
UNIT 1 POST-GANDHIAN SCENARIO

Structure

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1.1 INTRODUCTION

India after Gandhi represents, in the profoundest sense of the term, a negation of Gandhi. Gandhi's concept of India signified village republics comprising of self-reliant, democratic local communities committed to the ideal of the minimisation of wants. However, when, after independence, Jawaharlal Nehru became the prime minister, he declared India's "tryst with destiny." This tryst was to create a totally new India modeled upon the industrial civilisation, which Gandhi had condemned in *Hind Swaraj*. In translating his vision of India, Nehru progressively undermined what Gandhi had envisioned about the reconstruction of the Indian society after the base of Indian civilisation was dismantled by the British rulers.

The realisation of the Nehruvian vision of India was, however, beset with a set of three major problems that were crying out for solution, i.e. ethnic and social divisions, extreme economic disparities, regional differences and imbalances, multitudinous languages and existence of princely states. All these problems kept, so Nehru thought, India socially, culturally and politically fragmented and, nourished and reinforced local and regional loyalties. As such, integration of diverse people and unification of political purpose were the *sine qua non* of forging oneness. The second problem was to evolve a political system that could ensure unity of political purpose and its realisation in a concerted manner.

Creation of such a political system was necessary in view of the problems of social schisms and economic backwardness that India suffered from. Lower mortality rates, illiteracy, backward economy, low agriculture productivity kept Indian people extremely poor; and health services were conspicuous by their absence. The third problem pertained to social and economic reforms. India had to tackle successfully to realise the Nehruvian vision of a new India. The solution of these problems was urgent and required a strategy of development with a view to embarking upon a beneficial growth trajectory. Resultantly, India had to shed its old socio-cultural garb and emerge as a modern political entity for action in history.

The national reconstruction for promoting a new pattern of social life and relations meant re-alignment of the past and its socio-economic institutional arrangements and the initiation of the process of radical change in the economy by introducing new thought-ways and work-ways to give a fillip to modernity, without disturbing the existing equilibrium. Given these systemic goals, certain questions relating to the character and the functioning of the newly created institution—political, social, and economic—in the last six decades, arise.

Aims and Objectives

This Unit would enable you to understand

- The different facets of Indian polity
- Assess its achievements, short-falls, vulnerabilities and problems
- Evaluate its performance as a political unit acting in history.

1.2 POLITICAL STRUCTURE AND ITS WORKING

Three years of rigorous deliberation, discussion, and drafting bore fruit and the Constitution was inaugurated on 26th January 1950. The Preamble promised justices—social, economic, and political—to the people of India, while the Directive Principles of State Policy exhorted the government, and other provisions imposed upon it, the responsibility of pursuing the social revolution and to protect the minorities. Fundamental Rights enjoined the government both to protect rights and refrain from violating them. The power of the central and state governments to amend the constitution was subject to judicial review. The Supreme Court became the apex court and the last resort of appeal. The central government was given vast powers to intervene in the affairs of state governments. An entirely new institution, the constitutional head of the state, the President, was created. Two vitally important Commissions, The Finance Commission and the Planning Commission, came into existence. The government, including the national civil service, was made responsible for economic development, over and above collecting taxes and maintaining order in the country.

To enhance national unity and to promote economic development without alienating subordinate levels of government was tackled by refurbishing the federal structure introduced by the 1935 Reforms Act. Since federalism is a political arrangement, Indian Constitution provides for three tiers and three lists—Centre, State and Concurrent lists for the division of power and authority; these lists specify the areas in which the Federal government alone can act, the areas in which States alone have the power to initiate action and the areas where both the Federal and State governments can legislate.

The Constitution provides for a parliamentary system in which the lower house of the Parliament, the Lok Sabha, represents the sovereign people of India. It is the highest legislative organ, the national forum for the articulation of public opinion and aspirations and is elected every five years through popular elections unless dissolved earlier for some reason. The Lok Sabha is the highest law making body of the country and enjoys equality of status with the Rajya Sabha except in the matter of money bills, which can originate only in the Lok Sabha. The people's will is supposed to reign supreme in the Lok Sabha, through the members of the Parliament they elect as their representatives. When called for, they exercise their franchise moved by their reaction to the acts of omissions and commissions of the party in power.

The Indian Constitution seeks to institutionalise the rule of law, prescribes certain goals to be pursued by the political community and authorises the ways and means for realising these goals. It sets out certain substantive goals to be pursued to carry on the social revolution it had launched and provides a framework that stipulates the goals to be achieved by the State. The constitutional provisions are subject to change depending on diverse socio-economic interests; those, who are adversely affected or if the promotion of their interest is blocked, clamour for change and take recourse to confrontational politics to change the concerned provisions. Also “as values change and the views regarding how the world works—and the social forces associated with those forces associated with those views—change, constitution too tends to change. Either their letter is amended or their spirit (‘intent’) is reinterpreted.”⁷ Thus politics also determines the way these constraints work and what forces should change them.

India opted for representative democracy as a mode of governance. This meant that the sovereign people rule through their chosen representatives. India has opted for single-member constituencies where representatives are chosen by majority vote. The key to the working of the political system is the existence two or more parties that compete for capturing and controlling the power apparatus of society. India was initially ruled by the Indian National Congress (Congress Party), which happened to be a dominant party, but soon, its dominance began to atrophy and was ultimately replaced by a robust multi-party system.

Congress majorities in the Parliament and State legislatures confronted the JP Movement and all-India railway workers strike in 1974 that paralysed the largest railway network in the world. All these developments led to the proclamation of internal emergency by Mrs. Indira Gandhi in June 1975 after the Allahabad High Court unseated Mrs. Gandhi on the charge of electoral malpractices in the 1971 election. The entire leadership of the movement and the opposition parties, including a few congress dissidents, were put behind the bars; press censorship was also imposed. The Emergency excesses made the Congress regime extremely unpopular. As a result, the congress Party suffered the heaviest loss in the 1977 election just after the termination of the Emergency. However, the fiasco of the Janata Party government, falling prey to factional feuds and ego clashes among its top leaders, paved the way for a mid-term election in 1980, which saw Mrs. Gandhi back in power. Mrs. Gandhi’s assassination in 1984 was instrumental in restoring Congress dominance. Soon, this dominance was soon squandered away. It has recorded a steady decline but later regained its strength to form a Congress-led UPA government at the centre. In the interregnum, coalition governments have come and gone out of power due to Congress decline and the regionalisation of politics. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) emerged as a powerful national rival party to the Congress and there was rise of various State and regional parties like the Samajwadi Party (SP) and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) in UP and the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) in Bihar that constituted crucial elements in the formation of coalition government at the national level.

This variegated electoral change raises two vital questions: (1) what induces change in the electoral fortunes of different political parties? (2) what ramifications does this have for the functioning of the party system in India, on the other? In an interest-driven society, socio-economic groups vie among themselves for articulation, ascendance and control of power apparatus of society with a view to influencing or controlling collective decision-making in order to safeguard and promote their interests. This leads to the surfacing and deepening of social cleavages, as reflected in the electoral process. Diverse socio-economic interests

work through either existing political parties or some of them organise themselves in political parties.

Social creation in India involves a complete turn around of society from what it formerly signified. The reconstruction rests primarily on material prosperity. It is economic prosperity that is considered to be the king-pin of the good life signifying the conquest of deprivation and the achievement of progressively rising levels of living for all without any exception. Material prosperity is supposed to be the basis of development of all varieties including even moral development. This has meant not only revolutionising the production system but also making available goods and services to all. Both these prospects stimulate a strident demand for privileged access to scarce societal resources especially by those who have suffered poverty and deprivation.

Failure in satisfying these expectations evoke sectional and regional loyalties that eventually lead to the formation of regional/state parties, vying to capture power and having more leverage and greater say in the decision-making process at the national level. This encourages the formation and persistence of regional/state parties and is a major factor in the unavoidability of formation of coalition governments at the national level.

1.3 ECONOMIC CHANGE

The process of social creation today needs the support of democracy and economic development to sustain irreversible and durable modernisation. At the time of independence India had inherited a backward economy rendered more depressing by the British's draining India's wealth. The British rulers did initiate the process of economic development but it was insufficient to unleash the creative entrepreneurial energy that could have introduced a self-propelling dynamism in Indian economy. India remained staggeringly poor at the time of independence in 1947, despite being endowed with rich natural resources. In view of the social backwardness reinforced by economic stagnation, the question of development assumed a critical importance. To overcome backwardness two distinct strategies, one Gandhian and the Nehruvian, were vying for supremacy.

The Gandhian model of development was articulated by Sriman Narayan Agrawal, who, inspired by Mahatma Gandhi's vision of man and his world emphasised the need for conserving indigenous culture and civilisation and promoting organic growth. This plan emphasised the need to avoid excessive regimentation of the masses and to promote a democratic political life and relations as well as ensuring minimum state control. Agrawal underscored the need for erecting the edifice of economy on simplicity, decentralisation and cottage industrialism. His aim was to infuse, in Gandhian lines, the construction of a reverse pyramid that would make the village the primary unit of economic activities and also for democratic political management of local affairs. His plan for economic growth and revitalisation was inspired by Gandhi's advocacy of the minimisation of wants and complete decentralisation that would enable the ordinary people to guide their own destiny whether economic or political. In this perspective, there is only a reluctant recognition of the role of the state and little or no room for large-scale industrialisation. Gandhi condemned the consumerism that the western civilisation promoted and the economic and political rivalry that lay at the heart of Western civilisation, with its emphasis on the value of competition over and above cooperation. The learner has been familiarised with the Gandhian economic thought in the previous courses.

The strategy adopted by the Nehru-led Congress government was, however, at complete

variance with Gandhian vision. Nehru's vision envisaged a modern social order in which the state assumed the primary responsibility of launching a revolution of social creation; it highlighted the primacy of material life focusing on the ever-escalating levels of standard of living. It did, however, accept the importance of agriculture and small-scale village-based industries. It chose a centrally planned economic development that treated the growth of capital-producing industries as the driver of economic development. The choice of technologically induced and sustained economic growth was deliberate; it emphasised on growth simultaneously with distribution and opted for growth first, distribution later. Nehru presided over the process of planning and was convinced that the problems of poverty and unemployment, of national defence and of economic regeneration would not be resolved without rapid industrialisation. He believed in three fundamental requirements of Indian development and national self-sufficiency as (i) heavy engineering and machine-making industry, (ii) scientific research institutes and (iii) electric power. The State controlled planned economic development, building of industrial base for an autonomous capitalism, controlled core sectors of production, control over re-distribution, or in other words the mixed economy model (coexistence of public and private sector).

Post-Nehru period was characterised by political instability, widespread social unrest and marked fluctuations in the planning process as well as in development achievement. The economy had become considerably weakened following the Indo-China war of 1962 and the Indo-Pak war of 1965. It became further weakened because of natural calamities like drought, failure of agriculture and absence of radical programme of redistribution, food shortages and weakened further due to administrative inefficiency and corruption. The central role of the State in guiding the course of economic development saw a strict regulation and control of the private sector with a view to attuning its activities to the aims and objectives of planned economic development.

Accent on creating heavy industries and scientific research institutes resulted in the building of an industrial base with trained and skilled man-power through state control and planned economic development. The state controlled the core sectors of production as well as redistribution. In other words, Nehru-Mahalanobis model of planned economic development assumed mixed economy. It included (a) a method of political democracy; (b) government planning, regulation and control of economy; (c) a Public sector; and (d) a system of tax relief and state financial aid to the private sector.

What was aimed at was progressive elimination of social, political and economic exploitation and inequality along with the motive of private gain in economic activities. All this was summarised under the rubric of socialist pattern of society. It laid emphasis on the need of sizable increase in national income through an increase in agricultural productivity and industrial development to improve the standard of life for the people. During Indira Gandhi's era, populist policies and vote-catching devices with the slogans like *Garibi Hatao* gained thumping majority in 1971 General Elections.

The economic development through planning was plagued by balance of payment difficulties, food shortages, rising population, shrinking marketable food surplus and stagnant agricultural production. There was political upheaval, social unrest, deepening economic crisis, and radical rhetoric of "remove poverty" unsupported by concrete action. Dependence on the USA for food supply was the harsh reality of the day. India had to buckle before the World Bank, which forced upon it the Washington Accord containing a package of policies considered to be growth-inducing.

This meant a shift in emphasis from major to minor irrigation, adequate provision for credit to credit-worthy farmers, increase in new costly agricultural inputs and production of fertilizers and hybrid seeds. These measures did stimulate farm production, especially of wheat, initiating the Green Revolution. However, in its social impact, it “conferred more than proportionate benefit to the better off farmers in the infrastructurally better endowed regions.” Also, it forged a linkage between agriculture and industry and the made the former vulnerable to market fluctuations, especially in regard to price and availability of key inputs. It certainly ended the stagnation which had assumed alarming proportions, but it did so at the cost of increased polarisation within the countryside. A financial crisis ensued; it led to the devaluation of the rupee, created a political storm and led to recession, inflation and decline in exports.

The deepening economic crisis combined with the weakening legitimacy of the political institutions ultimately resulted in the imposition of Emergency in 1975. The consequent political instability weakened commitment to socialism and attempts to develop the Indian economy on a capitalist path. The state-controlled industrial infrastructure, instead of promoting distributive justice led to an arbitrary, authoritarian, unimaginative and corrupt bureaucratic regime. Thus, 1980s started with the new regime of liberalisation of the economy.

The third phase of planning began in 1984, which saw the acceleration of the process of liberalisation as well as the emergence of state units as power centres enjoying a decisive voice in government formation at the national level. This phase is still continuing and the process of liberalisation, initiated on a large-scale by P. V. Narasimha Rao in 1991, has widened the scope for the private sector to play a pivotal role in shaping the economy and taking it on a higher growth curve.

The third phase is ongoing and marked by the process of liberation that became inevitable because of the malfunctioning of the economy. Excessive state control, straight-jacketed private sector and highly inefficient public sector were responsible for this. India, therefore, embarked upon the process of liberalisation in the 1980s wherein it initiated economic reforms by removing License Raj, a key factor in the irresponsible, self-perpetuating bureaucracy and widespread corruption and inefficiency. Telecommunications and software industry gained prominence. The liberalisation process aimed at tackling the balance of payment problem and ensuring long-term budgetary viability and the enhancement of the efficiency of the production system on the whole. It reflected market-orientation and integration with the world economy designed to promote openness of the economy to competition. The primary initiatives were in three areas, namely: (i) relaxation or removal of controls, greater competition and bigger role for the private sector and reforms in the public sector; (ii) reorientation of the fiscal policy and (iii) modernisation of industries with hi-tech bias.

A huge balance of payments crisis ensued in 1991, which provided an opportunity to the government to undertake major policy reforms of domestic investment and international trade policy reforms. The government abandoned the use of quantitative controls in economic management in favour of market instruments. There was a decisive move away from inward orientation towards greater integration with the global economy. Efforts to attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) have so far met with limited success. Critics point out that liberalisation and privatisation lead to jobless growth, voluntary retirement, and job retrenchment. Rise in fiscal deficit and neglect of agriculture are other areas of concern. Furthermore, redistribution of income in favour of the internalised elite, deterioration

in living standards of the vast majority of people, laxity towards the goals of social equality, justice and welfare are some of the areas where the New Economic policy has raised questioned marks.

Though liberalisation process has unleashed a higher economic growth rate, several problems remain unresolved, for example, the average Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and per capita income growth rates are lower; there is a prolonged deceleration in agriculture and industrial growth rates along with increased volatility of the former; decline in per capita production of food grains; sharp fall in capacity utilisation in industry; and the steep rise in unemployment ratio. Agriculture is grossly neglected without the creation of infrastructure like irrigation, research and extension, power and transport and distribution of land directly to the cultivator and the creation of cooperatives (or credit marketing and the establishment of rural industries) so that growth benefits could be shared with the population at large. The Green Revolution did help in achieving self-sufficiency in food but it increased the cost of production greatly burdening the small and marginal farmers. The rich farmers reaped the benefits of the Green Revolution, thus creating a vast chasm between the rural areas and the urban class in terms of their access to resources necessary for carrying out production purposes successfully and better standard of living. Failure of reforms in this sector has led to increasing poverty, slow growth in productivity, migration of villagers to the cities and low levels of nutrition and high rates of infant mortality. India's agrarian structure remains unchanged. Moreover, a new class of middle peasants has acquired political clout and emerged as a significant force in Indian politics. With no land reforms, a vast number of marginal and landless have been unable to improve their lot.

1.4 DEMOCRACY AND SOCIAL REVOLUTION

India embarked on creating a new social order founded on the values of freedom, equality and fraternity. The constitutional provisions setting the goals for social revolution, such as, the Directive Principles of State Policy, Fundamental Rights, the various articles protecting minority rights, those protecting the welfare of the weaker sections, especially Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) have now been in operation for the last six decades.

The Fundamental Rights aim at protecting the individual's private space from encroachment of the public space, such as, society and its conventions, and the government and other public associations. The provision of group rights was necessitated by cumulative inequality in a caste-differentiated, hierarchically organised society sanctioned by age-old traditions. Certain socioeconomic groups, such as, the SC, ST, and the OBC have been deprived of enjoying social goods such as, wealth, power and prestige and need to be uplifted not individually but as a group. Consequently, group rights have been granted to these groups so that they can be adequately empowered to take their rightful place in society. In order to achieve these objectives, the provision of removing socio-economic disparities that cripple individuals and prevent them from participating effectively in the shaping of collective decisions, has been provided for in the Constitution, particularly in the Preamble, to secure for all social, economic and political justice.

The working of the constitution is, however, influenced by socio-cultural environment of a country. India is no exception to this. Social stratification and cultural moorings have limited the spread of democracy and social and economic reforms, especially among the

lowest castes and poorest citizens. However, representative government and adult franchise are cherished by one and all for the empowerment they bring.

Insofar as Fundamental Rights are concerned, they, especially the right to property, created visible strains because of incompatibilities between the right of the individual and the goals of social revolution, on the one hand, and between Directive Principles and Fundamental Rights, on the other. These incompatibilities have led to a series of Constitutional amendments and to occasional instances of Parliament and Judiciary collusions as to who is a more capable guardian of the Constitution. The Fundamental Rights are no longer considered to be absolute. There are certain limitations, qualifications and exceptions to these. They are subject to Constitutional limitation and judicial review to ascertain conformity to the basic structure of the Constitution.

An attempt to remove incompatibilities between the Directive Principles and Fundamental Rights is also discernible. Even while the Directive Principles are not justiciable, the decisions of the Supreme Court from 1970 onwards have emphasised their positive aspects. The Directive Principles have been held to supplement the Fundamental Rights for achieving the objectives of a welfare state. The Supreme Court has begun to underscore their significance in determining the validity of an act. It holds that the exercise of Fundamental Rights by individuals cannot be ensured unless and until the Directive Principles are implemented.

The provision of group rights is meant to mete out preferential treatment to excluded or marginalised social groups within the Indian population. If the Preamble assures social justice to all, the Directive Principles require the state "to promote, with special care, the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections, and, in particular, of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes." The state is also directed to protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation (Art. 46). In addition, Art. 15 (1) prohibits discrimination against a citizen "on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them." Going beyond legal equality, the Constitution permits the state, through Art. 16 (3), to make any provision for the reservation of appointments or posts in favour of any backward class of citizens, which, in the opinion of the state, is not adequately represented in services under the state. Art. 15 provides that nothing can prevent the state from making special provisions for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward class of citizens or for the SCs and STs.

The Constitution sanctions three types of preferential treatments: reservation of seats of legislative bodies for SCs and STs, government jobs and educational institutions, provision of certain expenditure, services, and ameliorative schemes such as scholarships, grants, loans, land allotments, health-care, legal aid as well as some anti-poverty measures, and measures of social protection intended to safeguard vulnerable groups from oppression and injustice. In all this, the framers of the Constitution refused to accept economic deprivation and the consequent backwardness as the sole criterion of identifying groups for preferential treatment. They treated social backwardness as the *causa prima* of both educational and economic backwardness and deprivation. These provisions have been eminently helpful in reducing the pains of dispossession and destitution; they have uplifted a large number of people from economic distress and social degradation. The programmes of social justice, however, have not made a significant dent in the structure of exclusion or even blunted its sharpness. There is a gap between the deprived and the general population. Discrimination in employment, wages, credit, etc. is still widespread. Thus the differences in economic status among several social groups still persist.

1.5 OVERVIEW

It is at this backdrop as mentioned in the above sections that various movements arose, which tried to address the concerns of people at large. The dissatisfaction of the people with the lack of governance and government-related projects in the political, economic and social realms has given way to mass movements. In the political arena, instability and corrupt practices led to movements like Total Revolution; in the economic field, it saw movements like Bhoodan for land reforms; farmers' movements seeking to redress their long-term grievances; development-projects led to displacement and degradation of ecology and environment and hence gave way to Narmada Bachao Andolan and Tehri dam, Chipko Andolan and so on. All these movements, taking cue from the examples of history, followed non-violent principles as enunciated by Gandhi and involved a massive number of people to show their strength of solidarity and collectivity. We are now witnessing movements that are addressing issues as varied as civil and democratic rights; rights of tribals and adivasis; women's rights; rights for conserving natural resources like water and land. Most of these movements have been rather successful in achieving their objectives. Similarly, the organisational abilities, dynamics and strategies have acquired new dimensions and presented the leadership with enormous challenges to sustain the momentum of the movements. India has had an advantage of closely witnessing the Gandhian methods and principles being put into practice. It is, therefore, not surprising that many of these movements provided exemplary models to others across the world to seek justice. It is one legacy of Gandhi that refuses to fade away in this country of numerous contradictions.

1.6 SUMMARY

India's tryst with destiny has not only seen the forsaking of Mahatma Gandhi's vision of a resurgent India but also brought forth a pattern of development that has failed to tackle some of the basic problems that have plagued Indian society for centuries. The phenomenon of lopsided development region-wise, economic sector-wise and social sector-wise still dogs the Indian economy. While gross domestic product has recorded a phenomenal growth but the distributive aspect of growth has been grossly neglected. Food grain production has increased tremendously; however, hunger still plagues a large proportion of the people. Lack of education condemns a large section of the population to unemployment and under-employment reinforcing acute poverty or worse, low wage jobs. Health and nutrition have not yet received the attention they deserve.

The phenomenon of disproportionate development points to a serious gap between promise and performance. This is best illustrated by the progress India has made in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) that consist of a set of eight targets to fight hunger, disease and ignorance to be met by 2015. India is severely lagging in poverty eradication, in providing food to all (while food grains keep rotting in government's go-downs), in reducing child and mother deaths and in fighting infectious diseases. This backdrop serves as a catalyst for many movements that have been concentrating on issues of social justice and equality.

1.7 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. What distinguishes Mahatma Gandhi's vision of India from that of Jawaharlal Nehru?

2. What do you mean by social revolution and what instrumentalities did Jawaharlal Nehru use to realise the goals of this revolution?
3. Evaluate the achievements of state-planned economic development and the problems it has created.
4. What are the characteristics of democratic governance in India and how successful has it proven?
5. Discuss the achievements and shortfalls of the social revolution in India.

SUGGESTED READINGS

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