

SOCIAL GAINS OF
PLANNING.

By

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THE nature of our independence, of the new State that emerged in its wake, of the planning that followed were all determined to a considerable extent, apart from the other objective factors, by the nature of our struggle for freedom which itself emerged amidst peculiarly powerful social institutions, customs and cultural traditions. The stress in the pre-independence phase of our national struggle was naturally more on the political aspects though Gandhiji never ignored the social problems. The consciousness very much in evidence then was more political than social. In the context of the urgent need for a broad anti-imperialist united front, dedicated to the achievement of political freedom, the stress on politics was understandable, even desirable. But the state of petrification of India's economy and life when society was strictly fragmented and the upper classes enjoyed an unchallenged monopoly of power and privilege had started undergoing, during the course of the struggle itself, very significant, though not very considerable, changes. The induction of the masses into the national liberation movement which ensured that they were not going to be kept outside the national endeavour for political independence, also ensured, though it was not very discernible then, that they could not be denied for long their due place in the new set-up that was to emerge after freedom had been won. Still, the consciousness that the movement for political independence was a continuation of the old old quest for the expansion and freedom of the human spirit, was not very deep and there was but little appreciation of the values which underlay the movement. True, industrialisation had been making its impact felt. True also that

great personages and savants had initiated, what may be termed a renaissance movement. But the trends never coalesced or converged; never gained any significant momentum. Mahatma Gandhi with his unerring intuition had spotted the weaknesses of the social base and had prescribed the remedies but even those who shared his political vision enthusiastically, were not as warm-hearted when it came to imbibing his social ideals. There were many who acquiesced in accepting the values Mahatma Gandhi wanted to base the new order on, not out of any intellectual conviction or moral faith but because they considered such acquiescence to be a price of his unavoidable, necessary leadership.

So, when political independence came and ushered in the world's biggest democracy, the social framework was palpably and essentially not very suitable for its development and growth. The communal tensions, however, an expression again of the weakness of the social base, did not immediately permit the Free Indian Government to devote any considerable attention towards building a new social order. But within three years of the attainment of independence, the people gave to themselves a democratic constitution and the deck was made clear for planned action for the achievement of the other and more necessary freedoms. The First Five Year Plan became a firm indicator both of the direction and the pattern of our national endeavour, as also of the ultimate goal.

When evaluating the gains of the first Five Year Plan it is well to bear in mind the limitations which beset democratic planning. Firstly, the introduction of parliamentary democracy in such a vast country involving such large numbers almost all of a sudden was a new event in world history. In other countries it had been a slow growth and had followed a considerable expansion in education and rise in the level of social existence. Many a cynic, therefore, unable to appreciate how democracy

could succeed in a country largely lingering in the twilight of the middle ages, predicted disaster. Many a well-meaning critic, deriving his knowledge from text-books, chafed at the pace of change and sincerely wondered as to how democracy could co-exist with caste or private enterprise, with a social order evolving into socialism. Secondly, though the Government which had formulated the Plan and was executing it, was a new Government, the Government of a free State, it was, in a way, also a Government in continuity. It could not write on a clean slate and start all afresh. Many schemes were in the process and at various stages of implementation and these had to be taken on and carried on. The machinery, moreover, of execution and implementation was the old law-and-order machinery. Thirdly, the resources, both spiritual and physical, were strictly limited. The First Five Year Plan, therefore, was not, and it could not be, what people with greatly but uncritically aroused expectations wanted and had hoped for. It had to exercise extreme caution that the as-yet-raw democratic fabric was not only not impaired but gained in strength and cohesion. It had to pattern implementation by governmental agencies in a manner so as to arouse mass enthusiasm and stimulate the emergence of popular agencies filled with emotional fervour. It could not be very bold and imaginative but it had to prepare the bases so that boldness and imagination in planning could be possible. Thus, though, the first Plan had its limitations, it was the best in the given situation.

Naturally, land was the first to receive proper attention. Property relationship in land and the old agricultural economy fashioned the social climate in the lakhs of Indian villages. The very poor man-hour yield from agriculture severely limited the internal market and put a limit in turn to industrial expansion. And since about seventy per cent of the people were engaged in agriculture, any talk

of substantial increase in the national wealth was meaningless unless productivity in the basic national industry increased manifold and surplus labour was put to small-scale industries allied or subsidiary to agriculture. From a social point of view the biggest achievement has been the legislations for the abolition of the Zamindari System. While it is true that the pace of the vitally necessary reorganisation of the agricultural economy, in the wake of zamindari abolition, which must in the existing conditions take the form of some kind of co-operative farming, has not been as fast as one would desire, it is a happy augury that the consciousness of its need is being more and more urgently felt. It has to be borne in mind that unless homogeneity and democracy are restored to the villages and a change in mental attitudes brought about conditions under which co-operative enterprises may effectively function and replace uneconomic individualised farming will not be fully created. To that end endeavours are being made and soon we shall have legislations, some States have already enacted them, fixing ceilings on holdings and encouraging their consolidation. Similarly, though it has not been possible to put entire surplus rural labour to some gainful occupation in industries allied to agriculture, the many multi-purpose projects coupled with irrigation schemes are creating conditions under which rural industries may take strong roots and develop.

The legislations affecting industrial labour have been many and taken together they ensure a fair deal fulfilling the most ardent expectations and indicate a broader trend towards a new concept of the dignity of labour. Labour is no more regarded as a commodity or a factor of production but its role as a partner in the production sharing in both the management of industry and its rewards finding increasing recognition. With the new revolutionary idea of labour being a co-partner in industry gaining momentum, institutional changes of a momentous character are bound

to take shape leading to the establishment of what may be called a genuine industrial democracy. How soon or how long this industrial democracy of our dreams takes in coming will largely depend on how labour behaves. But the Labour Acts on the whole constitute a great gain and stand parallel with the land reforms, the Fundamental rights and the legal abolition of untouchability as a pillar of the new, free and equalitarian society we are trying to build.

The country has worked the Plan with a will. The ideal of socialistic society is in the process of being actively translated through the achievement of many of the specific economic targets—in many cases they have been exceeded—and the social objectives. Over the Plan period national income in constant prices will have increased by 18 per cent as against the target of 11 per cent and per capita income is likely to show an increase of over 10 per cent. True, it does not offer to the generality of our citizens a decent life, free of fear, of want. It certainly sets the pace which is bound to be progressively quicker. The new factories and the multi-purpose projects, cannot be just dismissed as show-pieces. They are part of the foundations of a new life and they are themselves symbolic of the new life.

Is there any awareness of this fast emerging new life in real India—the India of villages? What are the social gains registered by the realisation of the economic objectives?

Firstly, the bonds linking the State with the sub-merged and backward citizen, the citizen in need and distress, have been strengthened and stabilised. The Constitution abolished untouchability. The Untouchability (Offences) Act, enforced from June 1955, makes the practice of untouchability a cognizable offence. An expenditure of Rs. 20.28 crores on welfare schemes for Scheduled Castes in addition to Rs. 6.25 crores for Centrally sponsored schemes for housing, drinking water supply and aid to voluntary organisations, has gone a good way in enkindling a new sense of dignity and

worth among the lowliest. There are, moreover, the State plans. During the First Plan 4500 wells were sunk for the Scheduled Castes under Central Schemes in addition to thousands sunk by the States. Under the Second, 8200 more wells under the Centrally sponsored schemes and 15,200 wells under the States' plans are to be sunk. Also, 93,300 houses and house-sites are to be provided at a cost of about Rs. 3.48 crores. The Centrally sponsored schemes will account for 36,000 more houses at a cost of about Rs. 1.77 crores. Segregation of any kind is to be avoided and the extremely backward would receive priority in the matter of housing. Under the State plans 7000 Harijan students are to be trained at special craft training centres while under the Centrally sponsored schemes 160 training-cum-production centres would be opened for training 33,444 persons in various crafts and trades. As against the provision for less than a million scholarships in the First Plan, there are to be over 3 million freeships and scholarships and 6000 schools and hostels during the Second Plan period. The constitutional safeguards for the protection of the interests of the Scheduled Castes in the matter of educational progress, representation in services which are, however, being worked through administrative measures and non-official effort for the eradication of untouchability from men's minds, have found due encouragement.

The ex-criminal tribes are being settled and trained in the ways of settled community life. The stress is on economic rehabilitation and weaning away the younger ones from the anti-social practices of the past. During the First Plan period 42056 students belonging to the ex-criminal tribes were awarded stipends, grants and scholarships and 291 schools including children's centres and samskar kendras were opened. Vocational training and hostel accommodation were also provided. About 3629 families were helped to settle into agriculture through subsidies. Co-operative societies organised numbered 113 and cottage in-

dustry centres 33. There are now 17 settlements and 30 colonies for the members of the ex-criminal tribes. The provisions in the Second Plan are very much larger.

Development programmes for the Scheduled Tribes comprised development of the tribal economy, health, housing and water supply, education and culture and communications. In the First Plan Rs. 6 crores were spent in developing roads and communications in the Tribal areas. To facilitate instruction of the children in the tribal dialects special text-books were prepared in eight such dialects. Four lakhs fifty thousand tribal students received financial assistance and 4000 schools were established in the Tribal areas. Forest labour co-operatives numbered 6553 and multi-purpose ones and grain golas numbered 312 and 350 respectively. 111 cottage industry centres have also been established in the tribal areas. There were also established 3114 dispensaries and mobile health units and special provisions made for tackling diseases like malaria, small-pox, T.B. etc., which used to be epidemic in those areas. The provisions made under the Second Plan are ampler and more generous under each head. Welfare of women, children, the handicapped and the delinquent has also received due attention. Nor have the beggars and the destitute, old and the infirm and the mal-adjusted been forgotten. The welfare activities are directly or indirectly under the charge of the Social Welfare Board or its agencies or the State Governments. Voluntary social welfare work has acquired recognition and a status it hitherto lacked. Old and existing social welfare organisations have been enabled to maintain their existing level of activities and to expand them wherever possible. Welfare services are now extending their activities into areas and fields hitherto uncovered by them. A stimulus has been given to those desirous of participating in welfare work to lend their shoulders to the wheel of national effort for a relief of distress and destitution. New social welfare organisations are coming into

being in a climate of hopefulness and expectation. In addition to providing direct assistance to 2200 voluntary social welfare agencies, 317 welfare extension projects covering about 8000 villages have been inaugurated. Plans for enabling women in lower middle class families in urban areas to engage themselves in gainful employment are well under way.

For the first time in the wake of the First Five Year Plan the State, as such, began actively participating in the promotion on a nation-wide scale of social welfare which naturally has many facets. Prior to independence the meagre financial grants represented a combination of charity and grudging recognition of voluntary service. The entire concept of social welfare has now changed and democratic participation in services catering for the good of the needy, the under-privileged and the destitute are being encouraged and stimulated. Social law is being brought into line with the needs of the situation. The law making the practice of untouchability a penal offence and the Hindu Code Act fall in this category.

The First Plan provided for a total outlay of Rs. 136 crores for the rehabilitation of displaced persons. By the end of the First Plan period, 2.3 million displaced persons from West Pakistan have been settled on land and financial assistance provided for them. In urban areas 1.2 million displaced persons have been accommodated in evacuee houses and one million more in 2 lakh newly constructed tenements. Loans have been advanced to displaced persons for larger undertakings. In addition to the provision of educational facilities and establishment of small industries 75000 have already received training under vocational training centres and 6000 are under training. Similar assistance has been provided for displaced persons from East Pakistan but the progress of resettlement has not been very satisfactory due to the continued influx of refugees from that area.

In the sphere of social as well as general education considerable progress has been achieved and progress on a much larger scale has been mapped out under the Second Plan.

These are, I am quite aware, small provisions for tackling a problem of colossal dimensions but undeniably the Government means business though the limitations of resources and popular initiative are hurdles not easy to negotiate. It is also well to remember that though some of these figures are amply illustrative of the trend and extent of progress achieved in various social fields and are a concrete measure of welfare, their cumulative effect in creating a climate of opinion which invests with dignity and uniqueness, the lowliest of the land, cannot be precisely assessed or measured.

Secondly, a more egalitarian outlook has been engendered by the abolition or curtailment of age-old privileges. The Zamindars have gone. The Princes are fading out. Not only capitalists but even capitalism is undergoing, to a considerable extent it has undergone, a metamorphosis. I am not speaking of any change of heart. I am stressing the change in the nature of capitalism. It has been made to conform more and more to social needs. As the Prime Minister observed it is better strategy to mount a few guns on a hillock when occupying an enemy country than to post soldiers in each nook and corner. The Government has mounted not one but quite a number of guns on the strategic hillocks of private enterprise. There was a furore when Parliament cracked down on the Managing Agency System. It dates from the East India Company's practice of handling ventures for absentee owners and had gathered much support and more power, twenty-two agencies controlling between them twenty-three per cent of India's total industrial assets. The acquisition of the Imperial Bank and its conversion into the State Bank of

India, the nationalisation of Insurance and other basic enterprises, the progressive expansion of the public sector, taken together create a situation in which capitalism loses its directional powers and has to conform to the pattern of development determined by national needs. The constitutional amendment empowering Government to seize needed agricultural and other property without paying full compensation is a revolution in actual process and an index of the realisation that no theory, however sacrosanct, should be permitted to justify the continuance of the haves as the haves and the have-nots as have-nots. With the abolition of the office of the Rajpramukhs and progressive slashing of the privy purses, the last vestiges of the old feudal order are being removed. The day is not distant when nothing will be left of the power which property or capital were supposed to give, at least nothing of the power which sought to regulate the lives of numerous individuals. All the regulative powers now belong to the society and its political organisation—the State. This is a great change and is bound soon to affect social thinking and engender and nurture that climate of democracy without which it cannot thrive.

Thirdly, the subtle and none-too-obvious changes in the social order and outlook. Has the Indian Society developed a new equalitarian climate? Has the apathy and fatalism of the masses of Indian population been broken? Have the people emerged out of the old psychological cages? Have they developed a new sense of confidence, a new solace? Have the masses, who were for centuries, kept out of creative national endeavours and history-making found their rightful place? In an assessment of these intangibles there are bound to be differences of opinion. Many may aver that the general cultural climate has been hardly affected by the institutional changes and economic reforms embodying new values. Many may say that the masses have been so conditioned into communal and

parochial thinking by long habit and mental inertia that their adherence to modern political and social theories based on philosophic individualism is but formal. They still react to the appeal of group and parochial loyalties with those violent emotional responses which are typically tribal. The critics of the community projects point that they are not succeeding in imparting standards and arousing aspirations which outlast any temporary technical benefits. All this is carping and negative criticism. Those who know the India of our villages have no doubts that a revolution in thinking is in progress. The world, not only India, has lost the secret of community. The old sense of participation in a common life has to a great extent disappeared with the growth of technology and mass societies. The auto-determinism, so much spoken of in the totalitarian orders, which makes purposeful collective effort effectively possible does not achieve that balance between the individual and community in which neither is sacrificed to the other but each comes into its own. The problem in India, as elsewhere, is to seek forms of association in which the individual will secure his fullest development in a cooperative and creative fellowship—there is no fulfilment in isolation—without being lost. India is nearer the quest. The Community Projects are not only recapturing the old community sense; they are laying the foundations of a new rural order. They are working for the achievement of a new and higher rural-urban equilibrium. They have started developing into and becoming the integral parts of a popular and enlightened movement. Sant Vinoba's movement is infusing all the endeavours, group and national, with a moral purpose. But as is well-known, a change in social psychology does not come about within a few years. It is a slow process, sometimes, so slow that it is hardly visible. But it is all the while there. After the shake-up which Mahatma Gandhi gave to the country and the active

participation of the people in the movement for freedom, there is little chance of a relapse into the old passivity.

To sum up, the financial, economic and administrative measures adopted under the First Plan are bringing into being a new social order and outlook. In an overall view the objective facts appear to bear in the right direction. There are no internal centres of power which can hamper or obstruct the process. The Government is systematically and purposefully establishing an order in which reward is related to service and in which the State does what it can to ensure that all citizens enjoy an equality of opportunity. This is the new and great adventure. There are, of course, sterile cynics and doubting Thomases who prefer to live in their own glass houses. To them all is bleakness. They project their own darkness around themselves and get lost in it. But by and large the Indian people know they are moving and they know the goal too. Slowly but surely, under India's planning, social attitudes and an economic pattern are evolving which bear a very obvious relation to what any socialist must recognise as being his own ideal. That is the real explanation of the absence of an effective Left opposition. The slogan, opposition for its own sake, is at its best indicative of muddle-headedness.

I have no doubts that an over-all balanced view of the gains, political, economic and social, of planning in India will convince any clear thinking individual of the need for putting his shoulders to the wheel in a spirit of constructive co-operation. It will be more satisfying than sterile criticism.

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