

UNDERSTANDING STATE SYSTEM PERCEPTION OF INDEPENDENT INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Others alike the postcolonial state in India, its nature and the role has been interpreted in different ways. In India's case the liberals consider the active intervention of the state as an agent for recovering from centuries of colonial exploitation and underdevelopment. After independence the popular perception saw the state as an instrument of modernisation-socio-economic, political and cultural and the capitalists foresaw the state as an instrument to catalyze development. The Marxists criticised the national bourgeois, including a large section within the Congress party to support the capitalist path of development and reshape the economy and society with a view to expand national capitalism in India (Desai, 1984). State capitalism in India performed dual functions immediately after independence - acquiring social legitimacy and accumulating capital without external dependency. The active role of the state in development as explicated by the Nehruvian model of development, facilitated the mobilisation of economic resources for the interest of capitalist. Nehruvian socialism, in fact, strengthened the capitalist state. By controlling the state apparatus, the national bourgeoisie decisively influenced the developmental policies of the government. This mixed perception about state system in India is the by product of its social diversities which is similar in most Afro-Asian countries where no clear-cut policy of state system is in operation or obtained as legacy of the past. It also highlights the power-struggle among the various contending groups. The study, in larger context, would help in understanding the various state systems along with its power-nexus in prevailing society.

Keywords : Society, State, Power system, Political Party and Ruling elite.

Different Approaches of State System

From the beginning of the two prevalent approaches - state - centric and society - centric in relation to the way in which society is organised and governed, India is clearly near the former. State- centricism is described as the perception that operators of the state system - politicians, bureaucrats, the military, industrialists and representatives play the most decisive roles in the determination of public policies. Such actors influence the structure and content of public policies introduced by the state, which embodies a system of law and government; a structure of offices with jurisdiction over a definite territory in which its citizens are located; and a centre of bureaucratic skills focused on information, calculation and implementation

(Tivory, 1981). It also implies that the state is comprised of essentially of politicians and bureaucrats, since the making of public policy is the responsibility of the former while interpretation and implementation of public policy falls under the jurisdiction of bureaucrats. For many developing countries, the state centric approach becomes very useful when there are few sustained, well-organised social groups and when the population has limited international exposure. However its overdose may bring about discontent among the population and diminish the acceptability of state elites.

In contrast to the state - centric model which assumes the state to be an autonomous entity, the society - centric approach treats the state as an entity dependent on society and on social forces. Advocates of this approach argue that causes of decisions about public lie in understanding relationships of power and competition among individuals, groups or classes in society or in their international extensions. In this system the state becomes a representative structure that translates the expressed demands of members of society into policy outputs. According to Blondel a key function of government is to convert suggestions, values and ideas from inputs to outputs (*Blondel, 1982*). Society is assumed to be comprised of a large number of groups with varying interests and desires that they pursue. The dominant or allied classes eventually influence and shape the processes of the state (*Bjorkman, 2001*). In nutshell state - centric and society - centric approaches differ in their emphasis on the values, perceptions and preferences of the state versus those of societal classes and groups in the political decision-making process. However, both are used, in practice, depending on the type of activity sought; the prevailing social, political and economic circumstances; and the time available to accomplish the activity. Since the state arises out of society while society can not exist without some kind of administration or state, it is difficult to consider any of them as being independent of others in the decision-making process. The society - centric approach emphasises the centrality of social classes and interest groups in the initiation of public policies, while the state centric approach focuses on the operators of the state system or the government.

In a democratic set up party-system of the state is essential and has profound effects on the process of social, economic and political changes. Democracy seems to be the order of the day which is a widely accepted form of governance and still activities are on to democratise the institutions, the organisations and the society. In a state, writes Harold J. Laski in his book, *A Grammar of Politics*, ‘Parties arrange the issues upon which people are to vote. It is

obvious that in the confused welter of the modern state there must be some selection of problems as more urgent than others. It is necessary to select them as urgent and to present solutions of them which may be acceptable to the citizen body. It acts, in Lowell's phase as the broker of ideas. From the mass of opinion, sentiments, beliefs, by which the electorates move, it chooses out those it judges most likely to meet the general acceptance. It organises persons to advocate its own view of their meaning. It states that view as the issue upon which the voter has to make up his mind. Its power enables it to put forward for election candidates who are willing to identify themselves with its view (*Laski, 1979*). Countries which have granted universal adult franchise expect their voters to exercise their franchise in a free and fair manner and also expect the political parties to extend their support to ensure on their part purity and transparency in the electoral process as held by Ivor Jennings, 'in a democracy political power rests in free elections'.

With the spread of democracy, the role of national as well as regional political parties has also assumed immense significance for participation in the elections, formation of the government and discharge their functions as responsible opposition parties for the success and smooth functioning of democracy and its institutions like parliament, state legislatures etc. The political parties serve as a link between the ruler and the ruled. The Party in power is entrusted with the task of running the government in accordance with the programmes and policies envisaged in its Manifesto and the opposition parties serve as a watchdog on the actions of the government to find out its shortfalls and make the people aware about them (*Kumar, 2009*). The opposition party is always in look out for an opportunity to dislodge the ruling Party from the seat of power through the electoral process, whereas the ruling party becomes conscious about its rivals' tactics and tries to rectify its policies to retain in power. In this manner political parties play significant role in strengthening the process of democracy and consolidating the foundations of democracy.

State System and Constitution of India

The Constitution of India gave citizens of the country the right to elect their own Government and the Parliamentary democracy needs parties which are eligible to be elected by the broadest possible strata of the population. This opportunity for co-determination of political actions would have been without any impact if every voter were obliged to express his opinion individually, for the interests and opinions of the people vary according to their social

position or origin. In such a situation the necessity of parties becomes very much clear. The working of the Party system as well as the role of political leaders significantly influences the process of modernisation so crucial to developing societies like India. In fact the political parties evolve on the local dynamics, ideological past and socio-cultural as well as political expediency. The development of Indian Party system can be traced to the freedom movement days which resulted in the wide-ranging political recruitment, vast political socialisation and mobilisation of the masses. The Indian National Congress led the freedom struggle more as a mass movement for political emancipation than as political party. The ideological multiplicity and other contradictions within the Congress itself resulted in the development of parallel political parties/movements. Some of the political parties have their origin from before India's independence, for example, Indian National Congress, Forward Bloc, Akali Dal, National Conference and some other parties. Some of these parties were either social or political organisation before India's independence and they became political parties after India's independence. However, many of the present parties were established after independence.

Since the inauguration of its republican constitution in 1950, India, like other developing countries, presented an exciting scenario of Party system. On account of the continental size of the country and due to the large scale diversities based on religions, language, region caste, history and physical features, the makers of Indian constitution opted for the Parliamentary form of government. The heterogeneous and pluralist character of Indian society impelled them to form a liberal and secular constitution. Along with parliamentary democracy they also decided to have a federal system instead of unitary system (*Pal, 2008*). Federalism in India defines the power distribution between the federal government and the states. The government abides by constitutional checks and balances. But to maintain unity, integrity and development of the Indian polity they also decided to have a strong centre in this federal system. It was seen as a basic requirement for accelerating the process of modernisation, economic growth and institutionalising political democracy.

Apart from this, keeping in view the vastness and diversity of the country and the enormity and variegated nature of the problems confronting the nation, Indian Republic envisaged the existence of multi-party system, which represents the multiethnic and culturally plural character of Indian society. They introduced the single ballot simple majority electoral system that is generally considered essential for the success of Parliamentary democracy. This type of system envisages majority government which, in turn, is based on the game of numbers.

The Party which gets majority of seats in the lower house of the legislature is asked by the Head of State to form the government. This government does not have a fixed term but continues to exist so long it enjoys the confidence of the lower house of the parliament. The term of the Indian Parliament is, however, fixed for five years. But when no Party gets majority of seats in the legislature, it becomes difficult to form a government in such a situation. A coalition of parties is then thought upon to tide over the crisis created by a hung legislature. A number of parties in that situation come together and form a coalition to claim support in the legislature.

Indian Multi-party System in Global Context

The multi-party system obtaining in India is basically different from that prevalent in western countries like France and Italy. In a model multi-party system seldom any single party is able to obtain majority of seats in the legislature and such a system is more often than not results in the formation of a coalition government. In contrast, initially, India marked a departure from such a model. Scholars designated Indian Party system as "one party dominant system" and the concept was popularised in the 1960s by W.H. Morris Jones and Rajni Kothari. In a classic study they held the view that a one party dominant system is a multi-party system, in which free competition among parties occurred but in which the Indian National Congress enjoyed a dominant position, both in terms of the number of seats that it held in Parliament in New Delhi and the state legislative assemblies, and in terms of its immense organisational strength outside the legislature (*Kohli, 1991*). From 1952 to 1967, the peculiar party system generally described as the one-party dominant system as only the Congress was voted time and again with an overwhelming Parliamentary majority on plurality of votes in democratically contested elections. The Congress by virtue of being a pioneer in the freedom struggle, became an increasingly effective election winning machine. In 1952 the Congress had absolute majority in 18 out of 22 state assemblies. In the second and third general elections the Congress Party retained its hold on masses and occupied the seats in Lok Sabha more than required for making the government.

However, the Indian model of one Party dominance, in early years, was different from the one-dominant Party system of Ghana, Mexico, Alger and Egypt. The Indian Party system's dominance was democratic and constitutional. It was marked by in-built corrective and restraining force provided by factionalism within the Congress and occasional threats from

without. The Congress maintained an "umbrella" character and tried to build "consensus" and in this process accommodated various shades of political ideas and interests. In view of Maurice Duverger a party is dominant, if it displays the following two characteristics in a two-party or multi-party system : (a) It clearly outdistances its rivals over an extended period of time; and (b) it identifies itself with the nation as a whole. Its doctrines, ideas and even its style coincide with those of the times. The electoral success and the working of the Congress Party during the first twenty years after independence prompted Morris Jones and Rajni Kothari to characterise the Indian Party system as that of one Party dominance. The historic role of the Congress in the national movement, trauma of partition, the charisma of Nehru's leadership and the weaknesses of regional political parties led to the beginning of Parliamentary democracy in India with Congress at its centre. In the formative years, the founding class drew its legitimacy from its association with the freedom struggle, it renewed that legitimacy from the democratic promise, a promise that was at total and complete variance with the colonial state and feudal order (*Khare, 2007*). Within a decade of Independence, the constitutional order was definitely fulfilling two primary conditions, of popular acceptability and political representativeness. Simultaneously, the new nation-state was trying to prove its competence by undertaking a welfare agenda. The political culture was remarkably commensurate with the state's self-assigned goals and objectives.

On the whole, the Congress occupied the broad center of the political spectrum as well as most of the left and right. Throughout the 1950s, and 1960s, Indian National Congress was able to assimilate divergent interest, dividing the opposition by responding to the fragmentation on the lines of caste and ethnicity within Indian society and winning wide support. Indians gather around a leader either on the basis of caste, religion, economic interests or may be even birth. All that the leader has to do is to feed a hundred such people and push his caste or community or religion or even personality to assume leadership status of course, the importance of the leader is directly proportional to the number of people he can feed (*Mody, 1980*). This was the phase of Nehru's undisputed supremacy in the country and the total dominance of the Congress party. K. Santhanam, a well-known Indian writer on federalism writes in succeeding year that the Indian republic started with a contradiction. While the constitution established a federal system of government, all the political parties existing at the time it came into force were unitary and highly centralised. This was particularly the case with the Congress (*Santhanam, 1969*).

However, despite single party dominance and supremacy of Jawaharlal Nehru in the dominating party, opposition parties of the time never felt uneasiness. The Indian political parties are categorised into two main types - national level parties and state level or regional parties. The national parties are those political parties, which participate in different elections all over India, while state parties or regional parties are political parties, which take part in different elections but only within one or two states. In the first phase the national opposition consisted mainly of the Socialist Parties, the Communist Parties, the Bharatiya Jana Sangh and the Swatantra. The Praja Socialist Party (PSP) emerged as the largest opposition party in the parliament after the first general election in 1952. Split in the Party led to severe battering of the Socialist parties in the second and third general elections. The Communist Party of India was particularly strong in West Bengal, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh since the first general election. In Kerala a Communist Government was in power from April 1957 to July 1959. The Party had been weakened by personal and ideological differences of its leaders, which climaxed in a split in July 1964. The Swatantra Party formed in 1959 under the leadership in C. Rajgopalachari, was the "first democratically oriented conservative Party of any importance in India." (*Swain, 2008*). Some of the regional parties, which came into prominence during this period, were the DMK in Tamil Nadu, the Akali Dal in Punjab, the Muslim League in parts of Madras and Kerala, the Republican Party and Peasants' and Workers Party in Maharashtra, the Ganatantra Parishad in Orissa and the Jharkhand Party in Bihar and Orissa.

Early Evaluation of State System

In the formative years when Congress was dominant and on winning hat trick, the opposition parties of the time functioned on the margin and did not hold an alternative to the ruling party. Indian party system's experiences were of co-existing with competition but without a trace of alteration. As a result the opposition parties confined themselves to a role quite distinctive, instead of providing an alternative to the Congress Party they functioned by influencing sections within Congress. They opposed by making Congressmen oppose. In other words, groups within the ruling Party assumed the role of opposition parties, often quite openly reflecting the ideologies and interests of other parties (*Kothari, 1967*). The Congress, in the period, occupied most of the space in the political system because 'there was plurality within the dominant Party which made it more representative, provided flexibility and estimated internal competition. At the same time it was prepared to absorb groups and

movements from outside the Party and thus prevent other parties from strength. But Congress, ever during the height of its power and influence, represented the democratic model allowing elements of opposition leading to the existence of a multi-party system. It was competitive in character in as much as it permitted political struggle among a number of parties which functioned within the four corners of the Constitution.

In general political parties are born of the natural contrast between those who cling to the old and those who embrace the new but on the other some accept that they arise from the pugnacious instinct of men. In any society there is a conflict of wills in society, and that conflict is decided by the decision of the intermediate mass which is not firmly convinced of the truth of any general cause. To attract its support it is necessary to advertise one's view. Parties are the natural method of effecting that end. Their form is largely dependent upon the conditions of any given time. They may group themselves about religious issues, economic issues or there will be a tendency for radical solution to attract the young. Under the natural origin of political parties, they suffer from all the evils of group separatism. They distort the issues they create. They produce the divisions in electorate which very superficially represent the way in which opinion is in fact distributed. They secure, at best, an incomplete and compromising loyalty. They falsify the perspective of the issues they create. They build about persons, allegiance which should go to ideas. They build upon the unconscious and they force the judgement of men into the service of their prejudices. But in case of Indian Party system the above complexities did not arise particularly in the years following country's independence. It all started in a happy and purposeful manner.

In addition, of the two types of parties: one broad-based and functional, and the other local in character and based on primary groups or centred around personalities. The co-existence of both the types of parties must be regarded as an important characteristic of the Indian Party system. Thereby the numerical representation of the parties or their territorial diffusion does not have any significance in categorising them in one way or the other (*Jones, 1964*). The classification is entirely related to the degree of their social differentiation. Although these parties are frequently built upon traditional loyalties and to a great extent, they are considered eligible by various social, linguistic and religious groups. They comprise very heterogeneous social currents and interests in the complex of which differences in political representation naturally exist. In the process of creating political consciousness these parties work as a media of integration and have the capacity to provide the public with a measure of national

identification as distinct from parochial parties (*Hartmann, 1971*). In fact, there is a strong underlying feeling among all the people and political parties of the basic need for one sovereign Indian identity, even from the point of view of regard for their individual regional interests or pride in their regional identities. It is this feeling, historical, emotional and also utilitarian - that makes them use their separate identities for pressuring the Indian polity to giving them regional concessions rather than for breaking up the country's single political identity (*Rao, 1984*). Dr. Rajendra Prasad, also rightly pointed out on the occasion of his parting-speech, that if a constant compromise between the many heterogeneous social groups is not made, democracy in India is bound to collapse. At the same time he demanded of the Parties to strive for inter-party tolerance and political restraint'. In fact, political parties coordinate between various thoughts-ideologies, represent heterogeneous social interests and provide political training to citizen. While acting as a ruling party, they translate the dreams and aspirations of the country to reality. As opposition they aim at keeping the ruling Party on right track by adopting various methods.

In a republic like India political leaders are the torch bearers of the nation. They are the path breakers and path makers who become the hope, the dream, the friend, the philosopher and guide for the common man. Fortunately India witnessed at the dawn of independence the titanic leaders, who set the example of sacrifice, strength, support, sensitivity, sympathy simplicity and super will power. The independence struggle, in its earlier phases under the influence of the liberal philosophy and in its later period under the leadership of Gandhi, Nehru and others were fundamentally democratic in inspiration. The sovereign republic of India was proclaimed as a democratic one in the Preamble and Article providing for adult suffrage inserted in the Constitution along with a Election Commission to ensure free and fair elections for the successful working of the new democracy (*Menon, 1970*). In an initial and experimental manner, we accepted and dealt with this great world-moving force of man-on-the-March, which is democracy. We are aware that such experiment in democracy is sure to bring about revolutionary changes in our individual and social life.

Dominant Role of Nehru and Congress Party

At independence the Indian National Congress was converted into not just a ruling party, but a dominant framework institutionalising the whole process of power. The party system that emerged from such a framework was somewhat distinctive and served Indian democracy well

during this period of consolidation and consensus making. In particular, Jawaharlal Nehru's idea on democracy can best be attributed to his submission to the objective laws that led him to realise the direction of the historical process, to understand as an objective and progressive course of events proceeding from the higher to lower (*Singh, 2011*). He played a very significant role in order to strengthen political institutions under the framework of the Indian Constitution. Nehru was a democrat by instinct and temperament and contributed immensely towards inculcating the true parliamentary spirit and values in our people. Although he commanded absolute majority in the House, he never believed in steamrolling the Opposition and showed utmost respect to them, listened to their views and tried to accommodate them as far as possible. He recognised the due space of dissent in a true democracy favouring healthy and constructive criticism from all sections of the House. Some of his strongest critics in Parliament happened to be his greatest admirers, and perhaps there cannot be a better compliment to Nehru's democratic credentials than this fact (*Chatterjee, 2007*). And without any doubt it can be added that the opposition was not frowned upon; it was seen as a vital part of the arrangement. Within Parliament, the opposition was deemed to be entitled to have its say and the government was to have its way; rather effortlessly the Westminster model was accepted, imitated and practised. In the process, a few rules of the game were formulated and finessed: political rivals were not to be treated as enemies, nor were the state's coercive powers to be used to tame political opponents. The democratic system so established certainly worked well for a number of years.

Nehru did not confine his opinion to the realm of politics alone but the arena of economic was not out of his reach. He considered that political democracy by itself is not enough except that it may be used to obtain a gradually increasing measure of economic democracy. In the period of freedom movement the Congress had evolved the idea of a planned economy to fight the poverty of the mass and, to this end, established a Planning Committee in 1938, in order to prepare a draft plan for the socio-economic development of India. In the debates of the Constituent Assembly Nehru rejected all attempts to call India a 'Socialistic Republic, although after independence liberal economic ideas were popular in certain ranks of the Congress there was actually no discussion about whether at all a policy of economic planning should be followed or not. As a result, the economic policy of the Congress Government had let India into a paradoxical situation. On the one hand since the beginning of economic planning the objective of a socialist pattern of society had been realised in so far as the public

sector had constantly expanded but on the other the rate of economic growth as postulated had been partially fulfilled. In reality the rich became richer and poor became poorer (*Rosen, 1963*). Nehru believed in industrialisation and a strong industrial base. He was for a mixed economy and a good deal of progress was achieved but during his economic period he invested more in industry. More emphasis was laid on industry than agriculture.

However, the hold of Congress had begun to decline in the post - 1960 period on account of its failure on the economic front. People accused him of being a prisoner of the socialist maxims when in the beginning of the sixties the country faced an acute economic crisis. Mahatma Gandhi is also of the opinion, 'Economic equality is the master key to non-violent independence... A non-violent system of Government is clearly impossibility so long as the wide gulf between the rich and the hungry millions persists. The contrast between the palaces of New Delhi and the miserable hovels of the poor laboring classes cannot last one day in a free India in which the poor will enjoy the same political powers as the richest in the land. A violent and bloody revolution is a certainty one day unless there is a voluntary abdication of riches and the power that riches give and sharing them for the common good' (*Dean, 1961*).

Till Jawaharlal Nehru was alive the Congress Party and the Government as well remained a one-man show and both realised no difficulty in sailing the boat of Indian republic. In the opinion of Lucian W. Pye, 'Under the unassailable leadership of Nehru, Congress leaders had little trouble in thinking of themselves as the administration and Government of India, and they apparently convinced themselves that the future unity and progress of India as a nation was absolutely dependent upon Congress remaining in power' (*Pye, 1966*). Professor W.H. Morris-Jones, a perceptive observer of the Indian scene in the mid-fifties noted that Indian Parliament at that time was Panditji's sounding board" or "echo room". Nehru put this to splendid use. Through his rambling but always thoughtful speeches he educated his countrymen in the imperative need to transform India's medieval society into a modern one and preached to the world at large the virtues of peace, disarmament and a ban on nuclear weapons. He added further that somehow the world listened to him with a respect, it has not bestowed on any other world leader with the possible exception of de Gaulle (*Malhotra, 1980*). Even the impregnable position of the Congress was largely attributed to Nehru's immense popularity among the masses.

But all this was perhaps too good to last though it did last for well over a decade. Suddenly

things began to change and the seeds of present woes were sown during the last three or four years of Nehru's era itself. The process of the decline of Congress got further accelerated after the 1962 Parliamentary and assembly elections on account of the national humiliation caused by the defeat at the hands of China in 1962. At the time and thereafter Nehru was criticised by opposition parties and several Congress members for country's security lapses. Already during Nehru's lifetime the Chief Ministers consolidated their own position and ignored central direction on policies that did not suit them. With the crumbling of a united central leadership, the States 'Satraps' have practically been forced to act more autonomously. The overall situation in the Party and government deteriorated markedly after the death of Nehru in 1963. The post-Nehru elections took on a different character because the great leader, who had lost public esteem, because of defeat in Sino-Indian war, was no longer at the helm. Lal Bahadur Shastri succeeded Nehru. The short-lived Shastri era was essentially a continuation of the tragic, twilight years of Nehru. In fact things grew a lot worse because language became a highly explosive issue soon after Shastri became the Prime Minister. He was handicapped moreover by the general feeling that Nehru's shoes were too big for him. And just when, in the wake of the 1965 war between India and Pakistan, he looked like coming into his own, this most undramatic of man passed into history in highly dramatic circumstances. After Shastri Indira Gandhi became the Prime Minister of the country in January 1966. This period may be rightly termed as the advent of a political development with many non-Congress national political parties coming to the fore and the rise of regional political parties in most state of India. The hegemony of the Congress had to face a serious challenge from the national opposition parties as well as from the regional parties.

Conclusion and Future Challenges

Despite all goodness of leaders and organisations in the first two decades following India's independence, the period also witnessed the starting of several social evils and a clear degradation in public morality. Although Nehru had a scientific temper for the country, he was a poor judge of men, and therefore, he could not distinguish between real friends and sycophants. In the later phase of his life he took the support of undesirable elements to remain in power. Though he was popular with the masses he did not take action against vested interest which exploited the masses. He did not mind taking funds from anti-social elements. The Congress Party started accepting black money for elections during his time. Though soft, he was not always straightforward in dealing with his colleagues. His 'soft

pedaling' of corruption had a disastrous effect on public morals. Nehru admitted the facts of public life, then prevailing and said, 'Unhappily during the war and afterwards various types of corruption has grown. Controls have added to them and general standards fallen, both in government servant and in the public. Black marketing in India is not merely an individual offence, but a social evil. There can be no two opinions that adequate measures should be taken to check and end this degradation of our public life (*Nehru, 1984*). In post - Nehru years the rumblings of a system beginning to come under socio-economic stress were first clearly heard. Politically the most significant manifestation of this gathering crisis appeared in 1967 elections which saw the once unassailable Congress Party lose out to a motley assembly of opposition parties in a number of northern states. On the other Congress was faced with leadership problems during the period 1967-69. This period was, marked by India's transition from a dominant party system to a system of competitive sharing of power.

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