CHAPTER 4
POLITICAL PARTIES AND SOCIETAL VALUES (1)

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Perspective

How we think of institutions is - or has to be - one element in how we think of the West. To be sure, all societies, always, have had "institutions" in the sense of relatively stable, continuing relationships engaged in recurring activities: without them there would be no society. The pre-colonial Indian repertoire of institutions is familiar enough: family, village, caste order, bazaar, trading firm, kingship and its apparatus of government, *madarsa*, temple, pilgrimage, and so forth. When we think of "institution building", however, it is seldom directed at strengthening this repertoire. The concern is with institutions whose idea, if not their specific form, comes from the West.

This essay explores the values needed for sustaining political parties, as one kind of institution, in the domain of democratic politics. The notes assembled here began as scribbles in early 1996, as part of my continuing attempt to interpret my environment for myself. Political institutions have been central to my interests since the early 1980s: first in trying to understand what I see as the crisis in contemporary Indian society, and then in my attempt at considering the historical experiences - over the very long term - of three major civilizations, European, Indian, and now the Chinese.

Concepts

Politics, especially that concerning a society's core institutions and structures of governance, is a matter of the greatest importance in a large scale society. How these mechanisms are run is critical, for this sets the terms, as it were, for the conduct of all kinds of other activities - industry, scholarship, sports, or whatever. This politics deals with the instruments of power in the most general sense, just as the Reserve Bank deals with the instruments of money in the most general sense. This politics is, or can be, a society's prime mechanism for managing, bringing order to, its own present and future.

At the heart of political democracy lies political competition. At the national level in India, only a very *large* operation can be a credible political competitor. Such an effort *may* spring even from transient emotions or stimuli; but only a large political organization can *sustain* an enterprise of this order.

We may distinguish between three principal forms of political organization which can participate in a large-scale polity:

1. A *movement* is sustained by a collective purpose, a shared vision, a charismatic leadership - or some combination thereof. The members' levels of commitment and participation, and therefore their morale, are high. As between collective goals and personal interests, a movement thrives on subordinating the latter to the former. Movements are intrinsically episodic, however, being necessarily long on enthusiasm, and short on structure.

2. In order to participate in, and to manage, a society's everyday political affairs, a political movement would have to turn itself into a durable political party. It has to *routinize* its activities, and it does so by acquiring a *bureaucratic structure* (2) a party secretariat with officials, committees, possibly internal elections, and so forth; though this routinization - like everything else - can be leavened with a continuing, renewing, sense of shared vision and purpose.

3. A political party which controls a government, and therefore power, always runs the risk of turning into a *mafia*: that is, into an organization devoted principally to its members' personal gains, in ways which are illegitimate and clandestine - not open, legitimate, and law-governed. This risk can be reduced only if the society - or its political class - knows how to catch those using their control over power in clandestine ways and to mete them deterrent punishment. A people puts up with kleptocracy at its own peril.

Creating and maintaining an organization, and especially a bureaucratic structure, and mounting campaigns on a national scale, require massive re-sources: resources by way of personal time, of ideas and vision, of public commitment, but also a great deal of money.

The relative weight of these resources may vary from one organization to another. That is to say, the more an organization can command of voluntary time and commitment, the less it would need money, and *vice versa*. Building a national political party in a country as large and diverse as ours is a task of awesome proportions.

In multi-party political settings, a political party is a *voluntary association*, not a command organization like an army or a corporation (which would ordinarily command powerful sanctions for controlling its members). The party's bureaucratic structure - whose members may well be salaried - can be only a very small fraction of a party's strength. The party has to be able to secure the support of large numbers outside this structure.

The orderly functioning of voluntary associations - and therefore of large scale political parties - assumes the prior availability of a sense (a) of mutual relatedness, and (b) of realistic mutual trust - both in considerable measure. I say "realistic" mutual trust in order to stress that the objects of such trust have to be *trustworthy* (see below): failing this, the feelings of trust will sour. Trust has to be a two-way street, and it has to be backed by norms which are widely seen to be binding. If this is granted, two propositions may be advanced:

A. The greater the sense of mutual relatedness, the less the energy - and resources - which need go into infighting within organizations - and control thereof.

B. The greater the sense of realistic mutual trust, the more easily can an organization raise and use resources collectively.

The matter of trust needs comment, and I shall do so at the levels of interpersonal relations, of a large organization, and of a large-scale industrial society successively.

1. For A to trust B, B has to be trustworthy, and vice versa. That is to say, A and B have to play the game by rules that both understand, and both have to know that the other will abide by them. (There is an assumption here, of course, that both A and B do share one set of rules for the game! The assumption cannot always be taken for granted.)

2. For the working of a large-scale voluntary association or political party, it is necessary for this sense of mutual trust to be *generalized*: working on a large scale, on a voluntary basis, has to rest on the qualities of *generalized trust* and *generalized trustworthiness*. That is to say, (nearly) every member of the party has to be trustworthy so that most members may be able to take it for granted that they can trust each other. We shall return to the question of trust.

3. A key theme in the history of recent centuries is that of the enlargement of scales of activities - commerce, manufacture, urban centres, travel - and of the range of possible relationships. This enlargement of scales is a defining element of the industrial society; and its other aspect is the vastly increased magnitudes of *interdependence*, commonly between persons and groups who may have no face-to-face contact whatever. In embarking on a journey by rail or air, the passenger reposes an enormous level of trust in all those who manage railways or airways; in buying a medicine, likewise in its manufacturer. An industrial society can function effectively, then, if it has mastered the skills of creating generalized trust - and trustworthiness - as values. Hence the importance of "standards", of quality certification, and the like. Implicit in all this is a sensitivity to general norms - and to rule of law.

The importance of *control*: All societies - especially large and complex societies - are crucially dependent on their devices for social control. This is vital, for trust and trustworthiness can endure only if failures of trust elicit a condign response. The State has to be a central agency for underwriting these values in the larger social space.

Since the State commands vast agencies of (legitimate) force, law courts, and administrative power, it is a key instrument for social control. For that instrument to function responsibly, those who govern the State must themselves be accountable to the imperatives of social control. That is to say, their style and reputation must be such that they can be entrusted with power.

I quite realize that terms such as "control" and "social control" have been taboo in respectable Indian social and political thought in recent decades. We need to consider the heavy price we pay for this taboo. An extended discussion has appeared elsewhere(Saberwal 1996).

India: Twentieth Century Politics

If we look back on our experience with politics and political parties over the twentieth century, we can find only two mobilizational formulae which have clicked nationally:

1. *The National Movement.*There has been only one case: Indian National Congress. During the colonial period, its leadership controlled little by way of distributable material resources. The sense of humiliation at being subjugated was a major fact of life on which the national movement, from the late nineteenth century on, played to secure allegiance. With colonial power gone, the formula cannot be repeated; and, at least since the mid-70s, as the Congress continued as the principal party of government, it began to acquire the marks of a mafia.

2. *Religious identities*: Muslim League, Bhartiya Janata Party (and its associates). Their effectiveness has rested on digging up, and activating, the debris of history: that of symbols in the great religious traditions; and of past patterns of hurt, anxiety, and animosity, arising in myriad conquests, struggles, and domination in centuries past. The catch in this strategy is that it is inescapably divisive - and hostile to its "others". It corrodes the sense of mutual trust and relatedness, especially in relations with groups which it defines as "others"; it corrodes the preconditions of a vigorous democratic polity.

Other formulae have been tried, and these too may be seen in two groups.

A) At the regional level, other elements have been effective: a more or less revolutionary ideology, as with the *communist* parties in Kerala, West Bengal, and Tripura; *caste* and tribal identities; regional identities, reaching out to a linguistic community, sometimes through a religious tradition (Akali Dal) or a film star's following (Telegu Desam initially).

B) Then there are the coalitions. Janata Party in the wake of the Emergency (1977-79), National Front in the mid-80s, and currently the United Front (1996-), have tried to build coalitions out of disparate, smaller constituents. Their rise to power has been swift; as swift the disintegration of the two earlier efforts. National level coalitions, of such diverse constituents, have possessed neither firm structure nor ideological glue. These were not, these could not be, stable. The lesson seems to be that a short-term issue may enable you to win one election - or at least to form a government; but you need a durable structure to stay the political course over time.

In sum, India has had serious difficulties in creating durable national political parties, properly so called, if we set aside the Congress as a special case. Why?

Underlying Difficulties

We noted earlier some prerequisites for the viability of large scale political parties: a sense of mutual relatedness, and that of mutual trust, indeed of generalized mutual trust. In India, historically, this sense of relatedness and trust used to be concentrated within the family and *jati* - where the effective sanctions for internal control over members were located. It has been seen as a pattern of *small-scale morality* (Furer-Haimendorf 1967, pp. 117, 225) in this setting, the lines of trust would be relatively short, compared with situations where conditions of open-ended trust have come to be realized more adequately. It will be noted that, in recent decades, under pressure from the growing scales of economic activity, mass media, personal and social mobility, and the like, this small-scale morality - and its underlying sanctions - have also been giving way.

Now for a quality like "trust" in society, it is a question not of "yes" or "no" but of "more" or "less". A measure of trust is involved every time you step out of your house or order tea in a shop. It is simply that the *more of trust* that can realistically be taken for granted, the *lower the costs* of overcoming mistrust in any activity.

What happens where the lines of trust are short? One possible response is the following: in dealing with an unknown person A, B feels the need for an intermediary who knows A, or one who knows someone who knows A. To establish a mutual relationship, A and B need mutual trust, but are unable to generate it bilaterally; they need an intermediary X who provides them mutual reassurance, who is able to guarantee their mutual good faith, as it were. X may be related to the two parties separately, through such relationships as kinship, long friendship, clientship, and so forth. This shortness of the lines of trust may account for what Morrison sees as an aspect of Indian society: the widespread need "in innumerable interactions in Indian life [for] intermediaries..., particularly when the initiator is the socially inferior party" (Morrison 1972, p. 327). Every society uses intermediaries in some measure; the question is: how much?

To return to the enlargement of social scales: Independent India has had a lush profusion of all manner of associations, institutions, and arenas in which to act. Many of these are conceived formally in the Western mode but, whatever their charters, these have tended to suffer from two sets of weaknesses. On one side, these institutions - even the most hallowed ones, such as the Indian National Congress - have only a shallow grounding in Indian history, myth, psychology, and so forth: inescapably, since their models

came from the West. On the other, their personnel necessarily come from within Indian society. The more "rooted" they are in the soil, as it were, the greater their engagement with the smaller scale moralities - call them "codes" - which, as we have noted earlier, used to prevail by and large.

You get a multiplicity of these codes in these institutions, then, which spells anomic conditions: not a condition in which mutual trust can be expected to blossom easily. Linguistic cleavages - especially those around English - are one aspect of this situation. Agencies for fostering codes that would hold over wide social spans have failed to emerge - or be effective.

The "Congress", at least since the mid-70s, has survived not as an effective political organization but as a forum of personal control by the Leader. This needed enormous resources - secured by virtue of control over the apparatus of state, and the favours that could be shown. Much of this was necessarily clandestine. Its collections were in the suitcase and similar modes. A good many suitcases went into private closets.

The question, then, is: how to build an alternate form of political organization? One that is open, breeds generalized trust, raises funds transparently, and therefore would be durable?

Conclusion

I have argued that the quality of generalized trust is crucial for constructing large political organizations, which are necessarily voluntary associations. A similar argument could be mounted for institutions more generally. I have also suggested that "effective rule of law" may help advance this quality of generalized trust, though it would take a great deal more too. This kind of advocacy can seem wholly quixotic in contemporary India. At a time when mistrust is all too common - even within a family or a village - to speak of "generalized trust" may seem to bespeak a loss of contact with reality; similarly, to speak of "effective rule of law", context-free rules, and the like in a society racked by hierarchy and segmentation.

These are serious objections which must be taken seriously; and it is necessary to agree on some ground rules. In any situation, the viability of a specific proposal has to be judged not only absolutely, against some general ideas of viability, but also relatively, in relation to what alternatives are available.

One advantage of locating "trust" as a key value is this: even if people have difficulty in trusting their immediate kin, neighbours, and so forth, there is a widespread awareness of the importance of trust in social existence. It has ready equivalents in Hindi/ Urdu/ Punjabi - *itbar, vishwas* - and presumably in the other languages too. It may be possible, it seems to me, to pick this elementary kind of value, place it in a larger context - for example, by stressing the link between trust and trustworthiness - and lift it to the level of making it

a general expectation. We should not jump into this (or anything else!) precipitately; but if the basic idea seems reasonable and necessary, we could search for ways to promulgate it.

Similarly with effective rule of law, context-free rules, etc. in a context of hierarchy and segmentation. What we have to do, it seems to me, is to establish clear points of reference - even if pursuing them means that we have to take collective U-turns, socially speaking. If general rules are inescapably important for our future, we have no option but to learn our way to procedures whereby we can get around, or override, this hierarchy and segmentation.

We must recognize that, at the end of this twentieth century, it is only societies which learn the skills requisite for restructuring themselves con-sciously, repeatedly, that will retain the autonomy requisite even for making such an attempt at all. The others will become banana republics, large or small. Societies *can* learn the skills requisite for restructuring themselves. The most spectacular example, here, is contemporary Europe. Within this century, its internal antagonisms and conflicts provided occasions for two World Wars. That was barely two generations ago. Currently, the continent is in process of *political* unification into a federal structure. The various national entities are dovetailing parts of their sovereignty with institutions of federal Europe. The scope of this reconstruction is comprehensive, not limited to the "market": it includes education, human rights, animal husbandry, and a great deal else.

On one side, this reconstruction relies on the legal tradition; all Europe is inheritor of the same, Roman legal tradition. Confidence in the capacity of that legal tradition to mediate between national and federal laws and institutions in the future has been an important element in enabling Europeans to trust each other - despite their all too recent history. On the other side, this reconstruction is scarcely an act of God. This seemingly dramatic change of course for Europe is in fact the *slow* culmination of initiatives taken, and persisted in, by visionaries like Jean Monnet over the decades - since the second War, and indeed much before then.

To sum up, then, the important thing, I would submit, is to think about directions we ought to take, regardless of how quixotic these may seem. If our direction, and goals, are picked strategically, and pursued relentlessly, what may seem impossible at one point begins to look only difficult soon thereafter.

Notes

(1) Much in this essay is owed to Raju Damle, Mushirul Hasan, Bishnu Mohapatra, and Sunanda Sen. The argument was shaped through a discussion at a workshop on "Rethinking Institutions: Democratic politics in post-colonial India", Centre for Political Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University , New Delhi, March 22-23,1996. A variation on this will appear in Seminar issue on "Rethinking Institutions" (in press).

(2) "Structure" refers in this note to a bureaucratic apparatus: "Organization", to more varied political forms.

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CHAPTER 5
GENDER AND INEQUALITY IN SRI LANKAN SOCIETY: A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE (1)

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Introduction

The sociological approach to the study of inequality takes into account the difference between inequalities inherent in the nature of human beings and those which are evident in their conditions of existence. Inequalities inherent from nature are of no interest to sociologists. But differences in life chances and life styles among people which result from different positions they occupy in society, is the area of interest to sociologists (Beteille1972).

Thus the concern in this paper is, firstly, to bring gender into the main stream Sri Lankan sociological studies on inequalities where it has been neglected. Secondly, perhaps more importantly, to understand how, gender differences act as an independent dimension which can also cut across other dimensions such as class, caste, and ethnicity in determining one's life chances and one's status in Sri Lankan society.

Earlier studies on Sri Lankan society by sociologists and anthropologists did attempt to explain and interpret social inequalities evident in society. Their studies however, concentrated mainly on aspects of caste, kinship and land ownership. Passing remarks on gender relations in these studies never evolved into serious discussions (Ryan 1953; Pieris 1956; Leach 1961; Yalman 1967; Obeyesekere 1967).

Similarly, recent studies on social inequalities have also neglected the aspect of gender as their main concerns have been on factors such as income, occupations, ethnicity, landownership, correct political connections and caste (Hettige 1984, 1995; Perera 1985; Gunasinghe,1966). However, some scholars have been able to break this tradition and to bring gender into focus. De Zoysa in her study of a village in the Mahaweli Settlement area, analyzes the relationship between gender divisions, gender ideology, power and resistance among different class groups of settlers (De Zoysa 1995). Perera tried to understand the manner in which female sexuality and gender roles were socially and culturally constructed in Sinhala society by looking at the restrictive sexual scripts that are imposed on women (Perera 1985).