

DEBATING INTERACTION BETWEEN POLITICS AND THE POLITICAL WITH REFERENCE TO INDIA

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INTRODUCTION

Politics and the political are integral to each other but with different emphases on the aspects of social-political life. It is, however, important to mention that the very idea of the political represents both the existing political practices manifested through the processes of politics as well as the normative goals to be realized through these processes. In other words, the exercise of power by the state and society and its justification and evaluation in the light of the idea of right or wrong, good or bad constitute the very essence of the political. If politics and the political are the constituent parts of the same whole, or mutually inclusive to each other, what then raises the need to distinguish between them? The answer lies in the fact that politics is normally associated with the exercise of power that determines the different power and position of heterogeneous elements of society like caste, class, community, gender and other constituents in the wider society whereas the political examines and evaluates the righteousness of such determination. The former represents the empirical philosophical tradition, the latter normative. Although both these traditions are incorporated in the political, distinction emerges as political philosophers usually treat empirical and normative domains separately. The conscious split created in politics and the political by the political theorists does not only represent two distinct traditions but seemingly also

undermine the potential of the political. The purpose of this article is to understand politics and the political both in their inclusivity and exclusivity.

The concepts of politics and the political have been variously defined and interpreted by the theorists and philosophers, making them quite expansive in their range and scope difficult to identify political and social aspects distinctively. Multiple aspects of human life are crucially connected with the exercise of politics and the political as they shape and mould it in such a way that it becomes difficult to recognize its earlier position, a position before being shaped. How much human life would remain impoverished without answers to some of these questions concerning it is foregrounded by one of the writers who counts them as understanding of the happenings in the world, why they happen in a particular way not in the other, prediction of the continuity of the present occurrence in the future, ethical dimension of good or bad, right or wrong, metaphysical questions of the meaning of self. (Bhargava: 2010, 28). The idea of the political grapples with all these significant questions of human social world and enables each human to comprehend his/her world that makes life meaningful and worthwhile. The wide scope of both politics and the political thus inevitably leads to the comprehension of empirical understanding along with the position and meaning of the self-situated in that overall setting. How society is structured in terms of its various social-political entitlements? Is

there social and gender equality existing in that society? Are all the rights guaranteed by the Constitution equally enjoyed by all the members? These are some of the questions empirically inquired and answered by the political theory but it does not stop there and proceeds further in the light of normative-ethical evaluations that demand gender equality and equal enjoyment of rights by all the members of society. It has been quite evident that women, dalits, advasis, backward castes and the minorities in India have long been denied equal rights even after decades of independence. The compulsion of democratic politics and the political consciousness of these groups made it incumbent upon the state to ensure not only equal rights to them but deliver them social justice in a society that is hierarchical in terms of caste, class, community, gender and ethnicity. Here, the task of the political is not only confined to acquaint the people of the painful realities of their existence but also how to ameliorate their present conditions, how to demand the implementation of constitutional provision to get rid of denial of rights and justice. These empirical and normative concerns of the political are made functional through the exercise of politics. Such exercise of politics is performed through myriad institutions of the state that ensure proper implementation of these goals, seeking in the process not only legitimacy for the state but also explaining the rationale of obeying the state. Thus, both empirical and normative are synchronized in the domain of the political. Yet, the former as believed by many theorists is represented by the politics and its practices whereas the latter by the political. In this context, it is important to note that although the realm of the political incorporates and accounts for the practices of politics, it always attempts to transcend this realm of positivism and orient it in the direction of achieving normative values. That apart, the postulate of the political also envisions a new world with new ideas, ever improving the human world. This is what makes the world of politics and the political apart.

With such a preliminary understanding of the interaction between politics and the political, it

is pertinent to underscore some of the views expressed by political theories in the course of their elaborations of these two concepts. To some, they are related with the functioning of the institutions of the state especially after the emergence of modernity, some others derive their meaning from the ancient Greek city states where the idea of politics and the political is based on the exercise of collective power of all the citizens. Yet, there are others who associate their meanings in the actual exercise of social power, addressing the issues of conflict, contestations and resultant formation of hegemony of the regime or the system. In short, for them, social is the real site of politics and the political. This is how the idea of the political gives rise to the contested terrain of its varied meanings and interpretations. Nonetheless, it would serve the purpose well if we briefly identify some of these thinkers with their specific positions on the concepts.

INTELLECTUAL TRADITIONS

Max Weber primarily associates the functioning of politics with the state, defining it as the struggle for power within and among the states, and accordingly divides citizens into rulers and the ruled. The meaning assigned to politics by him is to augment ideals and eliminate evil, and finally to use state power to build and promote culture and character. The hopes and aspirations thus nurtured through the functioning of the state is something that makes the state final arbiter in the matters of all kinds of conflicts - social, cultural, political and economic - and their resolutions.

Another political thinker who bestows great hopes upon the state is German philosopher Carl Schmitt, defining the frontiers of the political in the form of friend-enemy relation in which confrontation acquires antagonistic dimensions. In fact, he associates the practice of politics with ensuring order and stability that reigns revolting nature of human beings. He also stretches the idea of order to the extent of supporting fascism that does not merely ensure stability but also makes the

people disciplined and forcing them to obey the authority of the state. It is, therefore, not wrong to conclude that his idea of the political ultimately terminates in eulogizing the Nazi regime of Hitler, although some theorists, particularly Mouffe, are influenced by his characterization of the political as inherently antagonistic.

Paul Ricoeur posits the idea of the political in the form of the state that ensures and privileges citizenship rights over personal individual rights. It also ensures rule of law along with human freedom. Like other moral philosophers, he believed that the idea of morality is imparted to human beings by the state, an embodiment of morality, ensuring the realization of justice, equality and freedom.

So far, the philosophers have emphasized the centrality of state in the process of politics and the exercise of power together with the attainment of ideals of the political. There is another set of political theorists who adumbrate the trajectory of politics and the political in terms of freedom enjoyed in public realm and the citizens participation in the process of governance. Echoing this spirit Hannah Arendt has reflected on human conditions keeping in view the reflections of the classical political philosophers and their stress on the contemplative nature of political theory. Accordingly, she maintains that the idea of the political deeply contemplates on the human condition as it exists or has been existing over a period of time (Bhargava: 2010, 47). She can easily be placed in the ancient political tradition of 'republicanism' and 'civic humanism', followed and inspired by the ideals of ancient Greeks and Romans (Wiley: 2016, 6).

Sheldon S. Wolin is yet another political philosopher who was greatly influenced by the ideals of democracy and the powers of demos almost in the same fashion as the citizen in the ancient Greece. He endorsed the idea of citizen's participation and the collective exercise of power in the functioning of direct democracy in the polis. He asserts that popular power is the defining feature of democracy that must be the cherished goal of any idea of the political. Similarly, he has also dwelt at length on the features and practice of politics that

aims at competitive advantage for groups, individual and societies; occurs in a situation of change and scarcity; and finally, produces consequence affecting the whole society or a very large number of it (Wolin:2004, 11). Wolin's historically driven meanings of the processes of politics and the political reiterates the need of serving collective good with the popular participation in the process of governance, a hallmark of the Athenian democracy. He is at loss to foreground how the contemporary practice of democracy has become short of popular-collective control and being seemingly practiced as a mere means of legitimation. Shorn of its substance, democracy has essentially acquired the fugitive character (Wolin: 2016, 100).

There are host of other scholars who have conceived the idea of the political in terms of radical democracy and as a mechanism of social transformation. They are Claude Lefort, Ernesto Laclau, and Chantal Mouffe. The common factors among all these thinkers are that they identify the domain of the political in the continuous realm of conflicts, contestations, debates and discussions that give rise to the notion of hegemony and establish it in the exercise of state powers by the holders of such power (Wiley: 2016, 6).

Mouffe defines the sphere of the political as a constant realm of antagonism that does not ever cease and at the same time also appears to be non-resolvable. Yet, the idea of radical democracy, as she believes, may transform its form from antagonism to agonism, a realm where contending parties agree to be adversaries, not enemies, building a consensus, though conflictual, to operate in the common institutional spaces provided by democracy. One of the most significant tasks of contemporary democracy is, therefore, to transform antagonism into agonism (Mouffe: 2005, 11-12). Again, she makes the distinction between politics and the political explicit as she defines the former as practices and institutional functioning that ensures order by organizing human coexistence whereas the latter constitutes the very principles of instituting the society—the one reflects the social facts of life, the other the way of instituting human life in that

society (Ibid: 9). Here one can easily discern the impact of Martin Heidegger on Mouffe's characterizations of politics and the political as he himself elevated the distinction between them to the metaphysical level. Politics for him represents the 'ontic' reality of our being whereas the political 'ontological' aspects of our life. The one (ontic) 'refers to surface realities such as politics, economics, art, religion etc. which are derived from a deeper ontological reality', emerging out of phenomenological interaction between human consciousness and outside material world (Wiley:2016: 9, 20). This is how the dynamic fields of politics and the political are visualized, interpreted and represented.

How far both these concepts have been variously defined are sought to be captured through the above brief accounts. Now, these are encapsulated in three specific forms — "the conceptions of the political and politics in Weber, Schmitt, and Ricouer derived from the historical institutions of the state, the conceptions of Arendt and Wolin were inspired by the ancient Greek polis and Roman res publica; and the concept of the political in Lefort, Laclau, and Mouffe derived from the French revolutionary tradition, as modified by the social movement politics symbolized by May 1968" (Ibid: 7).

What has been discussed so far clearly adumbrates the inclusive nature of the political - incorporating both empirical as well as normative aspects of the political processes. Although both these aspects are intrinsic to the concept (of the political), the former is almost exclusively highlighted as the most significant dimensions of our social-political life. It is stressed that facts alone can expeditiously explain the needs of our existence, clearing the cloud of our doubts. This is how the contemporary insistence is put on the discipline of political science to unravel something that is evidently in practice for the benefit of social-political life, and thereby shoving aside the tradition that gives importance to the study of political theory. In other words, their basic contention is that ethical-normative aspects often obfuscate social realities.

The contemporary characterization of the polity inevitably demands its contextualization in order to examine, assess and analyze such claim. So, what is proposed is to situate the conceptual understanding of the interaction between politics and the political in the context of overall Indian politics briefly.

INDIAN REALITY

The long anti-colonial struggle in India gave an opportunity to its leaders to grapple with the challenges thrown by the colonial rulers and to find a way out that syncs well with its historical traditions and diversities, underpinning India's core constituents as a nation. The orientalist's characterizations of India by the British rulers did not only express doubts about its unity but were also quite skeptical about the success of democracy in a country like India. They stuck to their own position that unlike the Western societies, the inherent contradictions emerging out of India's diverse social-cultural contexts would impede its long-term unity and integrity. Similarly, the success of democracy largely depends on the historical fact of its being preceded by development like European countries. In contrast, India remained predominately underdeveloped economy barely yielding enough for its large rural population that had persistently faced famines and starvation. In all development indices like literacy, health and employment, it remained primitive rather than modern society. The gloomy depictions appeared real rather than mere rhetoric.

This was the context awaiting answers from the India's leaders who accepted the gauntlet thrown by the British. First and foremost, backwardness cannot be the basis of alien rule. Freedom of the country is the basic condition of development that has been long denied. So, first leave the country. Secondly, the inevitability of Western modernization cannot be a universal template of development. Each and every society has to develop its own course suitable to the needs and aspirations of the people. In this context, the critique of modernity posited by India's tallest leader Mahatma Gandhi is important to mention who first

systematically exposed the idea of domination contained in the very notion of modernity. This was perpetuated through force and violence. Therefore, the reversal of alien rule was the most important task for the freedom struggle in order to erect suitable structures of democratic state that could autonomously decide the priorities of development and democracy. The idea of self-reliance was the new mantra to preserve and promote sovereignty of the newly independent country. The policy of import substitution followed after independence should be viewed in the context of freedom from colonialism along with the goal of ensuring unity, integrity and sovereignty of the country (Kaviraj: 2011, 90-92). This is the broad context that enabled India to embark on the path of democracy and development, independently conceived and carved by its leaders. In brief, the practice of politics that followed independence sought to accomplish the political vision of achieving liberty, equality and justice for all Indians, irrespective of caste, colour, community, class and gender. This is how the democratic idea of the political was given a chance to achieve these long-denied rights to Indians along with ensuring material well-beings of all.

It is not out of place to mention that the British colonial rulers initially also encountered with many serious problems in devising a uniform system of collection of land revenue, forcing them to implement three distinct systems to overcome the problems – Permanent Settlement, or Zamindari System, Ryotwari System, Mahalwari System- of revenue collections in different regions of India. It happened because of their inability to understand the historical significance of the regions of the country- these regions, in fact, enjoyed a lot of autonomy even from the centralized empire states of the past. Only with the recognition of this fact and coming in terms with the regional satraps, the colonial rulers succeeded in extracting land revenues, making them to realise the different nature of Indian society than their own (Kaviraj:2010:3,4). Not only did empirically driven change alter colonial practice of politics but enabled it to consolidate its rule and avert possible popular

protest. The underlying assumption is that even the most brutal regime can hardly ever ignore local culture and its yearnings. Moreover, the politics of dominance apparently short of ethical content cannot sustain itself for long. Many colonial reforms, introduction of election and the proclamation of civilizing mission of the British rule in India should be analysed and assessed with this background understanding of the colonial rule. The upshot is that even the alien rule cannot survive without a vision of the political, responding to the imperatives of local realities and changing the course of politics accordingly. It is indispensable even when the vision is farcical because of its colonial character. It was only with the independence of the country that duality of the colonial realm of politics and the political was reversed. What follows next is unravelling these two processes in the post-independence India with their strength and weaknesses. What is being proposed now is to delineate, as mentioned above, the interaction between politics and the political in the context of democracy and development broadly followed by India since her independence. Unlike the western societies, democracy precedes development that conceived the nature and its course to be followed in consonance with its political vision promised during and after independence. In almost all the post-colonial societies, state led development is rule rather than exception, and of them all, the example of India is the most glaring. In other words, politics was in command of the economics. In tune with the perspective, the state in India asserted its autonomy to fulfill its long commitment given to the agrarian classes, particularly the subalterns. The prompt abolition of oppressive Zamindari system was followed by the host of land reform measures. Although their goal was to democratize the agrarian structure, they mainly benefited the land-owning classes. The unresolved loopholes in these measures enabled the landed classes, on the one hand, to maintain their dominance over the agrarian scene leaving the agricultural labour, the landless, and the lower-caste peasants in the lurch, on the other. As the benefits of the abolition mainly accrued to the former, the latter largely remained excluded from

the benefits of both the abolition and the land reform measures. The subsequent implementation of Green Revolution in order to augment agricultural yield further reinforced the hold of entrenched classes and almost completely ignored the interests of the poor. This unevenness in turn enabled the Congress Party to reap the benefits of these measures in winning the support of dominant upper castes and also at the same time the poor peasants through the channels of providing patronage to them by the upper castes.

The industrial sector was also not in its own able to make its mark upon the course of development without an effective support of the state. Industrialisation was considered to be one of the most important determinants of economic prosperity as well as the guarantee of the sovereignty of the state, providing it enough space for strategic maneuverability in the global politics. As believed by many Indians, it was the lack of industrial development that made India susceptible to the British colonialism. This inevitably laid down the process of creating the industrial infrastructure by investing staggering amount in the establishment of capital-intensive industries. The Indian capitalist class was also in the fledgling stage to match the investment capacity and power of the state. This necessarily made them to absolutely rely upon the state for the growth of heavy industries. This too was in conformity with the recommendations of the Bombay Plan formed at the instance of Indian industrialists in 1940s (Kaviraj: 2011: 88). It is not wrong to conclude that at the very outset industrial asset was created by the conscious decision of the state for the promotion and benefit of the Indian capitalist class, ultimately facilitating the process of state-led capitalist development. The other useful purpose, however, served by it was to ensure employment to the millions of unemployed youths.

What actually emerges from the above descriptions is not that the practice of politics synchronises well with the vision of the political cherished by the people and political leaders after independence. A clear mismatch is evident between the former and the latter. This phenomenon has

been variously theorized by many scholars in the form of critique of democracy and development in India. One of them that needs mention in this regard is one that gets greatly inspired by the Gramscian formulation of 'passive revolution', averting the possibility of any real revolution. Application of it in the Indian condition explains how the prospect of historic revolutions was greatly minimized with strategic alliance between two mutually opposing social classes. It was prudent on the part of the capitalist class to strike a formidable alliance with the dominant agrarian classes to avoid any possibility of chaos as it was acutely aware of its inchoate position in the overall economic and social life of India. This alliance between the capitalist class and the landowning class was actively and overtly supported by the educated and the political elites (Kaviraj: 2010:100). Similarly, one scholar, while characterizing the contemporary nature of democracy and development in India, posits the ensuing conflict between the civil society and the political society, the former as the major beneficiary of neo-liberal economic reforms whereas the latter barely survives because of the democratic compulsion of the political class (Chatterjee:2011: 11,16).

In the beginning, the mobilizational aspect of democracy augured well for the Congress Party. Hustle and bustle of the normal democratic politics relatively remained calm till 1967. The legacy of nationalism was still fresh in the memory of the people. The then leadership enjoyed the complete trust of the masses. Since the Congress party was the conglomerate of diverse social-political interests, it shared power and well accommodated diversities that contained popular disappointment and nurtured hopes. But by 1967, the initial nationalist elan began to peter out as many of the promises largely remained unfulfilled. The poor faced the apathy and indifference of the states as they faced famine and concomitant problems that led to an end to their initial euphoria. That apart, the intermediary classes acquired new economic prosperity as they reaped the major benefits of the Green Revolution. They thus demanded an enhanced political role in

the state structures commensurate with their newly acquired economic status. In this changed scenario, the Congress Party contested the fourth general election held in 1967 in which it merely managed to get simple majority in the Parliament, indeed a very poor performance since it entered the electoral fray. Not only that, the situation further deteriorated for the Party with its first ever drubbing in the state assembly's elections in many of the North Indian states. In reality, the Party was in deep crisis. Instead of resolving the crisis, it triggered an intra-party squabble that reached flash point at the time of the Presidential election, finally causing split in the Congress Party in 1969. With the split, the old Congress politics of consensus assiduously built over the years abruptly came to an end, paving the way for the rise of personalized politics and direct appeal of the leader. Not only did it undermine the organizational structures and strength of the Party but also throttled inner-party democracy, casting its long spell on the party politics in India. This set an ominous trend which was embraced by all the political leaders and their cohorts who quickly developed disdain for the democratic norms of debates and discussions within the parties. Now they felt free to change all norms to suit their petty political interests, unleashing a new leaning where political legacies are inherited by their kin rather than by the long-term party leaders and committed cadres. Consequently, dynastic syndrome has become the hallmark of almost all the political parties of India. The shrinking democratic space within the parties heralded an aggressive and competitive politics of rhetoric. Mrs. Gandhi skillfully employed the rhetorical slogan of Garibi Hatao to win 1971 election. In a poor developing country where the poor and the deprived constitute the majority, it was a prudent political move to coin such a slogan to garner their support. Since then, the mobilizational strategies of all political parties were radically altered and they made suitable changes in their programmes, policies and action to woo the poor and deprived section of society. Mrs. Gandhi, however, launched many anti-poverty programmes to justify her move. One such programme, Integrated Rural Development Programme, was the

most significant government programme of capability building and employment generation for the poor. Yet these programmes were short of meaningful structural changes and reforms.

Rajiv Gandhi initially tried to restore the organizational strength of the party by announcing party election. He also seriously took up the demands of various autonomy movements (Punjab and Assam) by softening the stand of the government. But with his declining popularity and Congress reversals in the state assembly elections, he dithered to take bold steps on both the issues. This made him to succumb to two contrary processes of centralization and powerlessness (Kohli:1991:1,10).The democratic failure made him powerless and, therefore, he tried to compensate this loss by grabbing more and more powers in his own hand which unleashed trend of centralization in the system. This process of centralization weakened the institutional functioning of the state and the party. Consequently, the Congress Party lost the election in 1989.

Mr. V. P. Singh became the Prime Minister after the election in 1989. He did not last long in power but he gave a new turn to Indian politics which has had lasting impact. He implemented the Mandal Commission Report extending reservation to the other backward castes (OBCs). His decision of 27 percent reservation for the OBCs in government jobs was subsequently upheld with some qualifications by the Supreme Court. This one decision stirred the whole nation. For a while, it engendered a long agitation by the upper caste students against the reservation policy but it gradually calmed down in the absence of direct support by any political party. Since the implementation of reservation, the nature of the parties and polity has been drastically altered. One of the scholars, while recognizing its social-political significance, called it 'a second democratic upsurge' in the history of Indian democracy (Yadav:2000:120). It is also called a 'silent revolution' by yet another scholar of Indian politics who recognized its deeper impact on the politics of North India (Jaffrelot:2003:1,6).

The decade of nineties is also tumultuous as it witnessed the ascendancy of identity politics marked by caste and community, seemingly posing an insurmountable challenge to the idea of India. The increasing blending of theology with politics marked them indistinguishable from each other. The broad vision of the political was sought to be premised on a narrow cultural construct, stultifying the idea of unity in diversity. It appears that the political economy of neo liberalism has consciously created a cultural narrative to garner majority support for its unhindered economic prosperity. Naturally, the party that syncs with such a narrative rule the roost. A closer look on the worldwide surge in favour of free market society based on neo-liberal economic model, especially after the disintegration of Soviet Union and the East European Communist regimes, did not create a much hyped end of history, or post-political vision of the cosmopolitan world, rather a world full of strives that emerges out of communal and ethnic conflicts. The major beneficiaries of these changes locally as well as globally are the corporates and the parties and regimes supported by them. How the political idea of collective good is distorted by these unwarranted developments, needs to be studied in the context of impact of religion upon politics and society.

Since the nineties, India embarked on the path of economic reforms in which the economic role of the state was limited, economy was largely de-regularized and opened to foreign investment. Now the new mantra is growth and efficiency rather than the similar and earlier emphasis accorded to equality. For the first time since independence, economy not politics is in the commanding position, directing the political priorities in which the market and the corporates figure predominantly. This inevitably leads to a conflict between, what an economist characteristically put it, 'the economics of market' and 'the politics of democracy' (Nayyar:2001:391) The former is exclusive, the latter inclusive. The dynamics of market necessarily excludes people particularly those who do not have purchasing power (the poor and the deprived) but the politics of democracy entails the process of

inclusion of such people. The major issues that dominated the hustings held in the decade and afterwards revolved around them. It is commonly believed that democracy is the cause and effect of political empowerment, a crucial determinant over all other issues. Yet the economy of market in India appears to be unchallenged. Despite such ascendancy, the compulsion of democratic politics may ensure the dominance of politics of empowerment sooner than later.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

Thus, the interaction between politics and the political is crucial to comprehend the complex relation between the state and society. The overlapping dimensions of the two concepts with the split consciously made into them manifest the trajectory of Indian democracy after independence. The Congress party split in 1969 does not only signify intra-party conflict of power but also symbolizes extraordinary significance accorded to power politics, thereby undermining the attainment of collective goals of the political. The other crucial junctures when the normative goals of the political were passed over are not one but many, often betraying the trust of the people, be it the rhetoric of Garibi Hatao, declaration of national emergency, failure of Janata party experiment in 1977, Babri mosque demolition in 1992, emergence of majoritarian politics and decline of democratic institutions—all these indeed reflect the uneasy relations marking the interaction between politics and the political. The time in which we live now further intensifies and obfuscates the distinction between politics and the political, between facts and norms. Unlike the earlier periods when the political was envisioned against the existing miseries of human society and that sought to be remedied, the protean nature of contemporary changes have apparently erased the distinction between what is to be retained and to be replaced. In other words, the idea of good is critically dependent on the existence of its opposite in the contemporary theorizations. Furthermore, the classical political theorists conceived the idea of utopia by completely

eliminating the existing dystopia. But unlike them, the salience of even critical theorizations today cannot survive without the persistence of dystopia as the criticality that inheres in their conceptions cannot be fully appreciated in the absence of the latter. To put it simply, Kuhnian paradigm shift is conspicuously absent in today's intellectual pursuits. The essence of the argument is fully captured by the perceptive illustration offered by Wolin where he posits that the ephemeral nature of change evident today is, in fact, not naively conceived but premeditated in order to obliterate the distinction between fact and norm. What indeed remains is nothing but the omnipresence of power that links fact and norm in a way that the reign of the fact as a value competes and commands the orientation of so-called ephemeral changes. The upshot of the whole argument is how to deprive the idea of the political of its essence of realizing collective well-being and equal share in power. (Wolin: 2016: 43).

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