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India's Policy Deficit: As I Look At It

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My writing of this impressionistic essay has been partly spurred by the “India Economic Review” and partly by the urge, deep-seated in my heart, to convey some of my thoughts to others. I have not made any effort to give a structure to them mostly because I am gradually growing more convinced that any attempt to structure one's thoughts is to superimpose on them some logical sequence woven skillfully so as to induce coherence among them indicating strongly or weakly to some sense of necessity emerging out of the said sequence. This is partly on account the human nature that makes us pattern-seeking beings searching for the shadows, cast into some shape mostly imagined by us, while there could really exist none of them. Another motive, vivid or pallid, behind such efforts is our cultural bias that suggests us to present ourselves in person or in ideas before others in the manner or style generally considered acceptable, not necessarily by any valid reason supporting it but merely by the convention, the habit of thought, settled over a long time. They are also motivated, not occasionally but rather so often, to persuade others to believing in what the said sequence leads to or what the author desires others to believe. Because of the reason that our intellect is created and directed by our will to serve our purpose and not to seek for any impersonal truth, we often design our own personal truth that suits ourselves, irrespective of our awareness of it, often without any doubt whatsoever to our sincerity or honesty in upholding them.

As a resident Indian citizen, born and brought up corporally fully, albeit intellectually only partly, in India I do share the aspirations of my fellow countrymen as much as I partake of their discontent in fulfilling them not only at the personal level but also at a sublime level, beyond any affection or dislike that might lie underneath the experience of any of us in fulfilling or failing to attain what one desires. I do not really know how much of this sort of impersonal leaning towards either side is a consequence of the selective process that goes unnoticed for its causes, although possibly determined subconsciously and thus appearing natural. Hence in what follows I perceive certain

policy deficits that India has had in the past long years after her independence, which need not necessarily be akin to the perception that many in the populace share; but I do believe that my perception is not altogether mine owing to my mere idiosyncrasies, and indeed it would represent at least those who live and think much like me. So I proceed to portray my perceptions with a due apology to those who might not like them and this I do for the sake of manners, which is another name of the artful assaults on all immaculate emotions in interpersonal dealings.

Policies, be they administrative, economic, educational, scientific, social or regarding anything else, are necessarily grounded in some ideology; relating to the conception of an ideal man, an ideal economy, an ideal education system, an ideal society, an ideal scientific performance and so on. These ideals vary from time to time, from place to place and perhaps from context to context. A telling example of this we find in the *Mahabharata* wherein Lord Krishna was ready to bend all the ideals of the time any way that served his purpose, benign though, to uphold the cause of the good (*dharma*) and to vanquish all that go against it overtly or covertly. Vis-à-vis Krishna's, consider the ideology of that great hero, Bhishma, who, in keeping with his vows, was ruefully permitting all that he disapproved of, although he could have held them back merely by asserting himself slightly forcefully; and at the zenith of his despair, lastly, laid down his life to wind up the perennial chapter of conflict between his personal ideal and the sublime ideal. In this sense, Lord Krishna was perhaps the greatest of the utilitarian and the pragmatic philosophers conjoint.

India's policies have been grounded, foremost of all, in an *uncritical idealism*. This sort of idealism begins with the system of lofty axioms that suggest one to believe that every thing is fine, and uphold such a belief irrespective of what the imports of events or experience might be. In this system man is good; he would pursue his selfish interests only to the extent that does not harm other fellow beings' or national/social interests; and most often he may sacrifice his own interests for a loftier cause or on account of compassion. Nobody would deny that some men are of this sort, but to assume this for all and sundry is possibly one of the leading elements of the uncritical idealism syndrome. Review the tax structure during the major part of the post-independence India. One is led to believe that those who earn a lot would willfully surrender almost all

their earnings in the way of income tax to the government and would take pride in their high nationalism. Or the political leader wearing a folksy attire would not be allured by lust or lucre and serve the people's interest for just two meals a day.

One of the surest way to corrupt the entire nation is to corrupt the power class for when the haughty and mighty are deprave, corruption gains in no time a critical mass required to sustain itself and roar ablaze with an ever increasing might. Now comes another axiom of the said uncritical idealism. If the state believes in goodness of man then a complaint against an alleged offender must be a lie - nay a denial of the legitimacy of the judgment of the state - unless proven otherwise. The complainant must therefore prove the incidence of offence to occur and the involvement of the alleged offender in it with no iota of doubt, else the alleged offender is innocent. This iota of doubt argument is never in favour of the complainant. The state with a huge and mighty intelligence system could find the truth in no time, but to deploy the state's own intelligence framework to investigate into whether the state was wrong to have assumed the goodness of man is to doubt the judgment of the state by itself. And remember that the king (I mean the state) does no wrong. Hence, the burden of the proof lies on the complainant. One should always remember that the predator is more cunning and careful than the prey. So the burden of proof on the victim is unjust in itself. Also look at the extent of punishment to the offender if the complainant could impeccably prove that the offender did wrong to him (or her). It is never commensurate with the offence, because, implicitly, the state is not ready to admit that it was wrong in judging on the offender at the first place and unfortunately if it was caught on the wrong foot then let it save its face with as little of humiliation and damage as it could accord and afford. The President has the power to pardon the guilty, but not to punish. This attitude of the state also results into delay in judgment, which often hides itself behind the state's obsession on delivering justice. This systematic bias in favour of the offender raises the probability of him remain let loose and prowling for his new victims, and over the time the sufferers are decimated in number while the criminals thrive to outnumber them. Once the prey is scarce to hunt on, the offenders turn to their own class, chasing after the weaker ones, and over the time the intensity of offence increases at an ever-accelerating rate. Sooner or later, certain types of

offences become socially and then legally approved as the best way to reduce the extent of wrong is to redefine it.

The second trait of the said uncritical idealism is to value *conceited socialism* (nationalism) highly pampering *covert individualism* and permitting camouflaging or hypocrisy in all the walks of life. Covert individualism is to value personal interests and interpersonal relationship extremely highly vis-à-vis the social (but impersonal) interests or the interests of an unknown individual, but shrinking to admit of such affections publicly as well as in personal communications with others than those who might be in very close quarters, and yet expecting others to extend personal favours and praise such incidents in the name of nobility or magnanimity of the benefactor. Conceited socialism is to profess an avowed superiority and preference of the social interests over the personal interests but to practice covert individualism. Our policies in the past have almost always professed the said kind of socialism and fanned or fueled covert individualism, either deliberately or unwittingly.

The third trait of uncritical idealism is the obsession of the state on delivering protective justice. Nobody denies the value of protective justice in a welfare state. But justice cannot be self-righteous else any differential treatment can be demonstrated to be just. Justice when it loses sight of the very objective for which it is considered so lofty debases itself and in turn slenderizes its own significance. Justice may mean equality in matters of opportunities to live, grow and express; it cannot mean turning a blind eye to all other virtues for sake of establishing vulgar equalitarianism or state-sponsored discrimination. Society is like a pretty piece of poetry in which every word, nay every letter, has its right place. When we try to impose a vulgar equalitarianism on it that might mean equal right to all letters and words to occupy any place, the poetry is only a bizarre and cryptic collection of alphanumeric symbols. The uncritical idealism of the state in promoting such protective justice can hardly be just.

Justice may also be related to efficiency. There is a minimal level of distributive justice in each dimension of life of the citizens of a nation below which level the overall efficiency is adversely affected to the extent that the costs of establishing justice are nominal while the benefits accruing from it are magnificent. On the other hand there is an extent of distributive justice beyond which the costs of delivering it are monstrous while

the benefits that it delivers are only minuscule at the most. It is agreeable that such costs and benefits are difficult to reckon but in many cases the costs and the benefits are so vivid that some rule of thumb would suffice to weigh them against each other. Justice leading to wrong allocation of place, persons, power and resources is self-annihilating.

Many among us still consider politics as an instrument to establishment of a just society. However, politics is merely a profession, like any other profession, wherein one produces some good or delivers some service demanded by others in exchange of something else. Every professional is motivated by his (her) self-interest and not by philanthropic or altruistic urges. Similarly, those who buy the products or services are not driven by any love for those who deliver the products or services nor for the society at large. A meeting of the two interests may benefit both the parties, but such exchanges guarantee neither social nor individual welfare in the long run. An addict surely feels gratified and the peddler better off when the former buys some drug from the latter. But whether their gratification adds to the social welfare is dubious. Even the addict is only dubiously better off in the long run, if, of course, momentary kicks of pleasure are no equals of sullen suffering and dreadful death.

Politics is a profession that produces favour (mostly when the producer is in power) or hope, a futuristic of favour, (mostly when the producer is in opposition), that the electorate is ready to buy in exchange of support to a politician. Favour means reallocation of place, person, power or resources, not likely to occur without intervention of the politician. The recipient of favour may surely feel gratified. Such favoured fellows fortify the electorate to support the politician. Once in power, the politician uses his (her) office in promoting his (her) self-interest. It is questionable that the favour-induced reallocation is in the best interest of the society. It is also questionable that favour-induced reallocation, if occurring frequently and at a large scale, is not detrimental to the long run interests of the recipients of such favours. Further, when politicians use power at a higher level to reallocate resources in their own favour, it might not be beneficial to the society. It is more likely that the said favour-based reallocations at the different levels derail development and jeopardize justice.

As politics is a profession, so is crime. Crime is mostly reallocating in its nature, only with a difference that it does not have an open legal sanction. This lack of legal

sanction raises the risk level in the profession and hence discourages many a person to take up to this profession as a means to earn livelihood or fortune. The criminals' industry often produces joint products; the one of them is a 'good' and that is favour, and the other is an offence that might be considered as 'bad' to the afflicted. Both of these products have their futuristic as well; the one is called hope and the other is called threat. There are two types of consumer of the products of this industry – the one that buys 'favour' for support to the criminals or payment to them in material terms, and the other that buys its 'bads' by a refusal to support or pay. Of course, some criminals might be philanthropic or misanthropic in delivering their services to some or all, but that is rather an exception than the rule.

The relationship between politics and crime is more genotypic and much less phenotypic. Of late it has become a commonplace to talk on criminalization of politics and politicization of crime. However, what is overlooked is that both of them rest upon application of brute force, threat and other typically predatory acumen. When application of these powers has a legal sanction, we call it politics; when it is devoid of legal sanction we call it crime. This is the genotypic relationship. As a matter of fact politics and crime are the very close species of the same genus. At the phenotypic and behavioural levels there could be some competition between the two species or they might help each other. But this is less fundamental. More fundamental is the feasibility of hybridization – taking something from the one and something else from the other. This hybridization is taking place at a significant level these days. Criminals turned politicians are better fit to survive. Politicization of crime or giving political color to criminal acts is only a matter of degree; it has always existed with us. It is interesting to note that both the events – politicization of crime and criminalization of politics – are equally supported on lofty ideals of democracy, human considerations, unproven guilt, hate the crime and not the criminals, psychological and sociological compulsions that make criminals and so on.

Politics in India has continued to be populist inventing all sorts of stuff that has a great appeal to the mass. It was expected that over the years the mass would have developed a refined taste and a sense of discrimination between a junk and a pithy stuff. But it did not materialize. Literacy among the people has surely increased, but education

that makes them more productive, sensible, conscientious and discriminating has only gone thinner. Our casual educational policies are responsible for that.

The purpose of education in relation to development is twofold: (i) to rationalize and modernize the attitudes of the recipients of education and, in turn, to inculcate and nurture such attitudes among the rest of the society through them, and (ii) to impart to the recipients of education the knowledge and skill together with the ability to acquire further knowledge and still better skill by their own efforts. The touchstone of the worth of an education system is in meeting these objectives.

The modernized attitudes relate to efficiency, diligence, orderliness, punctuality, frugality, scrupulous honesty, rationality in decisions on actions, analytical rather than dogmatic view to understanding the world, preparedness for change, alertness to opportunities, energetic enterprise, integrity and self-reliance, cooperativeness, acceptance of responsibility for the welfare of the community and the nation, willingness to take the long view and so on (Myrdal, 1972). The skills relate to knowing and the application of knowledge to changing things that may be more useful after such a transformation.

But, unfortunately, our educational policies did not sincerely pay any attention to inculcating modernized attitudes among the recipients of education. Education has instead taught dogma and the art of justifying it; it has taught cunningness or the art of management in shirking responsibilities, camouflaging morality, moralizing sleights, praising opportunism, cultivating covert individualism, rationalizing communal affiliation, aggrandizing myopic view of advantages and so on. Many among the pass outs of this sort of educational system later on joined schools, colleges and universities. This degradation set the educational system on an ever-ending path to decline. Every new step to educational policy has fiddled with the form and possibly added to the causes of further decline of the educational standards.

Populism in spread of education, the higher education in particular, has resulted into an unprecedented fall of educational quality and the corresponding phenomenal rise in the number of pass outs. For example, in many states, especially after the debacle of the Congress about the mid 1970's and rise of the Janata to the power, the students were given a special permission to 'compensate' for the 'loss' that they had undergone in

supporting Jayaprakash Narayan in pulling Indira Gandhi down from the seat of power. This policy of compensation let loose the state sponsored use of degenerate means to obtain a degree from the colleges and the universities. Education in those states could never recover after that and has been following the path of decline with increasing momentum. Naturally, the mass of the educated youths has been multiplying with a great vigour. This swelling number of so-called “educated” youths aspiring for jobs is in fact unemployable partly because they have not acquired any skill that may be useful for the industry or even commerce, and partly because they have an apathetic attitude to manual work. Therefore they often seek jobs in the government, which suit most to their temperament and ability. The making of such unemployable educated youths is attributable to the feeble higher education system. This system has always pretended to impart knowledge and skill of critical examination to the students but in reality it has found out a myriad of methods to distribute degrees, even research degrees, to the most undeserving (Mishra, 2003).

Another conspicuous sign of populism in educational policy has been to banish English and promote local languages (as well as Hindi) as a medium of education. A similar type of fever (of using their native languages as a medium of instruction in education) has swept different nations at different times. Arthur Schopenhauer (1958) gives a critical account of this kind of fever that swept Germany in the 19th century. It is a prerequisite for any language to serve as a medium of instruction, especially in higher education, that it has sufficient number of books in different disciplines that may be used by the teachers and the students. The classics in richer languages have to be translated at a very large scale. The German intelligentsia really set itself at doing that and we find that during the said period and even much afterwards the German Scholars of great repute used their native language to write books in whichever discipline they wrote. But in case of India the matters have remained quite different. The intelligentsia in India could not be put to translating enough number of books in the native languages, keep apart writing good books in those languages. A poor stock of reading materials available to the teachers and students alike left them with no option than to use cheap notebooks. In turn it made them shallow, narrow-minded, uninformed, unmotivated, uncouth and above all uncritical and unthinking. It also instilled a sense of narrow regionalism in their minds.

I have already spoken of the politics as a profession. In this profession, like in any other profession, the national welfare (if at all) is an unintended output of pursuing self-interest. Politicians want to remain in power (or acquire power) by supplying the stuff wanted by the electorate. Occasionally, they also have to wake up the dormant desires and propensities or instill some fresh ones in the hearts of the people to aspire for those stuffs that they can profitably supply. They would also be the last to inculcate in their minds the sense of disinterested discrimination to judge between good and bad; they must tutor the people subconsciously to like what they supply and to dislike what the rivals do. The type of education given to the youth has been perfectly in harmony with all this. The endeavour of politicians in India has borne fruits; the various shades of regionalism, casteism, sectorianism, communalism, etc are only the fruits of the said horticulture that the politicians planted and nurtured so labouriously.

So far I have addressed the making of man and not making of goods. I believe that making of goods automatically flows from making of men. I have seen the vast fields stretched between my stand and the blue canopy meeting the ground only to limit my farther vision; I have seen the mountainous, tar-black, clouds covering the sky, then pouring mightily on the ground; I have seen the roaring rivers hastily going to meet the unfathomable; and I have seen men tilling the land under the scorching sun and women under the torrents of rain transplanting the seedlings in the fields filled with knee-deep waters. As long as men are cursed with hunger and the sun shines, the clouds pour water, the soil raises plants, the animals breed and lactate, the trees stand erect and bear fruits, some sort of effort, some interaction, some socialization, some trucking and bartering, some exchange and the activities of that sort are bound to continue. This is what makes an economy. As long as the descendents of Adam and Eve need a leaf to cover themselves at other's presence; as long as they need a roof over their heads; as long as men have not completely forgotten the teachings of Azazel as to how to make instruments, tools and weapons, and the women remember how to make and wear cosmetics (see the Book of Enoch), some sort of manufacturing will continue. And this is what makes an economy. As long as men do not like to eat their bread by the salt of their face; as long as the one enjoys the others' toil and as long as labour is irksome (Veblen,

1898), there will be some of them, who, driven by the hunger, bow down before others and run errands. And this is what makes an economy.

The core economy that I have thus described is the economy of the majority of population. The greater part of cultivated tracks of land continues to be rain-fed; the wages of labourers in rural India or in the informal sector of urban India continue to be at the subsistence level; more than one third of the total population – roughly about 370 millions in number – remains below poverty line; in spite of government declaration of primary education as ‘compulsory’, millions of children go to work than to school and so on. On the other hand, billions are spent overnight on mirth and merriment in the marriage parties of the children of some public figures.

In spite of elaborate planning for development well over a span of fifty years my core economy remains unchanged. This is what I saw when I was an optimistic child; this is what I see when I have become an old, frail, disillusioned man. And the reason: people are producing numerous children. This is what the old monk (Robert Malthus) lamented with an ulterior motive to blame the poor; guard the richer and repeal the poor law (Myrdal, 1953). This is what I teach my students to blame the wane and praise the vain.

Now I want to bid adieu to my reader. I do not know if I have presented before him (her) a truth or a fiction, for what I have said is only my perception and my opinion.

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