

INDIA UNDER SHACKLES

By
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It is more than two decades since India attained her freedom. Today, India is celebrating the nineteenth anniversary of the day when she declared herself to be a sovereign, democratic republic by means of a constitution drawn by the elected representatives of her people. A free India under the framework of her constitution has been struggling to free her people of misery and deprivation. As a matter of fact, it was this misery and deprivation of the people that provided inspiration and motivation to the leaders to wage a ceaseless struggle for India's freedom. Program for economic reconstruction of India was given due emphasis even when the political question of India's freedom was all too important and immediate. It was felt that alien rule by its very nature would condemn the ruled to perpetual economic exploitation and increasing poverty. Hence, that rule must end. That rule did end in 1947. Of course, the long existing misery of the masses of India did not end with the end of that rule. Nor did any sensible person expect such miracle to happen. It was clearly recognized that India's political freedom was only the first step – although a momentous one – towards her economic emancipation and reconstruction. This recognition was firmly established in the minds of the leaders of India's struggle for freedom. When the nation's jubilation knew no bounds on India's attainment of her freedom, the voice of her leaders was a little subdued on account of the realization of the arduous task lying ahead. It was a time of taking fresh pledge of services to the nation and of dedicating themselves to the real task of banishing poverty, hunger, disease and illiteracy from the land, they said. Such was the nation's enthusiastic mood and such was her leaders' firm conviction and dedication that India pushed ahead on the road to becoming a

modern, prosperous nation with amazing success. In retrospect, India's performance during the first fifteen years of her freedom, in the face of heavy odds, is simply amazing. Even a well established nation would have found it extremely straining to tackle the refugee problems of the magnitude and complexity which confronted India when she was just an infant as a free state struggling to stand on her own inexperienced feet. And India did remarkably well. When the secessionist and fissiparous forces in many parts of the world and in India are ever so strong, it was really a feat to integrate more than five hundred independently existing princely states into the newly emergent state of India. To usher in an era of economic development and technological progress in an ancient land with no such tradition and temperament was an act of great foresight and vision. To call a dam as a modern temple of India may sound as a simple allegorical utterance, but the change of outlook implied and envisaged in this statement is of momentous significance for a religion bound people. But today, twenty-one years after India's independence, the atmosphere in the country is much different. The fervor of the people generated in the wake of independence has subsided, leaders with conviction of India's destiny have almost all gone from the scene, confrontation with hard realities have reduced their charisma to a myth and disillusionment is writ large on people's faces. The deplorable state of affairs obtaining in the country at present makes many wonder whether it was for this that India wanted to get rid of foreign rulers, whether it was for this that the leaders spelled all that profound philosophy in demanding their birthright of freedom, whether it was for this that the freedom fighters considered no sacrifice too great to make.

Why has this unfortunate transformation taken place in our national life in a relatively short span of two decades? Why have all those values which Gandhi inculcated in us over the years made

a rapid retreat from our lives after a very brief stop-over? What has caused people's post-independence optimism to change to impatience and then to frustration and despondence today? The answer is either too difficult or too obvious. One can point one's finger in just about any direction of national life and declare, "Eureka! Here lies our problem". Widespread corruption and inefficiency in administration, second-rate leadership, defective planning, and poor implementation of plan – all of these and many more may be the targets of our attack. But let us not confuse the effect with the cause in our desperation. The question still remains why the Indian administration of which our erstwhile rulers were so proud has become so corrupt and inefficient today; why our leadership which once showed light not only to the millions in India but to the billions in the world has become so utterly second rate today; why our plans which once displayed real promise of changing the face of India have gone haywire today. With some hesitation but great conviction, I venture to answer this basic question which has long been agitating my mind. The freedom of which our leaders dreamed, the freedom for which a unique struggle demanding tremendous sacrifice on the part of the leaders and great moral strength on the part of the followers was waged, the freedom which was sincerely believed to usher India in an era of all round progress and prosperity – that freedom has not yet dawned on this land. True, we have succeeded in driving out the British rulers, thus putting an end to our slavery of the alien people. But slavery had come into the Indian life in many other insidious ways in the course of centuries of her servitude. Institutions were created and established which succeeded in promoting mental attitudes, habits of thinking and a sense of values conducive to acceptance of slavery as a way of life. While the Indian masses withdrew into a narrow and static shell of existence dominated by age-old and out of date social customs and religious superstitions, the hold of these institutions became more

and more widespread and strong, stifling all creative urge and organic growth of the nation. Unfortunately, that hold still continues and gets rather stronger as the moral training cultivated during the freedom struggle wears off. We have not got freedom from these institutions and the mental outlook resulting from them in any real sense. India is in shackles of these institutions. These shackles are extensive, elaborate, and what is far worse, invisible and intangible. India makes seemingly valiant efforts to better her lot, not realizing that she is bound by those shackles which frustrate her efforts, causing frustration in turn. There is no doubt that these invisible shackles have to be broken before India can be completely free and she can grow organically. This is a task of paramount importance for India's future. It is also very difficult, and in order to achieve success in this, we must first understand the true nature of these shackles.

The sole purpose of the British existence in India was her economic exploitation. It will be presumptuous on the part of anyone to imagine that they had come here from across the seas for uplifting the downtrodden India. This economic exploitation, they realized, could not be carried on in an atmosphere of constant strife and hostility with the natives. An attempt to keep India under subjugation by sheer force of arms or physical might would have been defeating the purpose. So an institution was created and established for the governance of India. It was through this institution that the dictates of the alien rulers were to be carried out for their sole interest of economic exploitation of India. Although the ultimate basis of existence of this institution was physical force, its façade had a more sophisticated look which made India's slavery imperceptible and acceptable.

How did this institution achieve its end so eminently? The rulers from the distant land had to deal with a sprawling country like India with a large population. The dictates of both practicability

and wisdom pointed to the necessity of manning this institution by the natives for exploitation of their own homeland. So it was felt necessary that this institution must be viewed with awed respect. It was made a matter of privilege merely to belong to that institution. A government servant was no servant imbued with a sense of service. He was a member of a privileged institution. His position of privilege was declared in a number of ways – by his being entitled to special housing, health services, schooling facilities and so on. These benefits were not regarded in the way of remuneration for a job, but rather as a reward for belonging to a privileged institution and were intended to set the recipient apart from his fellow countrymen whom he was supposed to serve. The services of a person, no matter how important they were for the nation, were not recognized unless he belonged to that institution. A government clerk, for example, enjoyed a more privileged position than a school teacher. Persons and particularly the intellectuals flocked to belong to that institution because that was the only way one's talents could be recognized and awarded. Since that institution happened to be neither an intellectual one nor one of public service, nation's intellectuality and conscience both became casualties in the process.

But however privileged the members of the governmental institution might feel, they were not and could not possibly be trusted by the rulers from afar. After all, these natives had to deal with other natives under the framework of an institution directed essentially against the interests of their homeland. The foreigners, under these circumstances, could trust the natives on their own peril. It was understandable, then, that the whole elaborate framework of that institution was based on distrust. Responsibilities for making decisions was fragmented, each entrusted with a fragment and none with the whole in a hierarchical bureaucracy which resulted from this basic distrust.

Particularly, members of the lower ranks in the hierarchy who had more direct contact with the people at large enjoyed lesser fragment of responsibility. Red-tape, with the provisions of checks and counter-checks became a normal procedure of operation of the institution. But at some points along the line, there must be men who could say yes or no in the name of the mighty institution of government. These would be crucial points in the network of British administration in India and on the unqualified loyalty of the men placed at these points would the stability of the structure of the British existence in India depend. By temperament and training, these men must identify themselves with the British if they themselves were not so. They must feel a sense of belonging to the ruling class, which meant that they must be placed on a pedestal high enough from the lower ranks and the subject people. The hypothesis was that the further one was in style of living, habits of thinking and identity of belonging from the ruled, the better ruler one would prove to be. This hypothesis of course led to the corollary that the British with no identity with the Indian whatsoever were the best rulers of all. Those British people who did identify themselves in some way with the Indian masses could belong to some philanthropic organization but had no place in administration. The Indian Civil Service was established for the purpose of this kind of administration. Such prestige was bestowed upon it that it attracted most intelligent Indians to it. It was claimed that it was a highly efficient service. No doubt it was so for running an administration of imperial concept in a colony. One of the features of this imperial administration was the transfer of its officers from one place to another or from one job to another at regular intervals. Normally one would expect that the longer one remained at a place or in a job, the better understanding would he gain of his responsibilities and the more competent would he become in discharging them. But this was not important in the imperial concept of administration. What was important was the

suspicion that a long stay at a place or a job would make one more vulnerable to being exposed to 'undesirable' influences due to increasing contact with the people, and thus would make him less trustworthy for imperial administration which had to be impersonal in order to be workable. Such was the distrust which formed the very basis of that administration.

These two features of the governmental institution – one, that it was an institution of privilege rather than of service and two, that distrust formed the basis of its operation – thoroughly demoralized the people, both within and without the institution. Privilege unduly granted or granted for an unethical reason demoralises both who receive it and those who are denied it. It promotes abnormality of behaviour among people, who become either arrogant or servile and sycophant in their attitudes. Normal relation ceases to exist among people. And a person distrusted becomes a person distrusting and demoralized. A person working in a hierarchical bureaucracy with fragmented responsibility is bound to feel like a cog in a complex machinery whose working is beyond his control. The only way he can assert himself or make his importance felt in the complex machinery is through a rather negative way – by being obstructive, thus making the machinery slow and inefficient. He is denied the thrill and satisfaction of applying wholeheartedly to a given problem. A sense of inner emptiness giving rise to cynicism, frustration and corruptibility without compunction dominates his life. The governmental institution was run by a vast number of people so demoralized. Whether such demoralization was intended or not, it inevitably resulted from the way the institution was conceived and operated and it eminently suited the British purpose. In a country whose intellectual level was considerably high, civil administration serving the interests of an alien people to the detriment of those of

the natives could not have lasted as long as it did without such deep and pervasive demoralization.

Such was the institution free India inherited from the British. No other institution of comparable importance had evolved in the colonial India. No doubt some other institutions did develop during the period, but they were much dominated by the all important governmental institution or they developed much along similar lines. Quite often, an administrative officer, for example, played a key role in the formulation of the policies of an educational institution by virtue of his office. This was expected as India was not growing organically during its colonial existence. But the unfortunate fact is that we are trying to use essentially the same institution in an altogether different situation – in a democratic, sovereign, welfare state of India. We gained political independence in 1947 and we gave to ourselves a Constitution in 1950. The affairs of India were no longer to be dictated by foreign interests and we formed ourselves into a democratic republic granting certain fundamental rights to our individual selves and setting as a guide certain directive principles of state policy. All this was a revolutionary change that occurred in India. But the revolution remained incomplete. In a democratic republic, we are using an institution designed for colonial administration of India; for economic development we have adopted the same institution whose dominant purpose was to keep India economically backward; for achieving a welfare state we are relying on an institution whose basic concept was far removed from any welfare; in a country of freedom of which the great poet Tagore dreamt (... *where the head is held high...*) we are clinging to an institution which constrains our creative urges and demoralises us. This is the most unfortunate anomaly we are confronted with. All the frustration, corruption and shameless apathy to the national cause that we witness today on the Indian scene are the consequences of

this anomaly. In spite of this institution, the nation made considerable headway in the economic, social and political directions during the fifteen years after her independence. That was because of the patriotic fervor of the people and the imaginative, charismatic leadership with conviction of India's great destiny. That fervor is gone today from the people's lives and it cannot be recreated. That imaginative, charismatic leadership is there no more and no nation can afford to depend on the emergence and continuance of such leadership for her steady growth, which can be assured and sustained only through a suitable system. And for this we need a revolutionary change in the governmental institution we have today, a change in the basic concept of governance and not just administrative reforms.

For bringing about this revolutionary change in a constructive way, one must have some idea of what basic features the new order of governmental institution should possess. That this institution is indispensable and that its importance for India's regeneration and reconstruction cannot be overemphasized, one should have no doubt. On ideological grounds, one may have different points of view regarding the quantum of role that a state should assume in a society. But against the background of historical evolution of various institutions in India and her stagnation, so to say, of centuries, one cannot but come to the conclusion that there is an imperative need to apply the national efforts in a concerted and organized way. This can only be achieved by means of some institution which is truly responsive to people's needs and aspirations and through which national efforts culminate into desired results with a minimum of loss in terms of time, money and human frustration. For want of any other well understood word, we may call this institution 'government'.

The first and foremost requirement of any national institution should be that it be suited to the genius, temperament and cultural

make-up of the people. The operation of any institution conceived in one context and operated in another will give rise to many undesirable features that we witness today in our governmental institution. In consonance with Indian tradition, an institution like this should be one of service rather than of privilege. A person serving in this institution should not feel arrogant due to the power and privileges he may enjoy, but the responsibilities he is entrusted with should make him rather humble. Of course, there should be adequate remuneration for a service rendered and also there should be some reasonable differences of remuneration for different types of services in order to provide incentives for talents in proper directions. But in the ultimate analysis, a person should be attracted to a job by what he has to offer rather than by what he is going to get in terms of power, privilege and money. Under such an institution, for example, there may not be many persons eager to become the Prime Minister of a nation confronted with such staggering problems.

Secondly, the governmental institution should be an intellectual one. The nation's problems which this institution is called upon to tackle are really intellectual in nature and they require intellectual approach for their effective solution. Unfortunately, under the present set-up of government, the intellectual challenge involved in a problem is not understood at all or understood very inadequately. The food problem of the country is a case in point. This problem is first of all a technical one of growing more food. It requires finding existing and new knowledge about the various aspects of this technical problem. Questions of irrigation, agricultural practices, seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, agricultural implements etc. have to be investigated with particular regard to the Indian conditions. Study and research in many branches of knowledge having a bearing on this problem are needed. Then, the food problem is one of extending this

knowledge to the farmers. It will require our scientists, engineers and farmers working hand in hand in the fields. Also, the question of agricultural economics with proper regard to the nation's other sectors of economy has to be carefully studied and suitable marketing policies evolved. Thus, the intellectual capacities of many intellectuals in various fields of knowledge and expertise have to be employed to solve this ever present problem. Our governmental institution should be such as to make it possible for these intellectual endeavors to be made in a whole-hearted and coordinated manner. This institution should provide a medium through which these endeavors should make an impact on the problem most directly. These intellectuals will then feel a thrill which comes from taking up a challenge in a positive spirit. The existing governmental institution is by no means such a medium and does not provide this thrill. It is essentially an anti-intellectual institution where intellectual endeavors are at best only its marginal preoccupation. It takes up every problem as if it were an old fashioned law and order problem, although even a law and order problem should be an intellectual one in a modern administration. It bases its action on anachronistic and crude policies implemented through its ramshackle bureaucratic machinery. Such action does not touch even the fringe of the problem. Instead, it creates frustration, demoralises people and increases corruption in its ranks.

The nation's material resources may some day set a limit to its prosperity, but that limit is yet very far, if not altogether non-existent. India's potential for her material wealth is far from realized. What is proving as a real bottleneck to her progress is inadequate and inefficient utilization, and even flagrant waste of her human resources. Apart from underemployment and laziness of people, the procedures of operation in the existing governmental institution are immensely wasteful of human energies. The

effective productivity of people's running around in government's offices is disproportionately small. Moreover, time and energy of millions of people who have the misfortune of dealing with these offices are callously wasted. Only if the effective productivity of whatever work is done in the government's offices be considerably improved and time and energy so wasted be usefully employed, immensely more progress could be achieved even under the present system of government. But this is simply not possible. The system is inherently wasteful.

Under the existing framework of government, awful misuse and waste of talents are unavoidable. The set-up is such that the nation hardly gets any benefit from the acquired knowledge and talents of its individuals. Such individuals become misfits in the set-up. The much talked about 'brain drain' is a consequence of this situation. The intellectuals are driven out of their homeland rather than being attracted by greener pastures abroad. Those who ascribe brain drain to monetary motives alone take too superficial a view of the problem. The U. S. A. and England are full of patriotic but frustrated scientists, engineers, doctors and other intellectuals. What is more pitiable, although less dramatic, is the situation at home. A person with talents in physics may not get any incentive for or satisfaction in being a physicist, a potential economist becomes the so called administrator, a person trained to be a researcher bids good bye to research and spend all his time in petty office work – such examples are all too numerous and common under the present set-up.

The unsuitability of the present governmental structure for coping with the nation's problems is rather dramatically illustrated by the recent phenomenon of large scale unemployment of engineers. No one would imagine that the nation's problems are exhausted and no more job is left to be done by them. On the contrary, incessant work of engineers will be needed for

generations before the nation can afford to take a breath of respite. But, in the present framework of government, these engineers have become a superfluous commodity. One tends to find fault with planning or lack of money or overproduction of engineers. But all these are just superficial views of the situation. The real fault lies with the governmental institution which has unfortunately outlived the colonial India for which it was designed.

Any one who comes in contact with the existing governmental institution will not fail to notice or cannot avoid being affected by the prevailing corruption, injustice and inefficiency. All the three are intimately interrelated phenomena sapping the vitality of the nation. There has been a lot of talk about banishing them and I believe even some sincere efforts have been made for this. It is common knowledge that such efforts have utterly failed to achieve their purpose. It is because these phenomena of corruption, injustice and inefficiency are inherent in the system of government which is based on distrust and induces demoralization. This distrust and demoralization were essential for an alien rule. But unfortunately we seem to rely on them to banish the phenomena which were caused by them in the first place. Consequently, we go on introducing checks, counter-checks and counter-counter-checks on the actions and motives of people – which lands us in hopeless mess and gets us nowhere. If we want to eradicate corruption, injustice and inefficiency from our national life, we must have an institution based on trust and basic dignity of man.

India is groaning under corruption, apathy and frustration today. Her creative energy and talent are all hopelessly enmeshed in the bureaucratic tangle. We have put a fashionable veil of democracy over her with the result that our attention does not go beyond this veil in search for the causes of the troubles afflicting her. In our desperation, we change one party with another or hold

the politicians responsible for all the ills. Little do we realize that behind that veil of democracy lies the afflicted body politic of India – her governmental institution. No matter what political party comes into power, it has not only to rely on this institution for governance, it becomes a part of it. It may have the illusion of supervising, directing or presiding over this institution, in reality it becomes a cog in the complex machinery.

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