imbibed western values and accepted western concepts such as nationalism, social justice and equality before law continued to be influenced by caste, local, communal and regional considerations. But for the first time in India's chequered history there arose a class of people capable of thinking in terms of India. These people were in every sense the products of the Raj. In course of time some of them formed the Indian National Congress to agitate first for more rights for the Indian people and then for complete freedom. The British can thus be said to have consummated the process of India's unification that had begun with the Brahmins over three millenia ago. Perhaps the Brahmins were preceeded by some others. But this issue is still open. While we do know now that the so-called Indus valley civilization was not limited to the Indus region, we do not know who the builders of that civilization were.

Roy, many of you will recall, had put forward the decolonisation thesis in 1923. He had then argued that Britain had lost the capacity to export capital and that it was, therefore, only a matter

of time before it would be forced to conclude that it was no longer particularly profitable for it to hold on to the empire in India. Events proved him right. But it does not follow that the Congress party did not play a significant role in speeding up the transfer of power. It forced the British to recognise that they could continue to rule India only at a cost which would soon become too high. In the absence of a powerful and a growing nationalist movement, the British could have stayed on for a decade or longer even after world war II, though it had further weakened the British economy.

More important, the Congress became the organisation which could assume the responsibility of running the Indian state after the withdrawal of the British. Independence, as we all know, was accompanied by partition because the Congress failed to win the confidence and support of the Muslim intelligentsia. This is an important aspect of Indian history. I cannot deal with it today. But a few observations on the factors that led to partition may be in order.

It was obvious in 1946-47 itself that India had to be partitioned. Since the break-up of Pakistan in 1971 it has also been obvious that what we had witnessed in the earlier part of the century was not the rise of Muslim nationalism but of Muslim communalism which was effective enough to force the partition of the country but not strong enough to serve as the basis of a Muslim nation in the newly created state of Pakistan. The continuing strains in the present Pakistan on the basis of language and ethnicity emphasise the same conclusion. There is, indeed, the larger issue whether or not Islam is compatible with nationalism in view of its emphasis on the unity of the *ummah*. But I am not concerned with that here. In fact my central concern is different—whether “Hindu nationalism” was any more of a reality than “Muslim nationalism” in British India.

It has often been suggested that Muslim communalism was the result of an inevitable reaction among the Muslims against the ascendancy of the Hindus in the professions, services, commerce and industry, and the rise of Hindu nationalism. The first was a fact in the three presidencies of Bengal, Madras and Bombay but not in the United Provinces where Muslim communalism assumed its most virulent form. The second premises is a total distortion of facts.

Men like Shri Aurobindo, Bipin Chandra Pal and Tilak

doubtless tried to give cultural contents to the concept of nationalism in terms of idealised script-based Hinduism and this had an appeal, especially to the English-educated elite which the British treated as if it belonged to an inferior, uncivilised race. Gandhiji can be said to have continued this process. But while this assertion of India's past cultural achievements and the intrinsic worth of the Hindu view of life had its usefulness in the general effort to fight the Christian-imperialist propaganda that we were an inferior people, the Hindus were too divided to become a nation. Their control of the Indian National Congress could not change this reality. Hindu communalism could and did exist, as a result of antipathy towards the Muslims, which was inevitably reinforced by the rise of Muslim communalism and the shift in the British attitude in favour of the Muslims after 1885. The dual nature of their struggle—anti-British and anti-Muslim—created the impression that the Hindus were finally on the way to becoming a coherent entity. In fact Hindu communalism was not and could not be as coherent and as strong as Muslim communalism because the Hindu society, if the Hindus can be so described, was far, far less coherent than the Muslim society.

In the very act of conversion to Islam, the Muslims had overcome the caste divisions of their forefathers to an extent. And even in the Muslim period, they suffered from the complex of being a minority, if not a besieged minority. Minorities, as we know, are more self-conscious of their cultural heritage; they are quick to feel that it is being threatened, and unite in defending it.

The weakness of Hindu communalism has been evident since independence. The failure of the RSS and its political front, the Jana Sangh, to make headway is one piece of irrefutable evidence in support of my contention. The absence of any revivalist movement worth the name among them is another. The willingness of the Hindus to support a secular leader like Jawaharlal Nehru is still another. This, too, is a complex phenomenon which must not be interpreted in simplistic terms.

Fortunately, in the Congress we had at the time of independence an organisation which was capable of taking over power from the British and running the Indian state. It was coherent enough and it was capable of rising above the constituents of the badly divided Indian society and act as an impartial umpire

on the rival claims of communal, regional, linguistic and caste groups.

In 1947 the Congress was in that position because it had Jawaharlal Nehru as its leader and because even its rank and file had been sufficiently influenced by the Western concept of nationalism to be willing to back him. It is a tribute to the Hindus that they were prepared to follow Nehru and his colleagues. They are a tolerant people. But this tolerance is also an expression of a weak sense of self-awareness and identity.

It is pointless to discuss whether a cultural-religious revival could have united the Hindus and whether such a unified Hindu society could have served as the basis of the Indian nation, the minorities being brought into it on the pattern of kinship groups on the basis of equality and justice. It is pointless because the Hindus are not capable of cultural-religious revivalism. Revivalism requires a fixed point at which a faith can be said to have crystallised as in the case of Christianity and Islam and a golden age to which the faithful can look back with nostalgia. In theological and philosophic terms Hinduism has been opened so much so that it can best be called a way of life.

I have said enough to indicate that the Indian experiment in building a "nation"—I use the quote advisedly—is different from the orthodox, European concept. The European kind of unity based on ethnicity, religion, culture and language is just not possible in India. It will be a long time before the experiment can be said to have succeeded or failed. But we have to hold the country together to give the unique effort a chance.

I am persuaded that the Congress in India could have gone the way of the Muslim League in Pakistan if Nehru was not available to lead it after Gandhiji's assassination in 1948 and Sardar Patel's death in 1950. In a sense it is possible to explain this dependence of the Indian political system on a dominating figure—first Gandhi, then Nehru and now Mrs. Gandhi. The explanation, in my opinion, is that factionalism is as natural to Indian politics as caste is to Indian society. The two are not necessarily inter-related.

Factionalism in politics is not always the product of caste divisions in our society. Factions can in fact cut through caste barriers, and operate on the patronage principle. Indeed, this was

the general view up to the seventies when our experience of factionalism was largely limited to the Congress and breakaway ideological groups like the socialists and the communists. But since then we have seen caste serving as the basis of both parties and factions in those parties. The rise and fall of Charan Singh illustrates this point.

Nehru stood above factionalism in the Congress by virtue of both his temperament and his stature as the darling of the Indian people. He was not inclined to lead a faction and he did not need to. These two aspects of his personality were also not inextricably interlinked. His opposition to factionalism was not the result of his popularity and vice versa. But he had to possess both these qualities to be able to play the historic role he did.

The Congress had the advantage of having been the party of independence. It was the best organised mass party. Its roots had spread even to the countryside. In the post-independence period it enjoyed the support of a substantial section of the Muslims, the Harijans and the tribals. In spite of these and other advantages in the first general election in 1952 it secured only 45 per cent of the total votes polled. I have not found a satisfactory explanation for this fact.

That apart, it is thus open to question whether the Congress could have won the first general election itself if Nehru was not there to lead it. The pertinence of this dependence on one individual was widely recognised in Nehru's own life time. That is why the question was often asked: After Nehru, what? Or After Nehru, Who? Subsequent events have only further underscored this aspect of the Indian political reality.

The Congress was swept out of office in 1967 in all north Indian states and coalition governments were formed. Each one of them collapsed within the next two years at least partly because a towering individual was not around to hold them together. The same experience was repeated at the Centre in 1979 when the Janata party, in effect a coalition of five parties, broke up, again at least partly for the same reason—the absence of a towering individual.

Mrs. Gandhi split the Congress party in 1969. Many of the important leaders, like Mr. Kamraj, Mr. Morarji Desai, Mr. S.K. Patil and Mr. Atulya Ghosh, stayed with the parent organisation.

But the Congress led by her swept the polls first in 1971 and then in 1972 reducing the Congress (O) to a small rump.

Mrs. Gandhi split the party once again in January 1978. This time important leaders like Mr. Y.B. Chavan, Mr. Brahmananda Reddy and Mr. Swaran Singh parted company with her. And she carried the odium of the emergency and the forcible family planning programme with which her second son, Mr. Sanjay Gandhi, had been closely associated. Yet within a few weeks of the split, her "party" won the election in Andhra and Karnataka and emerged as the second largest in Maharashtra. Once again the other Congress fared very badly.

On a surface view it is easy to provide the explanation. The poor, the Harijans and the Muslims once again placed their trust in her. But why did they do so especially in view of their wider experience of the emergency? We do not know the answer. But we do know that the Congress (I) could not have amounted to anything without her.

Mrs. Gandhi has often been charged with promoting the cult of personality. I do not wish to go into the merit or the demerit of this charge, though I said recently at another platform that to apply this phrase to her is to tear it out of the context in which it was first popularised by Mr. Khrushchev in 1956 in an effort to exonerate the Soviet communist party of the crimes that had been committed on a vast scale in the Stalin era. Be that as it may, I for one regard it more pertinent that events have shown that the people, especially the minorities and the poorer and oppressed sections among the Hindus, place their trust in her. I for one am also convinced that Indian polity will be in jeopardy without her or some other similar individual. This places us in a cruel dilemma from which no exit is in sight.

There has been a lot of talk of decentralisation since independence. Some of the advocates of decentralisation have favoured it because they believe that it is necessary for running an effective government in a large country like India. I broadly agree with them. But we must not assume that the small entities at the state and district levels are significantly more coherent than India as a whole. This is not so. For whatever it is worth it is also my firm view that these entities are even less capable of, and interested in, promoting social justice and maintaining proper standards

in public life and administration than those at the helm of affairs in New Delhi with whom the intelligentsia is far from happy.

In Nehru's days there was no dearth of individuals like us who sincerely believed that he could have promoted quicker economic growth along with social justice, indeed socialism, raised the standard of public life to reduce, if not eliminate, corruption, toned up and trimmed the administration if only he was willing to exert himself. Today the number of individuals who blame Mrs. Gandhi personally for the country's ills, as we the western-educated intelligentsia perceive them, is much bigger. But we had no replacement for Nehru and we have none for Mrs. Gandhi. Our conduct often reminds me of the well meaning *sanyasins* of yore who retired into the forests to seek their own salvation. We retire into our drawing rooms and into our private and professional worlds.

I have the horrible feeling that the country was not ready to move faster in the direction desired by people like us in the Nehru era and I know of no one in public life today who is capable of upholding standards we cherish. We borrowed our concepts of impartial, honest and efficient public men and officials, of judicial integrity and independence, the rule of law and so on from the British. They clash with our social reality which emphasises family and kinship ties. It would be wrong to conclude that the Indian social reality has finally triumphed over the imported value system but it is trying very hard to do so. We are all caught in the resulting confusion of values.

And this is not the only contradiction we face. For while the value and institutional framework we had borrowed from the British is in decline and disarray, the hinterland of the old culture and society is shrinking rapidly as a result of the spread of education, roads, transport, monetisation of the economy in the smallest hamlet, the abolition of the patron-client relationship in the countryside, the capitalisation of agriculture, the transistor revolution, repeated elections and so on. The Indian society is in a convulsion the like of which it has perhaps never witnessed ever before. There is no comparison between it and what happened even as a result of the arrival and spread of Muslim power from the 13th century onward. The change this time is more pervasive and much deeper. A whole society is busy tearing itself apart and possibly transforming itself in a different image—the

European image of which social equality, social justice and material well-being are important constituents.

The dominant values in the Indian society today are economic development, personal well-being and social justice and equality. Certain sections of the intelligentsia are more concerned with personal liberty than even before. But I am inclined to believe that they do not represent the dominant social ethos, however justified their concern and however precious the value they uphold. Indeed, it seems to me that even the concern for social justice and equality is being relegated to the background. The anti-reservation agitation in Gujarat is an expression of this development. Most of the up and coming people in India want to do well, does not matter how. In such a situation it is necessary that norms and institutions should be under enormous strain.

These pressures are bound to increase, especially in view of the growing gap in incomes, the inflation which is not likely to be controlled in view of the adverse external factors, the rapidly growing population and the poor management of the public sector, the steady rise in the percentage of people below or at the poverty line. There is a big question mark not only before the future of democracy but of the Indian state itself.

Finally, I shall make one more point and I shall have finished. Thirtyfour years after independence the English-speaking intelligentsia is managing the affairs of India and keeping it going. This class is still strongly represented in the bureaucracy and the military officer corps. But it has steadily been losing ground in the political field as more and more people with rural and semi-urban background have come to be elected to state legislatures and even Parliament. In this sense Indian democracy can be said to have become more representative than it was during Nehru's days. It is another matter if in the process it has also become more parochial and less capable of observing norms which people like us associate with a good democracy—impartiality, honesty, competence, openness, party loyalty and so on.

This process is bound to get extended to the bureaucracy, first in the states since English has ceased to be the medium of instruction in most universities. I am afraid that this development will place a strain on the country's unity itself. The best we can hope for is that we shall somehow manage to muddle through.

Social change cannot but be an agent of grave instability unless it is accompanied by rapid economic growth which can help cushion the shock which the uprooting of tens of millions of people from their social and cultural moorings must produce. In India the rate of economic growth has been too low to provide such a cushion. The danger of social and political upheaval must increase if the institutional framework is weak which is also the case in India. It is tempting to look for scapegoats in such a situation. All societies do so. In our case we have a tradition of sacrificing even human beings to propitiate angry gods and goddesses. But we owe it to the man we have met to honour today to resist this temptation. If we are rational human beings we must examine the reality calmly and dispassionately and look for rational solutions.

New Delhi.

March 21, 1981

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