# THE INDIAN FISCAL POLICY B. P. ADARKAR

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# TO THE UNIVERSITY OF ALLAHABAD

सितासिते सुरिते यत्रे संगुथे तत्र<sup>ं</sup> प्लुतासो दिव्**मृत्पं**तन्ति ।

### **PREFACE**

It was several years ago that I promised myself a volume on India's Fiscal Policy, mainly owing to a mental reaction against some recent academic literature on the subject, which seemed to suggest that Indian economists, in spite of their early pronouncements to the contrary, had abandoned the protectionist bias in favour of the laissez-faire ideology. The fulfilment of the promise was delayed; yet, such a volume surveying the whole field of our fiscal policy, becomes very opportune just at the moment for several reasons. In the first place, there is a helpful pause in the Tariff Board's work due to the War and it has become possible to avoid staleness. Secondly, inter-bellum years provide one completed period of the fiscal policy which roughly dates from the last war. Thirdly, most of the major industries which are receiving protection at present, will have completed their allotted periods by 1941 of 1942, and, if it were not for the War, should have had to face fresh enquiries by the Tariff Board by now. Finally, there is no doubt that when the war is over, a reexamination of the fiscal issues in the light of past experience and possibly a complete re-orientation of policy, involving the overhauling and systematisation of the tariff machinery and procedure, will be inevitable. What is more, most of the academic literature on the subject has become necessarily out-of-date, while some able analyses of our fiscal policy confine themselves to two or three of the major protected industries only, while examination of the cases of industries denied protection has been generally neglected. No apology, I hope, is therefore necessary for bringing out this study at the present moment.

The scope of the work is indicated by the natural division of the subject into two parts: Part I is styled "The Working of Protection" and gives a descriptive and analytical survey of the industries which Fiscal Policy had to deal with during 1923-40. Part II, on the other hand, is concerned with the

critical and general aspects of the subject. Thus, in Part I, I have attempted a review of the Tariff Board enquiries (numbering about fifty) and a "post-mortem" examination of the measures adopted in each case. I must state without hesitavion that it is futile, if not audacious, to question the validity of the Board's findings, especially on the factual side, as some writers seem to have done. The Board has had in each case at its command immense facilities, such as no individual can hope to possess, and, in fact, its Reports happen, in some cases, to be the only authoritative material surveying the industries concerned, somewhat on the lines of the Balfour Committee's Surveys in England. It may thus be possible perhaps to criticise the Board's conclusions, if at all, only on the grounds of wrong methodology, inaccurate principles, inaccurate statements regarding well-known national or international events, wrong emphasis, or non-sequitur logic and arguments. Though I have not been able to appreciate the conclusions of the Board in some places, I feel that the Tariff Board's work has been generally fair, impartial and almost always the result of painstaking inquiry and penetrating analysis, and that the Board has more often than not erred on the side of caution.

(The fiscal problem in India is two-fold.) In the first place it has its political side in so far as India has yet to attain the plenitude of powers, known as Fiscal Autonomy, such as the free countries of the world and the Dominions of the British Empire possess. The so-called "Fiscal Autonomy" conceded by the Convention of 1921 has been a bauble and a meaningless myth. The Dominions, to be sure, had also to carry on a long struggle with the "Mother Country" for obtaining the democratic power of shaping their tariff policies in consonance with their own requirements. Where it is not a Mother Country, but a "Step-Mother Country," it is obvious that a grimmer struggle is inevitable. Imperial preference has been a partial, though harmful, solution of the conflict between British and Indian commercial interests. But fundamentally speaking it does not appear to me that there can be any permanent compatibility between a free exercise of our fiscal freedom and the maintenance of Britain's hegemony in the future commercial developments in India. The other,

and more academical, part of the Indian fiscal problem is the determination of a correct policy for the country to adopt Here, there cannot be any room for doubt that the present system of Discriminating Protection has been disappointingly slow and ineffective. I do not suggest that mere manipulation of import tariffs by itself can work miracles. It is evident that even if we exhaust the entire import schedule, we may not be able to build up an all-sided industrial system for the market thus released is not very large in most cases. Yet, fiscal policy, along with monetary, banking, transport, power and financial policies, fits into a general scheme of economic planning aimed at nation-building. The greatest need of the hour is the galvanisation of the country's human and material resources into activity and the attainment of a higher productive efficiency, which can only come about through the mechanisation both of agriculture and industry, i.e., the application of accumulated knowledge due to scientific progress. Fiscal Policy, correctly conceived and effectively executed, can not only provide the initial impetus for the cumulative spiral of industrial employment, but will for long remain a potent safeguard for the future industries which will arise to cater for the internal market under the aegis of a planned national economy. As an integral part of planning, therefore, the instrument of Fiscal Policy is bound to be valuable; but it would be incorrect to suppose that the State can do no more than levy tariffs and leave industries to work their own way to success. "In India," as Dr. C. R. Reddy put it recently, "the State must undertake the primary responsibility for the economic reconstruction of the country." The laissez-faire idea, still reigning supreme at Government headquarters, is wholly incompatible with the vicissitudes of the modern age in which active interventionism is the order of the day

The War has thrown our economic, as well as political, institutions into the melting-pot, and it may not be too optimistic to hope for the re-formulation of our fiscal policy, when it is over. It is a matter of some satisfaction that the present Commerce Member of the Government of India, Sir A. Ramaswamy Mudaliar, was able to announce not only that the Government intends to "liberalise" the conditions of protection, but that after the War, a comprehensive enquiry

would be "inevitable." At the end of the last War, several industries, which had arisen under the shelter of a closed market, succumbed to the fierce competition which soon followed. This time, "assurances" of security are being given by the Government to those industries which assist in the "war effort," provided they satisfied "certain conditions." There is reason to fear, however, that the "war effort" is the chief or, perhaps, the only consideration governing the decisions and that the permanent needs of large-scale industrialisation are neglected or even opposed by certain elements and interests. While the War is going on, no one can expect any comprehensive measures of reorganisation, but certain paramount considerations have been indicated towards the end of this volume, which, to my mind, appear to be fundamental to the shaping of our future Fiscal Policy, if the Indian industries, old and new, are to survive the aftermath of war.

It remains for me to express my gratitude to those who have helped me in the production of this work. My thanks are due to my cousin, Mr. B. N. Adarkar, Assistant to the Economic Adviser, and to Messrs. K. L. Govil and P. C. Jain, my friends and colleagues at the Allahabad University, for helpful discussion, suggestions and supply of relevant literature. To my publishers, the Kitabistan of Allahabad, and printers, the Allahabad Law Journal Press, I am thankful for the efficient production of this work. Finally, I owe tons of thanks to my wife for assistance in transcribing, in typing and in collecting material, as also for being patient with me during many hours of silence and toil!

6th January, 1941

B. P. Adarkar

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