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6

Jayaprakash Narayan

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- To provide an explanation for Jayaprakash Narayan's transition from Marxism to *sarvodaya*.
- To illustrate Jayaprakash Narayan's ideas on reconstruction of the Indian polity.
- To assess the notion and feasibility of Jayaprakash Narayan's idea of *sarvodaya*.
- To explain Jayaprakash Narayan's concept of total revolution.

As a political thinker, Jayaprakash Narayan (1902–79), popularly called JP, seemingly represented one of the two discernible traditions underpinning the whole body of political thought in India. As such, one tradition of political thinking in the country may be said to have the unique distinction of invariably keeping almost perfect ideological consistency in the thought process of the thinker at various stages of his life which, on the flip side, might also be called the conservatism of the thinker. Nevertheless, this tradition has the quality of clearly demonstrating the ideological convictions of the thinker to such an extent that even the lived experiences of the thinker could not motivate him or her to carry out any sort of modifications or alterations in his or her ideological standing. The outstanding illustration of this tradition of Indian political thought may arguably be said to be none other than Mahatma Gandhi whose ideological position articulated as early as 1908 in *Hind Swaraj* remained unchangeably dear to him. When asked to incorporate certain modifications in his allegedly anachronistic ideological predilections of his early days, Gandhi showed an exemplary courage of conviction by stating that his experiences of those many years did not inspire to change even a single word crafted in *Hind Swaraj* at the time of its creation!

On the contrary, the other tradition of Indian political thinking consists of an extraordinary dynamism in the intellectually hyper-fertile minds and experience-wise highly diversified personalities of the thinkers. As a result, the earlier ideological convictions of such thinkers could not be retained fulsomely and over a period of time, the intellectual discourses and theorisations by such thinkers predominantly bore the mark of contemporary ideological influences on their thinking process. While such thinkers

undoubtedly appeared very versatile and diverse in their theorisations, the foremost casualty of such versatility and diversity in theorisations, arguably, seemed to be the virtue of consistency. Probably, a classic example of such a versatile and diversified yet inconsistent theorisation seems to be M.N. Roy whose rich, though occasionally painful, lived experiences of life turned him into so many intellectual incarnations that one is apparently bewildered at the range and depth of his intellectual discourses and theorisations. JP seems to be an icon of the second tradition of political thinking in India.

A LIFE OF IDEOLOGICAL TURBULENCE

JP's life happens to be a life of endless quest for getting suitable ways and means to ameliorate the socio-economic and political conditions of the toiling masses of the country. Born on 11 October 1902 in a village in Chhapra district in Bihar, he appeared to be an unconventional boy even from his early childhood as he was never found to be treading on the beaten track in the pursuits of his life. For instance, while in his studies he usually opted for the uncommon subjects, defying the prevailing social norms of his times he went for a dowryless and simple marriage under the influence of the nationalist leaders.¹ However, turbulent twists and turns set on in the life of JP from the early 1920s, when his life could not move on the chartered course due to his exposure to newer situations and contexts. For example, his studies almost got ruptured in 1921 when under the influential exhortation of Maulana Azad, he made up his mind to quit studies and join the national movement under Gandhi.

Sensing JP's growing inclination towards the national movement, his parents presumably motivated him to go abroad for his higher studies. Consequently, he landed up in the United States to pursue a degree course in Chemical Engineering. However, his inquisitive mind seeking a deeper understanding of the problems bothering people both at home and abroad, and his urge to become a part of the solutions to such problems compelled him to give up his engineering pursuits and move on to study sociology at the University of Wisconsin. This probably proved a turning point in the life of JP as his erudition in sociology drenched his mind

in the revolutionary ideas of Marx and Marxist writers like M.N. Roy, leading him eventually to become one of the most orthodox Marxists in India (Ghosh 1984: 393). Believing that the existing socio-economic problems of India could be solved only within the Marxist–Leninist ideological framework, JP outlined a comprehensive scheme of radical reforms supposedly to bring about a socialist socio-economic order in the country.

TRANSITION FROM MARXISM TO SARVODAYA

On his return to India in 1929, JP readily joined the national movement with the burning urge to practice socialism in India. His imprisonment in the wake of the Civil Disobedience Movement at Nasik Jail brought him close to the other like-minded nationalists which later on culminated in the formation of the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) in April 1934 (Sarkar 1989: 332). He also organised an All India Socialist Conference at Patna in May 1934 to strengthen the socialist movement in the country. However, his passion for Marxism was so strong that in 1936, JP published a thought-provoking booklet 'Why Socialism', under the aegis of the CSP, arguing that 'today more than ever before is possible to say that there is only one type, one theory of Socialism-Marxism' (Narayan 1936: 1). The booklet primarily aimed at providing a sort of ideological symmetry to the believers in the ideology of communism and socialism, and narrating a blueprint for the ideas and actions of the CSP.

The Marxist phase of JP's life seemingly continued during the decade of the 1930s, after which he drifted to the philosophy of democratic socialism and finally turning out to be *sarvodayee* in the post-independence times. This ideological transition in the thinking of JP needs to be explained to find out the causes for his disenchantment with an ideology which, at one point of time, seemed to be the only plausible framework of bringing about the socio-economic transformations in the country. In fact, JP's disenchantment from the ideology of Marxism apparently emanated at his critical appraisal of the course of events which the Bolshevik revolution took in the long term. The establishment of some sort of military bureaucratic dictatorship under the leadership of Stalin

in place of the promised dictatorship of the proletariat distressingly compelled JP to review his indoctrination in the ideology of Marxism at both philosophical as well as practical planes.

Quite evidently, the philosophical critique of Marxism by JP was also presumably conditioned by his increasing appreciation of the Gandhian techniques such as *satyagraha*, non-violence and the conformist perspective on the end-means dialectics. For instance, at one point of time, JP was quite critical of the slowness of the Gandhian methods of peaceful struggle and argued for the use of socialist methods to bring about quick socio-economic transformations of the society. But when empirical evidence from the Soviet Union started showing the true picture of the violent and forced methods of securing people's obedience to the Communist Party and a highly pressurised and forced extraction of labour from the workers to ensure a fast pace of industrialisation of the country in the times of Stalin, JP went into introspection. He ultimately came around the idea of Gandhi that to attain a pious end, the means ought to be equally pious. He wondered 'if good ends could ever be achieved by bad means' (Narayan 1959a: 22) and came to the conclusion that under Marxism, the sole focus on the veracity of means did not allow it to become a plausible ideological framework to bring about the desirable transformations in backward societies like India.

Apparently, under the influence of the ethical basis of political thinking and also movements under the leadership of Gandhi in India, JP turned out to be a staunch critic of the philosophy of dialectical materialism which forms the bedrock of Marxist ideology. He argued that the personality of a human being consists of both materialist as well as spiritual components and equal development of both was the condition precedent for the fulsome development of a human being as well as the society as a whole. But he found that the methodology of dialectical materialism confined the analysis of all the social processes to the domain of materialism only. As a result, the spiritual development of the society as well as the human being gets retarded leading to a lopsided development of the two. He, therefore, concluded that 'materialism as a philosophical outlook could not provide any basis for ethical conduct and any incentive for goodness' (ibid.: 27).

JP also expressed his reservation on a number of other formulations which constitute the foundation of Marxism. He, for instance,

was not agreeable to the idea that dictatorship of the proletariat ought to be the infallible truth of a socialist state. He maintained that the idea of dictatorship of the proletariat has relevance only for societies undergoing transition from capitalism to socialism. Moreover, such an idea has practicability only in societies where peaceful methods of bringing about such a transition is not feasible. Hence, he took it as a mistake on the part of Marxist theoreticians who argued for the inevitability of the dictatorship of the proletariat as the only method of bringing about the transformation from a capitalist to a socialist political order. Conversely, taking a reverse position, he maintained that the nature of a socialist state ought to be such that there is no need for any sort of dictatorship in the society. He, therefore, stated that it is a fallacy of the Marxian paradigm to argue for a compulsory imposition of the dictatorship of the proletariat in a socialist state (Narayan 1964: 50–51).

On the practical plane, JP showed his utter disappointment with the interrelationship between the nature of revolution and its future impact, as illustrated by the Soviet revolution in Russia. As Narayan (quoted in Panda 2004: 202) argued,

...a Soviet Revolution has two parts: destruction of the old order of society and construction of the new. In a successful violent revolution, success lies in the destruction of the old order from the roots. That indeed is a great achievement. But at that point, something vital happens which nearly strangles the succeeding process. During the revolution, there is widespread reorganised revolutionary violence. When that violence assisted by other factors into which one need not go here, has succeeded in destroying the old power structure, it becomes necessary to cry halt to the unorganised mass violence and create out of it an organised means of violence to protect and defend the revolution. Thus, a new instrument of power is created and whosoever among the revolutionary succeeds in capturing this instrument, they and their party or faction become the new rulers. They become the masters of the new state and power passes from the hands of the people to them. There is always struggle for power at the top and the heads roll and blood flows, victory going in the end to the most determined, the most ruthless and best organised. It is not that violent revolutionaries deceive and betray; it is just the logic of violence working itself out. It cannot be otherwise.

In facilitating JP's transition from Marxism to *sarvodaya*, the Machiavellian political processes in the Soviet Union during

the reign of Stalin played a significant role. What hurt him the most appears to be the two prominent features of the Stalinist Soviet political system. First, the purported establishment of the dictatorship of proletariat ensured that the Soviet Union becomes one of the most closed societies in the world. Not only any sort of interaction with the rest of the world was disallowed, even within the country, the abject absence of democratic norms and ethos even in the personal and civil life of the people happened to be the hallmark of the system. This appeared very appalling to JP given his exposure to the democratic way of life in the western societies and the democratic ethos which underpinned the main body of national movement in India. Second, JP also strongly disapproved of the brutal and secretive methods used in the Soviet Union in dealing with political dissenters of the communist country. The free hand given to institutions like the Red Army, the secret police and the bureaucracy in persecuting, exterminating, torturing and even murdering the non-conformists evoked in JP a feeling of detachment from the Soviet system of government. It was such an eye-opener for him that he readily exhorted himself to learn a lesson from such a phase in history and move away from it (Panda 2004: 202).

In final analysis, what constituted to JP the fundamental drawback of the operationalisation of communism in Soviet Union was 'Lenin's attempt to realise socialism through violence and Stalin's attempt to carry out a highly pressurised and forced process of industrialisation in a backward economy. This in the very nature of things "could not be accomplished without regimentation, compulsion and suppression of freedom"' (cited in Ghosh 1984: 396). In fact, such authoritarian styles of getting a rapid socio-economic transformation of the society convinced JP of going for a model where the socio-economic change could be brought about by peaceful and democratic methods. He, therefore, articulated his conviction in the veracity of Gandhian methods to bring about the desirable socio-economic transformations in the Indian society by arguing '(a) that in a society where it was possible for the people by democratic means to bring about social change, it would be counter-revolutionary to resort to violence, and (b) that socialism could not exist, nor be created, in the absence of democratic freedoms' (Narayan 1959a: 18).

PLAN FOR RECONSTRUCTION OF INDIAN POLITY

JP's growing frustration with the Marxian praxis and practical manifestation of its socio-economic and political order led him to evolve some sort of alternative order suitable to the specific requirements of the country. The adoption of the Constitution in the post-independence times was taken positively by the majority of people with the hope that it would result into translating the high aspirations of the national movement. However, people like JP soon got disillusioned with the working of the democratic polity in the country. Later, JP embarked on a tour of various European countries ostensibly in order to get a feel of the structure and functioning of the governments in these countries. A basic flaw discovered by JP in the structure of most of the system of governments, including the one prevailing in India after the implementation of the Constitution of 1950 was increasing concentration of powers at the higher levels of government. This appeared quite distressing to JP as, being a true democrat, he wanted the powers to be vested in the hands of the people and only that much power need to be transferred to the higher levels of authority structure which would have been unavoidably required. Thus, in order to give a concrete shape to his ideas on comprehensive reconceptualising the nature and structure of Indian political system, he published the book *A Plea for the Reconstruction of Indian Polity* in 1959.

In advancing his plea for the reconstruction of Indian polity, JP appeared extremely influenced by the ideas of Sri Aurobindo as he found in them the 'extraordinary, intuitive sweep of his vision [that] has laid bare the true nature of the foundations of Indian polity' (Narayan 1959b: 22). Following Aurobindo's line of argument, JP was convinced of the veracity of the ancient Indian political order based on the centrality of the self-governing village communities in that order. Indeed, JP's seemingly uncritical appreciation of the ancient Indian political order was so formidable that he argued that the conceptualisation of the political system in the post-independent times in India was nothing but 'a question of an ancient country finding its lost soul again' (ibid.: 26). Thus, JP's basic argument in calling for the reconstruction of the Indian polity was to reinvent and implant the village based political order with the

idea of decentralisation underpinning the basic functional ethos and spirit of the system.

Significantly, JP called for the replacement of prevailing politico-economic order in India based on the parliamentary system of democracy and centralised planning with what is called as the communitarian democracy and decentralised political economy (Narayan 1959b: 66–68). In fact, JP was a staunch critic of the parliamentary system of democracy, denouncing it from all probable quarters. But the most intolerable defect of such a system of democracy, to JP, was its inherent tendency towards centralism, which appears to be a contrast in terms of itself. In other words, the notion of democracy could not be conceptualised in a way that it leads to or supports any sort of centralism. As the parliamentary system of democracy invariably slips towards centralism, it could not have been the best of models of government for India.

The notion of 'communitarian democracy' as advocated by JP carries a distinct set of political processes which is squarely different from the ones characterising the nature of political processes in parliamentary democracy. For instance, the essence of the parliamentary democracy lies in intense competition amongst the political parties to seek power and establish their preponderance in the political system. On the contrary, JP suggests that the essence of the communitarian democracy lies in cooperation and co-sharing, as such a system must afford due space to all the interests of the society to be articulated in the political decision-making of the country in a harmonious manner. Naturally, in such a conceptualisation of democracy, JP's emphasis was on the moral and ethical moorings of democracy in utter contrast to the material and power-centred nature of the parliamentary system. To JP, therefore, the fundamental task of communitarian democracy is the moral regeneration to be brought about by example, service, sacrifice and love of scores of voluntary workers (*ibid.*: 107).

In conceptualising his plea for the reconstruction of the Indian polity, the basic concern of JP has been argued to be the idea of solving the riddle of representative democracy in the country (Samaddar 2008: 49). In concrete terms, JP's plea to reconstruct the Indian polity was principally based on the framework of a decentralised, participatory and grass roots oriented political order as reflected in practical shape by the idea of *panchayati raj*

as existing in the country since ancient times. This would be an essentially pyramidal model of democracy with widest possible diffusion of powers at the grass roots level making it the real level of government which matters most to people. Thus, JP's model gives a more decentralised base to the 'four-pillar model of government' as suggested by Ram Manohar Lohia (for details, see Chapter 10). To put it differently, while Lohia suggested the levels of villages, district, state and centre as the levels of governments, JP tried to broaden the base of local level of government by including a middle level also in between the village and district levels so that the operational imperatives of the local government may be strengthened. Thus, what JP suggested was five levels of decentralised polity consisting of village, block, district, provincial and central levels.

In JP's scheme of things on reconstructing the Indian polity, an overwhelming emphasis was placed on reviving and reinvigorating the *panchayati raj* system or what he calls as 'swaraj from below' (Narayan [undated]: Chapter 2). Under this framework, the basic and lowest unit of political organisation would be the *Gram Sabha* (village assembly) consisting of all the adults of the village. Primarily being a deliberative body to ensure the participation of all the adult residents of the village in the governance of their affairs, the *Gram Sabha* would elect, ordinarily by consensus, five or more members amongst themselves to constitute its executive committee which would be called *Gram Panchayat*. Thus, through these *panchs* (members of the village panchayat) acting as functionaries to take care of the day-to-day functioning of the system, the *Gram Sabha* was supposed to act as the lynchpin of the grass roots democracy conceptualised by JP.

Establishing an organic link amongst the various units of the *panchayati raj*, JP suggested the creation of two more interlinked bodies within the system. The middle level of *panchayati raj*, therefore, would be located identically at the administrative unit of block and would be known as *Panchayat Samiti*. Consisting of the representatives of the constituent *Gram Sabhas*, the *Panchayat Samiti's* operational area would be identical to the areas of its constituent *Gram Sabhas*. Functionally, the *Panchayat Samiti* would be entrusted with the responsibility of guiding and coordinating the activities of the *Gram Sabhas*, with particular focus on the

formulation and execution of development projects. Finally, the apex of the *panchayati raj* was conceptualised in terms of District Panchayat or *Zila Parishad*, constituted by the members elected by the *Panchayat Samitis*. The functional domain of the *Zila Parishad* would ordinarily remain focussed on consolidating and fine tuning the development projects initiated or approved by the *Panchayat Samitis* with a view to ensure their technical and economic viability. The common feature underpinning all the three levels of *panchayati raj* would be their endeavour to provide the people an opportunity to participate in the management of their own affairs and enjoy the spirit of true democracy.

Though the bodies of *panchayati raj* constituted the core of communitarian democracy as advocated by JP, he did not remain oblivious to the imperatives of the provincial and central levels of government. What was unique in his conceptualisations on these levels of government was that he wanted them to remain confined, functionally, to their stipulated domains and devoid of any temptation on their part to bulldoze over the lower levels of democratic institutions. JP, thus, argued for a democratic and federal structure of polity in India, so that the true spirit of democratic governance might be infused and afforded to the masses. Moreover, for this, he wanted the political system to be free from party politics based on numerous primordial and sectarian motivations to serve the selfish interest of dominant unscrupulous elements in the society.

An important element of the plan of reconstruction of Indian polity, as suggested by JP included the reconstruction of the economic system also (see Narayan [undated]: Chapter 3). Being dead against the exploitative and competitive economic system as prevailing in the capitalist societies, he argued for the reconstruction of Indian economic system on the doctrines of cooperation, coexistence and co-sharing. He decried the element of centralism in the Indian planning system and argued for remodelling of the planning system by making it decentralised and non-political. On the pattern of the grass roots orientation in the political system of the country, JP advocated for village-ward orientation in the planning process of the country as well. He argued that the formulation of development plans should be initiated at the level of village with its progressive integration and consolidation at the block and district levels. The

planning processes at the state and national levels should confine themselves with only providing technical and logistical support for the formulation and execution of the plans at the local levels. JP also called for sectoral balance and harmony in bringing about rapid economic development of the country. Thus, the restructured political economy of the country, in JP's view, would result into the realisation of true *swaraj* for the common people of the country.

Despite a seeming sentimental and apparently logical consistency in the plea of JP for the reconstruction of Indian polity, his scheme has been criticised by scholars as being utopian and set to be suitable for the wonderland of JP's imagination.² A common critique of JP's scheme has been its obvious focus at reviving and implanting an ancient Indian construct which might have outlived its utility in the contemporary times. Moreover, the disproportionate focus on *panchayati raj* as the nucleus of the post-independent Indian polity appears absurd to the extent of its practical abstractness, among others. Thus, over the years, JP himself became quite weary of the practical utility of his plea for the reconstruction of India polity and shifted his focus of attention to what is called as '*sarvodaya*'.

SARVODAYA

Sarvodaya was a conceptual construct JP borrowed from Gandhi to cumulatively articulate his vision of a decentralised, participatory and egalitarian socio-economic and political order for the country. Delineating the core concerns of the idea of *sarvodaya*, Vinoba Bhave (1964a: 3) wrote, 'Sarvodaya does not mean good government or majority rule, it means freedom from government, it means decentralisation of power.' Conceptualised so, *sarvodaya*, thus, becomes synonymous with a state of order where the bonds of being governed by a seemingly alien or outsider ruler are totally absent and people are able to enjoy the vocations of their life without any extraneous considerations. Hence, the full realisation of the ideal of *sarvodaya* necessitates the absence of government itself in the first place, yet even if the government remains in existence, the power relations ought to be so decentralised that nobody finds himself in any sort of subjugation with another. It is within this theoretical framework that JP outlined his vision of a *sarvodaya* social order.

In visualising his *sarvodaya* social order, JP begins with explorations in the innate characteristics of human nature. Though acknowledging that evil spirits and motivations exist in individuals and society, he argued that they can be overcome by virtues of compassion and non-violence. Moreover, by inculcating the positive values of life such as cooperation, generosity, creativity and eternal joy, the good spirits and motivations of the people might be brought on the fore to make them realise the significance of such traits in securing a happy and peaceful life for them. Above all, if the examples of such a perspective of life become prominent and people were properly educated in this regard, they would definitely pursue the noble causes and follow good men (Narayan 1961: 6). Thus, at the root of the proposed *sarvodaya* order of JP lies his indomitable belief in the inherently noble and positive nature of the common people which may be harnessed to secure a just, egalitarian and democratically decentralised order in India.

The social component of the *sarvodaya* order rests on an all-inclusive egalitarian social structure (Narayan 1959a: 39–41). The social relations would be based on the principles of equality, justice and inclusiveness of the diverse stocks of people. As society would seek the welfare of each and every individual, there would not be any place for socially degrading and discriminatory practices rooted in the primordial and sectarian motivations of any other individual. JP was quite specific about the role of various sections in the society and argued for visionary mindset and missionary zeal amongst the youth whose selfless and untiring efforts would be the main vehicle through which the reconstruction of the society would be materialised. Democratic ethos and spirit would visit all the walks of social interactions and nobody would be persuaded to do anything against his will despite the plausibility of the task at hand. Voluntarism would be major plank to get people do their bit for the welfare of society.

The political dimension of *sarvodaya*, as explained earlier, would rest on the widest and effective system of decentralised and participatory system of democracy concretised in the form of *panchayati raj*. What, however, was refreshing in the *sarvodaya* political order was JP's insistence on revolving his scheme of things around what is called as *lokniti* (politics of people) and *lokshakti* (power of people) in place of the existing dependence on *rajniti* (politics of power) and *rajya shakti* (power of state). Despite

appearing unconventional, such notions of people-centric and society-centric perspectives of Indian politics would have been quite obvious given JP's constant prodding for decentralised and participatory nature of the *sarvodaya* political order. In fact, in the later years when the governments in India were charged with numerous cases of corruption and high-handedness in dealing with political opponents, JP relied exclusively on the powers having their roots in the social and other non-governmental formations. Thus, JP conceptualised the *sarvodaya* social order as consisting of morally upright individuals having courage to stand up for the ideals such as 'self-government, self management, mutual cooperation and sharing, equality, freedom and brotherhood' (Narayan 1959a: 40).

Economically, the framework of the *sarvodaya* order would seek to establish a balanced and equitable economic setup in the country. India being a predominantly agricultural country, JP was sure to afford the first place to agricultural activities in the economic life of the people. Hence, he argued for organising numerous collectivist farms under the collective ownership and management of the whole village. Further, JP's deep faith in the Gandhian economic perspectives apparently influenced him to advocate a prime place to village and cottage industries organised at local and regional levels. However, the wave of heavy industrialisation in various parts of the world made him offer a place to heavy and large scale industries also in the industrial outlook of the economy. Thus, in *sarvodaya* economy, a balanced approach according due weightage to various sectors of economy would be followed. The net gains from the economic activities of the society would be so equitably distributed that it results in a decentralised, prosperous, distributive and participatory economic order.

METHODS OF REALISING THE SARVODAYA ORDER

Having conceptualised the *sarvodaya* social order in very insightful and precise terms, JP also appeared quite categorical in suggesting the appropriate methods of implementing the plan for creating a *sarvodaya* social order in India. Quite evidently, JP's deep erudition and lived experiences in various methods and institutional arrangements in bringing about drastic transformations in society made

him a rebel vis-à-vis numerous conventional methods of effecting desirable social change. For instance, his old fancies about the classical Marxian prescription of changing the society through revolutionary violence no more remained a favourite with him. Castigating the violent methods of social change, he held that such methods did not take care of the veracity of the objective in view and 'ensure the victory of party that is more skilled in its use' (Narayan 1961: 4–5). The victory ensured by such methods would invariably, as shown primarily by the Russian experiences, be authoritarian and undermine 'all attempts at democracy and the attainment of social justice or equality' (ibid.: 4–5).

Significantly, JP was equally disillusioned with the liberal methods of social change which is sought to be achieved through the means of legal provisions and institutional arrangement to implement them. JP's basic critique of the parliamentary route of effecting social change was that it would not yield desirable results without mentally preparing people to accept and adapt such changes in their lifestyles. As he wrote eloquently,

[I]t is not institutions, not laws, not political system, not constitutions which create good people. For that you require a widespread process of education understood in the widest sense of the word. Education does not mean academic education; but the improving of human beings through service, love, examples, preaching, reasoning and argument. (ibid.: 151)

JP also argued for setting of concrete examples by the leaders and awakened citizens of the country, so that the masses could emulate such examples and be equipped with proper education to be able to become the harbinger of a new *sarvodaya* social order in the country.

The cumulative impact of the twin virtues of education and concrete examples, in JP's view, would be to ingrain an indelible mark of awakening in a person's mental and moral values, infusing some sort of voluntary perspective in him towards the prevailing problems of the society and plausible solutions for them. The concrete exemplification of such a moralist theoretical construct was experienced in the *Bhoodan* and *Gramdaan* movements launched by Vinoba Bhave. JP was very impressed with the idea and practice of such voluntary sharing on the part of the people and argued for the extension and strengthening of such movements by way

of *sampattidaan* (sharing together of property) and the ultimate *jeevandaan* (sharing together the entire life of an individual and dedicating it for the cause of welfare of others). JP anticipated that such voluntary sharing together of various prized possessions of life would ensure a non-violent, voluntary and democratic transformation of the Indian society on the lines of the *sarvodaya* order.

TOTAL REVOLUTION

Total revolution (*sampurna kranti*) was the last intellectual intervention of JP in his unending quest to seek and establish such a socio-economic and political order in the country which would turn India into a democratic, federal, participatory, equitable and prosperous nation in the world. The concept of total revolution was for the first time evolved by Vinoba Bhave during the 1960s to articulate his desire for the need of a comprehensive movement in the country which would transform all the aspects of life in order to 'mould a new man ... to change human life and create a new world' (Bhave 1964b: 1). The idea was picked up by JP to call upon the people in 1975 to work for total revolution in order to stem the rot creeping into all aspects of public life and create a whole new world encompassing the basic elements of socio-economic and political order that he had been advocating in the name of *sarvodaya*.

The context of JP calling for the total revolution (see Narayan 1975) was provided by the growing authoritarianism in the functioning of the government machinery headed by Mrs Indira Gandhi. In fact, his call for *sampurna kranti* became the rallying cry for the movement against Indira Gandhi's government (Beteille 2008: 35). One of nefarious repercussions of such governance was the spreading of corruption in all aspects of political life in India. Hence, on the declaration of emergency in June 1975, JP found it compelling to call for the total revolution in the country aimed at transforming the whole gamut of social, economic, political, spiritual, educational and cultural life of the people. JP was convinced that piecemeal engineering would not suffice to bring about the desirable level and pace of holistic transformation in India, thereby necessitating the call for the total revolution. Through his call for

total revolution, JP, therefore, not only appeared dissatisfied with having cosmetic changes in the outer set up of the socio-economic and political structures of power but also called for effecting and deepening an informed consciousness of the masses for ensuring the holistic transformations of the entire system. The essence of all such transformations would lie in restoring the basic spiritual foundations of all the aspects of human life in the country.

The concept of total revolution of JP aimed at reversing the tide of rot taking place in the political and economic system of the country ostensibly due to the concentration of political and economic powers in few hands, and restoring the sanctity of institutions and procedures in those spheres of life by decentralising such powers in the hands of the masses. In the sphere of political system, JP noted the inherent fallacies of the prevailing parliamentary system of government, as its basic characteristics such as electoral system, party-based political processes and increasing concentration of powers in the hand of one person, that is, the Prime Minister, are bound to convert the system into a corrupt, tyrannical and farcical one. Hence, in his conceptualisation of total revolution, JP was firm on reforming the electoral system in such a way that the people can vote in an incorruptible manner and in accordance with their free conscience. Moreover, in such a system, there would be no place for political parties and the potential concentration of powers in few hands would be effectively curbed by having greatest possible diffusion of political powers to various levels of government.

Like political power, JP was also convinced of the perverse effects of the concentration of economic power in the hands of few in the society. He, therefore, called for total recasting of the economic system of country as well. Arguing for a mixed economy framework for India, JP aspired that the economic dispensation of the country must be able to provide for the basic necessities of people like food, cloth and shelter. His idea of *sampattidaan* was nothing but a call for sharing together of one's wealth and economic resources in such a way that its utilisation benefits the larger sections of people rather than ensuring affluence for a few. JP visualised an economic order for the country where there would be progressive socialisation of the means of resources by way of establishing cooperative societies and voluntary associations to manage the resources with a view to ensure prosperity for all. Thus, even in the sphere of economic

activities, JP's diagnosis of and cure for the ills appeared rooted in concentration and decentralisation of the powers, respectively. And, therefore, he suggested that the first and foremost task of the *sarvodaya* worker would be to 'diffuse political and economic power and decentralise the politico-economic structure' (Narayan 1978: 79). Indeed, decentralisation, along with people's participation was argued by JP as the panacea for all the ills which had become deep rooted in the politico-economic system of the country.

JP's call for executing the idea of total revolution in 1975 was accompanied by some sort of blueprint for the volunteers to carry out the implementation of the scheme of holistic transformations of Indian society. He exhorted the people to rise against the authoritarian and inimical policies and programmes of government of the day and persevere to push it back to its legitimate domain. He also called for the dissolution of the legislative bodies in the country as they had ceased to reflect the opinion of the people by going neck deep in all sorts of political and economic corruptions. JP also pointed out the problem of price rise as the target of total revolution, since it had the potential of turning the life of people into virtual poverty and starvation, keeping in view their inability to pay for the exorbitantly high prices of essential commodities. At the same time, he was also forthright in eradicating the existing social inequality in the country by putting a full stop to the discrimination amongst the people on the basis of religion and caste. In a nutshell, thus, the operationalisation of the idea of total revolution in 1975 encompassed within its fold almost all the major problems facing the people before embarking on the path of long term revolutionary transformations aimed at establishing the *sarvodaya* social order in the country.

In its operationalisation, however, the idea of total revolution, as advocated by JP, occasionally evoked misplaced perceptions in the minds of its practitioners. For instance, undoubtedly, it proved electrifying for the people and gave birth to a mammoth students' movement in many parts of the country with particular formidability in Bihar in 1974. But the public perception of the notion of total revolution appeared ambivalent as many construed it to be total subduing of *rajya shakti* or state power at the hands of the people. However, JP was quite categorical that he did not advocate the disappearance of all political power but, rather, the

placement of it where it belongs, that is, in the hands of the people (Dalton 1986: 292). Similarly, few people tried to take recourse to some sort of violent methods also in carrying out the movement for total revolution. But JP was firm in his conviction that total revolution could be brought about only through peaceful and non-violent voluntary actions on the part of the people.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

The life and thought of JP appears to be in a state of constant transformation owing to the fact that he never allowed his personality and mind to be closed to newer influences and experiences. Moreover, they represented JP's perceptions on the desirable as well as prevailing realities in the country. Right from the very beginning, JP's receptive mind became so welcoming to all sorts of ideas that when he got infatuated by the Marxian thoughts, he argued for revolutionary transformations in the Indian society on the pattern of socialist Russia. However, his return to India and the gradual exposition to the ideas of Gandhi, accompanied with his growing disenchantment with the theory and practice of Marxist thought, gave a new ideological orientation to his thoughts known as *sarvodaya*. Yet, the failure of the country to move in the direction suggested by JP and the increasingly authoritarian style of functioning of Mrs Indira Gandhi led JP to call for total revolution. But even his call for total revolution proved ephemeral and the country reverted back to the rule of Mrs Indira Gandhi in 1980. Thus, the conceptual interventions of JP in the realm of Indian political thought proved to be more of theoretical value than practical as 'JP was a dreamer and an idealist to a fault' (Devasahayam 2008: 7).

NOTES

1. For a lucid biographical account of JP, see Lal (1975).
2. For a lucid and representative critique of JP's plan for reconstruction of Indian polity, see Morris-Jones (1978: 97–106).

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7

Jawaharlal Nehru

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- To examine the standing of Nehru as a pragmatic thinker.
- To explain Nehruvian inputs in understanding the structure of governance in India.
- To explore Nehru's ideas on planning.
- To describe the internationalist Nehru.

Jawaharlal Nehru (1889–1964) was one of the few nationalist leaders who remained critical both in the freedom struggle and its aftermath. Politically baptised by Mahatma Gandhi, Nehru was not a blind follower of his leader, but redefined the nationalist ideology as and when he deemed it fit. For instance, the Congress leadership was content with dominion status till the 1928 Calcutta Congress, though Nehru and his radical colleagues expressed annoyance. Because of his strong defence and mobilisation of support, the 1929 Lahore Congress accepted his demand for complete freedom and not dominion status. He was a scientific rationalist and held views contrary to the majority opinion even at the chagrin of the Congress leadership, including Gandhi. In the aftermath of India's independence, he, along with his colleagues who led the nationalist struggle, strove to guide India towards a socialistic pattern of society following a path based on his interpretation of socialism drawn on a mixed recipe of classical Marxism and a version of capitalism that evolved in India under the aegis of colonialism. Similarly, his foreign policy was also a unique blend of realism and ideology that seemed to have worked, presumably because of the 'distrust' among the major powers and generally vitiated circumstances of the cold war era. On the whole, Jawaharlal Nehru remained an icon not only during the nationalist struggle but also in its aftermath when he presided over India's destiny. Since this is a contextual study of Nehruvian socio-political ideas, the chapter is structured around those critical themes that remained close to Nehru's heart. Dialectically evolved, the Nehruvian ideas were also responses to the circumstances

which Nehru confronted both as a freedom fighter and later as India's Prime Minister. Reiterating the basic argument of the book, the chapter is an analytical statement on Nehru's political thought by underlining the dialectics of its evolution and articulation in black and white. Nehru brought fresh air to the freedom struggle that was articulated ideologically by combining youthful zeal with inspiration from the successful Soviet experiment under Lenin's stewardship. He knew that it was not possible to blindly imitate the Soviet model in India for reasons connected with a peculiar capitalist development due largely to colonialism of the British variety. Nonetheless, his intervention both during the freedom struggle and afterwards when India became politically free, was creative enough to chart a course of action that was refreshing, and relevant.

BACKGROUND

Jawaharlal Nehru was born when British colonialism was at its peak. He had 'a sheltered and uneventful childhood' (Nehru 1941: 6). Like other politically conscious Indians, he 'was filled with resentment against the alien rulers ... who misbehaved with Indians' (ibid.) though he had no rancour against individual Englishmen. In fact, he admitted that 'in my heart, I rather admired the English' (ibid.). He was awestruck by his father, Motilal Nehru, one of the leading Congressmen before Gandhi emerged on India's political scene who was, according to him 'the embodiment of strength and courage and cleverness, far above all the other men I saw' (ibid.: 418). He also treasured the hope that when he grew up, he would like to be like his father. But Nehru was soon to be disillusioned. He was upset when Motilal Nehru took up 'a strong line against the Extremists of Bengal and Maharashtra', though Nehru found this position absolutely tenable given his father's 'grounding in law and constitutionalism' (ibid.: 7). Holding 'a constitutional view of politics' (ibid.), Motilal never appreciated the *swadeshi* and boycott movements because 'hard and extreme words lead nowhere unless they are followed by action appropriate to the language' (ibid.: 24). As a hardcore moderate, Motilal always looked to the West, argued Nehru and also thought that 'progress could come through an association with England' (ibid.: 23–24). There is no doubt that Nehru who