

## **“Constituent Assembly and Indian Federation” (1940)**

**By Y. G. Krishnamurti**

### **INTRODUCTION**

**By Dr S. Srikanta Sastri**

It is with great pleasure that I introduce this work of my friend and pupil Mr. Y. G Krishnamurti to the scholars and patriots of our country. In this small but comprehensive work he deals with a topic of great importance for the future of the nation. The wide range of scholarship and the sweep of imagination displayed in this work are sufficient evidence as to his capacity and fitness for the task he has undertaken. Not merely for the concrete suggestions he has put forward but also because of what is implicit, his book deserves earnest consideration. On the foundation of facts and theories he has not advocated, it is possible to build up a theory of government as it ought not to be. He justifiably say with Montesquieu have not drawn my principles from my prejudices but from the nature of things." He thus makes a realistic approach to the problems that confront the nation. There is a type of idealism in our country which tries to mask hard facts with sentiment, and is nothing but wishful thinking, but his idealism is of a purer variety—never suppressing the verities or resorting to terminological in-exactitudes but striving to visualise and realise future possibilities.

He deals with the nature and history of the constituent assemblies and points out the conditions on which their success depends. The questions of representation, minorities, economic and social planning and the defects of the Federation as contemplated in the Government of India Act of 1935, the partial of provincial autonomy are dealt with. Finally he has discussed in the light of the most recent and authoritative discussions on the subject, the problem of Dominion Status and Independence.

The fundamental problem is of course the kind and method of freedom suitable to the conditions in our country. The great set-back in the west to all that connotes freedom, decency, and dignity, such as the rise of dictatorships and the consequent denial of humanity, is not merely due to a class-conflict.

It can be traced to something far deeper than that. Efficiency, order and security are promised by the dictators in return for complete surrender and implicit obedience. To be feared is better than to be loved and hence the resort to insane cruelty—smiting off one by one the tallest of the poppy-heads. But there are far potent forces let loose in the world that make for the instability of dictatorships. No amount of repression and distraction of men's minds, no fomenting of class hatreds, no hypnotisation and intoxication can bring about a stable society or lasting prosperity.

In a sense it is true that men are "tired of liberty", if liberty means merely that of the ballot-box, without the control of cash box. Political freedom would be like the Dead Sea fruit turning to ashes in our mouths without economic freedom. Democracy in the old sense of political freedom, can no longer work with the same smoothness in the midst of the complexities of modern life. But this does not mean that with perverted cleverness we should denounce democracy and liberty as "putrefying corpses." Genuine democracy is something more comprehensive. It advances slowly and tardily, meddling and muddling, by compromises and experiments but it achieves results far more permanent and we might almost say eternal because it does not ignore the values of human personality and of a fearless freedom of thought.

Tolerance of intolerance is not possible to out and out tolerationists; it is a passion and not rational, an aversion to compromise with evil, a negation of the Life Force which advances from the mere will-to-live to the will-to-know. Race instincts, inhibitions and complexes no doubt account for the sordid mentality and the profound inertia manifested in the herd and are cleverly exploited by determined minorities, until a point is reached when there is a fatalistic acceptance of a single idea and opposition to further change. The incompetent many select the corrupt few who promise them panaceas for all the ills that human flesh is heir to. Therefore one sure indication of an approaching totalitarian state is the propensity of the masses to resort to any curious theory. In the spacious days before the last war, the gospel of laissez faire was hailed as a revelation, completely ignoring the fact that it depended on the temporary condition of undeveloped industrialisation in particular nations. But the development of the capitalist economy so as to encompass the whole world naturally brought it into conflict with national interests. The price that toleration had to pay was prosperity, and the standards of

life had also increased. Therefore the existing social order was at the mercy of political and economic events.

The world wars have brought about the abandonment of laissez faire by imposing, out of necessity, regimentation and coordination of all state activities. When prosperity faded away and security was jeopardised, people were prepared to sacrifice everything—liberty, democracy, principles and constitutions for private security. A return to the pure doctrine of non-intervention by the state is now impossible. In fact as political and economic history shows, pure non-intervention of the state was never a reality. The change is merely one of degree. Therefore the problem of modern governments is how to preserve the continuity of an ordered existence by insuring to the citizens a decent standard of life. A kind of collectivism should be adopted so as to eschew the evils of a dictatorial collectivism as well as those of irresponsible private initiative and adjustment.

In backward countries like India where the people spend all their earnings on the barest necessities of life and where there is little choice of occupation, a rigidly enforced system of social and economic planning may achieve excellent results. But when a point is reached at which the primary needs of a person are satisfied, there arises the problem of planning for a society which exercises and spends its surplus income on comforts and luxuries. An inelastic economic plan fails to meet the new conditions and either there would be great waste or an attempt to force down private incomes to the old subsistence level, with a dictatorial hand.

Is there no choice between the "police state" — the neutral state looking on benevolently upon wasteful private enterprises and a military state which suppresses private initiative altogether? A disciplined liberty is no doubt essential but the emphasis should be on liberty. The risks of liberty must be taken but it is also necessary to guard against the risk of ignorance and self-helplessness. To achieve this in the true democratic tradition, it is necessary to evolve a state organism so adaptable, so flexible, and automatically self-compensating and balancing, as to establish a decent standard of life throughout the state and at the same time to preserve the liberty of private enterprise within reasonably wide limits.

The state can thus stave off the dangers of both disorganised private enterprise and totalitarianism. As the custodian of the monetary system it can put to test new financial methods to control the general price levels and act directly on the markets by timing its operations as to neutralise a dangerous tendency towards unwarranted booms and depressions. A taxation policy can be evolved to control the rates and encourage wise expenditure and prudent savings. Such measures naturally imply the need for long-range planning. The obstacles may be innumerable especially in a country like India with its economic backwardness and foreign domination. But this is the democratic method, though private enterprise might be controlled to a certain extent.

Successful planning is possible in a country like India where the choice of goods is limited, supply is insufficient and distribution is restricted by many factors. But the plan must also take into consideration the possibility of expansion and abundance, when plenty of choice is offered to the consumers and there will be keen competition not only in the same industry but among several industries.

The supreme necessity for economic and social planning is self-evident. But the political aspect of it deserves careful consideration. We in India are confronted with many self-styled minorities, who have been exerting pressure to frustrate all attempts to follow a policy which is in the long run in the interests of the country but which is stigmatised as contrary to their temporary and immediate interests by these myopic microscopic minorities. Wild claims are put forward sacrificing national interests to particular interests, liberty to communal claims, and order to the gratification of individual whims. Temporary majorities are equally dangerous to the ultimate welfare of the state if unrestrained power is consigned to them. Therefore a healthy convention as in England that one Parliament cannot bind its successors must be established or a certain rigidity of the constitution becomes essential as in the United States. A democracy which is carried away by the prevailing opinion and with no provision for second thoughts, sooner or later destroys liberty or civilisation or both. Pure democracy may be tolerated in a neutral state but it must be adapted to suit modern socialist states if it is not to be entirely destroyed.

The popular assemblies in a democracy have claimed the right to refuse supplies to the executive. "*Supply and redress of grievances go hand in hand*", "*No taxation without representation*" are time-honoured slogans. But in a modern state good government is not possible if the supplies depend upon delegates who represent local interests.

No planned economy can be successful. Many remedies of a technical nature like the list system, transfer of the initiative to the executive etc., are suggested in this book. The conflicting groups should assign a large measure of freedom and initiative to the executive retaining for themselves the right to accept, modify or reject the pro-In fact there is no comprehensive scheme "to eliminate diversity of interests" even in a dictatorship. The danger to the nation is where there are considerable sections of the people who have nothing to lose but their chains. And if such classes barter their liberty for a few necessities to a plutocracy, though they may be in a minority, may yet overpower the whole state. Dictatorship and gangsterism will emerge. Therefore a state should initiate a policy of social services and collective enterprise so as to provide reasonable security. If too much property is theft, equally poverty is the greatest of crimes. Voluntary poverty is an impossible ideal. Not all the people in a nation are Gandhis, who can live a life of constant self-abnegation. It may be a dull bourgeois ideal to live and let live. But it is far better than a dictatorship which lives but not lets others to live. The tree of liberty has its roots in the economic and political independence of the common citizens. Their way of life is based on the conviction that no single man or group of men possess the wisdom or the goodness to determine the destinies of a nation.

The future of India therefore depends upon fostering such a notion of independence and sturdy individuality which can find adequate expression only through a thoroughly democratic constituent Assembly. No foreign power can adopt the attitude of the parent of Victorian era, "I am one of the successes of the Almighty, therefore imitate me in every particular or I will have the skin off your back." It is to be hoped that Indian patriotism under the guidance of one of the most saintly and least selfish of men we have the good fortune to possess, achieves success through the Constituent Assembly. "If night and day are such that you greet them with joy, if life emits a fragrance like flowers and sweet scented herbs, is more elastic, more starry, more immortal; that is your success." We cannot envisage a better national ideal than is enshrined in this ancient national anthem of the Indian people.

आ ब्रह्मन् ब्राह्मणो ब्रह्मवर्चसी जायताम् । आऽस्मिन् राष्ट्रे राजन्य इषव्य  
श्रूरो महारथो जायताम् । दोग्धी धेनुर्वोढा अवड्वानाशुस्साप्तिः पुरन्धर्योषा जिणूः  
रथेष्टा सभेयो युवाऽऽस्य यजमानस्य वीरो जायताम् । निकामे नि कामे नः  
पर्जन्यो वर्षतु फलिन्यो न ओषधयः पृच्यन्ताम् । योगक्षेमो नः कल्पताम् ॥

S. SRIKANTHA SĀSTRĪ.

*May those dwellers in the Spirit Eternal be full of divine grace;  
May the guardians of the moral order in this country be ever armed  
and alert to protect. May the nation be full of wealth in cows rich  
in milk, strong bulls, swift horses, women—ornaments to the house-  
hold, heroes ready for war and young men famous for intellect and  
public spirit. May there be no famines and calamities; may there  
be economic prosperity. May we attain unity and happiness.  
(Yajur Vidg ; TaittiTiya Samhita VII-5-18.44.)*