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Population and Development : The Indian Context

OUR purpose here is to present a perspective of the prevailing situation which might serve to highlight the importance of integrating population policy and development planning. Both development and population are, in the present context, matters of paramount political importance. They have, in fact, been endowed with political character from the beginning of our existence as an independent nation. If their interaction poses a problem today, we have to seek its solution in consonance with the nature of the polity we have been trying to establish in this country and in the context of the ideals we cherish for the political order for this ancient land. This does not necessarily imply that the problem should invoke partisan politics but it does not also exclude the need of making changes in the operation of the political system such as would help its viable solution.

We, as a nation, swear by 'democracy' and many of us have recently taken pride in saving it, such as it was operating, from a grave danger of its eclipse. Yet, the impression is unavoidable that the art of practising 'true' democracy still escapes us. A man, ripe in age, had warned us, before he was so suddenly Snatched away, by fate some 30 years ago from his 'dumb millions', that what his country needed was not merely the displacement of the alien rule but a complete replacement of the alien method of governance by one suited to the start realities faced all over the country. This has not happened and we have had thisway so long of what has been called 'neo-colonialism'. This has inexorably

led to the accentuation of 'dualism' not merely in the realism of economic progress but also in that of social life. There, therefore, has flourished the supremacy of the elite classes over the hapless masses, of cleverness and intellect over wisdom, of intrigue over integrity, of politics, which was once called the last resort of a scoundrel over statesmanship which is but an accomplished and purposeful exercise of skill, vision and wisdom, and, in the task of development, of the latest more sophisticated econometrics as a branch of abstract, asocial and amoral mathematics over economics, which is but a branch of social philosophy or that of practical wisdom.

We have today a small 'emancipated' elite class at the helm in political, social, economic, administrative and even intellectual or cultural spheres in the modern sector, displaying a pattern of living of affluent western style characterised by ever zealous pursuit of consumerism and commensurate demographic behaviour. Their affluence is derived from not so visible but none the less invidious exploitation of the teeming masses, both in urban and rural areas, who continue to share the misery of living, seeking to preserve whatever security, social and economic, that the traditional social order had ensured them for millenia.

Inevitably, the manner of functioning of the parliamentary democracy has generated among them from time to time hopes and aspirations for rapid amelioration of their material conditions but only to bring in its trail ever widening spread of frustrations and occasional bursts of angry disenchantments. The result, on the whole, has been that they would not forsake traditional patterns of behaviour for want of a viable alternative. Freedom, which, if anything, is all-round self-help, has remained elusive to them for the reason that benevolence has been the presumptions arrogation characterising the development effort of the powers that had set their sights on making 'India-as-a whole' a modern state competing on equal terms with those who had behind them a couple of centuries of material progress. This has so far pre-empted full involvement of the masses in the development process; it was, and probably still is, a development process by the classes, apparently for the masses, but in reality, for themselves.

The performance of the development effort of the sort that we had mounted and have pursued now for nearly a generation has been extolled, by those who had carried the responsibility for its planning at the highest levels, for its success in basic reconstruction, including the creation of a nationwide infrastructure of economic overheads and a variety of heavy and key industries and for accumu-

lating a sizable pool of scientific knowledge, technical skills and technological expertise. It is pointed out that even with the bulk of the greatly expanded population living on the verge of subsistence in agriculture, despite the green revolution for its success has been patchy and limited, we have found a place among the major industrial nations of the world. May be We are stronger and more resourceful as a nation now than we were at the beginning of independence, and are able even to win contracts in other developing countries against keen competition from more prosperous nations.

But it is also true that these claims have been criticised as of little consequence and the feeling in some knowledgeable quarters is that the whole strategy of planning was misguided as it drew inspiration from outside rather than basing itself squarely on the specific requirements of the shattered economy of the country in which rural poverty and urban misery have continued to grow ever more acute. It is not denied that development has successfully created islands of affluence and prosperity within a pervasive situation of underdevelopment and deprivation; but it is equally true that in the process we have accumulated a variety of inter- and intra-sectoral imbalances and widened inter-regional, inter-class and inter-personal disparities in economic performance, in the accumulation or disposition of wealth, in the generation of income and in fulfilment of the needs of essential consumption. It has been contended that development has bypassed the masses, and that its gains, whose distribution has led to the disparities mentioned above, have been obtained at a tremendous social cost involved in the progressive expansion of the under-utilization of the growing labour force.

The vocal denunciation of the approach to development adopted till recently has in the same breath strongly pleaded for a switchover of investment priorities to the rural sector, to agriculture, to small and cottage industries and to social overheads of health and education and advocated a strategy of decentralising development; and in all this, there has been a tendency to invoke the name of Mahatma Gandhi. But it is doubtful whether the approach propounded by him will be accepted in its totality; so far there has been no convincing evidence in the performance of governmental functions that it is informed by Gandhiji's ideals. The matter calls for a much deeper appreciation of the realities of the situation that has witnessed profound changes since the formulation of that holistic approach.

This is not to deny the continuing validity of his method of approach but only

to underscore his own counsel that social action at any given time must rest oa a clear understanding of all the varied aspects of the prevailing situation. Following him, it is necessary to be ever vigilant of the emergence of negative elements in the evolving social situation and to be ever ready to cash on the positive aspects of that situation; his only insistence was that in doing so there should not be the slightest compromise of the external and universal principles on the basis of which he had evolved his strategy of social and economic progress and formulated his vision of a social order suited to the genius of his great country. A pertinent question is : Would not a partial and selective application of his ideas take us farther away from the 'revolution' that he had begun in the interest of the most deprived among the masses of this country ?

The story of our pioneering lead in the adoption of population policy at the official level has been repeated much too often, at times with great pride. But a little reflection on the uneasy course of its plight during the last two decades will reveal that it has not formed a part of, but an appendage to, development planning; that it has been limited in scope to population control through fertility reduction; and that its emphasis on modern contraceptive technology, including the much abused programme of sterilization, has smacked equally of neo-colonialism swaying the minds of those who appropriated the onus of its formulation and execution. The exigencies of the situation have been, for some time now, prompting a serious reconsideration of the diverse aspects of the programme and the emerging accent is on packaging contraception, under the pseudonym of family welfare replacing family planning, along with public health, medical care, maternal and child health, nutrition etc. This new orientation may indeed prove to be good in so far as it goes; but it would not do us any good to ignore the probability that its efficacy is inevitably conditioned by the nature and tempo of interrelated processes of social and economic development.

Of late, it has been fashionable also to talk of integrating population policies and programmes into the development process but as yet there is nowhere to be found a sufficient measure of sure knowledge about how best to accomplish this crucial trick, at least, within a political system resting on individual freedom, It has, at the same time, been urged that we must so expand the scope of population related action as to envelope the varied aspects of population dynamics, including mortality and morbidity, fertility and family planning, internal migration and urbanization, international migration and even social mobility. If

we agree, as I feel we must, with this broad view of the population problem, we would find that there is hardly any development policy and programme that remains untouched by the problem; there is no doubt that population phenomena constitute an all-pervasive process of continuous change. It is with this notion in mind that I had availed myself of the opportunity, at the Asian Population Conference held under the auspices of ECAFE in New Delhi in 1963, to advance a plea that 'it is not sufficient to remain content with a population policy of an exclusive nature that it has so far been. The urgency of dealing with population problems should inform the *conception* of all and every programme and policy undertaken by development planning'.

This, it seems to me, is even more crucial today than ever before for the very reason that our endeavour to generate the necessary change in the reproductive behaviour of the broad masses of our people through official propagation of modern contraception, on the strength of a nation-wide infrastructure of centres and sub-centres offering the public service of family planning, accompanied through it was by 'extension education' in the benefits it would bring to the nation and to individual families using the service, has not prevented the huge addition of over 150 million persons to our population since the holding of that Conference in New Delhi. There is, however, reason to believe that this could not have been avoided, because the course of development during that period had remained uneasy and uncertain on account of a host of internal and external factors. What is of more crucial importance is that the exercise of planning could not impart any firmness to the development process because it has yet to find its way out of the maze of spacious assumptions and abstractions, borrowed from the more advanced economies of the West, for the conceptualization of the development process, in an economy almost wholly characterised by acute and pervasive backwardness in contrast, in terms of national income, the rate of growth of material product, capital-output ratios, input-output matrices, capital accumulation, labour mobilization, social cost-benefit analysis, economic model-building and the like.

However, a disenchantment with this kind of 'academic' planning exercises did progressively emerge during the period, more from the shortfalls in plan targets of economic growth and unanticipated sectoral imbalances arising from utter lack of coordination of progress in different fields than from the failure of planning to take adequately into account the dynamics of rapid population growth. It became, in any case, fashionable to quantify poverty, measure dis-

parities in the distribution of income and wealth, conceptualise minimum needs for the sustenance of human existence and speak of the neglected planning goals of social justice and employment.

At the popular level, all this led to the coining of such slogans as *'Garibi Hatao'* i.e. Get Rid of Poverty, in order to catch the imagination of unwary masses and finally to a string of promises, for the amelioration of mass misery, contained in the 20-point programme taken up for execution in the era of 'discipline'. It is now a matter of history that this populist programme had for the time being supplanted, not supplemented, several of the related programmes of development in the fifth plan, including the vital minimum needs programme. The process of planning has since been resumed to be purveyed from the centre in the same old Yojana Bhavan of New Delhi. There is as yet no clear evidence that the art of purveyance will mark a substantial departure from the past in the conceptualization or orientation of the development process, apart, of course, from the proclamation of the resort to the technique ofrolling' the plan in search of greater flexibility. How it would grapple with the salient problems of population is a matter, at the moment, of guessing, which is frankly hazardous to attempt.

The said disenchantment with the sophistication of planning exercises has not prevented many planners and policy makers from viewing population growth at times as a scapegoat for the poor performance of the development effort in the matter of increasing the gross national product. It has been much too tempting to point to its significance in enlarging the denominator in the computation of per capita product growth. It has been argued, rather helplessly, at the highest level that we must 'somehow' get this problem of growing numbers out of the way in order to deal more effectively with the more pressing and accentuating problem of mass poverty. And this 'somehow' had meant fixing of time-bound targets of administrative action, increasing the emphasis on once-for-all method of sterilization, and wide-spreading the use of incentives and disincentives, which culminated ultimately into a large scale exercise of coercion. It is not necessary and even legitimate to shift the blame now on to any individual or group involved in the counter-productive process of culminating the sterilization drive into one of forcible vasectomies, for the basic responsibility for misconstruction lay not with those who relentlessly pursued its inherent logic but with those who adopted the approach, from the beginning, of looking at the problem of population growth in isolation of social forces and with a sense of fear, despair and helplessness.

What that culmination had nipped in the bud was the returning sanity in search for a middle path of optimally combining population policy with the development policy, such as the one we had advanced at the 1974 World Population Conference. We had, at that Conference, gone even further to propound a piece of wisdom that 'development was the best contraceptive'. This was not a matter of raising a mere slogan in order to catch the international press. We were, I believe, trying thereby to enunciate, on the basis of our accumulating experience of running an official family planning programme, a valid and practicable approach to the question of reducing the negative influence of population growth on the raising of material levels of living.

What that phrase implied in the context of our experience is that if population growth had remained virtually unchecked despite the vigorous pursuit of a nationwide family planning programme simultaneously with the execution of a series of comprehensive plans for the development of the national economy, the fault did not lie solely with the former programme, which was conceptually quite straightforward but it lay squarely, to a much greater extent, with the character as well as the tempo of development that had hopelessly failed to generate the necessary motivation among the masses for the practice of contraception. It is too much indeed to expect a mere technique of convenience meant only to facilitate the most intimate behaviour to generate changes in the long entrenched value systems governing that behaviour; the latter generation of changes in the value systems is the legitimate role of development, both economic and social. The above formulation of the approach to population question at the World Population Conference was, in effect, a strong plea for the need to so restructure development as to maximise the kind of impact it should have on the social milieu, such as would help the speedier generalisation of small family norm within the society.

The question is not, therefore, of letting population alone but of approaching it with the fullest possible appreciation of the agonizing realities of the 'developing* economy, that remains, by and large, in a state of disintegration such as it was in when its imperialist exploitation was removed with the lifting of the British Rule and, more pertinently, in the light of the obdurate elements in social structures in different parts of this vast country, all of which have continued to tatter even after that happy event. While we must retain population control and make it more effective by imparting it the most humane orientation that is possible, it is of crucial importance to approach the onerous task of develop-

ment in terms of that appreciation. This would only mean the adoption of a truely indigenous course of development.

In any case, it is being increasingly realised, both here and abroad among the concerned international agencies, that the concept, content and strategy of development call for a rather drastic reorientation; concern is shifting from mere quantum of goods and services to 'quality of life', hopefully, also within nations oversaturated with affluence. So far as we are concerned, the affluence is marginal and therefore more conspicuous, and quantum of goods and services is also vitally important for improving the quality of life. What requires careful consideration for this purpose is the composition of the national product which must record speedier quantitative growth. In this regard, one might hope that the recent political changes at the national level have created the semblance of an opportunity. It would, however, be too presumptuous for us to speculate if, when and how that semblance would turn into a reality.

It is not, even so, idle for us to reflect upon how an approach to development might, in the course of its dealing with the complex issues of economic growth and social progress, take due note not only of the rate of growth in its size but also of the progression of changes in the structure, distribution and composition of the population. This reflection may well begin by recognising the fact that we are not starting in this country today on a clean slate and we must, therefore, attempt an objective appraisal of both the positive and negative elements left in. the prevailing situation by the history of this nation's endeavour since independence, without in any way letting our minds to be clouded by biases relating to the personalities, fads, and fancies of those who have had the privilege of participating in the making of that history. However much one may deplore the general course of this history, it is incumbent upon us to turn the elements of progress of material development attained so far, especially the expansion of basic economic overheads, the diversification of the industrial structure and the advances in science and technology, into positive assets on the basis of which the process of development could be carried forward in consonance with a newer, more realistic orientation that we might wish to impart to the strategy of economic and social progress.

The perception of the needed orientation will differ, at times sharply, not only among academic disciplines involved or even among scholars belonging to a given discipline but, more crucially, also among politicians, policy makers, pro-

gramme administrators and leaders of public opinion in general, according to the differing ideological nuances swaying their minds. Hopefully there exists, however, a common denominator in their avowed concern for the people. All the concerned parties and people of different shades profess to be greatly exercised by such salient facts of the situation as mass poverty, massive unemployment and pervasive incidence of social injustice, and, apparently, also by the rapid growth of our population, One might expect, therefore, that they all should admit, at least in principle, the necessity of evolving an alternative strategy of development such as would hold out the promise of a simultaneous alleviation of these common concerns. It is the initiation of this vital search for an alternative path of development that calls for a shift in the focus of attention from population to people, from a mere quantitative analysis constricting the scope of technical demography to the study of population in exploration of ways of securing a rapid all-round improvement in the quality of life.

This search must necessarily be conducted for our own sake and by us, in line with the evolution of applied economic thought rooted in the genius of this land of ours, which has, as shown recently by Ganguli, been handed down to us, say, from Raja Rammohun Roy, through the succession of such leaders of public opinion as Ranade, Joshi, Dadabhai Naoroji, Gokhale, Tagore, Gandhi and Nehru. But that is not to say that we must, at the same time, leave outside our purview even specious considerations of the problem facing us and other similarly situated developing nations of the Third World, flowing into our open society from outside, especially from the industrially powerful West and from the multi-national international agencies like those allied to United Nations, if only to appreciate the ways of thinking and action to be scrupulously eschewed in the process. We have, for example, a peroration in the compilation of studies issued by the World Bank on the attainment of *Economic Growth with Social Justice,* a very persuasive outline of an approach to 'Another Development' enunciated by the 1975 Dag Hammarskjold Report entitled *What Now* ? and a provocative and scholarly *Study of Economics* as if *People Mattered* by the late Professor E. F. Schummacher. This is indeed a highly selective short citation of references but I am persuaded that together they adequately represent the kind of fare we receive from outside in great abundance. There is no doubt that much of this accumulating literature carries the impression of a great concern for our plight, an ample measure of goodwill for our endeavour and a mixture of well-meant appreciation and criticism of our performance. Even so, it would not do us any good to be so overwhelmed either by the appreciation

or by the criticism of our performance as to let our firm hold of the ground to loosen in any way.

That such a response to the words of wisdom flowing in from outside is, on our part, quite probable is indicated by the uncritical acceptance by many in this country of the above catchy tract on the study of economics as a sort of Gandhian panacea for all our ills, social and economic. There is apparently much in it that draws upon Gandhi's thinking. Its appeal to reason and intelligence derives from its denouement, almost in Gandhi's style, of the economic course that the modern world has been following and from a series of telling home-truths pronounced in unambiguous terms. To cite but a few of these home-truths: it underscores the fact that the problem of production remains unresolved despite the triumphant march of science and technology; it castigates western affluence for its wanton rape of the environment; it unequivocally denounces the use of nuclear energy even for peaceful purposes as perilous to mankind's future; and it asserts that the rich societies; and not the poor, are the problem children of the world. No less appealing are its earnest pleas for infusing a little ethics into economics, for the ushering in of an 'economy of permanence' and for seeking out technology with a human face. Much of it, however, is relevant only to those who suffer from surfeit of affluence based on sophisticated technology. To seek beauty in the small is a game that is better played by those who are afflicted all round by industrial gigantism than by those who, like us, abound with masses in dire want of even tiny means of subsistence. We may, therefore, take the *Small is Beautiful,* at best, as an able and intelligent exposition of some of Gandhi's ideas for the benefit of the western world. For the rest, we may, if we are so inclined, use our own direct access to the plenty of authentic compilations on his life and work.

What, then, is the kind of orientation it is feasible for us to impart to the course of development in a situation rendered ever more desperate by the rapid growth of population? How do we build upon the gains of development secured so far, however small and few they might appear to those who would not see? How do we eliminate the constraints that we have in the process accumulated in plenty to make the task of development more arduous than ever, as most people have now come to realise? How can we entirely remove, or at least substantially reduce, the 'dualism' infesting our economic and social life? And, since the failure to involve the people at large in the process is a most generally admitted bane of our development effort, how can we now make

development a matter of serious concern of the masses? These are large questions that need to be resolved in order to restore a healthy interaction between population and development such as would render population change helpful to the "moral and material' progress of the society.

Admittedly, these are questions that are easily raised but they are also the questions that cannot be easily answered. We are still, despite the restoration of democracy, groping in the dark, even if we may persuade ourselves to hope that it is only the darkness before dawn. Whether the fond hope for the dawn is realised or not, the quest for resolution of these questions has to be mounted and pursued relentlessly, perhaps for a long time to come. As a mere beginning of this quest, we might take a cue from the *1975 Dag Hommarskjold Report* mentioned earlier. Following that lead, it can be maintained that the needed reorientation of development must place the satisfaction of the basic needs of the masses, especially the most deprived among them, at the focal point of the development process; carry effective self-reliance down to the grass-root levels; secure the transformation of social, economic and political structures necessary for these purposes; facilitate full and wise use of science and technology in such a total transformation; and ensure free and full circulation of public information among the masses in order to generate social consciousness on a scale requisite for them to recapture their self-confidence in their own capacity to carry on, with responsibility, their vital role in the dynamics of the reoriented development process.

Progressive erosion of self-reliant satisfaction of the basic needs of the Indian masses, witnessed all through the period of the British Rule, had continued virtually unabated during the succeeding three decades of independence. It is even felt in some quarters that the process of erosion had, in fact, been more rapid during these decades on account particularly of the acceleration of the rate of population growth. In any case, the present dimensions of the resulting corrosion are shown to be quite staggering by the numerous exercises in quantitative assessment of the extent of poverty pervading the country, which have appeared in recent years. This is reflected partly, but no less seriously, also in the mounting official figures of the unemployed or underemployed job-seekers. The want of self-reliant satisfaction of basic necessaries of life is, in substance, synonymous with unemployment or inadequate employment.

The problem of employment, in its varied aspects of unemployment, under-

employment, marginal employment etc., has, for quite some time, been exercising the minds of planners, policy makers and scholars, especially those belonging to the discipline of economics. Among them, there has been a rather unending and inconclusive discussion of such issues as the conceptualisation, definition and measurement of the phenomenon of unemployment, including underemployment; the social, economic and demographic identification of the so afflicted groups and sections within the population; the related crucial problem of the choice of production techniques; and the fixation of priorities in a programme of generating employment opportunities. At the same time, there appeared an increasing number of ad hoc projects, each designed (o touch but a particular fringe of the colossal totality of the problem. All this has, no doubt, been attempted within the broad frame of successive five year plans. But we have, as yet, to reach the heart of the problem. Even while the planners and the pandits continued to debate the issues involved at the theoretical level and while the adhocism continued to spread its sway widely in the field of substantive action, the accelerated growth of the total population of the fifties and sixties had started to pass on that acceleration to the successive working age groups and to progressively enlarge thereby the unemployed component of the labour force. The situation is becoming increasingly desperate; so much so that the absence of viable policy options is leading even the extreme left at the state level to the dispensation of an avowedly capitalistic fiscal aberration of doling out unemployment relief.

Even in this desperate situation we might embrace the truism that there is no conflict between economic growth and employment and hope that the official commitment at the central level to eradicate unemployment within a decade or so is inspired by such a conviction. It is not sceptism to sound a warning that this august commitment can be fulfilled *only* if we switch the emphasis from the official creation ofjob opportunities by the centre over to the task to imparting hope and confidence to the masses at the grass-root level that they can themselves create these opportunities. It is pretentious to discount the potentialities of mass participation in such a venture, even though we realise their despair of the day, which they suffer for want of direction and organisation in an atmosphere of utter dependence on the state and its administration built up during the colonial period and remaining unalleviated during the succeeding decades. We are face to face with a rather strange contradiction between underdevelopment which implies a tremendous lot of work that remains to be done and pervasive unemployment signifying great lack of opportunity to work. It is a

question basically of arousing the productive forces of the 'dumb millions' without waiting too long for accumulating material capital with which to equip the human labour power for a quantum jump in its productivity. It is a difficult and time-consuming task of generation on so large a scale the necessary motivation among the masses and preparing them to exercise their rights but not without at the same time accepting the responsibility and the duty of putting in their best effort. It would no doubt require them also to temper their aspirations and begin with their more modest and simple requirements of life. This is the task of the same kind as the constructive work which the Congress when it was in wilderness in pre-independence days had sought to promote but which it had foresaken on coming into power. I am therefore inclined to agree with the *Small is Beautiful* in its plea, "The really helpful things will not be done from the centre; they cannot be done by big organisations; but they can be done by people themselves. If we can recover the sense that it is the most natural thing for every person born into this world to use his hands in a productive way and that it is not beyond the wit of man to make this possible, then I think the problem of unemployment will disappear and we shall be asking ourselves how we can get all the work done that needs to be done".

To begin to deal with the people in this manner by promoting 'constructive work' activities among them is to begin to approach, in right earnest, the hitherto largely neglected field of social development. Conceptually, the scope and content of social development are much less clear than those of economic development. It must be recognised, however, that it impinges more directly on the diverse aspects of population change; for example, the determination of the more crucial component of population change, namely fertility, is a function ultimately of social organisation. It is, indeed, possible to view social development as dealing with a variety of intermediate variables intervening between economic growth and population change without discounting the fact that all the three fields are highly interlocked in a holistic process of mutual interaction.

It seems necessary, in connection with social development, to realise that public provision of social services of health, education and welfare, including social security and the satisfaction of other minimum needs of those on the lowest rungs of the income ladder, does not itself constitute social development. This is not to deny the pressing need for these public services or to argue against their rapid expansion and ensuring, in the process, an equitable access to them

for all sections of the population and for all parts of the country. There is, in this regard, a great scope for reorganising the nationwide infrastructures created for their dispensation from the centre.

This is well illustrated by the painful course of our educational development. The deficiencies and the many dysfunctional elements inhering the present education system are too well-known to be recalled here. We may, however, take note of the emerging signs of change in approach to this as to many other fields of public policy. There is now considerable enthusiasm for dealing with the more glaring of these deficiencies. It is said, for example, that illiteracy among the youth and adult sections of the population will be removed over a short span of the next five years. This would be a great achievement, as seen in the light of the progress of literacy during the last thirty years. It would be a much greater achievement if it is followed up by concrete measures enabling the use of the newly acquired literacy as a means of upward social and economic mobility. At the same time, we should begin to tailor the expanding educational system to the specific needs of the general progress of the masses in different parts of the country.

Social development has, in any case, to be viewed in much broader terms than public provision of social services. So viewed, its legitimate role is to speed up and appropriately canalize the processes of social change, involving far-reaching reformations of social structures, institutions, norms, mores and value systems; to eliminate entrenched bastions of social privilege and eradicate resilient sources of social exploitation and injustice so as to generalise the realisation of social freedom and equality, and to temper the tensions unavoidably generated by these processes. This broader need of securing speedy and purposeful social change has acquired urgency in the course of our functioning as an independent nation for the reason that the inequitable distribution of the gains of economic development achieved so far has greatly compounded the continuing inequalities, disabilities and indignities of the traditional social order. It is from the anguish caused by this pervasive deterioration of the social situation that a desperate call has been addressed to the youth of this country to launch a nationwide movement in the name of 'total revolution'. What form and scale will this movement assume is a matter, as yet, of speculation but it seems quite clear that the movement is conceived to be pursued along peaceful and constructive lines.

The role of the state in social development would, in principle, be rather

limited. The state could, for example, promote mass participation in wholesome social change, galvanize communication media for creating public opinion in favour of desirable changes in attitudes, norms and mores in tune with the needs of development as it has been attempting to do in respect of family planning; and enact appropriate social legislation by way of a follow-up of public opinion so created. Even so, the major burden of carrying forward the broader processes of social development would rest on the shoulders of leaders of public opinion at different levels. Hopefully, it can be pursued through a nationwide non-political cadre of disciplined and dedicated constructive workers, such as the one that had emerged to ally with the Congress in the pre-independence days. In the present context characterized by the alienation of the masses even from the political activists in the field, such a hope must appear to be without substance. But it cannot be denied that the course of social development will be not only slow and halting but also needlessly very painful without the constructive education of the masses in the exercise of their rights and responsibilities.

For the kind of reorientation of the development process that is needed for the wide promotion for self-reliant satisfaction of the basic needs of the masses and for appropriately directing the course of social change in this country, it seems imperative to make a rather drastic departure in our approach to the operational problems of planning. For much too long, we have kept on deploring the well known disabilities of the masses such as illiteracy, ignorance, superstition, fatalism, lack of initiative, and the like, without successfully exploring ways of arousing and harnessing their "dormant" energies for the removal of these disabilities and for enabling them to better their lot by their own effort. We have been, on the other hand, inspired always to make a valiant effort to confer on them welfare and development from the centre but succeeding thereby only in raising their expectations to impossible heights without in any way warranting them to accept their imperative duties to themselves, towards the society and towards posterity. We have in the process made the task of planning development so stupendous and needlessly so complex that it can no longer be handled from the centre alone.

Such a realisation has been increasingly felt at the highest levels for some time now. There has been an increasing advocacy of decentralised planning, of planning from below or of carrying down the process of planning to the grass-root levels. The successive five year plans have sought to enlarge the

scope for what has been called area planning, to place increasing emphasis oft regional planning and to plead for taking the district as the basic unit for conducting the exercises of planning. Of late, it has been widely canvassed that there is no alternative to dispersal of industrial growth. While all this has been in the air, there has appeared no serious attempt to restructure the unwieldy planning machinery at the centre. The idea, therefore, could be that even decentralisation, including area planning, district level planning, regional planning etc., would remain the prerogative of the over-expanded central planning caucus. What could be expected from this kind of entrenched planning set-up is decentralisation in form but not in substance.

It is thus important to emphasize that development, that is necessarily to be purveyed by the state, is a political process and economic decentralisation must necessarily be accompanied by the decentralisation of the political decision-making process. It is rather strange that while we have been applauding 'unity in diversities' of this land, our concern for unity has been at the excessive cost of disregarding the spatial differences not only in social, cultural, linguistic and institutional aspects of life but also in geographical, environmental and economic resource bases obtained in this vast land of ours. It can even be contended in the light of these diversities, that the maintenance of our political unity *as* a nation is conditioned by the manner in which we can provide equitable scope to development of resource bases in different parts of the country for meeting the specific needs of the local populations.

It is thus of some importance for the centre to help equally all parts of the country to fully develop local resources through systematic planning. For this purpose it would be appropriate to view the country as divided in a number of well-defined planning areas or regions. In each such region or area, the planning exercise should cover alJ its relevant steps including the conceptualisation of the perspective, the fomulation of a comprehensive plan and the execution of programmes, projects and schemes included in the plan. This would mean that the present practice of disaggregating a centrally conceived programme of development would be replaced by one of aggregating at the centre a large number of local programmes of development. The importance of the centre in such a scheme would in no sense be reduced; the centre will have to co-ordinate and guide decentralised activities of planning; provide the needed research guidance, technical know-how, technological expertise and management advice; and continuously monitor this necessarily widespread process of development through

its own information and communication system. Such an effective decentralisation of both economic and political decision making processes may hopefully succeed in effectively enlisting the participation of the masses in development.

To conclude, we must re-emphasize that the basic problem before the country is to liquidate the dualism in social and economic life which is not only constraining the development process but also misdirecting whatever development that occurs despite the constraint. It seems quite apparent, in the context of our recent history, that the only way to deal with this constraint is to mount a constructive programme, similar in approach to the one we had in the prcindependence days but differing in its content in the light of the changed situation. This suggestion of undertaking constructive work, outside the political field of action, rests on a realisation that it has not been possible to transform this dualism, on any meaningful scale, in a polarisation of social forces for the reason that the preponderant part of the dualism comprising the masses is plagued on a pervasive scale with factionalism and divisiveness, both social and economic in nature. It is arguable that the liquidation of the dualism is not possible without tempering the arrogant aristocracy of the politician, the bureaucrat, the new technocrat and the intellectual by arousing their social consciousness through constructive work among them. Even so, the major task of constructive work will remain to arouse the social conscience of the masses so that they can exercise their responsibility and adequately perform their duties for the general good of the society, if this does not happen, the masses will continue to feel, in their alienation, as if they were, as a saying goes, 'cooped up in the hulk* to wonder, 'what else to do but breed?'