

5300

DEMOCRACY IN INDIA

WHAT IT MEANS

AND BY WHAT MEANS?

“Sri Atulananda Chakrabarti is dedicating his pen to the cause of cultural fellowship in India.”

—RABINDRANATH TAGORE

“Mr. Chakrabarti has devoted much of his time and his substance to this cause.”

—SIR MAURICE GWYER

“ . . . what I had suggested before. It (your duty) resolves itself—and quite properly—into spreading your message through your book, other writings and through your speeches. . . . You seem to be a man with a mission.”

—MAHATMA GANDHI
(in a letter dated 28.8.37)

“They became friends and corresponded regularly thereafter. Atulananda kept sending his articles to Gandhi for comments.”

—LOUIS FISCHER,
The Life of Mahatma Gandhi.

Some Books by Atulananda Chakrabarti

Cultural Fellowship in India
Hindus and Musalmans of India
Not By Politics Alone
Asoka for the Young
The Mahatma and His Men
The Second Five Year Plan
Problems of Education

THE STATESMAN

DELHI EDITION

December 23, 1957

Definer

Mr. Atulananda Chakrabarti's exuberant personality brings a new idea to the capital. His mission is to "redefine democracy."

Mr Chakrabarti has led a full life. He went to an East Bengal village in his young-

Mr Chakrabarti has now set his heart on "redefining democracy." India, he maintains, has modified Lincoln's concept of democracy by coupling with it the idea of a "socialistic pattern of society" which he describes as the "x

New

Delhi

Notebook

er days to promote communal harmony and has devoted many subsequent years to this pursuit, writing books on the subject and bringing out a short-lived magazine called "Concord."

factor." This he is attempting to analyse.

Mr Chakrabarti intends to send out a pamphlet on the subject to India's 38 universities to prepare for a seminar on the subject in Delhi.

ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES

Sir,—Each nation has to find its own way of life. At the same time, all the peoples of the world have to find a broad enough way for all of them to tread together toward a fundamentally non-conflicting way of living. Yet the world today is very much divided or, at best, is drawn into an inconvenient knot of unwillingly tolerated groups. This happens because of ideological conflicts which are there in any nation as also between nations. Governments have been trying to co-ordinate political, social and economic demands reflecting these conflicts. But the order that is brought about is, and can be, only tentative and temporary, for, while scientific experiment is not possible except on testable theories, the majority of politicians think they are practical only to the extent of their dislike for theories.

The time has come to call upon the universities to come to their aid. It is the role of universities to formulate ethical and theoretical foundations for correct beliefs and actions. In ancient India forest universities defined the intellectual outlooks and set the social standards, but these nerve centres ceased to be

when freedom was lost. Now that we are in the "twilight" of the dawn of a new age, it is time that they resumed their assigned roles as the clearing house of thoughts, giving proper intellectual direction to rescue life from its present complications.

The way of life is determined by the way Governments are run. Life to-day is frightfully beset with ideological complexities and conflicts. Consequently the ideology behind governments has been perplexing the common man in all countries and causing no end of misunderstanding. For ourselves, it is to our universities that we have primarily to turn to posit the problems and grapple with the answers to arrive at a true definition of the democratic way of life that we wish to carve out for the masses. We appeal as well to the theorists among our politicians since, sooner or later, university men would need the cooperation of thinking political leaders of all camps to bring to bear their day-to-day experience on the investigations intended to secure fulfilment of life for one and all in our country.—Yours, etc.

ATULANANDA CHAKRABARTI
Calcutta.

“ . . . intelligent men and women everywhere were saying with a sort of astonishment: ‘But have our universities been doing nothing about it? Is there indeed no science of these things? Is there no knowledge? Has history learnt nothing of causes, and is there no analysis of the social processes that are destroying us? To which the professors, greatly preoccupied at that particular date in marking honours papers in history and social and political science, made no audible reply.’ ”

—HABWRIGHT'S REPORT ON WORLD ECONOMIC CONFERENCE OF JULY, 1933, Quoted by H. G. Wells in *The Shape of Things to Come*.

.

“One of the things which universities do continually is to unsettle people, to challenge their prejudices and assumptions, and to try to instil into them the desire to search for truth wherever it may take them. We who work in universities think that it is a good thing.”

—BRUCE MILLER, *Prof. of Politics, Leicester University*, speaking in the B.B.C.'s Midland Home Service.

“We English and Americans are singularly unimaginative in our interpretations of the term ‘democracy’; we seem unable to admit under our definition any form of society which does not conform closely to our own.”

—WHITEHEAD

“Complete freedom of the individual in economic behaviour is incompatible with the existence of an orderly State, and the totalitarian State is incompatible with the development of the individual . . . I must leave this to a future quantum theory of human affairs.”

—MAX BORN

“We call a proposition ‘true’, not because it agrees with a fixed reality beyond all thought and all possibility of thought, but because it is verified in the process of thought and leads to new and fruitful consequences.”

—ERNST CASSIRER

Democracy for New India
GIVE US THE DEFINITION

All agree that there should be popular government. They disagree, however, as to which is the best form of popular government.

By far the major portion of the political discontent of the world today stems from a society not satisfactorily organised and a polity that does not answer to the demands of the bulk of the population. In the evolution of socio-political forms of life a stage of indecision was introduced in the beginning of this century by a sort of separation between those who wanted political democracy and those who were for economic democracy.

A dominant problem of modern life is the character of Government itself. And as Governments of today represent more or less one or other of the two rival political philosophies—Democracy and Socialism, the relation between these two ideologies constitutes a key problem for the modern man. But no over-simplification is possible.

But that is life. Life in every age creates its own contradictions and throws up its own challenge to the human intellect. And the human intellect accepts the obligation to fight it. The challenge of our age is the task of co-relating Democracy and Socialism.

Taking up this challenge, India has offered to mediate between the rival forms of popular government. Her formula of mediation is democracy woven into the social web, i.e., a composite pattern of Government designed to use democratic means to attain socialist ends. Evidently, this implies some kind of policy integration.

But the integration, to be successful, should be based on the widest agreement of principles, or in other words, on some universal principles. If that is done,

India will find her own way to political peace, and make useful suggestions to other States and contribute to laying a new foundation of world peace.

It will not be irrelevant to point out that the task of arriving at universal principles is, primarily, one for the theoreticians. Here is a job for our universities whose distinctive duty it is to unfold the theory in terms of the life around them. And the people too expect them to do this. For they are a body of thinkers who have been equipped by their profession to look into the objective foundation. As such, they have the requisite training to go into the matter of Government as a science, so that its practice, in our country, may be constructed on the logic of applicable theories. Where the method is scientific, theories lend themselves to empirical verification and, vice versa, empirical findings can be interpreted by theories.

Two main differences have to be kept in clear view as we seek to adopt western democracy. First, in the West democracy had grown, while here it has been made, to some extent even found ready-made. Secondly, there democracy grew in the favourable climate of a vigorously expanding economy (which brought 'wealth' to the conquering 'nations'), while here in order to grow a new economy out of ruins we have to use democracy. So we need to use it very thoughtfully. It may be desirable to think if we should proceed on the given definition by Lincoln or evolve our own definition in the context of our adventure for a new economy and also in the context of the challenge of Socialism which, at least in this virulent form, was not there in the West when democracy was in blooming adolescence.

India is to be particularly careful that her approach is scientific. She is too new to her present political function to have grown any tested convention and implicitly trust to it. As such any political obligation she may choose to discharge or any experiment she may feel willing to conduct must have to be a severely conscious effort. Democracy and Socialism are no home

products of India. She has not lived through the historical travail of any of these. Yet, while the West, where these evolved, stops at 'co-existence,' India proceeds to unite the two into a common and concerted action. It is good, and wanted. But it naturally raises a lot of big and small questions, some of which may here be listed:

Has India got the adequate intellectual equipment for this integration or something of the insight that is born of absorbed thinking? Or, has she been inspired only by her history of ethical mission? And, is it purely a mission to ease international tension? Or, is she also under some compulsion to relieve her own internal tension, and in that case, is it in any way a local measure on the part of the party in Government to neutralize the slogans of the opposition? What is the intrinsic value of this term 'socialist pattern,' or is it just tactical? Then again, are Democracy and Socialism at all amenable to reconciliation? And even if their ideologies may converge to some fundamental agreements, would it be possible to bend their methodologies too to a workable harmony? What, again, is the significant background of this term with reference to India? Why has she had recourse to this term, while England and America felt or found no such need? Is it because India has not that much innate understanding of Democracy which these elder democracies have? Or, does she mean to take some new line in view of the current criticisms that Lincoln's classic definition of Democracy is, strictly speaking, inexact, at least inadequate and incomplete? Or, does she find this definition too inexplicit to be understood in India where people have no axiomatic faith in Democracy nor enough working knowledge of its mechanism? Again, what exactly is meant by 'democratic means'? Is it confined only to votes by means of which Parliamentary Democracy usually functions? And in that case, is there not a wide gap between the vote in the legislature and what is regarded as the general consensus of opinion? Is India a Democracy in the larger perspec-

tive of adopting it as a way of life or only in the limited sense of using it as a mode of Government? And, is democracy in India going to be a democracy of India, i.e., rooted to her traditions and yet spreading out to meet all her modern requirements? But are there any traditions at all of democracy in India, or for the matter of that, in Asia? Yet is not an Asian variety of democracy in real demand?

For an analysis of the problems behind these and similar other questions people look, in the first instance, to the universities.

For these are about the best place for analytical work, being away from the distractions of the day to day problems with which the rather new Government of this country is bound to be pre-occupied. Of course, there may be some risks of omissions when thinking becomes too abstract and disjoined from the world of realities. But then, in modern times academies are also functioning right in the midst of the battle for life, and as such they cannot completely break away from the pressures of reality. Yet by their tradition and their climate universities are the proper agencies that can undertake for the society the responsibility for providing the speculative services which alone can indicate the right or at least the least misleading course of action.

So then, it is a great national necessity that in every university and research institute in our country Professors of Political Science, supported by a full array of Professors of History, Indology, Sociology and Economics may please hold group discussions on the subject of an applicable definition of Democracy in the new Indian context. The discussion papers of all these universities, published together in a single volume, should serve as a source material for future researchers. Meanwhile these papers are proposed to be utilized as a basis of a broader discussion at a public symposium where professors, politicians and publicists may co-operate in building the thought structure of new India that stands for equal opportunity to all her people.

Reviewing CROSSLAND's *The Future of Socialism*, Strachey observes:

" . . . it is an honest, searching attempt to bring some, at least, of the basic problems which confront us into full consciousness. And that is all that really matters. It is probable that neither Mr. Crossland nor I nor anyone else is right about these immensely difficult and important questions. It is, therefore, only out of controversy that any true insight can emerge. Let the debate continue."

To let a democracy grow up here in consonance with India's nature and needs likewise involves too many difficult questions and inarticulate doubts. It is very necessary that our thinking leaders and leading thinkers will debate over the issues in an honest, searching attempt to find out truth.

To define India's democracy, would you not add to Lincoln's basic definition an extra clause to include the 'Socialist pattern' peculiar to her own?

Kind Communications to :
ATULANANDA CHAKRABARTI,
39D, Golf Club Road,
Calcutta-33.

1.3.58

Printed at Thacker's Press & Directories Ltd, 6, Bentinck Street, Calcutta-1