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The Influence of Tradition in India

by Professor Latheef N. Ahmed, Kansas City

The following is to illustrate through a case study the stronger role that economic variables play in total social development and to suggest that their proper management through appropriate political and administrative measures and processes will yield positive results. The general hypothesis is that if a polity handles especially its economic forces properly then the religious behaviours of its people can be accommodated and/or changed constructively for the good of the community as a whole. This is not a revolutionary hypothesis; the hope is to add another empirical example to throw further light on what some thinkers and analysts have been saying for a long time.

Methodologically, it should be clearly understood that this analysis concentrates on (a) just one city, a metropolitan one, (b) just one ethnic group's behaviour, that of the Muslims in this area, (c) just one man's point of view, that of this author's and (d) covers one specified period, from about 1940-1945. This writer's role in the study was that of a participant observer in the processes described here; it does not involve any statistically sophisticated claims.

The Case

The story, in short¹, is that a whole way of life in Bangalore City (South India) and its environs was at least shaken when an economic boom hit this area during World War II as a result of Bangalore becoming the headquarters of the South East Asia Command. It altered, or began altering, some of the oldest habits, rooted in the remotest past. Specifically, increased "entrepreneur" opportunities meant to many individuals an invitation to rising expectations for "better" standards of living, and "better" status relationships.

We were eye witness to all kinds of people with all kinds of superstitions suddenly awakening and becoming entrepreneurs par excellence! Fear of trains, fear of travel itself, lack of money, lack of travel clothes and travel bedding, no place to stay in the big city once you get there (you do not like to "descend" on your relatives, nor do you have enough money to pay for boarding in the big city hotels and sarayes), no people of our type over there to mix with (you can be very lonely in such distant big places), not easy to get vegetarian or non-

vegetarian food, as the case may be, no capital to start with—and a host of other such rational concerns and irrational fears all worked themselves out eventually in a period of approximately 1 to 5 years.

We knew first hand younger people, particularly, who pulled out their bathroom pipes, sold them at unbelievably high prices in Bangalore and got started. One lorry load of cabbage taken to Bangalore City now brought you 20 to 50 times more money, only if your entrepreneurship saw to it that it got there, and in time. It did. Backed with such incentives, you succeeded in securing the initial capital by begging, borrowing, or even stealing, you opened up new forest areas, you grew more cabbage and even more cabbage, you lined up a lorry or lorries, and you got to Bangalore, with that cabbage. Then you returned immediately, the same day or night, indeed, for more cabbage. "You had cash in your pocket, but no sleep in your eyes nor any religious prayers in your mind, which you had missed for days now but which did not worry you much now anyway.

Your social status had improved. Fresh college graduates were now willing to marry you, the "vegetable merchant's" daughter. They were quite willing to marry the "scrap iron dealer's" niece also. You could now marry yourself among the "higher circles", if you were a bachelor and even a widower. There was money in these alliances now and "good family people" could not ignore it. You, the "uneducated", "wrong" family and "lowly" merchant thus became quite eligible to the hand of the "noble" daughters and "fair" maidens now. The apple cart was down for sure and you could see the fissures in the old social structures and processes clearly. Old families resented this, but they began adjusting soon.

An Analysis

Thus massive economic activity can be a very important agent of social change, and positive social change, if it is managed well. Twelve billion dollars, with constitutional engineering going on hand in hand, has produced certain changes in Germany, West Germany to be sure, that are quite different from this country's whole back-log of age-old traditions. American secularism, as another example, may be traceable more to American industrialism (an economic phenomenon essentially) than to anything else. The entire American culture of today, so very different from our way of life of the home-stead

¹ We have elaborated this more fully elsewhere. See Latheef and Hajira Ahmed, "Weber's 'Hindu Ethic and the Rise of Capitalism' and its Political Implications for an Industrializing India", *Indian Journal of Political Science*, Jan.-March, 1965.

days, can be shown to be a consequence of the technological developments that have taken place in our society since, which are anything but "religious" developments.

The real answer then is to work on all four (politico-economic-socio-cultural) fronts of development and simultaneously. Religion does count under one or all of these variables, but it is not dominant force in itself. Priorities are necessary, as our resources are so limited and so badly distributed. In fixing these priorities, we can be completely off base if our research and analyses do not show clearly as to where the emphasis should lie, on politico-economic and/or on religious change.

Two Examples

The Neihoffs² seem to have hypothesised that in the case of India, religion is an impediment to socio-economic development there. But they themselves point to the fact that in one of the development projects, the convenience of shorter distance that the Indian women had to cover in going to the new wells to get their daily supply of water did overcome their traditional local belief system (if it did exist at all and among all the people of the village(s) in question?) that "spirits" and not "dirty water" is the cause of disease. They themselves provide further evidence from India and Egypt, all of which in the view of this writer would seem to support a counter hypothesis: that religion plays a comparatively minor role vis-à-vis economic forces in Indian development. Yet they leave the reader with the general impression at least that it is mainly religious determinism that needs to be tackled in these countries in bringing about positive social development.

In another article³, of a slightly different nature, Professor Theodore P. Wright Jr. comes to conclusions which also do not take the economic variables enough into consideration. He does a commendable job on analysing the Muslim League's political role in South India, a more detailed, better documented and up to date study of which subject is not known to this writer, at least, who was a one time close observer of South Indian Muslim politics and has been checking back periodically on it since then.

But Professor Wright also falls into the same trap that most of the western scholars do. He points out that "the familiar alternatives in western (underscoring this author's) political systems have been . . .", and then follows up with what the Muslim League is or is not doing in South India, and perhaps in all of India, to develop Muslim minority group political strategies. He illustrates his point by showing how the New York Jews get a successful crack at the

city, state and national political processes here in this country, the United States.

This writer suspects, that one reason, the major one perhaps, that this happens in New York and in the United States as a whole is that the Jewish minority here is a part of a far more affluent society in general and ethnic community in particular, whose leadership, at least, has many material resources at its command at different levels. This affluence is one important variable in everything from this group's or any other group's initial consolidation politically, to its staying consolidated and organised and, finally, to its making its weight felt in the political processes⁴.

But suppose for a moment the Indian Muslims are organised this way, what then? Suppose for that matter India as a whole achieves a perfectly disciplined two party system or a multiple crack system (Grodzins) and the Indian Muslims, as a sub-system of an effective total system, develop for themselves a fully operational minority group strategy for securing their legitimate share from "Who Gets What When and How" (Lasswell) and play their own successful role in decision making about issues leading to pay offs (Froman Jr.), what then? What happens when in spite of this, there is not enough in the refrigerator to go around for all members of a poor family, for all, and worse, for the fast multiplying members of a materially poor polity? How much distributive justice occurs then, after the leaders have appropriated their share in one way or another? What has happened to the Indian food situation, in spite of all the consortium and other direct and indirect assistance that India has been getting?

Conclusion

Unquestionably, many variables go into the inputs-outputs (Easton) of a competitive (Almond-Coleman) or a participative (MacIver) political system. The Almond-Coleman model can be adopted in general, this writer thinks to the South Indian case, too. Using this model, one can see that at the base there is lacking a "proper" political socialisation and recruitment among the South Indian Muslims. "Correct" interest articulation is just not done, which makes interest aggregation under the League's leadership on behalf of all Muslims a farce. Finally, legislative, executive and even judicial functions and processes become merged, confused and family-friend oriented.

Economic facilities provide in this case also one basic answer. If they can be provided, they would give you the underpinnings necessary for "healthy" political variables to emerge and to become operative, which is not to say that a certain type of political system would automatically result from this, as this depends further upon other variables. South Indian Muslim masses have lacked the economically generated or facilitated political culture, political

² "The Influence of Religion on Social Economic Development", *International Development Review*. Vol. VII. No. 2. June, 1966, pp. 6-12.

³ "The Muslim League in South India Since Independence: A Case Study in Minority Group Political Strategies". *The American Political Science Review*. Vol. LX. No. 3. September, 1966, pp. 579-599.

⁴ See Lipset's *Union Democracy and Political Man*, especially chapter 2 of the latter; Almond and Coleman's *Politics of Developing Areas*, especially its concluding chapter; Organski's *The Stages of Political Development*.

interest, political incentives, and politically usable extra time. Their ceaseless struggle for survival just does not permit this. Even little facilities such as those necessary for informing people, and informing them in time, of politically significant meetings and schedules are lacking; no phones, no money for postal stamps, no typewriters let alone typists, no letter paper even, ad infinitum! And even if you did succeed in informing people about the meetings, where would you meet!

The question that is generally asked when this kind of reasoning is presented is what kind of culture did initially bring forth these material facilities, helpful to "healthy" political processes, out of a given environment? The answer is, in short, both: a given set of attitudes values and beliefs, plus geo-economic advantages or facilities. How else would you explain the fact that two at least relatively different ways of life, with differently operative political cultures, have

sprung up in the two continents of Australia and the United States, though it was about the same time and about the same kind of people (with similar traditions) that started life in these two areas?

It must be stressed strongly that it is not suggested here that economic well being ipso facto means "healthy" political processes and "healthy" social development in general. It is a whole syndrome of political, economic, socio-psychological and cultural forces and conditions that interact with each other constantly and in a multi-variate system (Lipset) that give us one or the other type of political legitimacy and social system. The economic factor is but one of these; this is recognised. But, among the poorer polities, especially, this one variable looms very long indeed. Recognition of this fact fully leads one to different research approaches, different findings and different developmental plans. This, luckily, is already happening.

ETHIOPIA

Industrialisation of a Developing Country

by Detlev Karsten, Addis Ababa

Much emphasis is laid on industrialisation as the solution to the problems of the developing countries. But very often the difficulties of this policy are not seen by economists and politicians advocating a faster pace of industrialisation in particular by encouraging foreign private investment. This report is meant to elucidate some of the general difficulties by looking at the situation in Ethiopia. The whole analysis is unaffected by the question of the prevailing economic system since the investment criteria of the private entrepreneur and of a central planning agency in the field of manufacturing industry do not differ so widely.

The Importance of Manufacturing Industry

Figures in this report are basically taken from a survey of manufacturing industry, carried out in 1966 by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and are supplemented by data published by the Central Statistical Office. Although much could be said about problems of definition and the reliability of the data, the picture of the situation as reflected in the figures, appears to be fairly accurate.

The contribution of manufacturing industry to the Gross Domestic Product is well below 3 per cent. The share of manufactured products in exports is very small. In spite of a very broad definition of manufactured products, their share in total exports in 1962 was only 4.1 per cent, in 1963 only 5.9 per cent and in 1964 6.4 per cent, the major items being meat, oil

seed cakes, sugar and salt. The imports into Ethiopia are almost exclusively manufactured products.

In 1965 the total employment in manufacturing industry is given as 43,583 permanent employees plus 2,269 seasonal workers. Reckoning with a population of 22.6 million, and assuming that 5 people depend on each worker in manufacturing industry, about 1 per cent of the population derive their livelihood from manufacturing industry. Manufacturing industry is concentrated in three small areas: the Addis Ababa/Nazareth area, Asmara, and the Dire Dawa/Harrar area. The reasons for this are the vicinity of the market, the availability of workers and the existence of infrastructure facilities.

By all indicators, manufacturing industry has at present very small importance in the Ethiopian economy.

Most Important Branches

Table I gives the number of establishments, gross value of production, fixed capital assets and employment by branches. One has to keep in mind, however, that the branches with a great number of small establishments are less completely covered by the statistical data than others; this distorts the picture insofar as the importance of the following industries is underestimated for the reasons given:

The food industry:

As a result of the widely scattered small flour mills and oil-crushing stations.