

K.C. Agarwal, *Shaping India of Our Dreams* (Knowledge Books Inc., New Delhi, 2003). Pp.xviii+402. Price: Rs.690

Understanding and comprehending Indian polity has always been an endless intellectual exercise both for academia and journalists. Political concerns for both the creeds have always been there in one form or the other, and a minute analysis of the same in the writings of various political philosophers and authors on Indian polity reveals that they have not been any different. Thus, during different phases, even though the society and polity has changed radically, the political and social concerns have remained the same. As also they have remained divided into two schools: one of skeptics and the other of optimists. However, what is important is that whether such expressed political concerns have been able to guide the policy planners in constructive and positive directions?

The book *Shaping India of our Dreams* by K.C. Agarwal is one such attempt to comprehend and present an analysis of the contemporary India and then suggest remedy thereof. As the title suggests, the book seems to have been written with dedication to change India according to the dreams of the suffering common masses. Right in the beginning the author claims that:

This book is a wake up call for the people of India to enable them to see their country more closely and understand the reasons for its highly ramshackled state of affairs and for the unbound miseries of its people. For identifying causes of people's sufferings and seeking their solutions some investigation into the causes of our failures was imperative. If the causes are identified, it will be

easy to cure the disease. This is what I have attempted to do through my present work.¹

Thus, it is quite obvious in the above statements that the author is more interested in curing the diseases; the Indian polity is suffering from. However, it is essential to mention in the beginning of the review that the book has been written with a pessimistic and skeptic's perspective. The book suggests that there is nothing in the Indian polity which can be praised or the people can take pride of. The Indian polity is a sham and a fraud upon the people of India and the leaders all along were such short sighted that in the last fifty-five years there has been no progress in any walk of life of the people of India. Such is the kind of feeling one gets after reading the book thoroughly. But the praiseworthy part of the book is that it has expressed concerns that things have to be improved and what are the things that are required to be done to mitigate the miseries of the suffering masses. However, the ways and means how it can be or will be done is missing conspicuously. Nowhere the book suggests the ways and means for achieving the set goals and objectives but everywhere it reminds the readers that what is to be done.

Towards the end of the book the author appeals the readers to join the organization (conceived by him only) called "Crusade India" (the address and other details of which are provided in the book) to shape India of our dreams i.e. to establish supposedly a '*Ram Rajya*\ A state rid of all sufferings and where justice and equality would prevail and each individual will lead a happy life.

The title of the book no doubt is tempting for a person concerned with changing the system and improving the state of affairs in India. However, after reading the book one gets highly disappointed that what it contains are trifles, superficial and unscientific. The book badly lacks scientific vigor which is *sine quo non* for understanding a political system and prevailing systemic bias to explore the ways and means to adopt and apply

¹ K.C. Agrawal, *Shaping India of our Dream* (Knowledge Books Inc., New Delhi, 2003). As mentioned in the foreword by author in the book.

rectification measures. Overall the book is a systematic presentation of the prevailing scenario in the country which most of us i.e. Indians read daily in various newspapers and keep watching on news channels. Hence, one misses the theoretical punch, and often finds the book lost in a maze of descriptive empirical material, much of which covers familiar ground. However, a thorough and micro-level analysis of the book and its contents are obvious to understand the dynamics of Indian polity and the ever-growing concerns for the same.

This is not for the first time that some one has written a book of this sort, rather interpreting Indian polity and suggesting measures for good governance has continued since independence. However, the trend for such articles and books were quite prominent during the sixties and seventies when political scientists and scholars in other fields wrote a number of books analyzing the various sectors of the Indian political system and governance in India. The most remarkable ones are by Rajni Kothari², Atul Kohli³, Rudolph and Rudolph⁴, Paul R. Brass, Bhawani Sen Gupta⁵, N.S. Saksena⁶, Rabin Mukherji⁷ to name but a few.

The most recent one is by Rabin Mukherji who writes that democracy is a failure and "Shefocracy" (an acronym which stands for shelter, health, education, food and clothing to the people) is the solution. Here also the title suggests something and the book

² Rajni Kothari, *Growing Amensia* (Ajanta Publications, New Delhi, 1994). See also his *State against Democracy: The Search for Humane Governance* (Ajanta Publishers, New Delhi, 1988).

³ Atul Kohli, *Democracy and Discontent: India's Growing Crisis of Governability* (Cambridge University Press, 1991).

⁴ Lloyd I Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, *In Pursuit of Lakshmi: The Political Economy of the Indian State* (University of Chicago Press, New Delhi, 1987).

⁵ Bhabani Sen Gupta, *India: Problems of Governance* (Center for Policy Research, Konark Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1996)

⁶ N.S. Saksena, *India: Towards Anarchy, 1967-1992* (Abhinav Publications, New Delhi, 1993). See also his *Law and Disorder in India* (Abhinav Publications, New Delhi, 1987) for authentic analyses and reporting of the steadily growing crisis of governance in India since 1970s.

⁷ Rabin Mukherji, *Democracy, A Failure, Shefocracy-The Solution* (Indian Research Press, New Delhi, 2001).

contains something else. As mentioned in the book, it was sent for nomination for 'the noble prize for peace'. Writing on functioning of democracy, the book presents a blue-print for the change over from a 'worst form of government' to a 'better form of government' i.e. Shefocracy. The book overall talks more about the electoral reforms and reforms in the parliamentary system than about the ways and means through which the governance can be improved in the country thereby ensuring 'Shefocracy'.

The book under review is also of the same kind but differ in the sense that rather than suggesting reforms in parliamentary democracy alone the author proposes radical changes in the system. The author proposes to create "City Centers" which if realized would be like a model State for the world community where almost everything would be available which a human being needs for his day-to-day happy life, which would also take care of most of the problems that many of the developing polity are facing today. However, since there are not many recent general treatises on contemporary Indian politics; the ones that exist and continue to be used have become dated and call for major revisions. This book could well fill the gap in spite of containing major methodological flaws. While it would be a misnomer to call it a book on political economy—it is rather a book on the politics of economic development—and while its handling of the Indian state is rather limited, confining itself to the performances of the Indian state along different policy arenas, it does manage to cover a vast ground and provides the reader a broad panorama of how the polity has 'fared' in the face of growing challenges and the reality of less than satisfactory performance when it comes to the conditions of the people.

The book opens with 'The Mission' in which the author exposes the countrymen to the macro level problems of the country and provide examples to prove that there is no dearth of potentials in the country still the country has failed and explains that as individuals we have succeeded in other countries but have failed in our own. He has raised many questions for which the 'reasons' he has tried to analyze later in the book. Author gives the message to the countrymen that:

In view of our enormous resource availability and inherent unbound potential as researched by the author and discussed in this book, our lone motto is to make optimum use of all these and construct our nation into one of the mightiest and most prosperous nations in the world.

With this message author also expresses in an emotional way that when we see the fabulous buildings, shopping malls, roads and recreation avenues of the affluent world or their well dressed and satisfied people, school-going children, fun and frolic, we also feel that our people should also enjoy like them. And author assures the people of the country that one day we will also be like them through hard work. There is no doubt about the fact that each individual aspires for a happy life. How it can be done, he claims unfolds in the following pages. Author seems to be slightly mistaken because in the following pages what he suggests is 'what can be done' but not 'how it can be done'.

The author has structured the book into four sections: first, dealing with 'what we are'; second deals with 'why we are'; third deals with 'what can be done; and the fourth with 'how it can be done'. The first two parts are self-explanatory as it deals with 'what is' and what are the reasons for existing anomalies. The third part is about the suggestion and the measures that can be adopted to deliver good governance in the buzzwords of the last decades. Though the title of the last part speaks about the ways of achieving the set goals in the previous section but this also is only about the things that can be adopted for improving the plight of the people but not as to how they can be achieved. The reason is quite obvious; the author though is an engineer by profession, lacks scientific vigor. He has failed to theorize the trends that he has discovered in the first two sections of the book. It is ironical that whereas he has devoted almost 382 pages for understanding the Indian polity and has almost explored every field of activity, 'has devoted only 15 pages on "How it can be done"-. This itself makes

it obvious the seriousness of the author about the mechanism of the radical change which he envisages.

After reading the book one gets an impression that the title of the book itself, is misleading, rather than 'Shaping India of our Dreams' it should have been 'Polemics of Indian Polity" or 'failures of the Indian democracy'. This is because through out the book the author is running while trying to discuss about the anomalies of various kinds that the Indian polity is suffering from. He has tried to deliberate upon a variety of things like, food problem, poverty alleviation, environmental pollution and degradation, water related problems and water management, problem related to trade and commerce, defence vs. Development dilemma, drawbacks of nuclearization, rural development, urbanization, problems in the field of agriculture, dwindling economy, industrial failure, corruption at every stages, reforming education, optimizing power generation, tourism, emphasis on R&D and information technology, reforming policy and judiciary, developing northeastern states, resolving Kashmir through unification, and reforming defence services, to name but a few. The vast array of issues that the author tries to raise about in his book exposes the author's basic understanding about research and resolution of problems. Each of the issues raised by the author are a subject of mega research itself and treating them in the way the author has done is making it trifle and undermining the seriousness of the issue under study.

In Aristotelian terms one can divide the book into two parts: first the political actualities and; second the political idealism. So far as political actualities are concerned the book could score some appraisal as it deals at length with the polemics of the Indian political system and different failures of the democracy. The suggestions that are there in the book are too idealistic; it is more so on account of the fact that how the ideals set by the author could be achieved is totally absent. The suggestion are idealistic could be observed in his concept of 'City Centers' through which he is

trying to achieve good governance and a life of idyllic happiness⁹ for the individuals in the 'City Centers'. A glimpse of the same could not be uncalled for, he says:

The city centers are conceived to provide and opportunity to the village folks to live together and work together to become a force one day. — The concept behind these centres is the development of each village into a full-fledged city by clubbing a few villages together to attain self-reliance. It also aims at remote habitation from the place of work. ~
- Each city center will have residential, commercial and industrial activities at one place and somewhere at the center of the city center. In the periphery will be the farmlands which may also have hillocks, mountains, forests, marshy lands, fallow lands, sand dunes, rivers, canals, ponds and lakes.¹⁰

Above is the mention of the proposed 'city centre' which sounds a heaven on earth if one reads the detailed provisions of the 'city centres'. This is something on the line of Platonic 'ideal state' or Aristotle's concept of the 'best practicable state' which he envisaged to the size of a Greek City-State. Considering today's population and the complexities of life the author's 'city-centres' also makes provision for almost all things the same way Plato and Aristotle suggested for their ideal state and best practicable state respectively. However, the suggestions of Plato and Aristotle has always remained a part of political philosophy but could never be realized on earth. Since that day the concern for a 'perfect state' has always been there and scholars after scholars have presented their models some in terms of ideals and some in terms of realities. However, the fact remains that even today none of the existing states can be declared as the best model which one can think of

⁹ A term which J.J Rousseau uses to explain the life in the 'State of Nature' in his book *'The Social Contract'*. The life in the state of nature according to him is of complete happiness and there is peace and goodwill prevailing. ¹⁰*Supran.* 1, pp.173-175.

imitating. Francis Fukuyama¹¹ in his masterpiece called *End of History and the Last Man* established that after experimenting with all the forms of government what has come to survive is the 'liberal-democratic model of government'. However, even the liberal-democratic models of governments are also the victim of bad politics and bad governance. India too is no exception to this. India is also a liberal-democratic model based on free capitalism, though it too is surviving but is suffering on many counts and there is increasing emphasis on 'good governance'. Fukuyama's claim that political and economic development always terminates at liberal-capitalist democracy assumes that the non-western world is striving to imitate the western route to modernizations. However, this has not always been the case as most of the post-colonial societies started with imitation of the western model of modernizations but utterly failed as it led to 'westernization on the name of modernization' where former is a cultural concept and the later is a developmental concept. Hence, unfortunately in India also cultural modernization is trying to precede the economic and political modernization. This trend is required to be observed and analyzed to reverse the trend especially in the light of the recent upsurge in the 'knowledge society' of India.

A systematic analysis about the anomalies of Indian political system reveals that the system is underperforming and the common masses are suffering because of the following reasons:

- Widely rampant corruption;
- Criminalization of politics;
- Communalization of politics;
- Politics of opportunism;
- Politics of populism;

¹¹ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and The Last Man* (Penguin Books, 1992). For him, the end of the East-West conflict confirms that liberal capitalism is now unchallenged as a model of, and end point for, humankind's political and economic development. Like most liberals he sees history as progressive, linear and 'directional', and is convinced that there is a fundamental process at work that dictates a common evolutionary pattern for all human societies—in short, something like a Universal History of Mankind in the direction of liberal democracy.

- Regionalization of political parties and their parochial outlook;
- Indifferent civil-society and;
- Illiteracy and sagging moral values etc.

These are some of the broader trends which many political and social scientists have observed and declared that they are responsible for poor governance in India and also responsible for plight of the people and causing great harm to the system. None of the above trends have been observed in a theoretical way by the author. It is quite obvious that the system is almost crawling at a snail's pace because of the above factors and democracy is nearly a failure. However, on the other hand there are also social scientists who though accept the drawbacks of the system but at the same time they also assert that all is not wrong with the system. Myron Weiner has written in his book that the greatest Indian paradox is that democracy has survived in India in spite of a high level of political violence, abject poverty, criminalization of politics and politicization of almost every aspect of human existence. This is more so when the society is under constant threat more from the 'intellectual criminals' than from the 'anti-social elements'. Democracy as a form of government cannot be rendered a failure because of certain mis-governance and mismanagement.

Author, thus, has failed to observe any such trends and goes on to describe as to what are different wrongs in the system. Now it is quite obvious, a revolution is next to impossible in such a large democracy. It is more so because the shock absorbing capacity of the system is quite huge and the political structure is such that a radical rearrangement of power is next to impossible. Under such circumstances and existing realities what is required is to comprehend the system and locate the loopholes which would help in devising the means to plug the same. Author has diagnosed well the maladies underlying the system but has failed to evolve any theoretical base which would have helped him to conceive of some remedies to help out the concerned people and the policy-makers. For example, once we understand that there is criminalization of politics and many criminals are making into legislatures and union parliament, then only we can analyze its ramifications on the entire

system. A through analysis of the same would help the social scientists in devising ways and means to curb this menace which has almost hijacked the whole system. Recent electoral reforms like 'disclosure norms' for contestants to the state and union legislatures are one such measure to eliminate criminals entering into active politics. It may not be too relevant or hundred percent foolproof but of course it can be termed as a viable and well thought out step to get rid of the problem. Similarly, policy-makers came up with a new 'Anti-defection law' to curb the menace of 'politics of opportunism' which has rendered the politics and governance 'a business in government'.

The author of the book has failed to think of any such trends and menace from which our polity is suffering today. Hence, his solutions are also very simplistic and superficial. The approach of the author can neither be termed as 'pragmatic' nor can it be termed as 'idealistic'. Why it cannot be termed as pragmatic has already been explained above because it suggests radical measures which are not possible to adopt in the existing political and social circumstances. It is not idealistic because author is not conceiving of an ideal state or a state in 'idea' like Plato, Aristotle or Karl Marx who conceived of a classless communist society after withering away of the state. Author, moreover has not build up any philosophy for the same anywhere in his book. He begins with a mission to change the society and the state i.e. the existing political structure, to provide maximum happiness to all, not even the 'greatest happiness to greatest number' as Jermy Bentham thought of.

While suggesting the solution as "how it can be done" in the last chapter of the book, author begins:

Without a rigid and stable foundation one cannot construct a super structure neither without a competent and prudent system of governance can we construct a prosperous nation. Solution to all problems afflicting the nation and implementing the

ideals discussed in this book call for establishing this kind of governance first.

Thus, in the above passage author calls for establishing a competent and prudent system of governance without understanding the meaning of governance and making it clear as to what exactly he means by it 'more government' or 'less government'. Democracy as a philosophy of governance has been the confusion of the twentieth century and is no different in this century. Sartori rightly pointed out that Democracy could be defined as a high-flown name for something which does not exist. Perhaps no other form of government has contributed to the present deplorable conditions of human being than democracy. Democracy gave people freedom without facilities and rights without means to ensure it. Undoubtedly, Churchill was right when he said that democracy is the worst form of government but there is no other alternative. He must have visualized the outcome of this form of government in the future. Aristotle too was not wrong when he categorized "Democracy" as the perverted form of government and rule by many, but one gets a scant idea of his corresponding form of government "Polity" which he has categorized as the best form of government. The branding of democracy as mobocracy by Aristotle was also appropriate. But where do we go from here for having competent and prudent governance. Let us see how author proposes to do this:

The basic virtues of good governance are sincerity, devotion and a will to work with integrity and prudence. There must be an unflinching loyalty and determination to achieve the promised goals. —Our findings are only against the system of governance (polity and bureaucracy) not the staff or services. Because they (staff and services) are simply organs of the main body and have to function at the dictates of it.---- Our system is like a tree-polity forming the roots, bureaucracy the stem, offices and staff the branches and people the leaves. Change the roots and the stem-the branches shall change on their own and greener and more vibrant will become the leaves. Our

¹² *Supra* n. 1, p. 385.

crusade is against the system that has led use from poverty to deprivation and destitution and not an individual.¹³

Thus, author suggests that it is polity and governance which is more responsible than the staff and services. This lacks clarity as to what author means to suggest by staff and services. Polity is an all-encompassing concept which includes political, social and economical institutions. Changing the polity means that changing the entire system. Democracy is a polity, a form of governance if one wants to change the polity it means adopting an altogether a new form of government and changing the very nature and characteristics of the state, which is not an easy task. This kind of change is a revolutionary change which happened after French, American and Russian revolutions. Thus, author means to suggest a revolution without letting us know what he would bring in place of bureaucracy.

Author then in the last three pages of the book hurriedly suggests that the entire goal of good governance will be achieved by adopting a Presidential form of Government. He says:

We have broadly studied the various systems of governments as adopted by different developed countries of the world and consider that a Federal system of governance with a President as the constitutional head, somewhat like the Presidential system of America, would best serve the interests of the people and fulfill our aspirations. The system will necessarily involve the best brains of the country to frame policies, disseminate them amongst the masses and execute the same in the true spirit —This time it will be established on the basis of selection rather than election.¹⁴

This shows that author is not aware about the ramifications and problems in changing from cabinet system to presidential system and

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 390-392.

¹⁴ *iW.*, pp. 393-394.

how difficult the process would be. Moreover, Indian situations are much different than the American situations. How one can think of such a remedy. This proposal has been debated quite a lot by various scholars in the recent past and the wider consensus that has emerged is on adopting the German model¹⁵ if at all the governing and non-governing elites decide to change to ensure good governance and bring stability in the system and government.

However, while suggesting a new form of government or a new system one needs to be very careful as to how there is going to be a shift from old system to the new one otherwise any suggestion or philosophy would be irrelevant and useless. Therefore, the concern of the author is highly appreciable but the methodology adopted and ways and means suggested by him lacks seriousness and are superficial in nature. Consequently, the school of thought which believes in change through 'piecemeal social engineering' is dominant and sounds more convincing.

The book written in a lucid language is comprehensive enough even for an amateur reader. Democracy in many countries has not been able to deliver the ideals for which it was created because of certain reasons which the rulers of the democratic countries were well aware of but did not dare or intended to venture because of their selfish and vested interest. They were more akin to gratify their own needs first because of the hedonistic nature of man, than to channelize their potentials towards the philanthropic causes.

The endeavor of the author in the book '*Shaping India of Our Dreams*' could be considered as praiseworthy towards understanding the phenomenon of state building through economic development as well as the growth and decline of political institutions. Though the author claims it to be a work of intense research to make India one of the mightiest and most prosperous nations in the world, but he has failed in developing a theoretical framework for the study of state politics. It can at best be regarded as an empiricist's attempt at model building from collected data, rather than an exercise in analytic political theory. The

¹⁵This model suggests that an old government will cease to exist the moment a confidence motion is passed in favour of a new government. This of course will remove trading in parliamentarians where one party tries to purchase the MPs of the **ruling** party to bring down the government.

task becomes all the more challenging because one has to deal with dynamics of contemporary politics, the full facts about which are not usually known and, as such, its outline tends to be blurred and hazy. What makes the job more baffling is the fact that one has to grapple not with one pattern but with several patterns of State politics which are emerging, if at all, through none too steady pull and swing of politics at the Central and state levels.

India being a transitional society, its politics tends to be in a process of flux and change. As the pace of socio-economic transformation is slow and as the direction of polarization of political forces in its wake is not clearly discernible, the patterns of state politics do not have in every case a determinate outline with steady contours. Thus, to conclude it is worth noting that author has failed to understand that for post-colonial society which is still in the phase of transition not a radical change like 'development of rural areas through city centers' and changing the cabinet system to presidential system would ensure good governance but it is through empowerment of civil-society and accessibility of poorest of the poor to education that good government can be brought about. Author has given inadequate stress on radical reformation in the system of education than he has given on the radical transformation of the whole system. The level of education is closely allied to the potential of the human resource. The role of education in articulating people, in making them ardent defenders of their interests and in converting them into a potential pressure groups are significant areas for political analysis of the politics in Indian polity. Author has missed the most recent trend of India becoming a digital republic. Where electoral democracy is still the basis of political authority and the key to social transformation, an over-emphasis on digital democracy can preclude many of the initiatives towards good governance. The level and pattern of economic development is another crucial variable in the context of State politics. The resource potential, the level of economic growth, pace of industrialization, and crystallization of class consciousness of a state may go a long way in shaping the form and substance of its politics on the one hand and the life of people on the other. There is no denying the fact that the most arresting observation about India has been that her soil is rich and her people poor, but how this poverty can be eliminated and India can maximize her utilization of resources is a point of research which has been partially done and more

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is required to be done. Any attempt at analyzing Indian polity must take into account both the ongoing trends as well as emerging trends in the backdrop of changing social, economical and political circumstances.