

First M. Srinivasa Iyengar Memorial Lecture

WHAT AILS OUR DEMOCRACY?

By

SRI N. RAGHUNATHA IYER, M.A., B.L.



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PREFATORY NOTE

This pamphlet reproduces the M. Srinivasa Iyengar Memorial Lecture for 1968 delivered at the GIPA on 18-5-1968. It was first published, [together with an introductory Note on Mr. M. Srinivasa Iyengar (of the *Mysore Standard* and *Nadegannadi*] in the Institute's Journal *Public Affairs* for June, July, August and September 1968.

The subject and the lecturer are also important. The problem of democracy is one of the utmost urgency to India at present; and Mr. N. Raghunatha Iyer brings to its study a mind at once independent and enriched by learning and experience of public affairs. He was Assistant Editor of *The Hindu* for many years, and is the author of three stimulating volumes of comment on public men and public policy:

- (1) Stotto Voce
- (2) Avadi Socialists
- (3) Our New Rulers

Every page of these books is marked by Mr. Raghunatha Iyer's profound knowledge of history and politics, his intimacy with the classics of three literatures and his turn for epigram and satire. Reflections of a publicist of such distinction are sure to be full of illumination and instruction to the public. I have every hope this publication will be widely welcomed.

October 1968

D. V. GUNDAPPA,
Hon. Secretary, GIPA.

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SWARAJ INDIA is twenty-one years old. She has thus, chronologically speaking, come of age. But, to adopt for the nonce the Sanskrit convention and speak of the country as the Bharata Purusha, he is far from fulfilling the ideal of manliness and strength — *aasishio dradhishio balishtah* — which the Upanishad has set up. Being culturally orphaned, he does not know, or but dimly suspects where his secret treasure is laid up. And he is sick of an old passion; he longs to be what he was by nature meant to be. But he is bewildered by the multitude of counsel. However much his self-constituted guides might differ among themselves, every one of them insists that he has come into the world spiritually naked and in order to be presentable, must be made to cover himself with the particular patch-work quilt that he has stitched for him.

Let us now drop the metaphor and make a brief survey of the record of these twenty odd years. First, as to the political set-up. We adopted the parliamentary form of democracy and have seen four general elections. Till about a year ago it was the fashion to maintain that the elaborate edifice the Founding Fathers had reared on the basis of adult suffrage and unlimited illiteracy had proved to be a brilliant success. The fourth general election has brought a sharp reaction. Some people, especially those who have drawn blanks, are having second thoughts about democracy; others, without going so far, think that the British model has proved a miserable failure and we must opt for the Presidential system — a typical case of distant prospects pleasing. But everybody decorously averts his gaze from the truth that adult franchise has meant the practical elimination of the toothed wheel which makes representative democracy work. Our elected representatives do not by and large represent the real mind of the country. If they did, and felt they might be called to account by their constituencies, should we be

who could get Parliament to listen to them. Parliament, like all popular assemblies, was dominated by a few men of outstanding ability, and the King had to make his choice between them, choosing him who would carry most votes. Thus the Prime Minister came into the centre of the picture. Let us compare this with Indian polity as sketched by Bhishma : I select that in preference to the better known Kautilya polity, for the reason that the high centralisation and bureaucratisation the *Arthashastra* depicts was a transient phenomenon, being alien to the genius of the people. Bhishma says that a kingdom cannot be run by one man. The King must have helpers. His description of their status *vis a vis* the King is strikingly reminiscent of the familiar description of the British Prime Minister as *primus inter pares*.

Affinity with Ancient Polity

Taischa tulyo bhaved bhogaih ichattra - maatraajnyayaadhikaih : ("The King should make no distinction whatever between himself and his 'helpers' in the matter of amenities, status and so on, except that he alone sits under the umbrella of State and the royal writs run in his name".) According to the Ramayana as well, the Ministers worked in close co-operation with each other. Incidentally, Vyasa's picture of the ideal Minister is worth pondering. "They should be well-born, free from bodily ills, imperturbable, incorruptible, brought up in righteousness by the tutelage of the high-minded, valiant, modest, learned, well-informed, and in easy circumstances". To modern egalitarian ears that might sound suspiciously like aristocracy, but England was ruled by about forty families till the First World War, and British democracy achieved its most resounding triumphs in the Victorian heyday.

To return to the Bhishma polity. There were, apart from the Council of Ministers, and the officials, bodies of counsellors who represented the cream of the community. And from the Ramayana we know that on great issues the general assembly of the spokesmen of the people, including the 'srenimukhyas' and 'naigamas', was consulted. As regards the men he should take as counsellors, the King was warned in particular against giving his confidence or listening

to the advice of men who were contemptuous of the citizen. He was carefully to listen to the counsel of the leader of men "who has political insight and in whose righteousness the urban and rural folk have confidence".

*Poura-jaanapadah yasmin visvaasam dharmato gataah
Yodhaa naya-vipaschiccha sa mantram srotum arhati*

The old Indian polity did not know the ballot box ;— but its machinery of consultation served the purposes of elective democracy perhaps better than we have seen our brand-new apparatus do. The old-time King and his counsellors had their ears pretty close to the ground. The elaborate system of spies served largely the purposes which the modern newspaper does, or at any rate ought to. And in regard to taxation in particular, they proceeded with a circumspection and a moderation which would have made them recoil with horror from the totalitarian methods of our democratic Finance Ministers. They fully realised the wisdom of Burke's dictum: "Taxing is an easy business. Any projector can contrive new impositions ; any bungler can add to the old. But is it altogether wise to have no other bounds to your impositions than the patience of those who are to bear them?"

The 1967 Debacle

Now 'patience' is a word the implications of which all who love the country must carefully consider in the context of the masses' attitude towards our rulers. The one thing that the General Election of 1967 seemed to establish was that their patience was wearing dangerously thin. It gave a nasty jolt to the ruling party and a spurious confidence to some of the newer parties, but none of them has learnt the lesson. The masses behaved much like the whale in the story ; when the unsuspecting shipwrecked mariner bivouacked on its back, taking it for an islet, and lit a fire, the whale just turned on its side ; the next moment the sailor was in the water and swimming for dear life and thanking his stars that things were not worse. But unlike him our politicians go on playing the old game.

Unless the people are roused to the realities of self-government, and enabled to participate, through representatives chosen really *by* them, and not *for* them by any caucus, in the making of decisions the necessity for which they understand and the consequences whereof they can foresee, theirs will be but a shadow-play on the democratic stage. Everybody concedes that the man in the fields and the workshops does understand what bears nearly on his life and work, that he is hard-working, conservative but shrewd, not averse to cautious risk-taking, and that he can display public spirit in the environment where he lives his social life. Why then have the community development schemes been such a costly fiasco, and why has the much boosted Panchayati Raj been so fertile a breeding ground of faction? The difficulties into which the Co-ops., have run are blamed on the local money-bag. Surely he cannot capture them without the connivance of the local Tammany boss? The rural community had a traditional leadership—the landed class, the caste panchayat, the old peasant steeped in the lore and custom of the country, the respected village teacher. In their egalitarian fury the rulers have jettisoned that leadership lock, stock and barrel, adopting various means in the name of socialism and modernity, and substituted for it a parvenu class of intermediaries whose influence stems from their power to offer work on starvation wages during the long intervals of annual unemployment, their supposed pull with the bosses and their skill in fomenting factions. The contractors—their name is legion—are the rural counterparts of the urban licence and permit holders; the ruins of C. D. schemes are a monument to their acquisitive skill and ubiquity.

But while the caste panchayat has been sidetracked as an unclean thing, the wrong kind of caste feeling was never stronger, thanks to the systematic way in which the short-sighted cupidity and envy of the ignorant is worked upon, especially at election time, by the Tadpoles and Tapers, who also distribute (after deducting substantial commission, you may be sure) the bakshish that makes the votes flow. No wonder that the longest purses and the largest packets of lies too often win. The voter votes

not for principles and policies, nor even for personalities on a view of their fundamental commitment to Dharma (which was Bhishma's criterion) but as his *hangani* directs. But when the fanfare is over and the cash spent and the promises are discovered to be so much hot air, the villager is apt to run cynical. And he has a long memory. He sees how much worse off he is than he was twenty years ago for all his sweating and pinching and he sees side by side the blatant display of the new rich who operate the vote machine. In 1967 he showed his dislike of this state of affairs unmistakably.

Defects of the Constitution

Universal suffrage was a disastrous mistake ; some such scheme as was envisaged by Mrs. Besant in her Commonwealth of India Bill would have been far preferable. But there is no use crying over spilt milk. We can, however, try to mitigate the harm done. I shall presently place before you one or two suggestions in this behalf. But before doing that it is necessary to glance at the other disruptive factors that have been built into the Constitution. You have a Chapter on the Directive Principles of State Policy, which has simply no business to be there. It was merely a chunk of the election manifesto of the Congress Party slapped down into the Constitution which the sovereign people of India were supposed to be giving themselves. This was possible because the Congress dominated the body which was elected for a different purpose but was allowed to convert itself into a Constituent Assembly by a stroke of the legislative pen. The Directive Principles are a hotch-potch. Some of the clauses go contrary to the basic postulates of the Constitution. The liberal democracy proclaimed in the Preamble turns chameleon-like into the predatory socialism that claims absolute rights over the *ownership* as well as the control of the means of production in Art. 39 (b). That Article directs the State to see that ownership and control are so distributed as best to subserve the common good ; 'the common good' being, of course, what the party, that the chances of the hustings have brought on top, chooses to say it is.

No wonder that the elaborately paraded Fundamental Right to Property has, so far as land is concerned, been practically wiped out by a series of amendments; while the State has also conferred upon itself a Fundamental Right to extinguish any private enterprises without compensation by announcing that it intended to carry it on exclusively in future. A lurid commentary on the slogan "Land to the tiller" was the revelation, the other day, that in the U. P. surplus land has been distributed predominantly among substantial landholders. Meanwhile the landless labourer is out in the cold sucking his thumb. From the days of zamindari abolition, land legislation has been unabashedly class legislation for the security of the ruling party. The right to property or any other right for that matter, has not been labelled as fundamental by Britain at any time in her long constitutional history. But there, no less than in the U. S., which has a Bill of Rights, the right to property is in truth and fact regarded as fundamental, and guarded by the flaming sword of the Rule of Law ('due process,' and 'just compensation' being its American analogue). In fact one cannot imagine liberal democracy without the right to property, which from the days of Aristotle has been regarded as an indispensable safeguard of the freedom of the individual, the integrity of the family and the stability of society.

Another Clause, the one that bravely declares that the State shall endeavour to bring about prohibition, has today the melancholy interest that attaches to obituary notices. And yet the Supreme Court once felt so constrained by the superior claims of the Directive Principles over the Fundamental Rights that it held that any limitation imposed upon one of those rights in pursuance of a Directive Principle must be regarded as 'reasonable' in the language of the Constitution and could not be questioned. I am not entering into the merits of prohibition here; but I ask you would prohibition be incontinently scrapped if the people were behind it? Can even the partial implementation of a Directive of such exalted status—which has, too, been in force for many years over large parts of the country—be so casually undone by State Governments without showing up this Directive Principles Chapter for the dead wood that it is? The honest as well as the wise course is to cut it out.

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II

As regards the Fundamental Rights, moth-eaten as they are, it is doubtful whether politicians avid for power will acquiesce in the Supreme Court's decision that they must not be amended further. These Rights, as I showed in a book published some years ago, were in their origin the pawns of party gambling. When presenting the Interim Report of the committee that dealt with the subject to the Constituent Assembly in April 1947, Sardar Patel proposed the omission of the exceptions the Committee concerned had tacked on to the Rights to Freedom in Art. 19; this was enthusiastically agreed to by the Assembly. The result was that the Rights were absolute in form, as in the American Bill of Rights, and only the Supreme Court would have been able to pronounce on the reasonableness of any limitation the Executive might propose. But when the matter was brought up finally before the Assembly in December 1949, all the limiting exceptions had been reintroduced and some new exceptions had been added.

Pakistan had come into being in the interval. It has been suggested that the omission of the exceptions in 1947 was due to the fear that they might be misused in the predominantly Muslim autonomous States. When it was clear that there would be no such States in truncated India, the Congress decided that what might have proved an instrument of tyranny in Muslim hands would be an invaluable tool of social engineering in patriotic Congress hands!

No less divorced from principle was the manner in which the Right to Freedom of Religion was dealt with, conceding to

the religious minorities the unlimited right to proselytise in a country where the vast majority belong to a non-proselytising religion. Spokesmen of the evangelistic faiths, from the Lindsay Commission onward, have made no secret of the fact that all their educational, medical and other missions had the ultimate object of winning souls for Christ. That made no difference to our broadminded statesmen's view of the propriety and wisdom of enshrining the right to conversion in the Constitution; the right to "propagate" religion, being expressly mentioned, unlike in any other Constitution that I have seen, which at all refers to freedom of religion. And in spite of the evidence that has accumulated over the years—in Nagaland, in Madhya Pradesh, and so on—of the insidious activities of missionaries, our Government is as complacent as ever. Some time ago the American papers carried the sensational allegation that the United States Government had a definite understanding with the Government of India that in view of American aid the activities of American missionaries would not be interfered with. Delhi is quick enough to contradict incorrect reports which irk it, but I have not seen any contradiction issued in this matter.

At the same time the rampant secularism of the Congress taboos all religious education in the State-maintained schools, though education is the obligatory duty of a taxing State and no seasoned democracy considers education complete without religious education and the moral instruction that can be effective only if grounded in religion. Refusal to impart religious instruction on the ground that it might promote religious discord is like refusing to light the oven lest the roof should catch fire. We are dearly paying in student hooliganism for this fundamental right accorded to the unbeliever. And what is one to think of that secularism which ostentatiously claims the right to make-hay of the personal laws of the majority community, while it quails at the thought of a uniform civil code for all communities, though there is a positive Directive (Art. 44) to that effect?

The manner in which the Congress dealt with the Preventive Detention provisions in the Fundamental Rights chapter afforded

a glaring contrast to its attitude to the basic religious rights of the people. It gave Preventive Detention a more exalted place in the very structure of the Constitution than it had ever occurred to the British to claim for it. And Congress policy in this respect has shown an unblest consistency all these twenty years of its imperium; it has taken five years to nerve itself to the belated and half-hearted annulment of the emergency.

From what I have said so far, I hope it will be clear that if it is decided to rewrite or amend the Fundamental Rights Chapter, whether by summoning a national convention or otherwise, lovers of liberty should strain every nerve to reinstall the basic rights without ambiguous and nullifying qualifications, leaving it to the supreme judiciary to pronounce on any action taken by the executive which might have a bearing on these rights.

Regional and linguistic cleavages

After twenty years' experience of a Constitution working with a strong bias towards the Centre, we are appalled to discover that in addition to the traditional vertical cleavages based on religion and community have been added horizontal chasms produced by regional and linguistic self-love. True, there has always been an under-current of discontent among the economically more backward States; they felt that it was a case of *Dilli dur-ast*, that the States which by their bulk and predominance of representation in the legislature and the administration had a larger pull than the others, found the Centre more ready to listen to them. But it is the advent of the linguistic State that has enormously intensified this self-consciousness and mutual acerbity. The revolutions within the State hierarchies of the Congress Party caused by this chauvinism has brought on top, men who, while paying lip service to national integration, entertain ambitions of playing the Peishwa to the Delhi Moghul. Outsiders have openly speculated whether the Central Cabinet might not become in effect a mere delegation of the States Chief Ministers. The acute embarrassment which the Centre feels in having to deal with the Mahajan Report tells its own tale; what a contrast is here to the ready deference

to the International Court's decision on the Cutch dispute—not that I question for a moment the propriety of the Government's decision, in the latter case, that we must lie gracefully on the bed we have made!

Traditional territorial loyalties, and the more material considerations that enable politicians to work up passions over such matters as water-disputes are not to be pooh-poohed. But it is surely time to cry halt when the spokesmen of our States assail each other more rancorously than America and Russia do in the U. N., and the honesty of a Minister faced with the delicate task of arbitrating on rival claims, or finding a *via media*, is impugned because his home State is interested in the dispute.

State boundaries have been largely the result of historical accidents or administrative exigencies. Uttar Pradesh was known to us at school sixty odd years ago as the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh; the name perpetuated the memory of an amalgamation of separate provinces. The result is a huge conglomerate of disparate parts and yet, when a member of the linguistic Reorganisation Commission suggested that in the interest of efficiency it might be split into two parts, the late Pandit Vallabh Pant flared in indignation, saying that it was like asking that the cow be cut in two. Others outside that influential State rather uncharitably suggested that it was not religious veneration, but down to earth political considerations that inspired the outburst. Madison's main argument for a Federation was that by extending the sphere of choice of representatives "you make it less probable that a majority of the whole will have a common motive to invade the rights of the other citizens". You will see how much that argument loses its force, when four huge contiguous States, intent on Hindi supremacy (to take but one cause of dispute likely to arise), command between them a near majority in Parliament and a more than proportionate voice in the Cabinet.

And that reminds one that it was the special place accorded to Hindi in the Constitution that enormously strengthened the demand for the formation of linguistic States. And, with all due deference to those here who may think otherwise, I must state my view that

linguistic States are, along with Pakistan and adult franchise, the three Himalayan blunders for which we shall have to pay indefinitely. It might not have been so bad if the mystic formula, "One language, one State" had not been so rigorously followed. Somebody has said that if the country had been split up into thirty handy States, there might have been sizeable linguistic minorities in some of the States, which were in the majority in the others, and thus some sort of guarantee for fairness might have been achieved, as well as the satisfaction of *amour propre*; while the real differences in history, development, natural resources and opportunities between a number of regions which had been artificially joined by a political act into one State would not have been masked under the spurious unity of a common language.

Here, again, it is too late to undo the mischief. But might it not be possible to do something positive to draw men's minds off this barren obsession? *Senas* of one description or other are springing up like dragon's teeth all over the place. If a Keralite may be treated as an enemy alien in Poona or, a Mysorean in the sacred land of Kari Boli, why do we rant against South African Apartheid or the blimpishness of the British' Powells? *Civis Romanus Sum* was the proud boast of the barbarian on the Rhine. Shall not the people of this ancient land, whose sages said, "The mother and the mother-land are dearer than life itself" feel the warm glow of affections steeling over their hearts at the very thought of Indian citizenship?

There is no use contenting ourselves with pious inanities about national integration. The tragic assumption that a North Indian dialect could be imposed as an official language by a Government fiat, and then it would grow like Jack's beanstalk and cover the whole of Indian earth, should be given up before more mischief is done. No country of the size of India, or characterised by such immense diversity, ever had or ever could have a common language. It is not impossible that if there were no bungling interference with the operation of time and natural forces, and attention was concentrated on things that really mattered, some

day a kind of polyglot might emerge, as Urdu did, and might serve those who needed it. But that kind of thing is not produced by taking thought, much less by constantly treading on each other's corns. Let every one try and make his language as beautiful, comprehensive and perfect as possible. That happened to Russian in the Nineteenth century, thanks to the 'fortunate emergence of a galaxy of literary giants. Languages are not made in the Secretariats or the Law courts. Meanwhile the day's work must not be held up while we are all herded into Hindi classes. Let every man be free to learn the language or languages he will need in life. Where the nature of one's employment requires it, a man might be asked to 'acquire competence in a particular language. But where the employer happens to be the Government, it will have to remember that what is sauce for the non-Hindi gander is sauce for the Hindi goose also.

And it is absurd to make a dead set against English which the man from Goa needs when he wants to speak to the man in Gaya, and needs far more badly if he has to put through a deal with a Japanese firm or a firm in South America. Our attitude towards that language should be purely pragmatic. Even the Hindi enthusiast concedes that you must have a window on the world. Your village barber will not go to Delhi, nor does his living 'depend on his knowing any language but his own Kannada. Why in the name of common sense insist on his learning, either Hindi or English? But men who go in for higher education with a view to entering the professions or the higher ranks of the administration will have to know English. There is no help for it. What should be the medium of instruction is a matter for teachers to decide. Why should we be invited to spend millions of money on incompetent translations of text-books and law reports? It is said that the language of the courts must be the language of the people. It is that to a more or less degree in many of the courts. If it be insisted that it should be used in all courts and in all contexts, one may ask, "Is it proposed to dispense with lawyers altogether? Are not the newspapers there to give the man in the street all that he needs or wishes to know of what the courts are doing?"

Again, in the sphere of executive government, English is, I believe, employed only in the offices that have a State-wide jurisdiction and have to deal with other States and the Centre. What shall we gain by insisting that nothing there shall be only in the local language? Why should not English remain the official language at the Centre as it does in the Irish Free State? Is there no advantage to be gained by the same free commerce of minds among men in administration as there admittedly is among men in the professions? The notion that an S.S.L.C. qualification was sufficient for Government service, which received the imprimatur of an official Committee, has, as any one knows who know what is happening, done more to lower the standard of efficiency in the services than any other single cause. Why should something like a ceiling on educational qualifications be imposed for Government service alone, when promotion from the lower to the higher cadres is more liberal than under British rule, and the higher echelons require as much intellectual power, knowledge and versatility as any of the professions or the world of scholarship? If these cadres are, as they ought to be, filled by men with superior qualifications, why should they not go on using the English language? After all, uniformity in administration is as much to be desired as in the dispensation of justice; that is the only way to maintain standards.

Statism—Corruption and Extravagance

Even without the army of translators bilingualism will bring in its wake, we have enormously bloated civil establishments. The Chairman of the A. R. C. has already begun despairing of the Committee's recommendations for slimming being given effect to. Bureaucracies, like primitive jelly-like forms of life, grow by simple adhesion, and often in fits of forgetfulness. An American writer points out that in his country there is a suspicion, not always without cause, that vast Government agencies employing thousands of people, "set up to deal with some long-ago emergency, have continued to live an almost independent existence because no one has found them and told them to close up shop". Here we go one better. Clerkdom swells not so much because

temporary staffs perpetuate themselves as because political jobs multiply and every minister must have his gentleman, his gentleman's gentleman, and so on in an endless series. And the larger the number of hands, the larger the number of itching palms.

Everybody agrees that corruption has enormously increased since the advent of freedom. Democracies are notoriously venal. But in other democracies the canker is to some extent controlled by the existence on the one hand of a public that is conscious of its rights and prepared to fight for them, and on the other of a formidable corps of muck-rakers. In Britain or America no leader, however exalted, can pronounce plenary absolution over erring colleagues or subordinates, consulting merely his inner consciousness. Our public is too apathetic to quarrel against fate. Our respectable Press is far too respectable to handle muck, even though only with a rake. When Governorships, Chairmanships, gilded delegacies *ad lib*, are bestowed on the lame and the halt and the party hacks, few protests are heard. For twenty years the Congress resisted the demand for a ban on companies' subscriptions to Party funds; now that other parties are getting some of the scraps, the Congress has awoken to the unhealthiness of the practice. It is four years since the Santhanam Committee reported. There is now a Bill in the offing creating a Lok Pal and Ayuktas. But the Committee's suggestions for cutting red tape in regard to the bringing of corrupt officials to book are still being sat upon. Two thousand years ago Kautilya insisted on continual vigilance; he emphasised that every one in authority, including the ministers, should be tested not once or twice, but during the whole period of their service. We may be horrified by his elaborate system of espionage and informers, though Incometax does not disdain to make use of these. But one suggestion of his seems eminently worth examining: that the prodigal, the miser and the spendthrift should all be suspected.

Statism is a prolific breeder of jobs; and there is a long and unblest tradition in this country that public money is no man's money—though the Dharmasastras prescribe the most stringent penalties for the looter of Raja-dhanam. To lessen corruption, if for nothing

else, Statism should be curbed. Reduction of public spending or squandering would keep inflation within reasonable bounds. Reform without retrenchment can be only an eye-wash. The gradual diminution of the importance of the State as employer would have at least one other advantage ; employment would depend upon accepted criteria of merit. Private employers cannot afford to dole out jobs on caste or communal considerations. And in all its melioristic schemes the Government should apply one and only one test of backwardness, the economic test for the individual. The backward and the depressed should not be encouraged to cling to that class status and to hug that mentality. Just as in a democracy like Britain the working class is constantly striving to lift itself up into the middle class, our poor— whatever their caste or community—should be enthused and helped to that honest self-effort which is the basis of self-respect. As for the redressal of historic wrongs, granting they are real, there is no point in keeping up the hunt for scapegoats. The better way is to leave it to the voluntary efforts of the philanthropic public and in particular to the caste or community itself—in so far as the generality are moved by a special fellow-feeling towards each other—to pool their goodwill and resources and uplift the weaker brethren and thus help them get over their inferiority complex. From this point of view it has always seemed to me that the refusal to extend the normal tax concessions to so-called denominational charities is based on wrong psychology. I have heard that in Mysore State there are important communities, officially labelled backward, who have set an example of self-effort by starting schools, colleges, and medical institutions. Such examples deserve to be encouraged.

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III

It is a trite saying that man is a social animal. But the unit of society in which his noblest virtues came into play — the old-time organic functional community — has been practically destroyed by urban industrial civilisation. Sociologists in the West are groping for some way of resuscitating that life. In India too the old village life is breaking up. But the hankering after the old amenity is still there, though not vocal. (You will have noticed that every new colony here in Bangalore unconsciously models itself on a village pattern. Unfortunately the village smells are there too!). If we are really to induce the masses to take an intelligent interest in public life, they must be helped to create a new community life which will fulfil both their material and spiritual urges, without losing consciousness of the fact that they are Indians first and last, and that the community in which they live must replenish its vitality continually from the well-spring of the national life.

Electoral Reforms

It seems to me that there is no single sovereign panacea for all the ills that we have been discussing, but a number of small, yet significant measures might open out promising ways of escape from universal frustration. Instead of indulging in academic speculation as to the advantages of a unitary Government we could see whether a modest measure of electoral reform, with proportional representation and multiple member constituencies as a rule, might not make for the emergence of healthier party divisions. That Proportional Representation has not been given a trial in Britain is not to be held against it. The large-scale

disfranchisement of political and cultural minorities under the present system has definitely militated against party alignments based on economic and social policies, and encouraged a mindless monolithic trend. "The best party", said the great statesman Halifax, known to history as 'the Trimmer', "is but a kind of conspiracy against the rest of the nation. They put everybody else out of their protection." He equated party with faction; it was after his time that the British Party system as we know it established itself. But have we really outgrown factions here?

The constituencies must be made the real source of political power. And that power should be harnessed in the first instance to the problem of local planning and execution of developmental activities. The average Revenue District, though largely fashioned by historical vicissitudes, does engage the affections of the people in a way that neither the State nor the country as a whole (politically speaking) yet does. The peasant can without much effort envisage progress in terms of physical achievement for his district. If the Zilla Parishads (and their analogues elsewhere) were asked to initiate proposals for projects on the basis of felt needs, to examine their progress and review their working; if, at the same time, the District Collector, restored to something like his old position of authority in the sphere of administration, and provided with necessary expert assistance, were invested with over-all responsibility for the actual execution; if the Central and State assembly constituencies were realigned within the District into a rather smaller number of multiple-member constituencies, with representatives selected by proportional representation; and if the members thus elected were required periodically to confer with the Zilla Parishads, study local problems and formulate ideas of reform or development, to be placed in due course before the large (States or Centre) forum — if these things were done, there would be two-way traffic between the centre and the circumference, constituencies would see their representatives more often, the Parties would have inducement to set up their own local machines working all the year round, and the villager would see these things done and learn the meaning, value and power of the vote.

The machinery is more or less there. A number of States have adopted the three-tier Panchayati Raj system. But the results are bizarre. Some of the fundamental safeguards have been neglected. The old fear was that bureaucracy might strangle village democracy in red tape. Today it is the politician at all levels that cows the bureaucrat and treats the panchayat as his private demesne. The Collector caught between his big and small bosses is more often than not a paper tiger. If the system is not to remain the ghastly farce that it is, no holder of elective office except members of the primary panchayats should be allowed to take up contracts or "offices of profit". And the interference of union presidents with the executive should be as effectively put down as any attempt on the part of officials to play politician.

If the suggestions above made were adopted with the necessary safeguards, in course of time diverse interests that cut across the barriers of regionalism, linguism, casteism and communalism, might organise themselves on an all-India basis with grass-roots in the constituencies, and sidetrack lesser constraining loyalties. Then it might be easier to set up administrative apparatus — such as a river board for the entire country — that would enable economic exploitation and equitable distribution of valuable assets, which may be legitimately regarded as belonging to the country as a whole.

The Press and Democratic Discussion

These tentative suggestions have no pretensions to anything like definitiveness or system. They are merely thrown out for discussion. Discussion is the life-blood of democracy; and the Press is still the most powerful medium of discussion. Though all media of mass communication have made considerable headway in recent years, serious discussion, which requires deliberation, reconsideration and continuity, cannot do without the printing press. In the eighteenth century, which gave British democracy its present shape, the pamphleteers were the formers of opinion. The great debate on American Federation was carried on by Hamilton, Madison and Jay in the columns of newspapers.

The Indian Press by and large has not been alive to its immense opportunity and responsibility in this matter. The press has no

doubt quite a few other functions, beside acting as the forum of opinion: it has to inform, to expose and amuse, as well as to instruct. But to my mind the press in a country like this has the primary duty of acting as the agenda-maker for democracy. If it is to be true to its trust, it must acknowledge no master but the public interest and insist on its right to serve it after its own fashion. It must refuse to be organised as the auxiliary of any other power. Professed party organs do not do much harm, they preach to the converted; they are, so to speak, the informal wing of the Information Department. But why should All-India Editors show such pathetic anxiety to seek inspiration from the fountain of ministerial wisdom? Every arm of the press runs to the Government to be protected against the others. No wonder that the Press Council has proved a farce and junior ministers are school-masterish.

The other day somebody was gravely exhorting the press to draw up a code to defend secularism, democracy and rule of law, and to lay down the line of action to be taken against erring newspapers. I have already said something about Congress Secularism and Democratic Socialism. And as for Rule of Law, the ruling party's example violently contradicts its precept. In twenty years there have been almost as many amendments to the Constitution, and it seems to be a point of honour with almost every Government in this country never to accept an adverse decision of the courts as final. Disorder is endemic. Violent infractions of the peace — caste, communal or other — should be swiftly, impartially and unhesitatingly put down. The record of authority in this respect has been less and less satisfactory. There is no use shrilly screaming when a more than usually horrible outrage takes place under our eyes and then subsiding into torpor again. There may be newspapers which see nothing seriously wrong in the present state of affairs, though I doubt it. But most papers are clearly distressed. Why do they not speak out — not spasmodically, not in spleen, not for making debating points, but in order to bring out the danger of accepting as axiomatic truths the opportunism and improvisation that too often pass for states-

manship? There are honourable exceptions of course, but they are far too few. I have a sad feeling that though everybody mouths the glib formula, "Facts are sacred, comment is free", there is far less general readiness on the part of the press than there was thirty years ago to give fair publicity to points of view with which the directors may not be in sympathy. A partisan press loses the rationale of its existence.

The place of the intellectual

The free press has an indispensable role in an inchoate democracy. It must maintain the intellectual climate in which well-tested ideas will become part of the national consciousness and make the politics of the day meaningful. It means, of course that the intellectual comes into his own. But does our society want him? And how far is the Indian variety of that article true to specification? I must devote the few minutes I have left myself to a brief and cursory view of this matter. Of late the shining lights of the ruling party have developed a warmth of affection for intellectuals, as sudden as it is surprising. The intellectuals have for long years been the neo-untouchables of our political world. Lawyers played a great and honourable part in the Congress in the pre-Gandhian era; their eclipse was all but complete with the advent of Swaraj. They were, in the eyes of the elect, tainted with the brush of moderatism. For the work of the Constituent Assembly the help of some top lawyers as well as of seasoned civil servants and other intellectuals was found useful: but they were never permitted to forget that they were there on sufferance and should not get above themselves. Because of the attractiveness of the various all-India services, considerable numbers of young intellectuals have entered them in recent years. But is the climate favourable to those who care to think for themselves and say what they think? I have my own doubts, and the performance of the economists on the panel of the Planning Commission are not calculated to dispel them.

I read the other day of a Congress Lawyers' Conference. To my way of thinking, a lawyer, an engineer or a medical man, let alone a journalist or an academic, should, if he is an intellectual, be wary of being annexed by any party. The professional will

have many valuable insights to offer if he brings to bear on public questions not only his expertise but intellectual rigour, probity, and an unfragmented culture. Far too long have the learned professions and intellectuals of every sort sulked in their tents. Politics even of the healthiest kind is but only one activity among the many which make for the harmonious unfolding of the potentialities of a people. And while the work-a-day politician has a place in it, his armoury needs to be replenished continually by the hard work of thinkers. For Literature, Education, Art, Commerce, Culture, Economic and Social research, and innumerable other creative activities, which will readily occur to all of you, the politician has no special competence. But in Swaraj India he has been allowed to lay down the law in all these matters. If the lawyers had spoken out on the Hindu Code, if the engineers had exposed the shoddy work and unsound plans that have cost millions of money, if the doctors had unitedly protested against the watering down of standards in medical education, the administration might not have been so headstrong. As it is, the results of bungling amateurism in education, to mention one of the most vital of such activities, have been near-chaos. When the Mahatma propounded his theory of education, very few educationists ventured so much as to hint at dissent or reservation. There were valuable elements in the Wardha scheme, but perceptive men did see how it might be easily caricatured. But they were benumbed by the magic of a great name. By a grim irony convent school culture is now firmly enshrined in fervently nationalist hearts who are rampant for unity through Hindi!

Battle of Two Cultures

I have often thought that this hesitancy and self-distrust of the contemporary generation of intellectuals rose partly at least from a sense of inadequacy, of consciousness of their roots not going sufficiently deep in the native ethos. I found much to confirm this feeling in the Report of a Seminar held under the auspices of the Indian Council for Cultural Freedom in 1961, which came out in book form in 1965. The Seminar took its cue from an observation made by Prof. Edward Shils of Chicago at a confe-

rence in Berlin, that the new States of Asia and Africa had given little thought to the "serious problem of combining modernity with an *identity-retaining continuity*". Prof. Shils apparently regarded the continuity as important. But by the time the Bombay Seminar had ended, the emphasis had subtly shifted. The question it asked and answered to its own satisfaction was, "If a synthesis (of Hindu religious tradition and the spirit of modernity) was possible, which elements of the Indian tradition are capable of incorporation into the new outlook that modernity stands for?" The assumption was that the rest had inevitably to go. The seminar concluded that *Manu* was muck and should go through the window; and as *Manu* represents Hindu tradition and is still dominant in Hindu Society, modern Hinduism with its entire outfit—God, *Karma*, transmigration, and so on—would have to be given up without a qualm. But they ask you to take comfort in the thought that materialism is also one of the strands of the Indian tradition. For proof we are invited to look not only at the "atheistic and life-affirming" Charvaka, but also at certain passages in the Upanishads. For example, from the passage in the Brhadaranyaka Upanishad, which speaks of Virochana imagining that Brahma taught him that the body was the soul and going away self-satisfied to teach the doctrine to the *asuras*, you are to conclude that the body-soul equation had a considerable following in ancient India. And another passage in the same Upanishad,— "*Etēbhyo devebhyo utthaya tanyevanuvinasyati*"—warrants the inference that the body perishes with the soul. Again poor Nachiketas is cited as an example of "the spirit of free and critical inquiry."

If this display of erudition does not convince you that, in taking leave of God and the soul, you will not be departing from the Indian tradition, you can console yourself with the reflection that modernity does not mind your keeping such harmless and pleasant things as your music, dance and handicrafts. The seminarists seem to be unaware of the fact that music and dance may also be insidious, because after all they were inspired by religion. As to 'spirituality', the seminar was of two minds. None of the speakers had any use for theology; but some thought that there

was no harm in mysticism of the kind Einstein and Tagore had exhibited, though they were impartially against Sankara for his world-negation, and a personal God who might refuse to be refined away into a hazy cloud.

All this exhausting cerebation was undertaken because the seminarists were absolutely certain that India must perish unless it went the whole hog in regard to not only modernisation, which means industrialisation, urbanisation *et hoc*, but also modernity. It seems modernity stands for three things. The first is a rational, secular and relative morality, which does not recognise absolute values; the second is a world view based on empirical scientific knowledge, which considers the search for truth more important than truth itself, since there is no such thing as absolute or final truth; and the third, a frame-work of institutions "better suited to the human urge and productive forces" set free by education, science and technology. Now, the West, the home of science, seems to be in no hurry to adopt, officially at any rate, the materialist world-view or the relativist and subjective ethics of intuitionism. Others beside Prof. Hayek have been sceptical of Scientism—the doctrine that "man can, by taking thought, direct in some measure the course of his future development". Nor does the West seem to consider either religion or even traditional ethics as inherently incompatible with science. Pascal, one of the greatest physicists and mathematicians of all time, was a mystic, a theologian and a brilliant pioneer in the application of science to technology. Those seminarists who scorned Hindu ethics on the ground that it breeds the toleration that is rooted in indifference and does not induce you to take active interest in your neighbour's welfare, perhaps did not remember that Mr. E. M. Forster, to whose gospel of the paramount importance of personal relations they enthusiastically subscribed, has no use for the bustling do-gooder. He holds that tolerance is a negative virtue, "it merely means putting up with people", and the activism of the muscular philanthropists and self-constituted uplifters is the breeding ground of fanaticism.

As regards the Seminar's thesis of the subjectivity of values, the relativity of truth, and the paramount importance of wealth and comfort, I will content myself with quoting a passage from the writings of that formidable intellectual, Lord Radcliffe, to show that Europe, rooted in its own tradition, has no more use for our seminarists' brand of modernity than India can have. He says in a sorrowful retrospect of post-war trends, but in no defeatist mood, "We seem to be losing at an alarming rate the power of independent judgment, the independent sense of value..... It does very greatly matter that each individual should be free to form, hold and honour his own belief as to the meaning and value of human life and its relationship to a spiritual universe that lies beyond it... But it does not by any means so greatly matter that society should be so organised as to produce the maximum sum of material wealth".

The battle of the "two cultures" may go on in the west, but there is little danger of the best minds agreeing in the name of science to the truncation of personality. Mr. T. S. Eliot put the matter in a nut-shell when he said, "For him (Pascal) in theological matters, which seemed to him much larger, more difficult and more important than scientific matters, the whole personality is involved"; we can find peace only through "a satisfaction of the whole being".

Our sages called it soul-making. They solved the problem of authority and liberty, which is at the core of democracy, in their own way by erecting the monitor within. All discipline enriched the spirit; all discovery was ultimately Self-discovery. And we must be true to that ancestral urge or perish. Karl Jaspers has well said: "No one can change his nationality without suffering for it. He will forfeit the power of expansion through participation in the whole out of which he has grown in his real world."

Matthew Arnold long ago pointed out the danger of constituting the man who is contemptuous of the past as a guide to the future. He wrote "I read (in Bentham's *Deontology*); 'While Xenophon was writing history and Euclid teaching Geometry, Socrates and Plato were talking nonsense under the pretence of talking wisdom and morality. This morality of theirs consisted in words; this wisdom of theirs, was the denial of matters known to every man's experience.' From the moment of reading that I am delivered of the bondage of Bentham". India too has her quota of Neo-philistines who glory in the cast-off cultural outfit of Europe. But she does not lack intellectuals who have faith in her age-long values, grit to speak out against current sophistries and powers of constructive thinking to shape her future in harmony with her past and in accordance with the national genius. They should set up their own forums and talk to the people.



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