Waiting and Waging

K Balagopal

India Waits by Jan Myrdal; Sangam Books, distributed by Orient Longman; Rs 95.

JAN MYRDAL, he tells us in the Preface, came in 1958 to 'do a book on India'. It was twenty years and many visits later that he managed to accomplish the task. And though his purpose is to depict the oppression and rebellion of the Indian masses today, he is involuntarily led down the bylanes of history to ask all the questions serious historians of India have been asking, and to provide some kind of answers of his own. It is a remarkable fact about Indian society that if you embark on a serious study of its nature you are led backwards and backwards through 1857 and the East India Company, through Mughal mansabdars and Afghan adventurers, through temple-building and land-grants, through Manu dharmasastra, the Gita and Kautilya, through the Buddha, the Upanishads and the Vedas, to arrive out of breath at the mythical figure of the Aryan warrior with his hymns, his horse and his spokeless chariot. And then you start with him and follow him as he chops and burns down the Gangetic forest, and painfully reconstruct these three thousand years' history to your satisfaction, before you can understand why the poor of India are as oppressed as they are and why they are oppressed in the manner they are. Likely as not, you will feel at the end that you know no more now for all your labours than you did to begin with, but there is no way out. In India the past has eaten into the present with a comprehensiveness that leaves you with little choice.

It is to Myrdal's credit that he does not shy away from the task, though he does not have anything very new to say until he comes to the modern period. His discussion of Subhas Chandra Bose unravels the extreme complexity of those times, when the world was to be saved from Fascism by imperialists who had colonised and brutally subjugated a large part of mankind, and when communists had to choose between saving their skins, saving mankind from Fascism, and liberating the colonised Africans and Asians from imperialism. The brutality of the British in putting down the 1857 uprising and during Jalianwalabagh and elsewhere , which Myrdal describes by quoting contemporary records, is not often discussed in our history books, which are so intent on proving that Indian independence was won without shedding a drop of blood, that the British get the unsolicited bonus that their brutality goes unmentioned. Interestingly, Myrdal believes that the failure of the 1857 Indian uprising put the final seal on the failure of the European revolutions of 1848. And the anecdotes about Bengali terrorists will no doubt add to the history of the Other Nationalist Movement that somebody must soon undertake to write comprehensively before the Gandhians falsify our history completely

Myrdal is most hard-hitting when he discusses the ideological content of intellectual activity He points out that the outlook of British Orientalists like William Jones was shaped by the 'tax-collecting interests of the East India Company', whereas it was the rising German bourgeoisie that produced the best Indologists. At another place he points out that there is not a single British writer-not even in the thirties, when most of them were leftists—who wrote of the Indian people's struggles from an anti-imperialist standpoint. The racist content of British Orientalists' ideas about India is well brought out in a discussion of the acrimonious debate between James Fergusson and Rajendra Lala Mitra concerning the history of Indian architecture, in the course of which Fergusson so far forgets himself that he manages to reveal his ideological concerns: "The real interest" (he says) "of this volume" (Rajendra Lala Mitra's "Antiquities of Orissa") "will probably be found to reside, in these days of discussion on the llbert Bill, in the question whether the natives of India are to be treated as equal to Europeans in all respects". The comment makes one yearn for the good old days when reactionaries were candidly reactionary-even when they were discussing architecture —and had not as yet learnt to dress up their notions in populist phrases. The book also contains some discussion of the urban middle class reform-minded intellectuals *of* India and their class bias, but Myrdal prudently quotes other people here without expressing his own opinion.

THE FUTURE

But of course the major concern is why the Indian revolution has failed. All the answers are there: that too many of the communist leaders were brahmins, that they never got a single idea of their own, etc. But Myrdal's own preference appears to be for the argument that the CPI was tied to the British CP, a party that had no inkling how to bring about a revolution in its own land. Many people appear to accept this explanation, but it leaves out the question *why* the Indian communists accepted this tutelage, while the Chinese for example did not. To answer that they were all upper caste or that they came from rich peasant/landlord families or that they were educated in England-all these are familiar themes of after-dinner chatter, but are tainted by subjectivism and historical arbitrariness to a degree that makes them not worth discussing. Where the communists fought (and let us remember in our mood of denigration that they fought long and hard in certain parts of the country), they fought well and with dedication, notwithstanding CPGB and upper caste leaders. What they lacked was a total perspective concerning the capture of state power, the necessary strategy and the path of struggle. And here, while not ignoring the pernicious influence of the Comintern and CPGB, due credit should perhaps be given to the extraordinary complexity of the agra rian conditions of India, and the national linguistic and communal diversity of the land, The complexity and the diversity appear to have weighed down upon the minds of the Indian communist leadership, for their intellectual cretinism is in sharp contrast to the genius thrown up by the revolutionary movements of other lands. When B T Ranadive announces with an empty pomposity that "Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin are the authoritative sources of Marxism. It has not discovered new sources beyond these", it is merely the self-confession of the old communist leaders that they can never be a new source of Marxist theory or practice.

loi the future which India wails for Myrdal looks to the communist revolutionaries who broke out of the CPI(M) in the late sixties. Myrdal spent much time in Andhra and visited Sirsilla and Jagtial then recently declared 'disturbed areas', the forests of Khammam where he appears to have got hold of the photographs that adorn the book, and, of course, Bihar. He does not enter into any polemics with the Parliamentary Left, though his antipathy towards them is obvious. Since he is no wild-eyed radical Utopian but a serious observer of Indian (and Chinese) politics, this abstinence is obviously a matter of choice. But his partiality for the revolutionary Left is palpable. He met them, talked to them, visited the areas which they were then organising, and noted the difficulty with which they were finding their feet. Today, if he comes back, he will find a paradoxical situation. He will find that there are many more places to visit this time than when he came last. In the teeth of terrible repression, he will find, the movement of the agrarian poor has spread well beyond the pockets he knew. But he will also find it many times more difficult than in the past to visit those places or to have an open discussion with the people—or even, for that matter, to deliver a lecture at Kakatiya University at Warangal as he did during his last visit. He will find instead a terribly brutalised state closing its steel grip over the militant agrarian poor and their leaders.

Some of the persons he spoke to are probably dead, some are in jail, and the rest are under seige. He will find that in these six years that have elapsed since he last came, the state of Andhra Pradesh has murdered about 60 communist revolutionaries in faked "encounters' and has tortured and maimed countless others. He will find that the repression he had then heard of—destruction of property, despoliation of fields, plunder of grain and fowl—has got magnified many times over. But he will also find that the agrarian poor, beaten and battered though they are, continue to fight and struggle, for unlike the urban lower middle class which has the alternative of a humiliating parasitical existence, the poor have none excepting destitution and slow death.

Prayer as Substitute for Theory?

Kumaresh Chakravarty

Political Growth and Political Development: The oretical Perspectives by Subir Das Gupta; Prajna, Calcutta, 1984; pp 299, Rs 120.

WHAT are the probable implications of the new liberalisation regime in India—with its open invitation to foreign capital and its emphasis on borrowing of technology—for the process of political development? *Is* it possible to do capitalist leap-frogging simply by expanding the technological base, without seriously constricting the existing parliamentary-democratic system? What are the Likely changes in the correlation of class forces initiated by the leap-frogging State policy? Do these changes necessarily favour 'political stability' or do they disturb the 'political equilibrium'?

No variant of Western political theory can provide the tools of analysis or a conceptual framework for answering these or similar questions. Most theories, though, have had a fairly eventful career during the past three-and-a-half decades. Starting with the faith that the "British parliamentary system and the American system of separation of the different powers of the government" are the "two historical versions of stable democracy"? political theorists faced, in the early fifties, a serious challenge to their optimism about the universality, or the stability, of the system exemplified by the two historical versions.

It was no longer enough to treat the "non-democratic or unstable democratic systems" in terms of "their distance from democratic ideological standards". So, some tried to draw lessons from the changes in the realm of economic theory, where 'dualism', 'modernisation' and allied concepts had already been placed within the framework of development economics. And economic development, as opposed to backwardness, had come to be distinguished from economic growth as such. Political theorists chose two paths in their search for explanatory or prognostic models. One by treating political change as dependent on the changes in the economy, and another by treating the two changes as interdependent. The latter, of course, generally emphasised the political change as the basis for economic development.

Neither, however, has met with any commendable success. The concern for stable political conditions in the developing countries of the capitalist world continues, perhaps with greater intensity. But the earlier preference for a libertarian modernisation is increasingly giving way to the conviction that adult franchise, or a functional separation of powers is a costly luxury for a society in transition from 'tradition' to 'modernity'. At the same time, authoritarianism is no safe answer. For, value considerations apart, the short-term safety devices of authoritarianism are not free from serious long-term explosion potentialities.

No wonder then that Western political theory has, by and large, lost its appeal to most social scientists in the developing world who have been striving hard to work out a non-communist manifesto of political development—one that could reconcile distributive justice of the 'egalitarian' variety with economic growth and parliamentary democracy.

GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

That is essentially what Subir Das Gupta attempts in this book. He underlines the distinction between political growth and political development, since he believes that for "theoretical politics concerning developing nations ... to mature and to indicate policy guidelines" (p 2) such a distinction is extremely important. Political growth is manifested "in the redefinition, proliferation and maintenance of structures of expanded, multi-class, high frequency decision-making in a community and is associated with a secular rise in per capita income in interacting reinforcement" (p 6).

Consideration of growth problems, therefore, involves an analysis of "(1) the nature of the holding mechanism of the equilibrium" (since all communities are in a state of moving equilibrium); "(2) the nature of imbalances in the mechanism", and "(3) the scope for enhancing or reducing imbalances" (p 8). The holding mechanism is given by the prevailing patterns of division of labour. In the interaction of these patterns—or perhaps within each pattern also—groups and individuals are the inputs, and the "distributive pattern of satisfaction constitutes the output" (p 16). This input-output (?) relationship is translated into one between demands for income to buy a range of goods and services and the willingness/ability of the community to meet these demands.

The need for (political) leadership emerges only if there are 'market imperfections' in buying and selling of functions in relation to the division of labour. As long as the leadership succeeds in organising the functional groups and negotiating with other groups for better terms and conditions, imperfections can well be absorbed into the equilibrium. If, however, a "new pattern of functional relationships" cannot be worked out, the system breaks. For long periods of history, the "overall functional relationship pattern in a community is seldom drastically changed" (p 20). But it is altered ("because of autonomous' factors: e g, discovery, inventions, innovations, war") in "critical periods of social change, of economic growth, and of political growth" (p 21). But the upper limit to such growth, political growth in particular, "is set by the total available transformation ability determined by division of labour", and the lower limit "by subsistence requirements of the community" (p 27). But political growth necessarily disrupts political stability since "political growth implies political costs, i e, costs arising out of the break up of the existing decision-making institutions and processes" (p 36). At the same time, growth by itself may not be enough to satisfy libertarian imperatives. This is where political development comes in. As Das Gupta puts it, "whether political growth implies a better life for the people living in a State depends upon the overall directionality and impact of expanded decision-making processes and decisional outputs, permitted by the State or directly emanating from it on the lives of the people" (p 36), Political development, therefore, is inseparable from political growth, if the direction of growth in terms of the distribution of its fruits is of any concern to the theorist.

VALUE FRAMEWORK

Development is primarily a matter of the theorists' value framework. David Easton's criterion of "authoritative allocation of values" is meant for defining politics as such. But political development remains implicit in it, particularly because, 'value' can take on a number of meanings associated with social relations at various levels. Subir Das Gupta is more elaborate about the

* Gabriel A Almond, & G Bingham Powell (Jr), "Comparative Politics; A Development Approach", 1966, p 2.