

Decentralisation or Centralisation of Power

or

“Authoritarianism in Indian Democracy”

Different philosophers and thinkers have been supporting centralization and decentralization from time to time. For the establishment of democracy, it is increasingly felt that decentralization of power is a check upon the degeneration of democracy into dictatorship. Philosophical Radicals, organized syndicalists agree that authoritarian rule and an excessive concentration of power are among the main obstacles in the way of social and individual progress. Even the communists express at least theoretical dislike of the centralized authoritarian state. Marx, for example, described the state as a parasite of society and looked forward to the time after the revolution when it would automatically wither away. No body can deny that if we want to change society for the better there must be freedom, justice, peaceful co-operation between the non-attached yet active and responsible individuals. This goal cannot be achieved through police espionage or military slavery. The centralization of power needs creation of an elaborate political hierarchy, the suppression of free discussion and the imposition of authoritarian system of education.

In some of the societies the state exists for the purpose of ensuring privileges to the ruling class. In feudal community the state is the instrument by means of which the landed nobility keeps itself in power. Similarly, under capitalism the rich retain their power with the help of the state. Clearly enough in such societies the people in power will always try to retain power in one or the other way. It is wrong to say that authoritarianism can help a government to consolidate democracy. But these dictatorial shortcuts can never take us to our destination. We must march directly, if we turn back to it we shall merely increase the distance which separates us from the goal. Political road to a better society is decentralization and responsible self-government.

In the present circumstances, it seems improbable that civilized community will take that road. Firstly, a society which is prepared for war cannot afford to be any thing but centralized. That is why any country which proposes to make war as an instrument of policy must have all powerful executive. So a democracy which prepares for war ceases to be democratic. The reverse is also true. That is why a highly centralized executive will always wage a war because whenever a tyrant feels that his popularity is waning he is tempted to exploit nationalistic feelings in order to consolidate his own position. Moreover, the individuals start feeling that

the state is himself. In this manner the state is made the instrument of an individual's mania of persecution and grandeurs.

Some may say that in the present state of circumstances every nation feels that it must prepare for war. That is why there is general tendency to increase the power for the Central executive. They say that a mad race for arms and conflicts in the world and the power bloc rivalries have resulted in a state of war. Consequently, there is a tendency towards totalitarian state. Before the Second World War the war hysteria had gripped most of the European nations and so there was centralization. For example, in England the Sedition Bill was passed and there was an enrolment of air raid wardens. Similarly, in France executive had taken much power. In such conditions they say that there was nothing wrong for India to move towards authoritarianism. But just to sacrifice democracy for the sake of war victories is morally unjustified and betrayal of the trust of the people. A true democrat would like to say even if India had lost battle with Pakistan without losing democracy it would have been better.

A common man is easily impressed by the successes of the government. Rather the glamour of success becomes one of the methods of perpetuating authoritarian rule. But if success is to be achieved by making a large number of people slaves it is analogous to killing the patient in an attempt to cure him.

The typical method adopted by the authoritarian rulers is to provide a set of terms in which their policies are rationalized and the crimes are justified. They serve as moulds for the thoughts of the people and the feelings and desires. This type of rationalization has been given by the Fascists, Nazis and Communists alike. In India the authoritarian government was ruling in the name of eradication poverty and disciplining the nation. Everything was justified in the name of discipline.

Again power is intoxicating by itself. That is why the people in power always try to retain it. That is why in all dictatorial countries the instruments of domestic policy are spying, torture, arbitrary imprisonment and execution. There may not have been executions in India, but arbitrary imprisonment was facilitated with the help of NSB and MISA.

The consequence of this curtailment of individual liberties and a progressive regimentation of the masses had frustrated people. The rational idealist deplore this tendency. It is completely wrong to think that tyranny will result in democracy. It has been suggested that we should not be misguided by the false attractions for this form of government. There was so much of dormant resentment that it might have burst and the result would have been one of the most unfortunate in history.